

**CHARACTERISTICS OF A SENSE OF BELONGING AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO ACADEMIC  
ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS IN SELECTED MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN REGION IV AND VI  
EDUCATIONAL SERVICE CENTERS, TEXAS**

A Dissertation

by

MATTHEW A. CAPPS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2003

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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## ABSTRACT

Characteristics of a Sense of Belonging and Its Relationship to Academic Achievement of

Students in Selected Middle School in Region IV and VI

Education Service Centers, Texas. (December 2003)

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The purpose of this research is to investigate the feeling of belonging that students may or may not have and the relationship of student sense of belonging to the overall academic achievement of a school.

Students were surveyed on their sense of belonging in selected middle schools. The students scored themselves on the Psychological Sense of School Membership scale, which revealed an overall mean score of belonging. Students from high-performing schools were compared to students from low-performing schools in regard to their sense of belonging. Additionally, teachers were asked to rate their perception of the students' sense of belonging. The teachers' scores were compared to the students' scores in both high- and low-performing schools. Lastly, teachers were asked to provide qualitative information about the schools' role in creating a sense of belonging.

An extensive review of the literature regarding sense of belonging reveals support of the importance of sense of belonging in student achievement. There is also extensive evidence regarding variation of sense of belonging among minority groups and the important role of teachers in creating a sense of belonging for students.

This study found that there is no significant difference in students' reported sense of belonging between high-performing schools and low-performing schools on the Psychological Sense of School Membership scale.

There is a significant difference between the teachers' perception of the students' sense of belonging and the students' reported sense of belonging on the Psychological Sense of School Membership scales.

Teachers reported important roles in creating an environment of belonging. The qualitative data provided by teachers support evidence from the literature review indicative of schools with sense of belonging.

High-performing schools do not report much information regarding discipline and routine as being important parts of creating belonging. However, low performing schools often report these as important to creating a sense of belonging for students.

Implications of the research include:

Teachers may not have an accurate understanding of students' sense of belonging and how to create a sense of belonging in schools.

Further study should try to gain better understanding of the relationship between sense of belonging and minority status.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Providing students with a sense of belonging is becoming increasingly critical for schools as well as the rest of society. It has been known since Alexis de Tocqueville (1969) studied the idea of democracy, that for all of its virtues, one of democracy's vices is a tendency to go to extremes. These extremes produce imbalances in individuals and organizations (Hoyle & Slater, 2001). In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville (1969) said that relationships between self and others would become more difficult to establish and maintain. Democracy undermines the capacity to develop profound connections between one's self and others (Hoyle & Slater, 2001). Tocqueville was convinced that over time in a democracy, increased opportunity for self-reliance and independence would exist. Eventually this would result in a hyper-individualism that did not allow for the social connections once established through the democracy. Tocqueville argued that Americans would allow the government more and more control of their lives as they themselves became more enraptured with the maintenance of the self (1969).

According to Hoyle and Slater (2001), the United States now ranks close to the bottom of highly developed countries in voter turnout. In the year 2000, less than 50% of the registered voters went to the polls in the presidential election. In regard to civic engagement, weekly churchgoing dropped from 48% to 41% from 1950 to 1970. Participation in labor unions dropped from 32% in 1953 to 16% in 1992. Significant drops in memberships in the Boy Scouts, Red Cross, Elks, Shriners, and Jaycees have occurred over the last 40 years. These all represent social institutions where individuals go to meet as a group for interaction and social development. Therefore, perhaps Tocqueville is right in his estimation of the growth of hyper-individualism. Connell and Wellborn (1991) found that a sense of relatedness to a school

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The style and format for this dissertation follow the *Journal of Educational Research*.

contributes to students adopting goals defined by the social group. Connell and Wellborn (1991) also learned that a lack of relatedness or a feeling of disaffection is characterized by a rejection of goals. However, it also seems plausible that, like the social organizations previously described, it is possible for different schools to have different levels of social connectedness (Hoyle & Slater, 2001).

According to Osterman (2000), a community exists when its members experience a sense of belonging or personal relatedness. Community members feel that the group is important to them and that they are important to the group. Members of the group feel that the community will satisfy their needs; they will be cared for and supported. Also, the community has a shared and emotional sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is considered one of the five major needs in Maslow's (1962) hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow (1962), until this need is satisfied, no true learning will ever occur. Until a school is able to establish in its students a sense of belonging, community, and a sense of place, a struggle to maximize the learning potential of the students within the school will occur.

Furthermore, Osterman (2000) argues that little attention is given to the affective needs of students. In fact, school culture often contains beliefs and practices that nurture individualism and competition, as opposed to community and collaboration. Organizational policies and practices systematically prevent the development of a sense of belonging among students, and therefore significantly contribute to the experience of isolation, alienation, and polarization.

Finn (1989) studied two models of student sense of belonging. One of these was the participation-identification model and its relation to dropouts. Specifically, Finn studied students' active participation in school and classroom activities and a concomitant feeling of identification with school. Finn learned that students who are successful develop a sense of identification with school, while less successful students do not develop a sense of identification with school, or not to the same extent as successful students. Positive terms associated in the naturalistic inquiries can be identified as "affiliation," "attachment," "commitment," and "bonding" and in negative terms such as "alienation" and "withdrawal." These sets of terms were used to de-

velop a definition of identification with school. Specifically, students who identify with school have an internalized conception of belongingness. They are discernibly part of the school environment, and the school constitutes an important part of their own experience. These individuals also value success in school-relevant goals (Finn, 1989).

### **Statement of the Problem**

“There is a growing consensus that academic motivation is not a purely individual, intrapsychic state; rather, it grows out of a complex web of social and personal relationships” (Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

Weiner (1990) stated that, “School motivation cannot be understood apart from the social fabric in which it is imbedded” (p.621). A student’s sense of belonging in the school or classroom is defined and dependent upon how he or she is personally accepted, respected, and supported by his or her peers, teachers, and others. Research has found that students’ sense of belonging in school has an impact on how well they are socially motivated (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Therefore, in order to improve the academic performance of all students, a school where students have a strong sense of belonging must exist.

Although a great deal of research has been conducted on students’ sense of belonging and its relationship to academic achievement (Goodenow, 1993a, 1993b; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Voelkl, 1997), very little is available in regard to schools in Texas. Goodenow (1993a) conducted research on students’ sense of belonging in urban school in the northeastern United States. Voelkl (1997) conducted a study of variation of sense of belonging as it relates to minority and white students in all categories of schools in Tennessee. Although research has been conducted regarding the role of the teacher in creating a supportive and caring environment (Larrivee, 2000), very little has been reported about the correlation between the students’ sense of belonging and the teacher’s perception of belonging. In addition, research is not available in the area of the teachers’ role in creating a sense of belonging in the students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the feeling of belonging that students may or may not have and the relationship of students' sense of belonging to their overall academic achievement of a school. The hypothesis proposes that students who attend schools with exemplary ratings will tend to have higher average scores on state standardized tests than those who attend schools with acceptable ratings.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions are proposed for study:

Does a relationship exist between students' sense of belonging and the academic achievement of the school as reported by students in selected middle schools in Texas Region IV and VI Education Service Centers (ESCs)?

Is there a correlation between the students' sense of belonging and the teachers' perceptions of belonging as identified by teachers in selected middle schools in Texas Region IV and VI Education Service Centers?

Do teachers have a role in creating an environment where students have a sense of belonging as reported by selected middle school teachers in Texas Region IV and VI Education Service Centers?

### **Operational Definitions**

The following definitions will be pertinent to this study:

**Characteristic:** An act, state of being, or feeling that can be verbally described or measured through the use of an instrument.

**Sense of belonging:** The extent to which a student feels personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others, especially teachers and other adults in the school social environment.

Academic achievement: The rating of a school as it relates to the Academic Excellence Indicators System used by the Texas Education Agency to determine whether a school is exemplary, recognized, acceptable, or low performing.

Students: Persons of any race or gender who attend a public school that serves grades six through eight in the identified education service centers in Texas.

Selected middle schools: Public schools, in the identified education service centers, whose assigned grade levels range from sixth to eighth grade.

Teacher perceptions: Opinions that teachers have about the way students may or may not feel in school.

Creating an environment: Attitudes that are fostered, activities that are conducted, and/or efforts that are made on the part of the adults in the school.

Region IV and VI Education Service Centers (ESCs): Any one of twenty public entities dispersed geographically throughout the state that were established under the auspices of the Texas Commissioner of Education for the purposes of 1) assisting school districts in improving students; 2) enabling school districts to operate more efficiently and economically; and 3) implementing initiatives assigned by the legislature of commissioner.

### **Assumptions**

For the purpose of this study the following assumptions were made by the researcher:

1. The researcher was impartial in collecting and analyzing the data.
2. The respondents surveyed will understand the scope of the study and the language of the instrument, will be competent in self-reporting, and will respond objectively and honestly.
3. Interpretation of the data collected accurately reflects the intent of the respondents.
4. The methodology proposed and described here offers the most logical and appropriate design for this particular project.

## **Limitations**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher identified the following limitations:

1. The study is limited to information acquired from literature review, survey instruments, and individual interviews.
2. Findings may generalize to selected middle schools in Regions IV & VI ESC, Texas only.
3. This study is based on perceptions and results may be skewed by the individuals' perceptions of what a sense of belonging is.

## **Significance of the Study**

Students' classroom success, academic effort, and engagement are influenced not only by individual differences in skills and abilities, but also by many situational and contextual factors. Among these many factors, the quality of the child's relationship to others in the school may be especially important (Goodenow, 1993b). Although belonging, relatedness, and similar social constructs have been found to be associated with school adjustment from childhood through college, they might be especially important, and therefore potentially problematic, during early adolescence (Goodenow, 1993a).

Recent studies have shown that students who experience school as a place where they have a sense of purpose and community are more motivated academically, are absent less often, engage in less disruptive behavior, and have higher achievement than students who do not have that sense of belonging (Battistich & Hom, 1997).

Therefore, it is important that educators understand what impact students' sense of belonging may have on their success individually and on the school as a whole. This study will attempt to determine whether students who attend exemplary schools have a stronger sense of belonging than students who attend low-performing schools. The study will also attempt to determine if there is a difference in the teachers' perceptions of students' sense of belonging and what the students actually report. This will allow teachers to determine their level of awareness

in relation to the students' emotional well-being. Lastly, this study will attempt to determine those activities teachers at exemplary schools provide that make their students feel important, give them a strong sense of belonging, and a strong sense of community within the school. With this information, new insights may be had into other methods that will promote successful educational experiences for all students.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an interpersonal underworld of emotion-laden personal and social relationships than can either facilitate or hinder educational success in school (Goodenow, 1991). One example of these social relationships is a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging has been considered a basic human need since Maslow's (1962) work on human development. Maslow (1962) suggested that basic needs, such as belonging, need to be met before any motivations higher on the scale could be satisfied. One of these higher motivations is the desire to learn. The author theorized that individuals could not move toward the acquisition of knowledge without first feeling as though they were a part of a group. This theory was further supported by Edwards (1995) when he suggested that belonging is critical for human development. Atkinson and Feather (1967) proposed that students' motives to achieve in school are the joint function of their expectancies for work and the value that school has for them.

This chapter reviews research on what defines a sense of belonging. It also reviews recent research on academic achievement and how a sense of belonging has been theorized to support success in school. Furthermore, it summarizes information regarding the educator's role in developing a sense of belonging for students.

#### **Belonging**

A sense of belonging has long been thought to be an important component of education. The concept of belongingness is a broad one, defined in many ways, such as relatedness, sense of community, sense of classroom membership, support, and identification (Osterman, 2000). According to Jefferson (1801), American public schools were founded so that children would possess the ideals of community that underlie democratic self-governance. An educated citizenry was thought to be the only hope for a fledging democracy. These same sentiments were later reiterated by Dewey (1924), who delineated two primary purposes for schools: to

serve the larger community by producing responsible, civic-minded citizens and to help children develop the ethical, social, and moral reasoning skills to function as responsible members of those communities. Schools were to accomplish these purposes by becoming authentic communities in which students had experiences of self-governance and moral decision-making. Students can only be mentored through the development of caring relationships with adults and other students in the school, the basis of which is a sense of belonging.

Goodenow (1992) defines a sense of belonging as the feeling of being included, accepted, and supported by other persons in a school social environment. Belonging is often seen as an interaction between a person and the environment in which he or she has a place. It is not a function of the school, nor is it an intrapsychic phenomenon. Perceived friendliness from others and a sense of being valued personally are necessary, but not sufficient for success. Belonging in a class must also include participation in the shared educational goals of the class (Goodenow, 1991). Belonging is influenced by societal factors, personal traits, and contextual factors (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). Cothran and Ennis (1999) lend support to this theory through their research. These authors suggest that educational engagement is not an isolated construct, but rather a function of individual and school characteristics. A key component that influences a student's decision to engage in school is the student's sense of membership. When a student believes there is a personal connection to the school, engagement is more likely to occur. Furthermore, this attachment involves caring about what others think and trying to fulfill those expectations (Cothran & Ennis, 1997). In addition, students must be more than enrolled; there must be a social bond among students and with adults in the school, and norms governing the school (Goodenow, 1991).

The concept of belonging has also been referred to in other terms. Voelkl (1995a) refers to the idea as identification. In her terms, identification represents attachments and bonding that may occur between an individual and an institution, such as a school. According to Voelkl (1995a), students identify with a place which possesses certain expectations, values, and beliefs. School serves as a central institution in a child's everyday life. All of these traits

can be learned and ingrained in the institution. The result of this is a sense of belonging that is developed in the student.

Finn (1989) defined belonging in school as an internal sense that one is important to the school and serves as a member of the school community. Furthermore, he believes that school is an important element in personal experiences in a child's life. The child is a part of the school and the school is a part of the child. Finn's (1989) research explained that belonging is represented by feelings of being accepted and respected in school, having a sense of inclusion in school, feeling proud of being a member of a school, and using the school to define one's self.

Osterman (2000) tied the idea of belonging to the sense of community described by Finn (1989). Osterman discussed the idea that a community exists when its members experience a sense of belonging and personal relatedness. In a community, the members feel that the group is important to them and they are important to the group. Members of a group feel that the group will satisfy their needs; that they will be cared for or supported. Also, the community has a sense of connection that is both social and emotional (Osterman, 2000). Similarly, Berends (1992) investigated the perceived support of teachers and friends as important influences on what he termed school bonding, the belief that school was personally worthwhile and that it was important to be engaged in the educational process.

Many studies identified a lack of belonging and its associated problems. A large qualitative study of four culturally diverse schools, using 18 months of observation and interview data, concluded that the crises in education are actually consequences of deeper problems of relationships within the schools (Voices from inside, 1992). Students and teachers alike cited alienation, feelings of distrust and lack of understanding, lack of respect, and personal connection to others as fundamental flaws in modern schooling. The lack of described meaningful relationships crossed boundaries of race, culture, and class. The culmination was groups of at-risk students who had the least satisfaction with schooling (Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997)(Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997). These at-risk students face obstacles at school

that perpetuate failure and social interaction with teachers and peers, which in turn alienate students and contribute to disengagement from school (Kagan, 1990)(Kagan, 1990).

Other non-school related sources provide similar evidence in regard to children who do not have nurturing relationships. A study by the Girl Scouts of America (Girl Scouts' survey, 1991) reported that 1% of school-aged children claimed that no adults really cared for them. This figure was as high as 7% for poor children. Only 33% of the children surveyed said that their teachers cared for them, and only 7% said they would ask a teacher for advice. Students' sense of alienation, lack of belonging, and lack of care tend to increase with age. Adolescents cite a sense of isolation and lack of personally meaningful relationships at school as equal contributors to their decisions to drop out of school (Baker et al., 1997).

Osterman (2000) tells us that the experience of belongingness is associated with important psychological processes. Children who experience a sense of relatedness have a stronger supply of inner resources. They perceive themselves to be more competent and autonomous and have high levels of intrinsic motivation. They have a strong sense of identity, engagement, and performance. Those students who have a sense of belonging have more positive attitudes toward school, class work, teachers, and their peers. They are more likely to enjoy school, and they are also more engaged. They participate more in school activities, and they invest more of themselves in the learning process.

### **Importance of Belonging**

Why is this sense of belonging described by researchers important for students? What is the significance of membership? A sense of belonging and valued participation in community is important motives throughout life. Social motives are important and prominent in early adolescence when young people begin to consider who they are and wish to be. Youth come to rely heavily on friendships for support and direction (Goodenow, 1991).

In general, the experience of belonging or relatedness is associated with more positive attitudes toward self and others. When students experience acceptance, and where the culture

values and encourages supportive interaction, they are more likely to be supportive of others. In the school community, they are more helping, more considerate of others, and more accepting of others (Osterman, 2000). Battistich and Hom (1997) researched the idea of belonging as it relates to success. They discovered that being a part of a supportive network reduces stress. Baumeister and Leary (1995) conducted research on belonging and discovered that being accepted, included, and welcomed led to positive emotions, such as happiness, elation, and tranquility. Being rejected, excluded, or ignored, however, leads to intense negative feelings of anxiety, depression, grief, and loneliness. The lack of belonging is also associated with incidence of mental and physical illness and a broad range of behavioral problems ranging from traffic accidents to suicide. In addition, Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that the need for belongingness is so powerful that people will develop social attachments very easily and strive to maintain relationships and social bonds even under difficult circumstances. Battistich and Horn (1997) confirmed these opinions, in that a lack of belonging and community results in increased drug use and incidents of delinquency both within and outside of school.

Ryan and Stiller (1991) suggest that authentic contact with others appears to play an important role in connecting individuals to social tasks and promoting valued goals. That is to say, one identifies with and emulates the practices of those to whom one is, or might desire, to be attached. A large qualitative study based in four culturally diverse schools using 18 months of observation and interview data concluded that the crises in education are actually consequences of deeper problems of relationships within the schools (Voices from inside, 1992). Students and teachers both cited alienation, feelings of distrust, lack of understanding, respect, or personal connections to others as fundamental flaws in schooling (Baker et al., 1997). When comparing the occurrence of meaningful relationships as they relate to race, culture, and class, students of color or low income are often cited as having the least connection to school. This in turn contributes to a series of obstacles at school which alienates students and contributes to disengagement of students (Baker et al., 1997).

Researchers reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, that an adolescent's sense of connectedness to family and school was significantly associated with lower rates of emotional distress, suicidality, violence, substance abuse, and sexual history (Resnick et al., 1997).

Ryan (1991) lends support to this discussion in that satisfaction of belonging supports the development of important psychological processes including intrinsic motivation, internalization, and autonomy. An intrinsically motivated person actively engages in behaviors out of personal choice rather than external requirement. These behaviors reflect an internal drive to seek out challenges and opportunities to expand knowledge and experience, both of which are important to academic success.

A sense of belonging can be evidenced as important for school safety as stated by Raywid and Oshiyama (2000). These authors write in response to the tragedies of Columbine High School, stating that among other causes, the students who perpetrated this terrible act did not have a sense of community. They did not feel a part of the school, and in fact, were outcast from the group. In addition, Raywid and Oshiyama (2000) state that in order for schools to avoid problems such as shootings, a sense of community, where individual students feel accepted for who they are must be fostered.

Early adolescence is an important developmental period in which school belonging, psychological membership, and the socioemotional support of teachers and other students are likely to have especially significant influence on motivation and the ability to be engaged in learning (Goodenow, 1992). The Carnegie Council, in its report, *Turning Points* (Turning points, 1989), called for schools to be communities for learning, with stable, close, mutually respectful relationships between all adults and all students. This was its first recommendation for improving education for early adolescence. Researchers found that support is most important at developmental stages for children. However, this critical support may be decreasing in school settings. As adolescents move from small elementary schools to large, impersonal junior highs,

a decrease in the support and sense of belonging necessary for success may exist (Goodenow, 1992).

Voelkl (1997) reiterated these same sentiments with her study regarding identification in school. The author reports that educators today face a serious problem with the emotional and physical withdrawal of students. She suggests that a person comes to identify with a place or activity structure that represents certain expectations, values, or beliefs. Schooling plays a dominant role in the lives of youngsters and may become a dominant influence on the child's self-view. Personal adjustments to the school may be reflected in attitudes toward school including being motivated to do well academically, feeling comfortable in school, and exhibiting acceptable behavior.

Resnick et al. (1997) found that school context accounted for as much or more of the variance in students' experience of emotional distress and violence than the family context, particularly at the middle school level. With respect to emotional distress, characteristics of the school context accounted for 17.6% and 13.1% of variance, respectively, in grades 7-8 and 9-12. The contribution of family context accounted for 14.6% and 13.5% of the variance in the two grade levels. With respect to violence, school context accounted for 7.1% and 5.8% of the variance, while family context accounted for slightly lower variances, 6.5% and 4.6%

Moss (1991) reported that by promoting motivation and commitment, cohesive relationships amplify the influence of personal growth dimensions and moderate the problematic consequences of highly demanding, performance-oriented environments. Furthermore, the author suggests that supportive social bonds foster task performance and learning and are associated with lower absenteeism and illness rates. Durkheim (1893) argued that involvement in community was a fundamental human experience meeting affective needs and helping individuals derive a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Without the experience of community, individuals experience loneliness, alienation from others, and a sense of disconnection from the society at large. Some social theorists (Etzioni, 1993; Putnam, 1995) imply that the

crises in American education derives from the lack of personal relationships and significant purposes to which children can affiliate in schools.

Battistich et. al (1995) suggest that participation in a caring school community provides an impetus for students who might otherwise be alienated from school to adopt and work toward the school's norms and values. Even in circumstances where students come from homes where parental support is minimal along with goal setting, the support commitment, and goal clarity in a caring school community may serve to compensate for the relative lack of such qualities in the lives of students outside of school and allow those students to develop the motivation and direction they otherwise might not have.

### **Belonging and Race**

When discussing sense of belonging, it is important to consider differences in minority feelings of belonging as opposed to those of Caucasian students.

Goodenow and Grady (1993) took this factor into consideration when studying belonging and friends' values as they relate to academic motivation in urban students.

The authors conducted a study in a middle-sized northeastern city made up of mostly working-class Hispanic and African Americans. The study was conducted in two junior high schools (Grades 7-9) in the city. Students were assessed on the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale to measure how they felt about school. In addition, students were measured on their expectancy of motivation through an instrument that measures what motivates students toward academics (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990).

Several significant results occurred from this study (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). First, many urban adolescents, in this case minority students, have a poor sense of school belonging and school motivation. Second, students who do have a strong sense of belonging are more likely to be academically motivated and engaged in learning than those who have a weak sense of belonging. Goodenow and Grady (1993) found, unfortunately, that students ex-



pressed relatively weak beliefs that they were a part of the school, were respected by teachers and schoolmates, were valued by friends, and that being in school was worthwhile.

While the matter of lack of belonging and its associated behaviors are exhibited by white and minority students alike, some researchers have suggested that this problem is even more common among African-American students (Voelkl, 1995a). Steele (1992) suggested that the lack of belonging among African-American students develops from a psychic alienation or defense which serves to disallow academic achievement outcomes from affecting their self-view. Goodenow (1993b) lent support to this suggestion by claiming that those stigmatized minority students may feel unsupported and discouraged by school staff and academically striving students in school. Consequently, the appeal of those peer groups with non-academic norms may be strong and result in a loss of belonging with the school and a disinvestment from academic and achievement goals. African-American students have been described as feeling hostility toward and distrusting of school. The African-American students may be skeptical about their ability to succeed in school, given that they have a belief in an unfair system. The result is anger, resistance, and disaffection (R. Taylor, 1991).

Hendrie (1998) reported on an ongoing study that began in 1977. The author of the study, Jason Osborne, compiled data on 25,000 students nationwide. His participants included students who were African American, Hispanic, and White. The goal was to determine to what degree identification with school affects academic achievement. The lead researcher found that both boys and girls in all three groups significantly identify with academics when they are in 8th grade. The correlation between school performance and self-esteem declines modestly for most groups of students as they move through high school. However, among black males, the drop off in the correlation is dramatic in the high school years. According to Hendrie (1998), black students in the study, particularly boys, detach their self-esteem from academics as they move toward 12th grade. The author cites social class, parental influences, peer group influences, treatment in school, school-minded friendships, and discrimination at school as reasons for disidentification. One surprising note in the study was that young black males were found to

hold the most positive views of themselves, even though their grades and test scores fell increasingly further behind those of whites during high school. The same could not be said for African-American girls. Their rate of disidentification was the same as that of Caucasian and Hispanic boys. That is to say that disidentification seems to be a problem more associated with African-American boys than with any other group, an alarming revelation (Hendrie, 1998).

Further study of minority students, specifically African-American students has brought to light some interesting research. Taylor (1991) maintained that a substantial subculture of disengagement from social institutions has evolved among African-American youngsters. The author suggested that the lack of belonging in schools among black students is evidenced by the recent growth in violent behavior, drug abuse, and school failure. Taylor(1991) summarized data on the school experiences of black males and reported that these students are disproportionately tracked into low-ability groups, socially and academically isolated from their classmates, and held in low regard, in terms of academics, by their teachers. The results of this are that a great deal of disaffection, resistance, and disharmony is felt by these youngsters. In addition, the author posited that black students, especially males, feel hostility toward the school system, lack trust in the school system, and experience a lack of confidence in their chances of success.

However, not all researchers hold this view. Graham (1994) studied 140 African-American students in regard to the assumption that they lack the personality traits necessary for academic achievement. She found inconsistent evidence that Caucasians have a higher need for achievement than do African Americans, when it is related to feelings about school. In addition, she found that African Americans are optimistic and have positive self-regard, even in the face of academic failure. In other words, poor achievement did not cause these students to have low expectations about their future or to hold negative self-views about abilities.

Mickelson (1990) supported these findings. The author reported that African-American students regard education as highly valuable. Mickleson first distinguished between concrete and abstract attitudes toward school. Abstract attitudes are those that represent the dominant

ideology of American society: that education will bring opportunity. Concrete attitudes are not based on hopes for the future but on material realities experienced by one's family and friends. Mickelson (1990) administered attitude surveys to 1,193 high school seniors. Results indicated that African-American students held more positive abstract attitudes than did white students. That is to say, black students were much more optimistic about educational efforts and the likelihood that they would lead to occupational rewards. On the other hand, African-American students were significantly more pessimistic about concrete attitudes than white students. The problem lies in the fact that when correlated with academic achievement, abstract attitudes were not related to school grades while concrete attitudes had a significant positive effect on achievement (Mickelson, 1990).

Others contend that African Americans arrive at school bright and eager to learn but lose some of their motivation when they find that the schooling process holds no value for them as individuals; holds low expectations for their success; labels them as inferior; and does not reward them equally with white students (Voelkl, 1995a). Fine (1991) argued that many African-American students do value education and understand its worth. However, they also believe that they are limited to the educational opportunities that yield success and therefore do not feel that they are part of the school or have a sense of place in the school.

Voelkl (1995a) surveyed 974 African-American and 2,565 Caucasian eighth grade students in 163 schools. The author used an "Identification with School" instrument to measure how much students identified with their school (Voelkl, 1995a, p. 49). Statistically main effects of race revealed that African Americans reported higher levels of belonging in the school than did white students. It appears that African-Americans do not disidentify with school. Rather, they feel that school is important and useful, part of their self-definition, and that they are part of the school.

Voelkl (1997) conducted research on African-American students' identification with school and the relationship to academic motivation. The author suggested that a student does not enter school with well-formulated feelings of identification or disidentification. Rather, this

develops over time as a reflection of school experiences. Positive experiences lead to feelings that a student belongs in school and that school is valuable in accomplishing desired outcomes. In addition, Voelkl (1997) suggested this pattern may be cyclical in that students who feel that they belong in school are more likely to participate in school and experience more achievement. The author's study involved 1,335 African-American and White eighth grade students from 104 urban, suburban, rural, and inner-city schools. The study followed the students longitudinally from fourth through eighth grade to study the antecedents of identification, academic achievement, and classroom participation. It was hypothesized that students who were most disidentified from school in grade 8 may have had repeated academic failure or had not participated in class (Voelkl, 1997).

Voelkl (1997) learned that African-American students do not disidentify with school. In fact, African-American students report that school is important and useful, that school is part of their self-definition, and that they feel as though they are important members of the school community. In addition, African-American students in eighth grade experience higher levels of belonging than their White counterparts.

However, incongruence exists among researchers concerning high positive attitudes not being coupled with appropriate behaviors for academic success (Mickelson, 1990; Steele, 1992). Voelkl (1997) suggests that African-American students do not connect feelings of belonging with academic achievement in order to buffer their self-esteem from societal devaluation. In addition, the author suggests that minority peer groups have been shown to have a negative influence on the academic desires of African-American students. In other words, while many of these students value school, their peers do not and provide disincentives for academic success (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992).

The significance of this information is that if a student believes that others at school are rooting for them, are willing to help, and are on their side, they have reason to believe that they have the resources necessary to be successful. Therefore, academic success results not only

from the students' belief in their individual abilities but also from their belief in the supportive resources that are available for academic tasks (Goodenow & Grady, 1993).

Other studies have focused on the sense of belonging that Hispanic students may or may not feel and how that relates to their ability to perform in school. Gordon (1996) performed a study of Hispanic youths to identify indicators of resilience that allowed them to become successful in school. The author defined resilience as a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses many environmental and personal factors. Self-concept is one important aspect of resilience. A resilient person is considered to have a healthier self-concept than a non-resilient person. This self-concept is thought to be partially developed through a person's sense of belonging in the environment.

The author (Gordon, 1996) wanted to know what attributes of resilience in Hispanic youths made them successful as opposed to non-resilient youths and what the school's role was in this. The author surveyed 123 Hispanic youths and identified 9 resilient and 27 non-resilient students. Each of these students was asked questions about self-concept, stress, and academic achievement. Gordon (1996) reports that resilient Hispanic students have a lower need for belonging in school than do their non-resilient counterparts. In other words, Hispanic students who are more successful in school do so with less dependence on the school itself. However, non-resilient Hispanic students feel a greater need for belonging in the school. The results of Gordon's (1996) study indicate much different levels of sense of belonging than other researchers found for African-American students.

### **Belonging and Achievement**

There is no doubt that the sense of school belonging and support are important for all students, they may be crucial for the academic survival of many students (Goodenow, 1992). Ryan and Powelson (1991) suggest that to a large extent, motivation has become a significant problem because we have removed learning from the traditional social contexts which provided intrinsic motivation. Children who are preferred by peers and teachers tend to be those who

are more academically competent. On the other hand, those who are most frequently rejected tend to be low achievers (Osterman, 2000).

Several studies have been conducted to research the connection between a sense of belonging and academic achievement. Robinson, Wilson, and Robinson (1981) conducted a study of students' abilities to perceive their teacher's level of warmth and empathy and the effect of this perception on student achievement. The authors conducted a study of 91 students and 10 teachers in two schools. The students were given questionnaires about empathy, and this was compared to achievement. Students who perceived their teachers as providing higher levels of empathy and warmth achieved significantly greater gain in language arts scores, as compared to students who perceived their teachers as providing lower levels of these conditions ( $p < .05$ ).

Goodenow (1993a) conducted a study of 353 sixth through eighth grade students in New England middle schools. She was interested in how a student's sense of belonging was related to academic classroom context. However, rather than using the Psychological Sense of School Meaning instrument, she chose the Class Belonging and Support Scale. Students were to complete the survey on a 5-point Likert scale in response to questions regarding how they feel about school. The results of Goodenow's (1993a) study indicated that a single dimension of belonging and support, teacher support, explained over one-third of students' assessment of the interest, importance, and value of the academic work in class. Stated another way, the findings suggest that early adolescents may derive much of their academic motivation from the perceived supportiveness of others in the school environment. It should be noted that there was no difference in the absolute levels of belonging that sixth graders reported as compared to eighth graders. However, the impact of belonging on motivation lessened from sixth to eighth grade (Goodenow, 1993a).

Other researchers have found similar conclusions about the connection between belonging and academic achievement. Voelkl's (1995b) research examined the relationship between student perceptions of school warmth and academic achievement. The author measured

school warmth by averaging six student ratings of feelings between students and teachers. Achievement tests were administered to each student. The author included the concept of participation in her study. Participation consisted of five variables: attendance, preparation, misbehavior, absent-tardy, and not engaged. The findings indicate that students' perceptions of warmth are related to academic achievement. It should be noted that the relationship between warmth and academic achievement was nonexistent after the effect of participation was eliminated. Voelkl (1995b) found that students' perceptions of warmth may have more effect on participation, which would then consequently affect academic achievement.

Seidman (1995) investigated the relationship between sense of school membership and grades. The author studied students in sixth through eighth grades from a middle school with an enrollment of 720. The researcher asked students to complete a survey designed to measure the students' sense of school membership. This information was compared to grade point average for the participants. Results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that students who have a high sense of school membership will have higher grade point averages than those students who have a low sense of school membership ( $p < .05$ ).

Goodenow's (1992) study on urban students and their feelings of belonging as they relate to academic achievement provide further insight to the research. The author conducted a study on largely urban, working, middle-class cities in the Northeast. Students in the study were junior high students in grades 7, 8, and 9. According to Goodenow, (1992) two significant results emerged from the study of school membership and motivation of junior high students in an urban setting. However, only one will be discussed in the context of sense of belonging. Goodenow (1992) reported that the immediate peer group does not have as much influence over the motivation of a student as does the sense of belonging that a student may feel. In other words, being liked, included, respected by teachers, and others in the school appears to have a significant impact on motivation and a persistence to sustain effort through difficult academic work. Goodenow (1992) argues that it is important to acknowledge the relationship between sense of belonging and motivation. Not only are they related, but they may also be

reciprocal. Simply stated, as students feel themselves to be full and valued members of the school, they are willing to put forth more effort and commit themselves more fully to the purposes of the school. As they are more fully engaged in academic work and learning, they are accorded more acceptance and respect from the school and the people who work in the school. Goodenow (1992) states that belonging and motivation are so intertwined that it is difficult to say which is the cause and which the effect.

Goodenow (1992) concludes that if students believe others within an environment are supporting them, are on their side, and are willing to help them if necessary, they can believe that they have the resources necessary to be successful. Expecting to be academically successful is not only a matter of students' sense of their own individual abilities, but also of their sense of the supportive resources, the help, and encouragement of others, that they can secure.

This is especially important for at-risk students. Goodenow (1992) concluded in her research that students for whom family or neighborhood does not provide academic support, a sense of belonging and membership in the school, and a sense of warm personal connection to teachers and others in school may be essential for the development and maintenance of academic motivation. The general sense of belonging and support in school can in some ways override the influence of a student's personal friendship group. A school that can function to create a sense of community where early adolescent students feel personally known, important, and encouraged to have a voice can serve as an influence potentially more powerful than the influence of individual dyadic or clique ties (Goodenow, 1992).

Hagborg (1998) performed a modified version of the Psychological Sense of School Membership study where he modified Goodenow's (1993b) version of 18 questions to 11 questions. The objective of the study was to determine the validity and test-retest reliability of the shortened version. Hagborg (1998) studied 120 middle-school students and compared their sense of belonging to academic motivation and achievement. The author found high internal consistency with the new instrument. In addition, the author found that those students with high



scores in regard to sense of belonging also indicated higher grades, more time spent on homework, and greater school motivation than did the low-scoring group.

Midgley, Feldlaufer, and Eccles (1989) reported that students who moved from classrooms where they experienced high teacher support to contexts where they felt the teacher support was lower, experienced decrements in interest and in positive attitudes toward learning. These researchers sampled 1,301 students who had made a transition from a sixth grade elementary classroom to a seventh grade junior high classroom. Surveys were given in the fall and in the spring to all students. The students were measured on teacher support, intrinsic value of math, and math achievement. Students whose teachers were perceived to be high in support in both years showed very little change in their valuing of math across the transition. This group of students also had the most positive view of the value and usefulness of math. The students who moved from a less supportive to a more supportive teacher demonstrated enhanced intrinsic value of math. In addition, Midgley et al. (1989) discovered that students who were categorized as low achievers who moved from teachers high in support to teachers low in support had a sharp decline in the perceived intrinsic value of math. This evidence would suggest that a sense of belonging and support may be more important for those students who are not as successful in school.

Another study by Goodenow (1991) concerned pre- and early adolescent children and their sense of belonging as it related to academic motivation. Like many of her other studies, this one involved a large number of students in fifth through eighth grade. Goodenow again used the Psychological Sense of School Membership to assess the students' feelings of belonging in school. However, with this study, she also included a measure of self-efficacy and intrinsic value as developed by Pintrich and DeGroot (1990). Self-efficacy in this context means that students have perceived expectancies for success in reaching goals. Intrinsic value indicates the importance that is attached to the goals.

Results of the study indicated that students who have a strong sense of membership also have a strong sense of self-efficacy and intrinsic value. Self-efficacy and intrinsic values

are also associated with high grade point averages. In addition, Goodenow (1991) reported that a sense of belonging rose with grade level in the school. That is to say, that as students became older, they developed a stronger sense of belonging in the school. Also, even though the students' sense of belonging was high for all grade levels, this indicator was lower than the ratings for self-efficacy and intrinsic value ( $p < .001$ ). This indicates that students were less sure that they belonged and that teachers and fellow students accepted them than they were about the value of their school work or about their own academic capabilities.

An important limitation to consider in regard to Goodenow's (1991) study is that the research was conducted in largely middle-class schools where supportive homes and encouraging schools are fairly common. The author reports that the favorability of the school may have had a skewed effect of the influence of belonging on motivation and achievement. In addition, the schools that were studied were almost entirely composed of Caucasian students (93%). Therefore, it is important to consider sense of belonging in other contexts such as minority and socioeconomic status.

Voelkl's (1997) study of African-American and Caucasian students in various schools in Tennessee revealed similar correlation between a sense of belonging and academic achievement. Through her investigation, she learned that patterns of school achievement and participation are associated with feelings of belonging. Students with higher academic achievement and higher levels of classroom participation have higher degrees of belonging. As students moved from grade 4 to grade 8, their sense of belonging increased and the relationship between a sense of belonging and academic achievement increased. The author suggests that as students have an increased number of positive experiences in school, they increase their feelings of belonging in the school and their sense of place. In addition, academic achievement becomes more closely tied to the students' sense of identification with the school. Voelkl (1997) also reports that the reverse is true as well. If students have negative experiences with school, they tend to have feelings of disidentification, and therefore lose academic motivation in school. The results of this investigation demonstrated that students' dis-

identification from school is partially a function of the degree of academic success experienced in school and partially of the degree to which youngsters participate in class.

Other researchers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999) showed that higher levels of student identification with school led to higher levels of student participation. Using survey data from 9,941 students in a large Canadian School District, the researchers explored the relative effects of principal and teacher leadership on two aspects of students' engagement: participation and identification. A path analysis testing the framework for the study found that the elements in the model (family, principal leadership, and school conditions) explained 84% of the variation in student participation and 78% of the variation in student identification. Their findings also showed that student identification contributed to variation in student participation. Leithwood and Jantzi's (1999) research is important because it challenges an embedded assumption: that students develop a sense of community through their participation in extra-curricular activities or that a strong extra-curricular program will satisfy student needs for a sense of community and lead to engagement. This finding suggests, however, that students' participation is also shaped by their experience of developing a sense of belonging and community.

Johnson, Lutzow, Strothoff, and Zannis (1995) supported this research through an action research model in an effort to reduce negative behavior by encouraging supportive relationships among students through cooperative learning and bonding activities within and between classes. At the completion of the project, researchers found that behavioral referrals had dropped by as much as 71% and students indicated a higher level of comfort and satisfaction with the group. In addition, students indicated a greater ability to make friends easily and naturally and to make mistakes without worrying about being ridiculed. Therefore, the authors (Johnson et al., 1995) concluded that where students experience risk, participation declines; as students' sense of belonging increased, their sense of personal risk decreases and participation increases.

Wentzel (1998), too, assessed the ways in which parent, teacher, and peer support are related to academic performance and to various measures of adolescent motivation, including

psychological distress, interest in school, academic and social goal orientations, and interest in class. Interest in class refers to the degree to which students engage and persist in classroom activities, based on teacher ratings and self-reports. With a sample of 167 sixth grade students from a sixth through eighth grade middle school in a suburban, middle-class, and predominantly white community, she found that while family support contributed to variance in school interest, perceived teacher support made the strongest contribution. Teacher support was also the only source of support contributing significantly to student interest in or engagement in class. In addition, teacher support was an independent and positive predictor of interest in class, interest in school, and social responsibility. Also, perceived peer support was the only predictor of students' adoption of prosocial goals and norms.

Ryan and Powelson (1991) offer a different perspective on motivation to achieve academically as it relates to relatedness. The authors suggest that schools have gone to the extreme of extrinsic motivation and that these motivators are actually destructive to long-term learning. Furthermore, it is suggested that the extrinsic motivators such as grades, promotions, detentions, and scholarships are ineffective for sustaining much excitement and passion for learning over an extended period of time. The social costs of an educational system that alienates students and fails to foster an internalized sense of purpose and importance among its participants is of a critical level. Ryan and Powelson (1991) argue that the facilitation of learning relies on factors that are largely interpersonal in nature. Specifically, they suggest that a learner is most likely to be interested and engaged in contexts of learning that are characterized by autonomy, support, relatedness, and belonging.

Ryan (1991) supports the idea of relatedness in terms of the emotional and personal bond between individuals. It reflects the striving for contact, support, and community with others. In addition, it refers to the experience of connecting with others in ways that conduce toward well being and self-cohesion in all individuals. The author argues that under conditions conducive to relatedness, people will be likely to express their inherent tendency to learn, to do, and to grow. People are engaged and motivated in domains where their basic psychologi-

cal needs can be and periodically are fulfilled. In educational contexts and tasks where students experience support for their autonomy and where they feel connected to and supported by significant others, they are likely to be highly motivated to learn and to achieve (Ryan & Powelson, 1991).

Moss (1991) reports that primary school students in cohesive, task-oriented, and structured classes where they feel a sense of belonging, tend to improve more in reading and mathematics.

### **Belonging and Gender**

Much of the research in regard to a sense of belonging takes into consideration gender. Because boys sometimes have different feelings about school than girls, many researchers have included this criteria in their research.

Goodenow's (1993a) research on middle-school students revealed that the most striking differences in a sense of belonging came from gender. The author reports that girls' grades were higher than boys'; however, their expectation for success and attitudes toward academic learning were not. The expectancies and values of the girls were maintained partially by their perceptions of good relationships and a sense of belonging with their teachers. Goodenow (1993a) further suggests that teacher support may in fact be more closely linked to the motivation and engagement of girls than it is for boys.

Voelkl (1995a) lent support to the findings with her study of student identification in school. The author surveyed students in an effort to identify differences in a sense of belonging between African-American students and Caucasian students. In addition, the author also accounted for gender differences. The author discovered that females report a higher level of identification with schools than do males.

Wong and Csikszentmihalyi (1991) learned that girls had higher needs for affiliation, and enjoyed spending more time interacting with others. Boys with high needs for affiliation viewed themselves as feminine and felt worse whether they were alone or with others than did

boys with lower affiliation needs. Boys with the strongest need to be liked and who were involved with others were less likely to demonstrate the dominance characteristics associated with male status and popularity in the peer group, more likely to experience non-acceptance, and more likely to have the strongest emotional reaction to non-acceptance. While acceptance by peers tends to be associated with a variety of positive outcomes, rejection is consistently and repeatedly associated with negative effects in both genders (Wong & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) .

Wentzell and Caldwell's (1997) study, in addition to providing information about reciprocating friendships, also shed light on gender relations in school. Their study suggests that boys are less likely to experience a sense of belonging in school than are girls. In addition, their research shows that girls have significantly higher peer acceptance ratings than boys and that girls have more and better friends, as reported by the students. The author suggested that males develop significantly more negative relationships with classmates than females do. Ryan, Stiller and Lynch (1994) found that boys are less likely to utilize friends for emotional issues and are significantly higher in reporting that they turn to no one for emotional and school concerns, behaviors that are linked with poorer school adaptation and motivation and lower self-esteem and identity integration. Moore and Boldero (1991) suggested that the strength of the relationship between the experience of peer acceptance and various outcomes is stronger for boys than for girls, leading them to the conclusion that although boys are less involved in friendships, friendships may be more important for their psychological development.

### **Belonging and Teachers**

In general, it is widely accepted that adolescents greatly benefit from positive relationships with adults both in and outside of school (Thor, 1998). Much of the research surrounding a student's sense of belonging has to do with the teachers' views of the students. Teachers play a major role in determining whether students feel that they are cared for and that they are a welcome part of the school community (Osterman, 2000). Taylor (A. Taylor, 1989) suggested

that the quality of a student's relationship with a teacher might parallel that of his/her classmates. In fact, the author found that teachers tend to dislike and reject students who are also disliked by their peers. This is important because students who are rejected by teachers tend to receive less help and more criticism from teachers and perhaps earn lower grades than those who are not disliked by teachers.

Travis (1995) suggests that sometime in the elementary school years, many students begin to develop a dislike for school and learning activities. This condition is due in part to the school environment; the behavior of teachers and administrators is not conducive to the learning process. Travis (1995) argues that the presumed ultimate effect of school is learning. Student resistance to learning, however, may be a significant outcome as well. The causes of disengagement from learning encompass the child's home and family, ethnic and cultural background, and school itself.

Travis (1995) continues that the administrative control of activities within a school includes a set of rules and procedures intended to establish and maintain order, thus ensuring the educational process, and providing a safe environment. Although the theories behind these rules seem logical, they are more applicable to control than to education. Silberman (1970) stated that obsession with control is based on distrust that permeates our schools systems—administrators do not trust teachers and teachers do not trust students. The violation of the rules, which are created by administrators and teachers, results in discipline of the students. This discipline, administered to the students, is one of the most alienating features of schools. Both physical and mental brutality have been employed in the name of discipline to control of schools (Kozol, 1967). Furthermore, disciplinary problems are considered one of the top three reasons for dropping out of school (Travis, 1995). If disciplinary action itself is not enough to foster alienation among students, an apparent inconsistency in enforcing discipline exists in our schools. The negative student response to such discrimination should not be surprising. Discipline and inconsistent application of penalties can easily make school appear unpleasant to a student (Travis, 1995).

Another aspect of schools and teaching is the curriculum that is taught (Travis, 1995). Schools teach a curriculum determined by an expert assessment of what children ought to learn. Although teachers may have some influence on the curriculum, over 70% of them are not allowed to make significant curricular decisions (Glickman, 1991). Such a curriculum may be seen by students to be alien, causing them to reject the lessons, perhaps entirely. This is indicated by the fact that many dropouts have cited boredom of curriculum as a major reason for leaving school; the influence of the curriculum is clear in this case (Travis, 1995). Kronick and Hargis (1990) also contributed to the idea of curriculum influence when they stated that the curriculum is ultimately a contributing factor of dropping out in nearly every case.

Larrivee (2000) suggests that schools must be caring communities where caring is a goal in itself, not a means to an end. Furthermore, the author suggests that schools function as a surrogate family, based on the underlying assumption that students today have fragmented home lives and require greater nurturance in the school. In addition, a fundamental need common to all models for healthy psychological development is the need to belong. Students need to develop a sense of belonging as a member of their school community (Larrivee, 2000).

A caring and supportive relationship with an adult has been described as a protective factor which promotes resiliency in children. Much of the research related to this relationship has been focused on the parent-child relationship. However, teachers have also been identified as significant adult role models in many students' lives (Garmezy, 1991; Werner, 1993). Edwards (1995) suggests that until teachers themselves feel that they have a place and a strong sense of belonging in the school, they will not be able to foster this same feeling in the students. Traditionally, learning has been nested within personal relationships and meaningful activities within a larger community. Education took place in a community of people to whom one had a strong attachment or relationship. Ryan and Powelson (1991) suggest that children have become isolated from adults and, to a large degree, from children of other ages, creating youth and school cultures that are out of touch with the work and social worlds of adults. Furthermore, the authors suggest that learning is expected to occur apart from the interpersonal



contexts that have traditionally provided the support for internalization (Ryan & Powelson, 1991). A great deal of research has investigated this hypothesis.

Werner and Smith's (Werner & Smith, 1989) at-risk children research in Kauai found that many youths who were considered to be resilient were able to mention a favorite teacher as one of the most frequently encountered positive role models outside the family circle. In addition, this person was not simply an instructor but was also a model for personal identification. A similar study was conducted by Van Scotter (1994) among students aged ten to seventeen. The author learned that teachers ranked second only to parents in terms of positive role models. Of the students surveyed, 94 % identified parents as role models while 78% also identified teachers. This evidence would suggest that students indicate a desire for social relationships with their teachers.

McCabe (1995) lends support to this statement with her study of eleventh-grade students. She found that these students wanted teachers to address both the cognitive and affective domain of teaching and learning. Students frequently stated that the best teachers made them feel known and respected, both qualities of a sense of belonging. In addition, the students wanted to learn because the teacher cared about them as well as the subject matter. Researchers at Stanford University's Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching found similar results.

Phelan, Locke-Davidson, Thanh Cao (1992) interviewed 54 students from four high schools in two California school districts. Most of the students were in their first year of high school when the study began. A substantial number of students indicated that they wanted caring teachers who knew them individually. The students also expressed a desire to feel safe while at school. The students indicated that they wanted to be challenged, but not insulted by teachers or peers, or made to look or feel stupid. Once again, these are characteristics of a sense of belonging.

Wentzel and Asher (1995) examined academically relevant characteristics of different sociometric status groups and academic orientation of behavioral subgroups of rejected chil-

dren. The study involved 423 sixth and seventh grade students who fell into various categories of peer acceptance. The authors studied four classifications of children: rejected, who were infrequently nominated as someone's best friend and actively disliked by peers; neglected students, those who did not seem to have friends but were not disliked; controversial, those who were nominated as someone's best friend but were also disliked; and popular, those who were nominated as someone's best friend and were well liked.

Wentzel and Asher (1995) had students anonymously nominate each other into various categories such as: someone they would like to do something with; someone they would not like to be around, etc. The researchers then determined which nominated students fell into one of the four categories. Each of these students was then given an instrument to measure their commitment to class work, quality of school life, and satisfaction with school. The results indicate that neglected children reported high levels of school motivation, were perceived to be independent, were perceived to be less impulsive, and preferred by teachers. Rejected students were perceived by teachers to be less self-assured and to instigate fights more often. They were also preferred less by teachers and by their classmates. Controversial students were perceived to be less independent, less likely to follow rules, and more likely to start fights. Popular children were perceived by teachers to be more helpful to others and often nominated as good students.

Wentzel and Asher (1995) suggest that the meaning of this information can be summed up in the argument that rejected children are perceived to be less interested in school, less independent and more impulsive. These children are not well liked by teachers and do not have positive academic reputations. This brings into question the long-term academic achievement ability of these students. Furthermore, children who are rejected are at a higher risk of dropping out of school, not neglected children. Neglected children, on the other hand, those who are frequently nominated as not having friends but who are not disliked, showed the highest level of school motivation. Perhaps being liked by teachers is more important for the

adoption of school-related goals than is a high level of acceptance among peers (Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

Other researchers have found evidence of students who do not belong to a group or who feel rejected by someone else. Kindermann's (1993) study of fourth and fifth grade students showed that 12% of the surveyed students did not belong to a peer group in a classroom. Bishop and Inderbitzen's (1995) study of ninth-grade students showed that 11% of students had no reciprocal friend. In two groups of sixth grade students, Wentzel & Caldwell (1997) found that 37% of 212 and 28% of 404 students did not have a reciprocated friend.

Ladd (1990) conducted a similar study, in which he performed a longitudinal study of 125 children from eight kindergarten classes in four Midwestern schools. The author examined the relative impact of friendships and peer acceptance on various aspects of school adjustment. Through peer nominations, children were classified as rejected, popular, neglected or controversial. Rejected students were rarely nominated as best friends and were actively disliked by peers. Popular students received frequent nominations as best friends and were not disliked. Controversial students had best friends but were also actively disliked. Findings showed that classroom peer status had more impact than friendships on school perceptions, school involvement, and performance. Rejected children had less favorable perceptions of school, higher level of school avoidance, and lower levels of school performance than did popular, average, or neglected children (Ladd, 1990).

Apparently, students desire more than academic instruction from their teachers; rather, students are longing for a sense of community and bonding in their classroom (Phelan et al., 1992). Teachers in schools where students gather a sense of belonging tend to express greater warmth and supportiveness toward students and spend much more time listening to and talking with students about personal and social issues (Solomon, Battstich, Kim, & Watson, 1997). These relationships help children derive a sense of belonging and engage in meaningful academic work (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Meier (1992) cites personalized, caring relationships with teachers as a prerequisite for high school-level reform. When asked about

teacher qualities that are most influential for students' success, teacher concern and support, not competency and proficiency, have been cited consistently for 30 years (Rogers, 1994; Witty, 1967).

Teachers in caring community school environments purposively mentor students in areas other than academics. They address social, ethnic, and civic behavior as part of their formal curriculum, often through the use of character education or ethics curricula to prosocial behavior. The teachers in these environments infuse the message of prosocial behavior into the academic curriculum and use these messages informally throughout the day to address interpersonal or classroom problems. This in turn creates an environment of mutual respect where students are accepted for who they are (Baker et al., 1997).

Researchers have identified school communities as important concepts for developing a sense of belonging in students. Community can be defined as the relational bonds between individuals that allow them to forge shared values and ideals in pursuit of a meaningful common goal, both of which are cornerstones of belonging (Sergiovanni, 1994). When schools function as formal organizations, they assume the societal tasks of education and socialization by inventing structures and role relationships to fulfill the mission of creating schools with a sense of belonging. Community-oriented schools reflect the primary group relationships of family and neighborhood more than the formal, artificial ones of institutions. The individual is valued as an integral part of the community where a sense of purpose is encouraged. This results in individuals who derive meaning and significance from the relationships (Sergiovanni, 1994). A sense of belonging is critical to the perception of one's place in a community. Members of a community share common values and ideas (Baker et al., 1997).

Leithwood et. al (1999) presented data showing that quality of instruction accounted for 46% of the variation in students' sense of belonging. Their study relied on students' perceptions of different aspects of their classroom experience, including teachers' support. Other research identifies two specific instructional strategies that relate directly to children's experience of relatedness: cooperative learning and dialogue. Anderman and Maehr (1994) and Covington

(1992) studied cooperation in contrast to competition to enhance overall student motivation. The researchers learned that cooperative learning is particularly significant for the development of peer relations and directly affects the frequency of student interaction. In addition, cooperative learning also affects the nature of student interaction.

The authors hypothesized that structuring the work to require and reward group effort (positive interdependence) for task completion and for the learning of each individual group member to ensure a high level and different kind of interaction than that of individual learning strategies was more effective. Tasks in cooperative learning are structured so that members of the group need each other and therefore, develop a sense of belonging (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Covington, 1992). Osterman (2000) reported that cooperative settings created more incidents of helping behavior, greater satisfaction with the group experience, more frequent perceptions of group cohesiveness, and greater attraction between members of the group. Furthermore, the quality of this interaction results in student beliefs that they are liked for who they are, are supported, and accepted by other students. In addition, Anderman and Maehr (1994), Covington (1992), and Osterman (2000) feel that other students care about how much group members learn in cooperative groups and that other students want to help each other learn.

Another study (Solomon et al., 1997) examined the relationship between teacher practices, various aspects of student behavior, and students' sense of belonging within the classroom. The researchers determined that teacher practices have an indirect relationship with students' sense of belonging through intermediate relationships with student engagement, influence, and positive interpersonal behavior. The strongest relationships were between teachers' encouragement of cooperation and students' positive interpersonal behavior and influence, leading the researchers to conclude that behaviors during cooperative exercises are a primary mechanism that provides students with opportunities to exert meaningful influence and to display positive behavior with their classmates.

Jules (1991) studied the impact of cooperative learning on peer interaction outside of the learning situation preceding and following cooperative learning experiences. The author observed students interacting in groups and cliques before the introduction of cooperative learning experiences. After five weeks of 40-minute lessons for 25 periods, the researcher found that the cliques were no longer evident, friendship patterns had widened, and same-race choices declined. Seventy-three percent of the students had more positive perceptions of themselves by others after the experience than they had before. In contrast to this research Altenbaugh et. al (1995) studied dropouts and reported that these students described the classroom as being depersonalized when the desks were lined up in rows. The structural arrangement of the classroom seems to influence how much students are able to interact and truly get to know one another. Without the opportunity for small group interaction, there is nothing more than superficial relationships where stereotypes continue to remain unchallenged and unexplored (Jones & Gerig, 1994).

One of the first proponents of the connection between learning and a sense of belonging in students was Dewey (1958). He argued that dialogue between students during the lesson facilitated the development of ideas, but it can also help students to develop a better appreciation of others and to experience themselves as part of a supportive community. Battistich et al. (1991) maintained that discussion in a supportive classroom environment where students have the opportunity to express personal opinions gave children the opportunity to discover that others care about them. Gamoran and Nystrand (1992) supported this hypothesis stating that “regardless of the activity in which students participate, discourse is a critical indicator of the extent to which school offers membership” (p. 40).

Although teachers play a major role in fostering an environment in which students feel they belong, not all students experience teacher support (Osterman, 2000). Research consistently shows that students receive differential treatment from teachers on basis of characteristics such as race, gender, class, ability, and appearance. This differentiation begins as early as kindergarten and lasts throughout high school.

Altenbaugh et al. (1995) reported teacher favoritism. The favorites, one explained, were “the kids that were real smart in class. The other ones, they just ignored altogether.” Those teachers who had favorites would show it in different ways, but, “They were always nicer to those students and always mean to the others. . . If a kid missed a day of notes, he would give it to him and help him out, but he wouldn’t the other students” (p.87). Ladd (1990) reported that by the end of the second month in school, kindergarten children with higher mental age scores and greater preschool experience tended to receive higher ratings from teachers for academic behaviors and preparedness.

Using path analysis, the Connell et al. study (1995) found that while engagement was a predictor of academic performance, it also directly influenced the level of perceived support from adults. The researchers summarized that students receive support depending upon their level of engagement. Those who were highly engaged received more support than those who did not. These studies indicate that teachers’ perceptions of student ability, engagement, and academic performance influence the quality of the relationships with students and their ability to feel a sense of belonging (Osterman, 2000). Each of these researchers (Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Connell et al., 1995; Ladd, 1990) demonstrates how teachers can inadvertently undermine students’ sense of belonging in the classroom. However, the reverse has also been found to be true.

Prosocial behavior can be learned and is best learned in an environment of caring. Experimental studies of children from infancy through eight years found that children learn best through imitation, and that learning was greatest when the experimenter and child had a nurturing relationship and when the adult was able to model caring behavior for others in real-life interaction (Osterman, 2000). An experimental study by Flanders and Havumaki (1960), cited in Schmuck and Schumck (1997), demonstrated how communication and supportive responses from teachers affect peer-group friendship nominations. In classrooms, teachers directed supportive comments only to selected students and not to others. At the completion of the week,

these students received significantly more friendship group nominations than those students who did not receive support.

Ryan and Powelson (1991) reported that teachers' attitudes toward autonomy and control have an impact on attitude orientations of children in the classroom. It was predicted that teachers who valued autonomy would be more likely to promote confidence and mastery motivation in learning on the part of the students. Classroom teachers who were oriented toward externally controlling learning were expected to produce more passive and less interested orientations toward learning in students. The researchers identified teachers who tended to motivate through external controls and those who motivate through internal controls. Ryan and Powelson (1991) then surveyed 610 children taught by these teachers to assess their motivation with respect to learning.

The authors (Ryan & Powelson, 1991) found that children in the classrooms of autonomy-oriented teachers reported more curiosity for learning, more desire for challenge, and more independent mastery attempts. In addition, the teachers were rated by the students as being "warmer" than those who were characterized as having a controlling orientation and the students reported greater levels of self-worth and belonging. This suggests that autonomy support, experienced relatedness, and belonging may be intertwined. In conclusion, the authors suggested that unless the socialization practices of schools facilitate the internalization by students of values and interests in learning, then the battle for cognitive gains is a futile one. Children who value learning and who feel confident in approaching achievement-relevant tasks will also tend to exhibit measurably better achievement. Ryan and Powelson (1991) close with the statement that:

Schools teach a great deal more than the curriculum. They are a primary context for cultural socialization wherein children's behaviors are regulated, and they acquire values for learning and attitudes about themselves as learners. During the years that children are in school, they receive affective lessons that will affect their aspirations, perceived competence, motivational style, and relationships with authorities, long after they leave school. (p.63)



Moss (1991) reported on the role of teachers as they relate to the learning environment of the school. The author reported that junior high and high school students who have supportive relationships with teachers and an emphasis on student participation in well organized classrooms have high student morale, interest in the subject matter, and a sense of academic efficacy. Furthermore, the author reported that gains on standard achievement tests are most likely to occur in task-oriented classes that set specific academic goals in the context of the supportive relationship and clear environmental structure. Moss (1991) also adds that substantial achievement gains can occur in classes that emphasize task performance and competition and are lower in warmth, but such classes are not as effective in fostering student creativity or continuing motivation to learn. Competition and control in the absence of support often promote student anxiety and absenteeism.

It is important to note that the sense of belonging that is created in schools can have as much effect on the teachers as it does on the students. Moss (1991) suggests that the social organization of a high school, especially the extent to which it provides a sense of community, can influence the work climate for teachers as well as the climate for learning and student outcomes. Teachers who work in a communal school organization are more likely to be satisfied with their work, to be seen by students as enjoying their teaching, and to share a high level of staff morale. This high level of school community in the teachers was associated with better outcomes for the students (Moss, 1991).

Baker et al. (1997) argue that children with positive, caring, consistent, caretaking relationships develop both the security and the competencies required for success in any school setting. The competencies include valuing social exchange, trusting the intent of adults, willingly taking positive risks, and developing a sense of worth. Children without secure relationship experiences in school face a host of mental health and school adjustment problems.

Capps and Maxwell (1999) report that even the size of the school can be a factor in adolescent alienation. Their research shows that students who attend small schools have a greater sense of belonging than those who attend large schools. In addition, minimizing alien-

ation that commonly afflicts adolescents appears to be one of the most redeeming qualities of small schools. Large and impersonal high schools can obviously cloak the severe feelings of student alienation to a much greater degree than small schools. According to Capps and Maxwell (1999) small schools can overcome the realities of not knowing one's neighbor because they are able to foster a greater sense of community among all students. Their evidence shows that students in small schools are more likely to bond with their teachers and peers, and that they more readily identify with their schools.

Battistich et. al. (1995) conducted a study of school communities and their effect on sense of belonging. In particular, they focused on students' sense of school community, poverty level, and students' attitudes, motives, beliefs, and behavior among a diverse sample of elementary schools. Their findings indicate that students who experience the school as a caring and supportive environment, in which they actively participate and have opportunities to influence, will feel attached to the school community and will, therefore, come to accept its norms and values.

Battistich et. al. (1995) also report that the relationships between poverty and sense of community are disheartening. Students from low-income areas tend to report the lowest levels of school community. School for these students is, on the whole, less pleasant and rewarding than for their wealthy counterparts. It is important to note that schools have not been particularly successful with students from low-income populations and both quality of instruction and academic performance continue to be lower for poor students than for more affluent students (Allington, 1987 as reported in Battistich et al.,1995)

Battistich et al. (1995) report also that the most encouraging aspect of their findings is that some of the negative aspects of living in poverty can be mitigated if the school is successful in creating a caring community for its members. Although community had a strong negative correlation with the poverty level of the school's student population and poverty had a strong negative correlation to most of the outcomes that were researched, the observed effects of school community held when poverty was taken into account. In addition, the sense of school

community showed its strongest positive relationships with students' outcomes in the high-poverty schools. This supports the authors' (Battistich et al., 1995) hypothesis that a caring and supportive community is important in schools with poor student populations.

One important outcome of the research of Battistich et. al. (1995) is the fact that many of the instructional techniques that are enlisted in higher socioeconomic schools are different from those used in poor schools. In addition, although it was once believed that instructional techniques in poor schools need to focus on basic skills and rote memory work, researchers suggest that autonomy and opportunities for active involvement for decision making are valuable for all students (Kronick & Hargis, 1990). Travis (1995) reiterated this, stating that students who are not permitted an opportunity to influence their learning process will become consequently less committed to school work. Not only is curriculum short-changing students by not appealing to their individual interests, but by showing a preference for a specific culture and unnecessarily stereotyping gender roles, the subject matter risks turning children off entirely from the learning process. Travis (1995) reinforces this finding stating that the methods in which curriculum is taught are influential in alienating students. An emphasis on memory learning rather than thinking, while obviously deficient, is still predominant. Although it is clearly regarded as poor practice, avoidance of higher levels of learning persists, nevertheless. Relegated to learning what may appear to students as a pointless array of facts, they once again find a gap in the relevance of their education. Travis (1995) reports that American schools set a goal of minimum competency, which further limits the extent of student effort. The students will either pursue learning on their own or simply withdraw from the learning process altogether.

Another aspect of student engagement in schooling falls under the category of school reform. Cook-Sather (2002) argues that authorizing student perspectives runs counter to most U.S. reforms to change schools. Most reform efforts are based upon the perspectives of adults' ideas about the conceptualization and practice of education. At the root of the debate is the term power—the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the

right to have one's part matter. Cook-Sather (2002) calls for the authorization of student power by allowing their perspectives to count as knowledge and to shape what constitutes education..(2002) Authorizing student perspectives can directly improve educational practice because when teachers listen to and learn from students, they can begin to see the world from the perspective of the students. When students are taken seriously and attended to as knowledgeable persons in important conversations, they feel empowered and will in turn participate in the education created as an outcome. Students not only feel more engaged but are also inclined to take more responsibility for their education because it is no longer something being done to them but rather something they do (Cook-Sather, 2002).

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Following a review of the literature, this study was designed to determine students' sense of belonging as perceived by students in junior high schools in Education Service Center Texas, Regions IV and VI. Secondly, teachers' perceptions of students' sense of belonging was measured using a modified version of the same instrument used for the students. Finally, this information was compared to the academic performance of the schools as identified through the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) of the Texas Education Agency. The questionnaire used was developed by a previous researcher. The Psychological Sense of School Membership was developed by Carol Goodenow (1993a) to measure the level of belonging that students feel when they are in school.

#### **Population**

The population for this study was approximately 7000 students who attended middle schools in Education Service Center, Region IV or VI. Schools for the study were identified through random sampling from the AEIS of the Texas Education Agency. A sample of 2000 students was randomly selected from each of the twenty schools. Ten schools were randomly chosen from those campuses that are considered exemplary or recognized on the AEIS. Ten schools were randomly chosen from those that are considered acceptable or low-performing on the AEIS. A sample of 700 teachers from a population of 1500 teachers from the exemplary or recognized campuses was randomly selected to participate in the survey and qualitative design of the study (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

#### **Instrumentation**

Students and teachers who were selected were asked to fill out the Psychological Sense of School Membership instrument. The instrument, developed by Carol Goodenow (1993a), was designed to measure the level of belonging that a student feels at school. The

survey consists of 18 questions that are answered on a 5-point Likert scale, with choices ranging from not at all true (1) to completely true (5); these were then averaged to produce a scale score. The Psychological Sense of School Membership includes items that involve not only perceived liking, personal acceptance, and inclusions but also respect and encouragement for participation. The student version of this instrument only asked for students to answer the questions that were already provided on the instrument. The teacher version of this instrument was slightly altered in order to gain an understanding of the teachers' perceptions of the students' sense of belonging. In addition, the teacher version of the survey asked qualitative questions designed to collect information on activities the school provides to help students have a strong sense of belonging.

The initial development of the instrument was completed in two related studies by Carol Goodenow (1993a) of Tufts University. According to Goodenow (1993a), the first step in developing a measure of belonging or psychological school membership was to generate a pool of potential questions reflecting issues raised by the research literature. Items were included that involved not only perceived liking, personal acceptance, and inclusion, but also respect and encouragement for participation. To avoid the development of a "response set" on the part of the students, approximately one third of the items were phrased in a negative direction.

Goodenow (1993a) eliminated ambiguous and redundant items, and an initial pool of 42 items was shortened to form an intermediate 28-item "school membership" scale. This instrument was administered in late spring, with several other measures, to three different samples of early adolescent students. The instrument was tested across both urban and suburban samples and with students of several ethnic groups before final scale reduction was achieved. This procedure made the application across diverse settings and populations reasonable.

Goodenow (1993a) conducted the first scale-development study with 6th-, 7th-, and 8th-grade students (N=454) in a suburban middle school in the Northeast. Participants included 234 boys and 220 girls. The school population as a whole was predominately Caucasian and

middle class. The average age of the students was 12.65 years ( $SD=.98$ ). In Study 1, questionnaires containing the preliminary school membership scale and several other measures were completed in an English class under the supervision of the classroom teachers. Teachers indicated which student questionnaires had been completed by ethnic minority students ( $n=32$ , 7% of sample) and by mainstreamed special education students ( $n=34$ , 7% of sample). However, Goodenow (1993a) did not indicate how the participants' identification might have overlapped.

In Study 2, Goodenow (1993a) conducted the second scale development in two urban junior high schools in a medium sized city in the same northeastern state as Study 1. The city's public school system enrolled approximately equal numbers of African-American, Hispanic, and Caucasian students. The average per capita income was in the lowest quartile of the state. At the time of the study, school assignment for junior high school students was based on area of residence within the city, resulting in a pattern of de facto ethnic segregation.

In School A, Goodenow (1993a) randomly chose half the student body to participate in the study by filling out a questionnaire. One hundred ninety-eight students completed the survey; 104 identified themselves as boys and 87 as girls. In this school, the largest group of students identified themselves as African-American ( $n=89$ , 45% of the total); 33 (16%) identified themselves as Hispanic; 66(33%) were Caucasian; 2 (1%) were Asian; and 9 did not indicate any ethnic identification. Student ages ranged from 12 to 16, averaging 13.80 years ( $SD = 1.0$ ).

In School B, Goodenow (1993a) reported that participants consisted of a randomly chosen half of the 7th-grade students in another junior high school in the same city ( $N=103$ ; 6 students did not identify gender). The 54 boys and 43 girls completing the questionnaire in School B were primarily Hispanic ( $n=77$ , 75% of total); 16 of these students completed a Spanish-language translation of the questionnaire. Additionally, 7 students (7%) identified themselves as African-American, 16 students (15%) as Caucasian, and 1 (1%) as Asian. Student ages ranged from 12 to 15, with a mean age of 13.11 years ( $SD = .89$ ).

In October of the school year following initial scale development, Goodenow (1993a) administered a final, shorter version of the Psychological Sense of School Membership as part of a larger project to all 5th-, 6th-, 7th-, and 8th- grade students (N=611) then attending the suburban school that had participated in Study 1. Participants were 312 boys and 294 girls (5 did not answer); no information was collected regarding ethnicity. At the time of the scale administration, participating students ranged in age from 9 to 14 years (mean = 11.60 years, SD = 1.18).

Goodenow (1993a) computed means and standard deviations for all school membership items separately for student samples from Studies 1 and 2. Internal consistency reliability was calculated for the set of school membership items. Two criteria were used to eliminate items in the creation of a final, shorter scale. First, items were eliminated that substantially reduced internal consistency reliability in either the suburban or the urban samples. Second, items with low variability were removed. The 18 best items, summed and divided by 18, constituted the final Psychological Sense of School Membership scale, which has a possible scale range from 1.0 to 5.0. This final shorter scale was also used in Study 3 (see appendix).

Goodenow (1993a) reported her descriptive statistics by separate study. In Study 1, the mean Psychological Sense of School Membership score was 3.86, with a standard deviation of .72. In the same suburban school the following fall, Study 3 students obtained an average Psychological sense of School Membership Score of 3.84 with a standard deviation of .72, virtually the same as the previous year. Although there was a substantial overlap in student participants from Study 1 to Study 3, unfortunately it was not possible to match students' responses from the two studies. Study 2 urban students from Schools A and B had means of 3.11 (SD= .70) and 3.09 (SD = .61), respectively. The two urban groups were not significantly different from each other; these two city school populations were combined as a single urban sample for subsequent analyses.



## **Procedures**

Review of information in the AEIS allowed the researcher to determine which middle school campuses in Region IV and VI had low-performing, acceptable, recognized, and exemplary ratings. Once a list of all these schools was compiled, further analysis was conducted to select 20 matched schools to participate in the study. Schools were selected from districts where enough middle schools were located that two could be chosen for the study. Because these schools were matched within a district, schools had similar distribution of funds. Schools were also matched based upon ethnic breakdown. A school that had a low-performing or acceptable rating on the AEIS was matched with a school within the same district that had a recognized or exemplary rating. Careful consideration was given to the selection of schools to ensure that both schools were as equal as possible in all categories. Schools tended to fall within a few percentage points of each other in terms of the ethnic breakdown. A cover letter was sent to the superintendent of each desired school district assuring anonymity and requesting permission to perform the study in the district. Then each principal was contacted, and permission was requested from him or her for students and faculty members to participate in the study. A cover letter was written to the parents describing the purpose of the study and assuring that all information would be kept anonymous. Each survey sent out to a child had an agreement to participate form that required the student's signature and the parent's signature. Any survey that was received by the researcher that was not accompanied by the parent permission form was not used in the study. This information was conveyed to the parents as well. All teachers received a letter explaining that in filling out the survey, they are giving permission for their information to be used in the study.

## **Data Analysis**

The data gathered was examined using quantitative and qualitative procedures. Analysis and interpretation of the data followed the principles described in *Educational Research: An Introduction* by Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996). A descriptive statistical analysis examined the data

gathered from the surveys by using measures of central tendency to organize and interpret data, and utilizing analysis of covariance. The data collected from Education Service Centers Texas Regions IV and VI on the survey instrument were entered into a personal computer and analyzed using a statistical program. The mean scores of the exemplary and recognized schools were compared to the mean scores of the acceptable and low-performing schools. In addition, the mean scores of the teachers were compared to the mean scores of the students in each corresponding school. The data retrieved from the qualitative analysis was transcribed and reported.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between students' sense of belonging, as reported by students on the Psychological Sense of School Membership survey (PSSM), and the academic performance of the school as a whole as measured by the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). The secondary purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the students' sense of belonging and the teachers' perception of the students' sense of belonging as reported on the PSSM. In addition, the sense of belonging as reported by the students was analyzed against demographic data of the school. The tertiary purpose of this study was to investigate the teachers' role in creating an environment where students have a sense of belonging.

This chapter provides the results of the data collected from the selected populations through the questionnaire used by the researcher. The results were analyzed to determine significant areas of relationship between a student's sense of belonging as reported on the PSSM and other factors related to the demographics of the studied schools. The analysis of the data that follows is divided into two areas: (a) quantitative analysis of survey data as reported on student and teacher surveys, and (b) qualitative data as reported on the teacher survey responses. The PSSM questionnaire was designed on a 5-point Likert scale to rate respondents' sense of belonging for 18 factors. A rank of 1 indicated that the statement was "not at all true"; 2 indicated "not very true"; 3 indicated "neither not at all true nor completely true"; 4 indicated "somewhat true"; and 5 indicated "completely true." Both the students' and teachers' versions of the PSSM used this scale. The teacher version of the PSSM was simply a perception of students' sense of belonging as reported by the teacher. The teachers' version of the PSSM had three opportunities for teacher response. On the back of the teacher survey were two questions: (a) What activities does this school have in place to make all students feel as though they belong? (b) What changes could teachers make to help students feel a part of the school?

Teachers were also given an opportunity to make other comments they deemed important to the topic.

The data for responses from each group and school is shown in Table 1. Group 1 shows the number of responses of students in all schools. Group 2 shows the number of responses of teachers in all schools. The table also shows the total number of responses of students and teachers at all schools.

**Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Teacher and Student Responses to PSSM for Selected Middle School Students and Teachers of Middle Schools Students.**

Group	Responses N
1. Students	896
2. Teachers	428
Total	1324

Table 2 shows the demographic data of each school that responded to the survey. This table indicates the number of responses from each school, the percentage of minority students in the school, the percentage of low–socioeconomic-status students in the school, and the performance of the school. The performance of the school is indicated by a 1, for exemplary or recognized school, or 2, for acceptable or low-performing schools.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Selected Middle School Participating in the Study Including Minority, Socioeconomic Status, and School Performance.**

School	Ethnicity %	Low Socioeconomic %	Performance High or Low
1	99.1	92.4	1
2	50.0	41.0	1
3	96.0	88.9	1
4	25.4	35.3	1
5	17.3	44.1	1
6	46.3	44.6	2
7	74.2	77.1	2
8	70.2	45.7	2
9	79.6	47.7	1
10	20.6	21.6	1
11	19.8	12.4	2
12	43.2	37.2	2
13	90.9	78.2	2
14	25.4	25.4	1
15	12.3	19.1	2
16	29.1	32.5	2
17	93.1	85.3	1
18	76.0	63.5	1
19	23.8	40.0	2
20	99.2	93.1	2

*Research Question #1*

Does a relationship exist between students' sense of belonging and academic achievement of the school as reported by students in selected middle schools in Texas Regions IV and VI Education Service Centers?

Table 3 contains the descriptive statistics for students' responses by school. The table indicates the mean scores on the PSSM, the standard deviation of the scores for each school response on the survey, and the number of student responses at each school.

**Table 3. Sample Size, Mean, and Standard Deviation of Students' Responses to the PSSM at Selected Middle Schools.**

School	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample N
1	2.8896	.54223	46
2	3.3782	.37204	22
3	3.6639	.27495	23
4	3.2381	.48055	42
5	2.9306	.45083	16
6	3.1627	.42733	70
7	3.2717	.47768	6
8	3.0360	.34341	20
9	3.1129	.49882	14
10	3.2809	.40605	54
11	3.3404	.34807	23
12	3.2120	.46378	45
13	3.2587	.41066	99
14	3.2771	.47978	48
15	3.0679	.50232	95
16	2.9006	.44176	33
17	3.3478	.41218	50
18	3.1830	.43931	61
19	2.5242	.38048	67
20	2.7640	.59389	60
Total	3.1118	.50985	896

Table 4 contains the descriptive statistics for teachers' responses by school. The table indicates the mean scores on the PSSM, the standard deviation of the scores for each school response on the PSSM, and the number of teacher responses to the PSSM at each school.

**Table 4. Sample Size, Mean, and Standard Deviation of Teachers' Responses to the**

School	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample N
1	3.4206	.34163	18
2	3.6181	.39795	26
3	3.6871	.60575	14
4	3.3256	.21856	18
5	3.2957	.29040	14
6	3.5547	.29507	30
7	3.4142	.27903	19
8	3.8789	.24847	9
9	3.3474	.30726	19
10	3.6550	.25397	12
11	3.6228	.16372	25
12	3.5931	.33980	16
13	3.3290	.33936	39
14	3.6729	.28491	17
15	3.2322	.42836	18
16	3.5450	.37849	16
17	3.4053	.38155	36
18	3.4959	.35728	34
19	3.8774	.22454	23
20	3.3672	.40038	25
Total	3.4820	.34924	428

Table 5 shows an analysis of covariance with sense of belonging as a dependent variable. In this analysis, group and performance were fixed factors. The covariates for this analysis were socioeconomic status, ethnicity, school, performance of school computed by ethnicity, performance of the school computed by socioeconomic status, and performance of the school computed by the group. The results and analysis of the study indicate that a students' sense of belonging does not have a relationship to the performance of the school as an independent factor. However, other factors in this study do indicate a significant difference for the students' sense of belonging.

**Table 5. Analysis of Covariance for Sense of Belonging Indicating Sum of Squares, Degree of Freedom, Mean Square, F Ratio and Significance Level for Data as Reported on PSSM by Selected Middle Schools.**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	67.181 <sup>a</sup>	7	9.597	49.097	.000
Intercept	2652.315	1	26252.315	13568.518	.000
PERXETHN	5.892	1	5.892	30.143	.000*
PERXSES	5.381	1	5.381	27.527	.000*
SES	1.217	1	1.217	6.226	.013*
ETHNICITY	1.560	1	1.560	7.982	.005*
PERFORMANCE	.026	1	.026	.133	.715
GROUP	37.632	1	37.632	192.513	.000*
PERFORMANCE* GROUP	2.289	1	2.289	11.712	.001*
Error	257.246	1316	.195		
Total	14149.999	1324			
Corrected Total	324.427	1323			

<sup>a</sup> R squared = .207 (Adjusted R Squared = .203)

\*p<.05



According to the analysis, the percentage of minority students in the selected middle schools is a significant factor in the reported students' sense of belonging. In addition, the percentage of low-socioeconomic students is a significant factor for students' sense of belonging as reported on the PSSM. There is a significant difference for sense of belonging for the performance of the school nested within ethnicity, performance of the school nested within socioeconomic status, socioeconomic status on its own, ethnicity on its own, the group reporting, and the performance of the school nested within the group.

### *Research Question #2*

Is there a relationship between the students' sense of belonging and the teachers' perception of students' sense of belonging as identified by teachers in selected middle schools in Texas Regions IV and VI Education Service Centers?

Table 5 indicates a significant difference in the students' reported sense of belonging and the teachers' perception of students' sense of belonging as recorded on the PSSM. The computed value of performance multiplied by ethnicity and the computed value of performance multiplied by socioeconomic status were analyzed as covariates against the dependent value of belonging. These were both significant factors for sense of belonging indicating that high-performing schools and low-performing schools have a different relationship between the percentage of minority students and their reported sense of belonging. There is also a difference in the relationship between the percentage of students of low socioeconomic status and their sense of belonging.

In order to adjust for the differences between schools in the analysis of covariance, school as a factor was calculated against a dependent variable for the residual error of belonging. This allows for a more accurate accounting of the error in the model due to differences between schools. The error type III sum of squares shown in Table 6 is an estimate of the error term for the analysis of covariance in the study of students' sense of belonging.

Reanalyzing the effects in Table 5 using the error term in Table 6 results in identical results with respect to significance or non-significance. This table indicates that a students' sense of belonging varies depending on which school he/she attends regardless of the performance of the school.

**Table 6. Analysis of Covariance for Residual Error in Sense of Belonging as Reported on PSSM as compared to Differences in Schools as Reported by Selected Middle Schools.**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	17.638 <sup>a</sup>	19	.928	5.052	.000
Intercept	.006	1	.006	.031	.861
SCHOOL	17.638	19	.928	5.052	.000*
Error	239.608	1304	.184		
Total	257.246	1324			
Corrected Total	257.246				

<sup>a</sup>R squared = .069 (Adjusted R Squared = .055)

\*p<.05

Table 7 further supports the data analysis of the difference between students' reported sense of belonging and the teachers' perception of sense of belonging. Table 7 describes the mean score for students and teachers. Scores are first divided by the performance of the school. Schools that are low-performing are in performance level 1. Schools that are high-performing are in performance level 2. These scores are further divided by students, indicated by group 1, and teachers, indicated by group 2. In addition to reporting the mean student and teacher scores as reported on PSSM, a standard deviation was calculated along with a total number of respondents. These scores indicate a larger discrepancy, which was found to be a significant factor, between students and teachers for low-performing schools than for high performing schools.

**Table 7. Mean Score of Students' Sense of Belonging and Teachers' Perception of Students' Sense of Belonging Categorized by Low and High Performing Schools as Reported on PSSM by Selected Middle School Students and Teachers.**

Performance	Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
1	1	3.0054	.52542	448
	2	3.4686	.35392	190
	Total	3.1433	.52579	638
2	1	3.2182	.41087	448
	2	3.4926	.34583	238
	Total	3.3134	.45072	686
Total	1	3.1118	.50985	896
	2	3.4820	.34924	428
	Total	3.2315	.49520	1324

Table 8 indicates the observed power of each unit of analysis as it relates to the dependent variable of sense of belonging. Observed power must be at a level of at least .70 in order to be considered significant. This table provides another analysis of how significant the relationship is between a sense of belonging and other factors recorded in this study. According to Table 8, the group a person is in has a significant impact on how he/she rates students' sense of belonging. There is a different relationship between the percentage of minority students and the reported sense of belonging depending on whether the school is high performing or low performing.

**Table 8. Test of Between-Subjects Effects Indicating the Observed Power of Each Unit of Analysis as They Relate to Sense of Belonging as Reported on PSSM at Selected Middle Schools.**

Source	Noncent Parameter.	Observed Power <sup>a</sup>
Corrected Model	343.679	1.000
Intercept	13568.518	1.000
PERXETHNICITY	30.143	1.000*
ETHNICITY	7.982	.806*
PERXSES	27.527	.999*
SES	6.226	.703*
PERFROMANCE	.133	.065
GROUP	192.513	1.000*
PERFORMANCE*		
GROUP	11.712	.928*

<sup>a</sup> Computed using alpha = .05

R squared = .207 (Adjusted R Squared = .203)

\*p>.70

In addition, the low-socioeconomic students reported sense of belonging has a different interaction with performance than does that of students who are not of low-socioeconomic status. Table 8 also indicates a difference between students and teachers when they are reporting the sense of belonging of students, depending upon whether their school is high performing or low performing. Minority status and socioeconomic status do have a significant interaction with reported sense of belonging as well.

Since the interaction of performance and socioeconomic status reflected a significant difference for reported sense of belonging, a linear regression was conducted for percentage of low socioeconomic students and sense of belonging, selecting only low performing schools. This analysis is reflected in Table 9.

**Table 9. Linear Regression of Low Socioeconomic Students and Sense of Belonging as Reported on PSSM at Low Performing Selected Middle Schools.**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	.203	1	.203	.735	.392*
Residual	175.499	636	.276		
Total	175.701	637			

\* $p < .05$

A similar analysis was conducted for high-performing schools. The data in Table 10 indicates a linear regression analysis for low socioeconomic students and the reported sense of belonging at high-performing schools.

**Table 10. Linear Regression of Low Socioeconomic Students and Sense of Belonging as Reported on PSSM at High Performing Selected Middle Schools.**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	.138	1	.138	.680	.410*
Residual	139.021	684	.203		
Total	139.159	685			

\* $p < .05$

Due to performance and percentage of minority students having a significant interaction with reported sense of belonging on PSSM, a linear regression was conducted on this data as well. Table 11 indicates a linear regression analysis between percentage of minority students in a school and the reported sense of belonging at low-performing schools.

**Table 11. Linear Regression of Percentage of Minority Students and Sense of Belonging as Reported on PSSM at Low-Performing Selected Middle Schools.**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	.548	1	.548	1.990	.159*
Residual	175.154	636	.275		
Total	175.701	637			

\*p<.05

A similar analysis was conducted for high-performing schools. The data in Table 12 indicates a linear regression analysis for percentage of minority students and the reported sense of belonging at high-performing schools.

**Table 12. Linear Regression of Percentage of Minority Students and Sense of Belonging as Reported on PSSM at High-Performing Selected Middle Schools.**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	.001	1	.001	.006	.937*
Residual	139.152	684	.203		
Total	139.159				

\*p<.05

None of the linear regression analyses were found to be significant when analyzed independently from the rest of the data. The change can be accounted for by the fact that the interaction of performance and percentage of minority students or performance and percentage of low-socioeconomic students were covariates in the analysis of covariance. This is where they were found to be significant factors. When these covariates were taken out to perform the linear regression, they variables were not significant on their own. Discussion of this limitation will be found in Chapter 5.

Table 13 indicates the mean scores of the students' sense of belonging as reported at selected middle schools. The table indicates that although there is a difference between the students' sense of belonging between high-performing schools and low-performing schools, there is not a significant difference. Analysis of covariance determined there was not a significant difference between high-performing schools and low-performing schools. This table indicates that a difference does occur in the mean scores as reported on the PSSM; however, the 95% confidence interval indicates that the upper bound of the score for low-performing schools overlaps with the lower bound of the high performing schools. In the category of performance a 1 indicates an acceptable or low-performing school while a 2 indicates an exemplary or recognized school.

**Table 13. Mean Score, Standard Error, and Confidence Interval at Low and High Performing Schools for Sense of Belonging as Reported on PSSM at Selected Middle Schools.**

Performance	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	3.286 <sup>a</sup>	.033	3.221	3.351
2	3.308 <sup>a</sup>	.031	3.247	3.368

<sup>a</sup>Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: PERXETHN = .8077, ETHNIC = .5555, PERXSES = .7665, SES = .5240

Table 14 describes the significant difference between the students' reported sense of belonging and the teachers' perception of the students' sense of belonging at selected middle schools. Table 14 is provided to indicate the mean score on the PSSM, standard deviation and

a confidence interval for the students, indicated as Group 1, and the teachers, indicated as Group 2. This table shows that for the 95% confidence interval, the upper bound of the students reported sense of belonging does not overlap with the lower bound of teachers' reported perception of students' sense of belonging

**Table 14. Mean Score, Standard Error and Confidence Interval of Students' Sense of Belonging as Compared to Teachers' Perception of Sense of Belonging as reported on PSSM by Selected Middle Schools.**

Group	Mean	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	3.115 <sup>a</sup>	.015	3.086	3.144
2	3.478 <sup>a</sup>	.022	3.436	3.521

<sup>a</sup> Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: PERXETHN = .8077, ETHNIC = .5555, PERXSES = .7665, SES = .5240



Table 15 provides a mean score of students' sense of belonging as reported on the PSSM and teachers' perception of students' sense of belonging. The scores are divided into two categories of low-performing schools, indicated as performance 1, and high-performing schools, indicated as performance 2. In addition, the standard error is given for all categories. Table 15 indicates that a larger discrepancy exists between the teachers' perception of sense of belonging and the students' reported sense of belonging at a low performing school than occurs at a higher performing school.

**Table 15. Sense of Belonging Reported by Students and Perceptions of Belonging as Reported by Teachers Nested within Low- and High-Performing Schools as Reported on the PSSM by Selected Middle Schools.**

Performance	Group	Mean	Std. Error	95 % Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	1	3.060 <sup>a</sup>	.034	2.993	3.127
	2	3.512 <sup>a</sup>	.042	3.430	3.595
2	1	3.174 <sup>a</sup>	.032	3.107	3.234
	2	3.444 <sup>a</sup>	.039	3.368	3.520

<sup>a</sup> Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: PERXETHN = .8077, ETHNIC = .5555, PERXSES = .7665, SES = .5240

### Qualitative Data

#### *Research Question #3*

Do teachers have a role in creating an environment where students have a sense of belonging as reported by selected middle schools teachers in Texas Region IV and VI Education Service Center?

In order to answer this question, the teacher version of the PSSM asked two questions on the back of the survey. This allowed teachers to provide qualitative data about the schools' role in providing opportunities to create a sense of belonging for students who attended their schools. In addition, space was provided for other comments the respondent may have deemed necessary or pertinent to the study.

Teachers who worked at the schools were asked to answer questions related to the development of a sense of belonging in the students. From a total of 428 completed questionnaires, there were 95 responses written from teachers who worked at exemplary or recognized schools in response to the following question: "What activities does this school have in place to make all students feel as though they belong?" These were condensed to 31 responses based upon similarities of response. The full transcript is available in the appendix.

The activities identified by teachers in exemplary and recognized schools in this section of the survey included:

1. Sports, Junior National Honor Society, 5th Word Enrichment, 21st Century.
2. Family Day, PTO, Consistency Management, Theatre Arts program, field trips, 8th-grade graduation.
3. None, all activities exclude some portion of the student population.
4. Athletics, Student Council, Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) Club, Band, Horticulture, Pep Squad, Houston Rodeo Art Contest, UIL Academic Events, National Junior Honor Society, Writing Contests, Poetry Contests.
5. Student Council (everyone can join), Beginning of the year Meet the Teacher Evening, SADD, Athletics, Pep Squad.
6. Students are involved in Mariachi, Copeira, Debate, Ballet Folklorico, Girls' Group, Web Quest, Student Council, and Best Friends.
7. Academic teams – (school) has 5 "Prides" that allow students and teachers to compete with others as well as brag about accomplishment.
8. Opportunities to celebrate individual and group achievement, recognition for birthdays, special awards, academic rally, awards night, classroom and team competition, student leadership opportunities.
9. There are many extracurricular activities and clubs – Band, drill team, cheerleading, sports, student council, KATS for Christ, Choir. These programs are for at-risk students as well. There are also 4 academic rallies per year. There are team and individual citi-

zenship awards as well as academic and team spirit awards. The preparation for the pep-rallies allows students to express creativity and build team spirit and a sense of belonging.

10. Athletics programs, CSU, Student Council, Science Club, Reading Club. Why should schools “make” student feel as though they belong? In order to feel a “part of” something, you must put forth some effort.
11. There are many choices – something for everyone: Girls Group, CSU, Athletics, Book Club, Science Olympiad, Band, Choir, Art, UIL, Newspaper.
12. Field trips, school yearbook, projects to help the less fortunate. Many opportunities for homeroom classes to bond, to work, and to compete as a team. Students may work as aides in different areas and with different teachers. Many after-school clubs, sport, and academic competitions, clubs for enjoyment. Pep rallies, assemblies, announcements, school newspaper that any student may participate in, awards ceremonies for competitions, awards for being caught doing something good.
13. STAR Program, various extracurricular activities, GIRP program, clubs, peer tutoring, peer mediation, teen leadership, student council, NJHS.
14. Choir, Band, Athletics, FCA, Art, Builder’s Club, and other clubs.
15. UIL, Student Council, FCA, Sports/Academics. New students meet with counselor for a tour and overview of the school.
16. Pep rallies, Veteran’s Day Assembly, 8th-grade graduation ceremony, participation in various elective courses, class field trips, field day, Raider Camp for 6th grade, Cheerleaders, Builder’s Club.
17. UIL, Sports, FCA, Art Club, Junior Historians, Spanish Club, Science Club, Intramurals, Band, Choir, Orchestra.
18. A number of teachers have participated in “capturing kids hearts” which encourages everyone to treat each other with respect. Some of the strategies give students a sense of their importance to the team, hence a sense of belonging.

19. Builder's Club, Student Council, Band, Choir, FCA, Crime-Stopppers Club, School dances, Team Sports.
20. Choir, Music, Band, Athletics, Spanish Club, Crime-Stopppers, Student Council, Cheerleading, Builder's Club.
21. FCA, Student Council, Announcers of <school> news, Peer Mediation, UIL, Mentoring programs.
22. We have had a lot of after-school activities. Budget cuts have eliminated activity buses after school. Before the cuts we had SNAP, Reading Club, Chess Club, Basketball, "What's for dinner," Home economics, History Club, Step-team, Cheerleaders, and much more.
23. Athletics, Band, Choir, Theatre Arts, Several clubs and organizations, dances, activities, cheerleaders..
24. We had SNAP-after school program, student council, and lots of other programs; sports, cheerleading. These are voluntary activities students can join. In terms of other programs, no there are no others.
25. Large student enrollment in athletics. Student council, Crime-stopppers, even tutoring sessions after school are beneficial. I have several students who came to my room for "tutoring" who just like to visit and have a quiet place to work.
26. Students divided into two 7th and two 8th grade teams. Therefore we have 4 "campuses" on one campus. Numerous organizations.
27. Clubs — every student is in a club, and we meet about once a 6 weeks during the school day. Field trips — each grade level goes on at least 1 during the school day during the year.
28. Band, art, UIL, theater art, shop, athletics, NJHS, student council, club days, G.T., student advisory, awards programs, academic pep rallies.
29. 20-25 clubs of various interests that meet monthly — intramural and UIL sports programs; band, theater arts, art dept.; honor society; student council; pep squad.

30. Art, speech, theatre arts, band, shop, athletics, G.T. (robotics team) and clubs to entertain all interests. Student advisors from each advisory period (homeroom) meet frequently with the principal to discuss and share interests and ideas that are actually carried out campus wide, for example: "Crazy Hair Day", "Backwards Days". "Mismatched Day", Door Decoration contests. Students survey their homerooms on various issues concerning the students and their school environment, in turn, these issues are brought before the principal, and the principal responds in an expeditious manner. Students are "caught being good" and are called out by the counselor and a phone call is made while the student is present to their parent expressing the student's positive accomplishments. Teachers use the team approach to their grade level students; in this manner, every teacher is made aware of strengths, areas of improvement, and social and emotional happenings of students in their grade level. Pictorial essays of student population is always fun and exciting to see, as well as being remembered on your birthday pictorially, to reading and seeing a picture of students who share their family, likes/dislikes and future goals with their "Campus family".
31. We have interests clubs, sports, band, regularly scheduled pep rallies, awards assemblies, and individual classroom teacher rewards. Also, there are a couple of field trips taken during the school year, drug free week, special days such as crazy hat day and crazy socks days.

Teachers who worked at the acceptable and low-performing schools were asked to answer questions related to the development of a sense of belonging in the students. From a total of 428 completed questionnaires there were 88 responses written from teachers who worked at acceptable or low-performing campuses in response to the following question: "What activities does this school have in place to make all students feel as though they belong?" These were condensed to 28 responses based upon similarities of response. The full transcript is available in the appendix.

The activities identified by teachers in acceptable and low-performing schools in this section of the survey included:

1. Behavior Raffles Weekly, Student Council, SOAR, AVID, Volunteers to recite daily pledges on the P.A.
2. Student Council, Chess Club, Science Olympiad, Science Club, Horizons –Girls in Science.
3. Not many. I feel there should be more available for students to do so they can interact with other students different from them. There should also be more all-school activities to encourage a sense of belonging.
4. Good Behavior rewards, No referral awards (weekly), positive parent contacts, end-of-year graduation ceremony (8th grade), 2nd step programs, NJHS, Top 10% Banquet, Student of the week pictures on bulletin board, Birthdays posted on Channel 72.
5. AVID, Student of the Week, Good Behavior, Chess Club, Student Council, Choir/Orchestra, Word of Day Activity, Morning Announcements, Science Olympiad, Science Bowl, Mathcounts, Horizons-Girls Science Club, Band, Mentors from <university>.
6. Sports, UIL, Student Council, SOAR, FCA, Chess Club, AM/PM Library, Field Trips, NJHS, Awards assembly, Weekly drawings.
7. <School> has different clubs for each ethnicity, but accepts any members. We have a tremendous amount of study groups and athletic programs.
8. <School> wide drug free program, Band, Drama, Chess Club, Math Club, Special experiences, Athletics, Choir, MediaMasters, electives, tutoring, TAKS Mentor Program.
9. <School> PROUD, Asian Club, African American Club, Hispanic Club, Soccer intramurals, Math Club, Science Club.
10. Math Club, Science Club, Math Counts, Chess Club, Crime-stoppers, Student Council, NJHS, UIL, Orchestra, Band, Athletics, Cheerleading, Choir, Tech Ed. Robotics, FCA, Drama, Office Aides, Yearbook, FFA.

11. Athletics, Academic organizations, Leadership organizations, Band, Orchestra, Crime-stoppers, Remedial help, Choir, Yearbook, Chess club.
12. Athletics, UIL Academics, Cheerleading, Activities for different interests and abilities, Band, Choir, Orchestra, Theatre, Chess Club, Student Council, NJHS.
13. We offer activities for everyone! Whether you are interested in athletics, arts, or academics. Tutorials for at-risk students are even called “clubs.”
14. Awards ceremony, Banquet at the end of the year, Honor roll, Community food drive, Athletic and extracurricular activities.
15. Pro-Act Club includes an excellent cross-section of diversity in our school. Choir, band, and athletics also include junior high students.
16. Sports, Pro-Act, Band, Choir. Not all students take advantage by choice.
17. All students are encouraged to be a part of various clubs and participate in extracurricular activities.
18. Pep rallies — good behavior and attendance, attendance dance, donuts-attendance, movie and popcorn party- good behavior and no referrals.
19. Athletics, student council, band, LOTC, choir, mentors and peer mediation.
20. The school offers a variety of extracurricular activities so that if a child is not good at one thing there is probably something offered they can belong to — choir, football, tennis.
21. Rewards and parties for good behavior, attendance and grades. Student assemblies with speakers that motivate them to succeed and that address drug abuse. Field trips for at-risk kids.
22. Clubs that address what they are interested in. Teachers that love children. Social skills program.
23. There are many extracurricular activities, including sports, and academic clubs. Most teachers establish a rapport with their students helping them feel at ease.
24. Good behavior group, uniforms required. Standard dress code. Sporting events.

25. Sports, LOTC, drill team, cheerleading, academic pentathlon, participate in school presentation.
26. Our LOTC program is an excellent example of where our students feel connected to our school. I believe the driving force behind that feeling is the individual teacher.
27. After-school elective clubs and competitions, and programs such as tutoring, sports competitions and as well, academic competitions.
28. AVID Program, Bears for Christ, NJHS, all sports, Valentine dance, Chess club, Theater, Choir, Band, Eighth-grade dance, dance class, Ag, very active PTO, livestock participation, field trips.

There were also 76 responses written from teachers who worked at exemplary or recognized schools in response to the following questions: "What changes could teachers make to help students feel a part of the school?" These were condensed to 36 responses, based upon similarities of response. The full transcript is available in the appendix.

The changes identified by teachers in exemplary and recognized schools in this section of the survey included:

1. Awards programs, Recognition at end of each 6 weeks, Family Day, student Council, Student patrol.
2. Consistently enforce rules — no favorites.
3. There continues to be some negativity among some teachers toward students with discipline issues – rather than helping students get to the root of their issues, they are often further isolated from their peers. Teachers need to give the same or more effort with these students as with high-achieving ones.
4. Require involvement as tutor, peer review board for disruption problems, activities to build loyalty to school and each other. Celebrate our differences.
5. I could probably survey my classes/or each teacher survey their team time to find out what their interests are.
6. Be more involved in student activities. Let the kids know that we are "real" people.



7. Acknowledge different backgrounds of the kids and just accept where the kids come from.
8. I think we are already doing everything humanly feasible.
9. Stop and listen to all students not just favored ones.
10. Encourage activity involvement in clubs, organizations, and other extracurricular activities.
11. Standardized dress code.
12. Most students do feel a part of the school. However, a suggestion box might help students speak out more about their needs. Then a committee comprised of students and teachers can address those needs.
13. Recognize the students' interests, opinions, and cultures. Encourage participation in UIL and Clubs.
14. Share responsibilities in sponsoring some of the activities that students are involved in.
15. A few teachers could be more welcoming and nurturing to the kids, but for the most part ,our students do feel a part of our <school> family!
16. Help make students aware of these positive activities and encourage them to participate.
17. Make time for one-on-one interactions.
18. Emphasize other activities and promote other activities rather than just sports.
19. Fortunately our teachers always mention the clubs we offer. Teachers also offer tutorials for the subject they teach. We could do more "family" activities, decorate doors, field days, and assemblies to recognize good grades and behavior.
20. Maintain a minimum standard, speak to students as people not inmates, expect students to meet standards.
21. Less time on teaching to TAKS, more time to teach to learn for real life. Show more respect to students and their diversities.

22. All teachers could try to build relationships with our students. All teachers could enforce the rules of the school as set forth by the administrative team. If all students felt they were treated equally by all faculty, I think the sense of equality would increase the sense of belonging.
23. I feel that the students have ample opportunities to help them feel a part of school.
24. Have more teachers involved in all events. More parents involved in the groups and activities.
25. We really do not have a sense of community here. Students do not have any ownership of <school>. They just come to school here- it is very disconcerting.
26. Activities that encourage more cultural awareness would foster better student relations. We have a large group of international students and I worry they don't feel a sense of belonging.
27. Most definitely we need some "clubs" for minority kids.. I am particularly concerned about our Hispanic girls.
28. If the teachers would realize that the student have a life besides schools and this if could notice a student's achievement outside of the classroom, a student would perform at a higher level/grade than what they are. Just show a little interest in their weekend/holiday activities, extracurricular activities, etc. Junior high/middle school students love recognition among their peers.
29. I really think we do as much as we possibly can.
30. Solicit student help in decorating rooms and halls. Eliminate competition between teams and possibly make contests that compete with other middle schools.
31. Introduce new students to the class and talk about where they came from; Possibly have a student mentor to "show the new students how things work in this school."
32. I think they should survey the students to find out if they "feel a part of the school" as well as solicit suggestions from the students.

33. Maintain consistency; it's a principle and a practice that our campus administration models for us. Consistency in all facets of students' growth mentally, physically, emotionally, and socially is structurally safe and secure for all.
34. Understand more about their home life so we can relate when they come in not prepared.
35. I would like to see more dances of "free day" as rewards for good behavior or good grades. Even though we do some community work, I'd also like to see more involvement with our community, especially with environmental issues.

There were also 78 responses from teachers who worked at acceptable or low-performing schools in response to the following question: "What changes could teachers make to help students feel a part of the school?" These were condensed to 32 responses based upon similarities of response. The full transcript is available in the appendix.

The changes identified by teachers in acceptable or low-performing schools in this section of the survey included:

1. Making sure the teachers feel like part of the campus. If teachers are proud of where they work and are satisfied in their jobs, the students will witness that in the classroom.
2. Teachers need to be more positive and pro-active in talking with all students to engage them in conversation.
3. Be more culturally aware in their dealings with students. Treat them fairly, and encourage pride in their school by exhibiting that pride themselves. Get to know their students on a more personal level. Know the interests of the students and design some lessons that are more meaningful to the students.
4. Not sure.
5. More teachers could make the effort to learn Spanish which is the native language of the majority of our students. Teachers can focus on making lessons multicultural. They can also encourage the students to take part in different clubs and organizations.

6. Approach students in a non-confrontational manner. No yelling. Smile more often.  
Speak to students in the hallway. Be more positive.
7. It might be helpful for each teacher to “adopt” one or two student to especially encourage. More time for students individually. However, time is always a hard thing to come by. More one-on-one conversations.
8. I feel that <school> does a good job of helping students feel a part of the school. For those students that may not feel a part, the biggest change I could suggest would be to get to know the students and find out how he/she could become a part.
9. There is a need to plan or schedule more “fun” activities that involve the entire student body. Assemblies, field trips, field day, pep-rallies. This allows students the opportunities to interact with other students and see their teachers participate in something other than “business as usual.” Teams need to have reward parties for those students that follow rules and procedures. In other middle schools where I have taught we took the students on picnics, skating, bowling, movies, etc...once each six weeks for their reward. We got to see a fun side of our students and they got to see a fun side of their teachers.
10. Overall, I think <school> does an awesome job of addressing students’ needs and interests.
11. It would be fun to have more assemblies, such as Christmas performances by band, choir, orchestra (and other holidays)- debate, etc. Also, intramural sports and teams during the day would be fun and add to the sense of belonging and more fun at school.
12. Teachers could be more intentional about seeking out students who are not involved and helping direct them.
13. Show they care about each and every student — build a relationship.
14. Be more open to the differences of students, offer more student service organizations, art program.

15. Every student needs to be part of something. Help guide the students towards a group/club.
16. I see no changes made, I feel <school> junior high offers our students a variety of choices; they just need to take advantage of it. There is something for everyone.
17. Treat them as though they were your own children. Show you have an honest interest in each of them. Try not to overlook the quiet ones who always conform to the rules. Be sensitive to students who may feel alienated; be aware when students try to alienate others and intervene.
18. I think we should all as teachers make a constant effort to get to know each students as an individual. Therefore, they will at least feel as though they belong to you, which is part of the school. Most teachers on our campus seem to already do this. However it is easy to overlook a student who is extremely shy and quiet, but still needs someone.
19. Some teachers are somewhat hesitant to embrace students. I think a lot of teachers have their guard up. Some need to change their attitudes about these children
20. Teachers could show up at extracurricular activities and praise the efforts of students.
21. Some teachers could be a little more friendly toward the students and they also could support the students more by attending the extracurricular activities that their students participate in.
22. Be more interested in student morale. If you don't relate your subject matter to present-day, most kids will feel inferior or not interested with you or that particular subject matter.
23. Allow them more ownership in their learning — not allowing structure to be the only focus!!
24. One change could be is to have the students do something at the school that could be seen by other in years to pass.
25. They could recruit more students into their programs. Seek parent help or involvement.

26. I know we have some spirit-related activities; I think we could have more. Also- more programs like the one we have just started to reward students every 6-weeks for improving on behavior.
27. Teachers are doing what they can — teachers must be motivated in order to motivate and encourage students. We are doing what we can. Teachers need to be motivated and supported by administration.
28. No change.
29. More activities offered. More chances for students to do what they enjoy.
30. We have already good communication between student, teacher, and administration but we could have a greater parent involvement.
31. Do more Inter/Co-curriculum activities. Attend more of student functions.
32. Placing students on teams and allowing them to have competitions. Teachers need to have more loyalty to the school and be more positive towards students, faculty, and staff.

Teachers who worked at the schools were also allowed to make other comments they felt were important to the survey about students' sense of belonging. Fifteen teachers from exemplary and recognized campuses and made the following open-ended comments.

1. Have an administration system that supports the teacher. Only 1 administrator doing support is not enough. End of year is too late to begin to worry about dress code (Capri pants, shirts tucked in).
2. Most of our students do not have a problem, if they do it's the student comes from a large urban campus to ours (small and rural).
3. A lot of kids do have a sense of belonging but there are always a few kids that are ostracized and made fun of no matter how many teacher interventions are made.
4. The only thing I can think of is the space program we used to have – it was really cool.
5. There are always a few groups of kids that do not care about belonging to anything – it's hard to make them feel a part of the school if they show no interest.

6. <School> is an incredible school with a very supportive, positive learning environment for all students.
7. Smaller schools or schools within schools would make a huge difference!
8. Our school offers many activities for students such as athletics, UIL, Builder's Club, and art events. With the wide variety, every student should be able to find a niche where he belongs.
9. Our school is very large, next year we will move to a new middle school. I feel the size of our school keeps us from doing many things to promote pride. We have 1800 students that are spread all over temporary buildings and main buildings, next year will be better.
10. Consistency among discipline with consequences and all students equal.
11. Teachers at <school> are committed to the academic success of the students. In order to ensure that all students achieve their highest potential, most teachers offer tutorials before and after school. Student may attend tutorials at 7:45 AM and 3:40-4:30 PM. Many students consistently attend these sessions.
12. <School> is a wonderful school with a super staff and administration. It has a great atmosphere and lots of activities to interest each student.
13. The survey was difficult to fill out. How a student defines "feel a part of a school" and how a teacher may interpret a student's "feel of partness" are difficult to measure. The survey might be more insightful if these terms were better defined.
14. <School> is a school with few cliques and rivalries among students.
15. I feel very proud to work at this school and with these children.
16. Teachers who worked at the schools were also allowed to make other comments they felt were important to the survey about students' sense of belonging. Nine teachers from acceptable and low-performing campuses made the following open-ended comments:

17. I feel most teachers here foster a sense of belonging, but we need more activities to encourage this for staff as well as students.
18. My students are beginning ESL students, therefore, my perspective may be quite different than that of others.
19. I think you must keep in mind that this is a middle school and kids are much more concerned with being cool than they are with anything else. That sometimes makes "being themselves" very difficult!
20. I think that the few students who may feel as though they don't really belong are ones who come from a non-middle class American background. It may take a while for students from other countries to feel as though they belong. Mainly, I think that the lower socioeconomic kids feel as though the school is a foreign place. I think that most of the teachers are middle-class and can't related to the mentality of these students to even know how to make them feel like the school is as much theirs as anyone's.
21. We need more clubs/opportunities for our students.
22. <school> is not a neighborhood school. Children are bussed over a wide area and have difficulty identifying with the school. Forty percent of our students are transient, which I believe plays a part in some of the answers on the survey.
23. Morale and motivation. Teachers are not supported fully concerning discipline.
24. Morale and motivation are at an all-time low. a). Teachers don't feel supported, Esp. w/discipline and parent conferences. b). Therefore the student doesn't feel supported.
25. I think as a whole <school> has very good students and the students enjoy attending <school>.

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship students' sense of belonging had to the performance of the school as a whole. Research question #1 stated:



Does a relationship exist between students' sense of belonging and academic achievement of the school as reported by students in selected middle schools in Texas Region IV and VI Education Service Centers?

According to the results of the data collected and analysis conducted, there is not a relationship between the students' sense of belonging and the academic achievement of the school. However, the performance of the school as an interaction with the percentage of minority students and with the percentage of low socioeconomic students does indicate a significant relationship. Unfortunately, the design of the study did not allow for accurate further analysis of this relationship. In addition, the percentage of minority students in a school set apart from performance does indicate a significant difference in the students' sense of belonging when it is analyzed as a covariate in the analysis of covariance. The percentage of low socioeconomic students in a school apart from performance does have a significant relationship to the students' reported sense of belonging.

There is also a difference in a students' sense of belonging, as reported on the PSSM, from one school to another. The analysis of covariance for residual error for sense of belonging showed that a not all students' have the same sense of belonging and this varies depending upon which schools they attend.

Research question #2 stated:

Is there a relationship between the students' sense of belonging and the teachers' perception of students' belonging as identified by teachers in selected middle schools in Texas Region IV and VI Education Service Centers?

According to the data collected and analysis conducted, there is a significant difference between the students' sense of belonging and the teachers' perception of students' sense of belonging. In particular, there is a greater discrepancy between the students' sense of belonging and the teachers' perception of their sense of belonging in low-performing schools than in high-performing schools.

The third research question stated:

Do teachers have a role in creating an environment where students have a sense of belonging as reported by selected middle schools teachers in Texas Region IV and VI Education Service Centers?

In order to gain an understanding of the role teachers have in creating an environment where students have a sense of belonging, teachers were asked to respond to questions about what their school currently does to create an environment of belonging and what they could do differently. In response to the first question regarding "What activities does this school have in place to make all students feel as though they belong?" teachers at high-performing schools had similar responses as teacher at low performing schools.

Each category of school suggested that athletics, clubs, student involvement groups, ethnic or minority involvement groups all fostered a sense of belonging in the students.

In regard to the second question: "What changes could teachers make to help students feel a part of the school?" teachers at high-performing schools made many suggestions regarding a need to learn more about students who attended the school. They also reported a need to survey students to find out what their interests were so they school could make adjustments. The teachers at low-performing schools seemed to make comments about consistently enforcing rules and implementing standardized dress.

Within the same schools, whether they were high-performing or low-performing, there were large discrepancies between teachers responses. For example; one teacher in a low-performing school might list several activities which are offered for students' participation, while the next respondent would comment that not much is offered for students. This trend was true of high-performing schools as well.

Also, when responding to the question about what changes could be made to improve students' sense of belonging, there were discrepancies between teachers. One teacher would write several things that could be done to improve students' participation while the next teacher would write that everything that could be done was being done. This trend was also true regardless of respondents working in high-performing or low-performing schools.

Teachers at low-performing schools also made many more comments about “not being supported by the administration,” “low morale,” and “teachers not having a sense of belonging.” These types of responses were not seen as much, if at all, in schools that were high-performing.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship of a students' sense of belonging to the academic achievement of the school as reported on the PSSM. The secondary purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the students' sense of belonging and the teachers' perception of the students' sense of belonging as reported on the PSSM. In addition, the sense of belonging as reported by the students was analyzed against demographic data of the school. The tertiary purpose of this study was to investigate the role teachers have in creating an environment where students have a sense of belonging.

The information gained from this study will be available to professionals in the field of education administration who are interested in the relationship of how students feel about their place in a school and other factors such as school performance, teacher perception, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. This information can also be used with university staff involved in the administrator training programs for the purpose of designing schools where students feel involved and develop a sense of place within a school, hopefully contributing to better performance. Finally, the results from this study should be useful for anyone associated with education in general since students' perception of themselves and of schools is significant to their success.

According to the data analysis, the academic achievement of the middle schools studied does not have a relationship to the students' sense of belonging. Although there is some difference between high-performing schools and low-performing schools, there is not a large enough difference in the mean scores of the students' sense of belonging to be significant. However, other factors of performance do seem to have a relationship with the sense of belonging in the school.

When performance is taken into account, sense of belonging does have an interaction effect with both the percentage of minority students in the building as well as the percentage of

low-socioeconomic students. This indicates that the interaction between sense of belonging and percentage of minority students is different for high-performing schools than it is for low-performing schools. In addition, the interaction between sense of belonging and percentage of low-socioeconomic students has a different interaction for high-performing schools than for low-performing schools. An attempt was made to understand the difference in the relationship between high and low performing schools further in regard to socioeconomic status. A linear regression analysis was conducted to understand this relationship further. However, because these factors were covariates in the original analysis, their use as variables in a linear regression revealed non-significant data. Recommendations to correct this are made later in this chapter.

Other demographic factors of the school can be accounted for in relation to the students' sense of belonging. The percentage of minority students and the percentage of low-socioeconomic students had a significant interaction with students' sense of belonging. When students' sense of belonging is plotted against the percentage of minority students, there is actually an increase in the students' sense of belonging as the number of minority students increases. However, this must be viewed cautiously because of the interaction of performance. This may support Voelkl's (1994) findings of African American students who were surveyed on their sense of identification with school. Voelkl (1994) found that African American students reported higher levels of belonging in the studied schools than did white students. Furthermore, it appeared that African-Americans do not disassociate from school. Voelkl (1997) later suggested that African-American students do not connect feelings of belonging with academic achievement.

The results of this study indicate that sense of belonging does not have an interaction with performance of the school. Although the demographics of the schools does not break down in the same way as Voelkl's (1997), there is some merit in the idea that minority students do have a stronger sense of belonging; it is simply not associated with how well the school does academically.

Another part of this study focused on the teachers' perception of students' sense of belonging and the students' self-report of belonging. The data analysis revealed that teachers believe students have a stronger sense of belonging than they actually do. This is true of all schools; however, it is important to take into account that the discrepancy between the teachers' perception and the students' self-report is greater in low performing schools than in high performing schools. This may suggest that teachers in low-performing schools may understand less about how students feel about their school than do teachers in high-performing schools. Ryan and Powelson (1991) suggest that children have become isolated from adults and, to a large degree, from children of other ages, creating youth and school cultures that are out of touch with the work and social worlds of adults. The evidence gathered in this study seems to lend support to the argument of Ryan and Powelson (1991).

Teachers were asked to respond to questions about what the school does to foster a sense of belonging in students and what could be changed to foster a sense of belonging. Many of the responses to the question about what is currently being done were similar for both high-performing schools and low-performing schools. Many of these factors reported by teachers are supportive of research findings by other authors. Osterman (2000) found that teachers play a major role in determining whether students feel they are cared for and that they are a welcome part of the community. Travis (1995) argues that curriculum taught by teachers, but not necessarily created by teachers, could cause alienation among students.

Many of the teachers responded to the second question regarding what changes could be made by suggesting that teachers in both high- and low-performing schools take more time to learn about their students as individuals. Werner (1993) suggested this same sentiment stating that a caring and supportive relationship with an adult as a protective factor which promotes resiliency in children.

Many of the comments regarding change at low-performing schools centered upon a need for improved support, discipline, routines, and standardized dress. These were not factors described by teachers at high-performing schools. Although on the surface it may not

seem that such concerns would have an impact on belonging, researchers have found quite the contrary. Travis (1995) found that the administrative control of activities within a school provides a safe environment. Travis (1995) found that consistent and fair discipline created a school that is pleasant for all students and makes all students feel safe. However, Travis (1995) cautions that inconsistent application of discipline and penalties can do great damage when trying to help students feel a part of the school community.

It seems the most significant factor coming from the analysis of data regarding teachers' perception of students' sense of belonging is the gap between teachers' and students' perceptions. This would suggest that teachers do not have an accurate interpretation of how strongly students feel they belong to their school. It may also suggest that the information provided regarding activities in place to give students a sense of belonging may not be doing so. Many teachers suggested surveying students in order to ascertain what they would like to do in school. Other researchers have found this to be true as well. Battsistich et al. (1991) maintained that discussion in a supportive classroom environment where students have the opportunity to express personal opinions give children the opportunity to discover that others care about them. Gamoran and Nystrand (1992) supported this hypothesis, stating that "regardless of the activity in which students participate, discourse is a critical indicator of the extent to which school offers membership" (p.40).

### **Limitations of the Research**

The study of belonging is not a new practice. A number of studies have been conducted using the PSSM created by Goodenow (1993b). Most of the studies conducted using this instrument or a variation of the instrument are 3 years old or older. The survey itself is 10 years old. Therefore, although the validity and reliability of the instrument were established, those studies may need to be repeated.

One of the findings of this research study revealed that the percentage of minority students has a significant interaction with the students' sense of belonging. However, this was

discovered through an analysis of covariance. When an attempt was made to glean data from the analysis of covariance to complete a regression analysis, the significance was lost. This was due to the fact that performance interacted with the number of minorities and this combined factor, along with percentage of minority students itself, were covariates in the original analysis. The same problem arose when trying to complete a linear regression between the percentage of low socioeconomic students and their reported sense of belonging. The design of the research study did not allow for students to report their minority status when completing the survey. The percentage of minority students was taken from the school data as a whole, while the sense of belonging was reported individually by students.

Another limitation of this line of research is the teachers' perception. Even though essentially the same survey was used for both teachers and students, there is bound to be some error in teachers recording how they think students feel. This may or may not be accurate.

Some students may have had difficulty in completing the survey. Two factors could have contributed to this problem. One, the vocabulary in the PSSM may have created some problems for students in trying to determine what the statement was saying. In addition, Likert-type scale may have created some problems. If students are not familiar with Likert-type scales or if students have a difficult time discerning between the point system, there could have been an inaccurate reporting of their scores.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

1. Future research needs to be conducted in order to better understand the PSSM. The PSSM gives an overall score of sense of belonging. A factor analysis of this survey may provide more in-depth understanding of how students feel about going to school. A researcher may be able to narrow down specific concepts within the PSSM to understand if specific areas lead to a stronger sense of belonging in school.

2. Further research needs to be conducted in the area of minority status and students' sense of belonging. Rather than taking a mean score of sense of belonging for a school and



comparing it to the percentage of minority students, it may be more useful to determine each students' individual minority status and their corresponding sense of belonging. This would provide the researcher more specific understanding of the subtle differences between minority groups and their feelings toward school. In addition, individual student achievement could be compared to that student's sense of belonging.

3. Additional research could be conducted to determine how students' sense of belonging changes as they grow older in school. It may be helpful to know at what age students begin to feel less a part of school and with what those feelings are associated. This type of survey could be conducted as a longitudinal study or a one time survey of students at different grade levels both within the same school and between schools. This type of study could be combined with a factor analysis to determine if specific areas within the PSSM change as the student grows older.

4. Finally, further research needs to be conducted with the teachers' and schools' roles in creating a warm and caring environment. The study conducted for this dissertation revealed that teachers do not have an accurate perception of how students feel about belonging to their school. Additional research needs to be conducted on methods to understand how students feel about school and its contribution to the success of the school.

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## APPENDIX A

### Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM)

#### *Student Version*

Directions: We are interested in learning more about how students feel about their teachers and their school. Please answer the following questions by circling one number for each question.

	Not at all true				Com- pletely true
1. I feel like a real part of (school).	1	2	3	4	5
2. People here notice when I'm good at something.	1	2	3	4	5
3. It is hard for people like me to be accepted here.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Other students in this school take my opinions seriously.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Most teachers at (school) are interested in me	1	2	3	4	5
6. Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong here.	1	2	3	4	5
7. There's at least one teacher or other adult in this school I can talk to if I have a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
8. People at this school are friendly to me.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Teachers here are not interested in people like me.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I am included in lots of activities at (school).	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am treated with as much respect as other students.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I feel very different from most other students here.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I can really be myself at this school.	1	2	3	4	5
14. The teachers here respect me.	1	2	3	4	5
15. People here know I can do good work.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I wish I were in a different school.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I feel proud of belonging to (school).	1	2	3	4	5
18. Other students here like me the way I am.	1	2	3	4	5

This instrument was developed by and is the property of Carol Goodenow, Ph.D.

### Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM)

#### Teacher Version

Directions: We are interested in learning more about how students feel about their teachers and their school. Please answer the following questions by circling one number for each question.

	Not at all true				Com- pletely true
1. Students feel like a real part of (school).	1	2	3	4	5
2. People here notice when a student is good at something.	1	2	3	4	5
3. It is hard for all students to be accepted here.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Students in this school take other students opinions seriously.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Most teachers at (school) are interested in students.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Some students feel as if they don't belong here.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Students in this school have at least one teacher or other adult in this school I can talk to if I have a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Students at this school are friendly to each other.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Teachers here are not interested in all students.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Students are included in lots of activities at (school).	1	2	3	4	5
11. Any student is treated with as much respect as other students.	1	2	3	4	5
12. There are some students who feel very different from most other students.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Students can really be themselves at this school.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Teachers here respect students.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Teachers recognize when all students do good work.	1	2	3	4	5
16. There are students who wish they were in a different school.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Most students feel proud of belonging to (school).	1	2	3	4	5
18. Students accept each other for the way they are.	1	2	3	4	5

**Narrative questions**

1. What activities does this school have in place to make all students feel as though they belong?

1. What changes could teachers make to help students feel a part of the school?

Other comments:

This instrument was developed by and is the property of Carol Goodenow, Ph.D.

To Superintendent of Schools  
 From: Matthew Capps  
 Date:  
 Re: Permission to conduct research in schools

I hereby request permission from \_\_\_\_\_ school district to conduct research at \_\_\_\_\_ middle school. The purpose of this research is to fulfill requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Administration at Texas A&M University.

This study is designed to determine the characteristics of a sense of belonging for students in selected middle schools across Region IV and VI. Students will be asked to complete a survey about how they feel about themselves in relation to experiences in school. This information will then be compared to the level of academic achievement in the school as reported on Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) data. Selected teachers will also be asked to complete a similar form so that their opinions can be compared to those of the students.

No reference will be made to any specific campus, administrator, staff member, or student in the study. The study will make reference to the perceptions of participants as a whole. All information will remain confidentially and collection procedures will be in strict adherence with the Institutional Review Board of Texas A&M University. I have enclosed copies of the surveys for both students and teachers as well as copies of the permission forms for participants to complete.

If this meets with your approval, please sign below and return a copy of this letter. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Superintendent Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew Capps  
 Doctoral Candidate  
 Texas A&M University

Dr. Luana Zellner  
 Committee Chair  
 Texas A&M University

Dr. John Hoyle  
 Committee Member  
 Texas A&M University

For further information or clarification contact Matthew Capps, Selman Intermediate School, 1741 Hwy 90 W, Sealy, TX 77474, telephone: (979) 885-4293, email: mcapps@sealyisd.com, or Dr. John Hoyle, committee chair, College of Education, Texas A&M University, 4226 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4226, (979) 845-2748.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Support Services, Office of Vice President for Research at (979)458-4067, mw Buckley@tamu.edu.

To Principal  
 From: Matthew Capps  
 Date:  
 Re: Permission to conduct research in schools

I hereby request permission from (school district) to conduct research at (blank) middle school. The purpose of this research is to fulfill requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Administration at Texas A&M University.

This study is designed to determine the characteristics of a sense of belonging for students in selected middle schools across Region IV and VI. Students will be asked to complete a survey about how they feel about themselves in relation to experiences in school. This information will then be compared to the level of academic achievement in the school as reported on AEIS data. Selected teachers will also be asked to complete a similar form so that their opinions can be compared to that of the students.

No reference will be made to any specific campus, administrator, staff member, or student in the study. The study will make reference to the perceptions of participants as a whole. All information will remain confidential and collection procedures will be in strict adherence with the Institutional Review Board of Texas A&M University. I have enclosed copies of the surveys for both students and teachers as well as copies of the permission forms for participants to complete.

If this meets with your approval, please sign below and return a copy of this letter. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Principal Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew Capps  
 Doctoral Candidate  
 Texas A&M University

Dr. Luana Zellner  
 Committee Chair  
 Texas A&M University

Dr. John Hoyle  
 Committee Member  
 Texas A&M University

For further information or clarification contact Matthew Capps, Selman Intermediate, 1741 Hwy 90 W, Sealy TX 77474, telephone (979)885-4293, email: mcapps@sealyisd.com or Dr. John Hoyle, committee chairman, College of Education, Texas A&M University, 4226 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4226, (979)845-2748.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Support Services, Office of Vice President for Research at (979)458-4067, mw Buckley@tamu.edu.

### Parent Consent Form

Parent Consent to use Sense of Belonging Survey for publication by Matthew Capps, Doctoral Student at Texas A&M University (To be completed by the parent of child participating in the STUDENT SENSE OF BELONGING SURVEY)

Dear Parent:

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration at Texas A&M University and the campus principal at Selman Intermediate in Sealy. As an administrator and educator, my primary mission is to improve student success in public schools. I am presently involved in research for my Doctoral Dissertation entitled, Characteristics of A Sense of Belonging as it Relates to Academic Achievement as Reported by Selected Middle School Students in Region IV and VI Education Service Centers, Texas.

I would like to have your permission to conduct a survey with your child related to his/her sense of belonging in school. The enclosed survey was developed by a professor of education at Tufts University and has been used by other researchers for approximately ten years. All participants were chosen randomly. This will be a confidential study. Your child's name will not appear on the survey; all data will be kept under strict confidence, and all participants will remain anonymous in the reporting and analysis of the research data.

If you agree to allow your child's survey to be used, please fill out the information below and sign your name. Any survey that is returned without a parent permission form will not be used in the study. Return the signed copy to your child's principal.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
signature of parent

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
signature of Matthew Capps, Researcher

For further information or clarification contact Matthew Capps, Selman Intermediate, 1741 Hwy 90 W, Sealy TX 77474, telephone (979)885-4293, email: mcapps@sealyisd.com or Dr. John Hoyle, committee chairman, College of Education, Texas A&M University, 4226 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4226, (979)845-2748.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Support Services, Office of Vice President for Research at (979)458-4067, mw\_buckley@tamu.edu.



## Consent Form

for Classroom Teacher  
Teacher Perception of Student Sense of Belonging

Dear Educator:

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration at Texas A&M University and the campus principal at Selman Intermediate in Sealy. As an administrator and educator, my primary mission is to improve student success in public schools. I am presently involved in research for my Doctoral Dissertation entitled, Characteristics of A Sense of Belonging as it Relates to Academic Achievement as Reported by Selected Middle School - Students in Region IV and VI Education Service Centers, Texas.

I would like to have your permission to conduct a survey with you relating to students' sense of belonging in school. The survey was developed by a professor of education at Tufts University and has been used by other researchers for approximately ten years. All participants were chosen randomly. This will be a confidential study. Your name will not appear on the survey; all data will be kept under strict confidence, and all participants will remain anonymous in the reporting and analysis of the research data. If you wish to withdraw your survey from the study, please contact the researcher immediately.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I have been given a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
signature of Matthew Capps, Researcher

For further information or clarification contact Matthew Capps, Selman Intermediate, 1741 Hwy 90 W, Sealy TX 77474, telephone (979)885-4293, email: mcapps@sealyisd.com or Dr. John Hoyle, committee chairman, College of Education, Texas A&M University, 4226 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4226, (979)845-2748.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Support Services, Office of Vice President for Research at (979)458-4067, mwbuckley@tamu.edu.



## APPENDIX B

### *Teacher Responses*

2. Sports and fine arts.
3. Band, Gymnastics, Dance, P.E., Choir, etc...
4. Sports, Junior National Honor Society, 5th Word Enrichment, 21st Century.
5. Family Day, PTO, Consistency Management, Theatre Arts program, field trips, 8th grade graduation.
6. None, all activities exclude some portion of the student population.
7. Athletics, Student Council, SADD Club, Band, Horticulture, Pep Squad, Houston Rodeo Art Contest, UIL Academic Events, National Junior Honor Society, Writing Contests, Poetry Contests
8. Student Council (everyone can join), Beginning of the year Meet The Teacher Evening, SADD Club, Athletics, Pep Squad.
9. After school activities, small classes, same teacher for all 3 years.
10. Students are involved in Mariachi, Copeira, Debate, Ballet Folklorico, Girls' Group, Web Quest, Student Council, and Best Friends.
11. Academic Pep Rallies recognize and reward group efforts and accomplishments.
12. Academic teams – (school) has 5 "Prides" that allow students and teachers to compete with others as well as brag about accomplishment.
13. Academic pep rallies where students are recognized; talent show; award ceremonies.
14. Sports activities, Drill team, Dances, Cheerleaders, Student Council, Academic Teams.
15. Athletics, Drill Team, Cheerleading, Student Council, KATS for Christ.
16. Academic Pep Rally, Recess (I think this helps with socialization).
17. Opportunities to celebrate individual and group achievement, recognition for birthdays, special awards, academic rally, awards night, classroom and team competition, students leadership opportunities.
18. Athletics, band, drama, UIL, KATS for Christ, Aristocats, Cheerkats.
19. There are many extracurricular activities and clubs – Band, drill team, cheerleading, sports, student council, KATS for Christ, Choir. These programs are for At-Risk students as well. There are also 4 academic rallies per year. There are team and individual citizenship awards as well as academic and team spirit awards. The preparation for the pep-rallies allow students to express creativity and build team spirit and a sense of belonging.
20. Band, Choir, Speech, Science Club, Cheerleading, Sports, Christian Student Union.
21. A variety of clubs, athletics, groups that get together to discuss things.
22. Athletics programs, CSU, Student Council, Science Club, Reading Club. Why should schools "make" student feel as though they belong. In order to feel a "part of" something, you must put forth some effort.
23. There are different clubs/organizations; activities that benefit extended day students.
24. There are many choices – something for everyone: Girls Group, CSU, Athletics, Book Club, Science Olympiad, Band, Choir, Art, UIL, Newspaper.
25. Sports, Clubs and Organizations.
26. Field trips, school yearbook, projects to help less fortunate. Many opportunities for homeroom classes to bond, to work and compete as a team. Students may work as aides in different areas and with different teachers. Many after school clubs, sport and academic competitions, clubs for enjoyment. Pep rallies, assemblies, announcements, school newspaper that any student may participate in, awards ceremonies for competitions, awards for being caught doing something good.
27. Sports but not all students are interested.

28. Lots of clubs.
29. We have academic and social clubs, activities, and student led school newspapers.
30. Builder's Club, Student Council, Fellowship of Christian Athletes.
31. Many types of clubs.
32. There are so many extra curricular activities here and clubs that peak the interests of many students.
33. STAR Program, various extracurricular activities, GIRP program, clubs, peer tutoring, peer mediation, teen leadership, student council, NJHS.
34. UIL Activities, Sports, Clubs, Awards Ceremony.
35. Choir, Band, Athletics, FCA, Art, Builder's Club, and other clubs.
36. UIL, Student Council, FCA, Sports/Academics. New students meet with counselor for a tour and overview of the school.
37. Pep rallies, Veteran's Day Assembly, 8Th grade graduation ceremony, participation in various elective courses, class field trips, field day, Raider Camp for 6th grade, Cheerleaders, Builder's Club.
38. There are a wide variety of clubs, organizations, and events for students of all interests to participate in.
39. FCA, Builder's Club, Crime Stoppers, Spanish Club, Robotics, Industrial Tech.
40. There are a variety of activities such as Builder's Club, Student Council, FCA, NJHS, Peer Mediation, Peer Tutoring, UIL, Athletics.
41. UIL, Sports, FCA, Art Club, Jr. Historians, Spanish Club, Science Club, Intramurals, Band, Choir, Orchestra.
42. Numerous varieties of extracurricular activities, as well as recognition during lunches or announcements.
43. Athletics, Band, Choir, Clubs.
44. UIL, Athletics, Spanish Club, Student Council, NHS.
45. Sports, Field Day, UIL, Clubs, Awards Ceremony, some classes.
46. A number of teachers have participated in "capturing kids hearts" which encourages everyone to treat each other with respect. Some of the strategies give students a sense of their importance to the team, hence a sense of belonging.
47. Pep rallies, Spirit days, various extracurricular activities open to all students.
48. Builder's Club, Student Council, Band, Choir, FCA, Crime-Stoppers Club, School dances, Team Sports.
49. Organizations like student council, athletics.
50. Athletics, Band , Orchestra, Choir, Art, UIL.
51. Lots of clubs and extracurricular activities.
52. Awards programs. Various clubs they are encouraged to join. Teachers use students as peer tutors, mentors, and helpers.
53. Choir, Music, Band, Athletics, Spanish Club, Crime-Stoppers, Student Council, Cheerleading, Builder's Club.
54. Band, Sports, UIL.
55. FCA, Student Council, Announcers of <school> news, Peer Mediation, UIL, Mentoring programs.
56. After school SNAP activities.
57. SNAP, Athletics, Clubs for all ages, races, genders, and interests.
58. Band, Choir, Athletics, Clubs, etc...
59. SNAP, Athletics, Music and Art competitions.
60. We offer a huge variety.
61. SNAP, STEP TEAM, sports, diversity clubs.
62. They use to have SNAPS programs which provided a variety of activities and emphasized a variety of strengths.
63. We have had a lot of afterschool activities. Budget cuts have eliminated activity buses after school. Before the cuts we had SNAP, Reading Club, Chess Club, Basketball,

- “Whats for dinner”, Home economics, History Club, Stepteam, Cheerleaders, and much more.
64. SNAP Grant for after school activities. Bus transportation provide for students that want to stay for activities.
  65. SNAP activities but ran out of money for salaries; bus transportation to activities.
  66. SNAP activities (i.e. TAKS tutorials, Intra-mural sports, cross stitching, step-team, chess club.
  67. Step club, student council, plays, sports, science/math clubs, computer club, cheer-leading, SNAP student aides, choir, band, cooking club, art club, reading club.
  68. Athletics, Band, Choir, Theatre Arts, Several clubs and organizations, dances, activities, cheerleaders.
  69. Before and after school tutorials, no zeros accepted tutorials, athletics, band, plays, step-team.
  70. SNAP.
  71. We had SNAP-after school program, student council, and lots of other programs; sports, cheerleading. These are voluntary activities students can join. In terms of other programs, no there are no others.
  72. Drama, Sports, Student Council, NJHS, Band, Orchestra, Crimestoppers.
  73. There are many, many different and varied activities at this school. So many that any child that wishes to be a part of something they could be. So many activities and so few teachers that we are becoming burned out.
  74. We have school dances that are free (or very minimal fees for entering). We don't do much that I'm aware of.
  75. Music, UIL activities, sports, clubs, organizations.
  76. Large student enrollment in athletics. Student council, Crimestoppers, even tutoring sessions after school are beneficial. I have several students who came to my room for “tutoring” who just like to visit and have a quiet place to work.
  77. Many different extra-curricular activities to target different groups – sports, band, orchestra, UIL, student council, Crimestoppers.
  78. Crimestoppers, FCA, UIL, Aviation Club, French Club, Math Counts, Cheerleaders.
  79. Students divided into two 7th and two 8th grade teams. Therefore we have 4 “campuses” on one campus. Numerous organizations.
  80. Student council, Crimestoppers, UIL activities, Mathcounts, Yearbook, Athletic events, etc...
  81. Athletics, Drama, UIL, Student Council, Crimestoppers, NJHS, Academic Teaming.
  82. Football and other sports.
  83. Club, pep-rallies.
  84. Clubs using as many students as possible in athletics and elective classes such as band, drama, art, and shop.
  85. Clubs- every student us in a club and we meet about once a 6 wks during the school day. Field trips- each grade level goes on at least 1 during the school day during the year.
  86. Club day, student council, various speakers.
  87. Band, art, UIL, theater art, shop, athletics, NJHS, student council, club days, G.T., student advisory, awards programs, academic pep rallies.
  88. 20-25 clubs of various interests that meet monthly- intramural and UIL sports programs; band, theater arts, art dept.; honor society; student council; pep squad.
  89. Yearbook photo bulletin board- we make every effort to get photos posted of all kids. Teachers say hi to the students by name.
  90. Art, speech, theatre arts, band, shop, athletics, G.T. (robotics team) and clubs to entertain all interests. Student advisors from each advisory period (homerom) meet frequently with the principal to discuss and share interests and ideas that are actually carried out campus wide, for example: “Crazy Hair Day”, “Backwards Days”. “Mis-

matched Day”, Door Decoration contests. Students survey their homerooms on various issues concerning the students and their school environment, in turn, these issues are brought before the principal and the principal responds in an expeditious manner. Students are “caught being good” and are called out by the counselor and a phone call is made while the student is present to their parent expressing the student’s positive accomplishments. Teachers use the team approach to their grade level students, in this manner, every teacher is made aware of strengths, areas of improvement, and social and emotional happenings of students in their grade level. Pictorial essays of student population is always fun and exciting to see, as well as being remembered on your birthday pictorially, to reading and seeing a picture of students who share their family, likes/dislikes and future goals with their “Campus family”.

91. Special dress “crazy” days in which everyone participates.
92. Club days – we have different clubs that range from silent reading to watching old movies, to roping.
93. We have interests club, sports, band, regularly scheduled pep rallies, awards assemblies, and individual classroom teacher rewards. Also, there are a couple of field trips taken during the school year, drug free week, special days such as crazy hat day and crazy sox days.
94. Athletics, UIL, Clubs.
95. <School>conducts clubs once each six weeks in which students pick a fun activity to participate in with others of the same interests.
96. Clubs – mandatory participation; class field trips; sports; UIL participation; National Geography Bee; mentoring.

Teachers who worked at the acceptable and low-performing schools were asked to answer questions related to the development of a sense of belonging in the students. From a total of 428 completed questionnaires there were 88 responses written from teachers who worked at acceptable or low-performing campuses in response to the following question: “What activities does this school have in place to make all students feel as though they belong?”

The activities identified by teachers in acceptable and low-performing schools in this section of the survey included:

1. Grade assemblies, Dances, Basketball games, Pep rallies, Football games.
2. AVID, Student Council, Band, Orchestra, Choir, Athletics.
3. SOAR, Student Council, Peer Mentoring, Athletics, Fine Arts Department.
4. Behavior Raffles Weekly, Student Council, SOAR, AVID, Volunteers to recite daily pledges on the P.A.
5. Student Council, Chess Club, Science Olympiad, Science Club, Horizons –Girls in Science.
6. Mentoring, groups that recruit all students for membership.
7. Not many. I feel there should be more available for students to do so they can interact with other students different from them. There should also be more all-school activities to encourage a sense of belonging.
8. Good Behavior rewards, No referral awards (weekly), positive parents contacts, end-of-year graduation ceremony (8th grade), 2nd step programs, NJHS, Top 10% Banquet, Student of the week pictures of bulletin board, Birthdays posted on Channel 72.
9. Sports, AVID, Crime-Stoppers, SOAR, Chess Club, Morning Tutorials, Band, Choir.
10. Clubs –Chess club, student council, NJHS, Wildlife Organizations, Extracurriculars such as band, choir, athletics, cheerleading, SOAR.
11. AVID, Student of the Week, Good Behavior, Chess Club, Student Council, Choir/Orchestra, Word of Day Activity, Morning Announcements, Science Olympiad,

- Science Bowl, Mathcounts, Horizons-Girls Science Club, Band, Mentors from <university>/
12. Sporting events and assemblies
  13. Sports, UIL, Student Council, SOAR, FCA, Chess Club, AM/PM Library, Field Trips, NJHS, Awards assembly, Weekly drawings.
  14. HISS, Sankofa, Asian Club.
  15. <School> has different clubs for each ethnicity, but accepts any members. We have a tremendous amount of study groups and athletic programs.
  16. Christian Club, Hispanic Club (HISS), Sankota, Asian Club.
  17. <School> wide drug free program, character education program, Adopt a county road.
  18. <School> wide drug free program, Band, Drama, Chess Club, Math Club, Special experiences, Athletics, Choir, MediaMasters, electives, tutoring, TAKS Mentor Program
  19. Athletics, HISS, Drug Free Program, SANKOFA, NJHS, math, science, clubs, dances, old/young game, tutorials, etc...
  20. <School> PROUD, Asian Club, African American Club, Hispanic Club, Soccer intramurals, Math Club, Science Club.
  21. Many different clubs for all cultures.
  22. Sports and many clubs are widely available.
  23. Wide variety of electives and extracurricular activities both academic and non-academic.
  24. Academic teams, athletics, Literary clubs, contests, electives, and art activities.
  25. Sports, Theatre, Student Council, Math Counts, UIL.
  26. Endless number of clubs, extracurricular activities and academic target areas.
  27. Athletics, theater, Crimestoppers, FCA, Student Council, NJHS, Band, Orchestra, Art, Tech Ed.
  28. We offer a myriad of extra-curricular activities. Teams work closely with parents to get students involved.
  29. Clubs, Athletics, FCA, Student Council, Crimestoppers, Theatre.
  30. Math Club, Science Club, Math Counts, Chess Club, Crimestoppers, Student Council, NJHS, UIL, Orchestra, Band, Athletics, Cheerleading, Choir, Tech Ed. Robotics, FCA, Drama, Office Aides, Yearbook, FFA.
  31. The school offers a large variety of extracurricular activities to students. From academics to athletics, drama to Crimestoppers, there are many choices for students.
  32. Athletics, Academic organizations, Leadership organizations, Band, Orchestra, Crimestoppers, Remedial help, Choir, Yearbook, Chess club.
  33. Sports and teams for all levels of abilities. Clubs, such as Theater, Target Clubs, Crimestoppers, Band, Orchestra.
  34. We have a variety of extra-curricular options that meet all sorts of needs.
  35. Choir, Cheerleading, Target Club, Theater, Band, Sports, Orchestra, Yearbook, FCA.
  36. Many Clubs and organizations to choose from.
  37. Athletics, UIL Academics, Cheerleading, Activities for different interests and abilities, Band, Choir, Orchestra, Theatre, Chess Club, Student Council, NJHS.
  38. We offer activities for everyone! Whether you are interested in athletics, arts, or academics. Tutorials for at-risk students are even called "clubs."
  39. Student Council, Band, Athletics, ProAct, Cheerleading.
  40. Activity groups to join (ProAct, Choir, Band, Athletics, Student Council, etc..).
  41. Band, Choir, Sports.
  42. Athletics, Band, UIL events, ProAct, Student Council.
  43. Awards ceremony, Banquet at the end of the year, Honor roll, Community food drive, Athletic and extracurricular activities.
  44. ProAct Club includes an excellent cross-section of diversity in our school. Choir, band, and athletics also includes junior high students.
  45. Sports, ProAct, Band, Choir. Not all students take advantage by choice.

46. Athletics, Band, ProAct, Drama.
47. Sports, ProAct Organization, Student Council, GT classes, office aides.
48. A variety of activities including athletics, band, choir, theater arts, and UIL academics.
49. <School> has activities ranging from athletics to academics. There are also such groups as band, choir, drama, and pro-act.
50. Sports, UIL, Choir, Band, Interact (ProAct).
51. Band, Choir, Yearbook, student Council, and ProAct. ProAct has been very successful in pulling in students that have not belonged to other activities.
52. All students are encouraged to be a part of various clubs and participate in extracurricular activities.
53. Teams, departments, LOTC, band, choir, tutorials.
54. Extracurricular activities are offered of a wide variety and encouraged.
55. Teams, sports, choir, LOTC, and cultural awareness programs also rewards for good behavior.
56. <school> has a wide variety of extracurricular activities to satisfy the needs of the student body. They include: sports, band, choir, LOTC, academic pentathlon, step teams, cheerleading.
57. Extracurricular activities, including choir, band, sports, LOTC, cheerleading, YMPA, YLPA, etc...
58. Pep rallies- good behavior and attendance, attendance dance, donuts-attendance, movie and popcorn party- good behavior and no referrals.
59. Athletics, student council, band, LOTC, choir, mentors and peer mediation.
60. The school offers a variety of extracurricular activities so that if a child is not good at one thing there is probably something offered they can belong to- choir, football, tennis.
61. Rewards and parties for good behavior, attendance and grades. Student assemblies with speakers that motivate them to succeed and that address drug abuse. Field trips for at risk kids.
62. Sports, cheerleading, clubs, LOTC, soccer, art club, choir, and good behavior group.
63. LOTC, choir, sports, art, technology and student council.
64. Clubs that address what they are interested in. Teachers that love children. Social skills program.
65. There are many extracurricular activities, including sports, academic clubs etc... Most teachers establish a rapport with their students helping them feel at ease.
66. Good behavior group, uniforms required.
67. Sporting events, student council.
68. Sports, LOTC, drill team, cheerleading, academic pentathlon, participate in school presentation.
69. LOTC, football, basketball, pentathlon.
70. Band, choir, cheerleading, LOTC, and team sports.
71. Our LOTC program is an excellent example of where our students feel connected to our school. I believe the driving force behind that feeling is the individual teacher.
72. This school has a variety of academic and athletic activities for students of all cultures.
73. Clubs, teams, sports teams, student council, honor society, band, choir, art, Spanish, ESL.
74. Standard dress code. Sporting events.
75. GBG, band, choir, LOTC.
76. LOTC, student council, band, sports, choir.
77. After school elective clubs and competitions, and programs such as tutoring, sports competitions and as well, academic competitions.
78. More electives to offer variety- after school activities.
79. A lot of electives and after school activities.
80. Caring about students.



81. LOTC, sports, choir, art, band.
82. Sports, art club, band, choir, LOTC, attendance incentives.
83. AVID Program, Bears for Christ, NJHS, all sports, Valentine dance, Chess club, Theater, Choir, Band, Eight grade dance, dance class, Ag, very active PTO, livestock participation, field trips.
84. Sports, UIL, writing and chess clubs.
85. A wide variety for all interests.
86. Dances, lunch time competitions, pep rally, vote on "choices."
87. Lots of sports, UIL, newspaper, yearbook, NJHS, student council.
88. Pep rallies, presentations at lunch, ceremonies.

There were also 76 responses written from teachers who worked at exemplary or recognized schools in response to the following questions: "What changes could teachers make to help students feel a part of the school?"

1. The changes identified by teachers in exemplary and recognized schools in this section of the survey included:
2. Increase positive reinforcement, encouragement, visibility.
3. More students need to participate in sports and other activities.
4. Awards programs, Recognition at end of each 6 weeks, Family Day, student Council, Student patrol.
5. Consistently enforce rules-no favorites.
6. Attend/Support student events more. Post outstanding examples of students work.
7. New student activities.
8. More team building activities, more sports activities.
9. Sports.
10. Teachers could be more open with students that are more reserved.
11. There continues to be some negativity among some teachers toward students with discipline issues – rather than helping students get to the root of their issues, they are often further isolated from their peers. Teachers need to give the same or more effort with these students as with high achieving ones.
12. Decorating bulletin boards outside classrooms, voting on assignments.
13. More club activities.
14. Sponsor more academic extra curricular clubs.
15. I know we are headed in the right direction. We have had an administration change this year. The students are complaining less. Parents have made statements that there is less restriction. Recess was new this year.
16. Require involvement as tutor, peer review board for disruption problems, activities to build loyalty to school and each other. Celebrate our differences.
17. I could probably survey my classes/or each teacher survey their team time to find out what their interests are.
18. Be more involved in student activities. Let the kids know that we are "real" people.
19. Be more open-minded.
20. Acknowledge different backgrounds of the kids and just accept where the kids come from.
21. I think we are already doing everything humanly feasible.
22. Consider all students – needs, feelings and backgrounds.
23. Mentoring program for special needs students.
24. Stop and listen to all students not just favored ones.
25. Encourage activity involvement in clubs, organizations and other extracurricular activities.
26. Standardized dress code.
27. Become more involved.

28. "Raider Camp" for transfer students as is done for 6th grade students.
29. Most students do feel a part of the school. However, a suggestion box might help students speak out more about their needs. Then a committee comprised of students and teachers can address those needs.
30. Recognize the students' interests, opinions and cultures. Encourage participation in UIL and Clubs.
31. Continue to innovate clubs and organizations that will help more kids belong.
32. Continue to stay positive.
33. Share responsibilities in sponsoring some of the activities that students are involved in.
34. Develop relationships, be aware of students needs, encourage involvement.
35. A few teachers could be more welcoming and nurturing to the kids, but for the most part or students do feel a part of our <school> family!
36. Teachers be more involved in extracurricular activities. It is always the same teachers that do extracurricular activities.
37. More attentiveness to outside pressures (home, parents, etc...).
38. Interest more students in extracurricular activities.
39. Smaller clusters, mentors assigned to at risk kids.
40. Care about students opinions, encourage students to join clubs and sports.
41. Advertise activities at the start of the school year more.
42. Help make students aware of these positive activities and encourage them to participate.
43. Make time for one-on-one interactions.
44. Encourage more participation.
45. Possibly volunteer to mentor a student during the school year (tutor, advise, etc...).
46. More activities for 6th grade to be involved in (sports, pepsquad, spirit, etc...).
47. Focus on student instead of the curriculum.
48. Try to encourage students to be a part of something.
49. Make themselves available.
50. We offer many activities, middle school students do not take the opportunity to participate in many of them.
51. Emphasize other activities and promote other activities rather than just sports.
52. Fortunately our teachers always mention the clubs etc.. we offer. Teachers also offer tutorials for the subject they teach. We could do more "family" activities, decorate doors, field days, have assemblies to recognize good grades and behavior.
53. Maintain a minimum standard, speak to students as people not inmates, expect students to meet standards.
54. Less time on teaching to TAKS, more time to teach to learn for real life. Show more respect to students and their diversities.
55. All teachers could try to build relationships with our students. All teachers could enforce the rules of the school as set forth by the administrative team. If all students felt they were treated equally by all faculty. I think the sense of equality would increase the sense of belonging.
56. I feel that the students have ample opportunities to help them feel a part of school.
57. Have more teachers involved in all events. More parents involved in the groups and activities.
58. Trying to get students to have pride and respect for themselves and others.
59. We really do not have a sense of community here. Students do not have any ownership of <school>. They just come to school here- it is very disconcerting.
60. Try to diversify above groups as much as possible.
61. Activities that encourage more cultural awareness would foster better student relations. We have a large group of international students and I worry they don't feel a sense of belonging.
62. All teachers are involved in many activities.

62. Most definitely we need some "clubs" for minority kids.. I am particularly concerned about or Hispanic girls.
63. Come and support the students at the activities they are involved in.
64. Sponsor more relevant clubs and activities that reach all students.
65. If the teachers would realize that the student have a life besides schools and this if could notice a students achievement outside of the classroom, a student would perform at a higher level/grade than what they are. Just show a little interest in their weekend/holiday activities, extracurricular activities, etc. Junior high/middle school students love recognition among their peers.
66. I really think we do as much as we possibly can.
67. Solicit student help in decorating rooms and halls. Eliminate competition between teams and possibly make contests that compete with other middle schools, etc...
68. Help them.
69. Go out of the way to include those students that tend to be left out.
70. Introduce new students to the class and talk about where they came from, etc...Possibly have a student mentor to "show the new students how things work in this school."
71. Encourage students to respect rather than ridicule students with different interests.
72. I think they should survey the students to find out if the "feel a part of the school" as well as solicit suggestions from the students.
73. Maintain consistency, it's a principle and a practice that our campus administration models for us. Consistency in all facets of students' growth mentally, physically, emotionally and socially is structurally safe and secure for all.
74. More warm "Fuzzy" activities or serious discussion groups.
75. Understand more about their home life so we can relate when they come in not prepared.
76. I would like to see more dances of "free day" as rewards for good behavior or good grades. Even though we do some community work, I'd also like to see more involvement with our community, especially with environmental issues.
77. More class projects.

There were also 78 responses from teachers who worked at acceptable or low-performing schools in response to the following questions: "What changes could teachers make to help students feel a part of the school?"

The changes identified by teachers in acceptable or low-performing schools in this section of the survey included:

1. Open up with better communication lines, faculty to students and students to faculty.
2. Making sure the teachers feel like part of the campus.
3. Smile more often. Speak to students in the hallway. Be more positive.
4. Have more activities for them to join, strive to treat all the same.
5. Teachers need to be more positive and pro-active in talking with all students to engage them in conversation.
6. Be more culturally aware in their dealings with students. Treat them fairly, and encourage pride in their school by exhibiting that pride themselves.
7. Make more positive parents contacts. Become more active in PTO and student activities.
8. Not sure.
9. Get to know their students on a more personal level. Know the interests of the students and design some lessons that are more meaningful to the students.
10. Don't yell. Tutor when they need help.

11. More teachers could make the effort to learn Spanish which is the native language of the majority of our students.
12. Approach students in a non-confrontational manner.
13. Teachers can focus on making lessons multicultural. They can also encourage the students to take part in different clubs and organizations.
14. More one-on-one conversations.
15. None that I can think of.
16. Talk up positives of <school> even more.
17. It is difficult to help students feel part of a school when schools continue to grow in size. "Families" do help with this.
18. Just making sure students are aware of what is available to them.
19. Emphasize tolerance, acceptance, and appreciation of different cultures.
20. It might be helpful for each teacher to "adopt" one or two student to especially encourage.
21. All them (teachers) to be more active in planning and conducting.
22. Help students know what is available.
23. More time for students individually. However, time is always a hard thing to come by.
24. I feel that <school> does a good job of helping students feel a part of the school. For those students that may not feel a part, the biggest change I could suggest would be to get to know the students and find out how he/she could become a part.
25. There is a need to plan or schedule more "fun" activities that involve the entire student body. Assemblies, field trips, field day, pep rallies, etc. This allows students the opportunities to interact with other students and see their teachers participate in something other than "business as usual." Teams need to have reward parties for those students that follow rules and procedures. IN other middle schools where I have taught we took the students on picnics, skating, bowling, movies, etc...once each six weeks for their reward. We got to see a fun side of our students and they got to see a fun side of their teachers.
26. Encourage those that aren't involved to become involved.
27. Overall, I think <school> does an awesome job of addressing students' needs and interests.
28. No changes. We do a great job!
29. It would be fun to have more assemblies, such as Christmas performances by band, choir, orchestra (and other holidays)- debate, etc. Also, intramural sports and teams during the day would be fun and add to the sense of belonging and more fun at school.
30. Maybe we could take student opinions/suggestions into account.
31. Teachers could be more intentional about seeking out students who are not involved and helping direct them.
32. Show they care about each and every student- build a relationship.
33. Survey students to determine interests and sponsor a club that would address those interests.
34. Well, I know I need to make more time to display student work and recognize their birthdays, etc... I am in a new job and hope to improve on it next year.
35. Do more things involving the school as a whole- instead of 7th vs. 8th grade, class vs. class, etc...
36. Bonding activities (ropes, etc..).
37. Evaluate the needs of the students and act on them accordingly.
38. Be more open to the differences of students, offer more student service organizations, art program.
39. Every student needs to be part of something. Help guide the students towards a group/club.
40. Sponsor additional organizations: math and science clubs, etc...

41. I see no changes made, I feel <school> junior high offers our students a variety of choices, they just need to take advantage of it. There is something for everyone.
42. Allow students to participate in the decision-making process as much as possible.
43. Treat them as though they were your own children. Show you have an honest interest in each of them. Try not to overlook the quiet ones who always conform to the rules.
44. Be sensitive to students who may feel alienated; be aware when students try to alienate others and intervene.
45. I think we should all as teachers make a constant effort to get to know each students as an individual. Therefore, they will at least feel as though they belong to you, which is part of the school. Most teachers on our campus seem to already do this. However it is easy to overlook a student who is extremely shy and quiet, but still needs someone.
46. Some teachers are somewhat hesitant to embrace students. I think a lot of teachers have their guard up.
47. Some need to change their attitudes about these children.
48. Continue to have other activities for other students to participate.
49. Teachers could show up at extracurricular activities and praise the efforts of students.
50. Always put the child first and make sure you're always positive!
51. Some teachers could be a little more friendly toward the students and they also could support the students more by attending the extracurricular activities that their students participate in.
52. Be more interested in student moral. If you don't relate your subject matter to present-day, most kids will feel inferior or not interested with you or that particular subject matter.
53. Allow them more ownership in their learning- not allowing structure to be the only focus!!
54. If teachers are proud of where they work and are satisfied in their jobs, the students will witness that in the classroom.
55. More after school clubs that include a broad range of students.
56. More one on one time.
57. Get to know the student more.
58. Stress social skills daily.
59. Encourage respect of everyone.
60. More school clubs.
61. Make at personal investment into the children we serve.
62. One change could be is to have the students do something at the school that could be seen by other in years to pass.
63. They could recruit more students into their programs. Seek parent help or involvement.
64. Keep track of sports on a poster posted in the room.
65. Participate or volunteer more in after-school activities.
66. I know we have some spirit related activities I think we could have more. Also- more programs like the one we have just started to reward students every 6- weeks for improving on behavior.
67. Teachers are doing what they can- teachers must be motivated in order to motivated and encourage students.
68. We are doing what we can. Teachers need to be motivated and supported by administration.
69. No change.
70. Be more involved.
71. More activities offered. More chances for students to do what they enjoy.
72. We have already good communication between student, teacher, and administration but we could have a greater parent involvement.
73. More activities for lower level students.
74. More teachers to be involved w/ activities.

75. Do more Inter/Co-curriculum activities. Attend more of student functions.
76. Accept diversity!
77. Be more acceptant of different types of student personalities.
78. Placing students on teams and allowing them to have competitions. Teachers need to have more loyalty to the school and be more positive towards students, faculty, and staff.

Teachers who worked at the schools were also allowed to make other comments they felt were important to the survey about students' sense of belonging.

Fifteen teachers at exemplary and recognized campuses made the following open-ended comments.

1. Have an administration system that supports the teacher. Only 1 administrator doing support is not enough. End of year is too late to begin to worry about dress code (Capri pants, shirts tucked in).
2. Most of our students do not have a problem, if they do it's the student come from a large urban campus to ours (small and rural).
3. A lot of kids do have a sense of belonging but there are always a few kids that are ostracized and made fun of no matter how many teacher interventions are made.
4. The only thin I can think of is the space program we use to have – it was really cool.
5. There are always a few groups of kids that do not care about belonging to anything – its hard to make them feel a part of the school if they show no interest.
6. <School> is an incredible school with a very supportive, positive learning environment for all students.
7. Smaller schools or schools within schools would make a huge difference!
8. Our school offers many activities for students such as athletics, UIL, Builder's Club, and art events. With the wide variety, every student should be able to find a niche where he belongs.
9. Our school is very large, next year we will move to a new middle school. I feel the size of our school keeps us from doing many things to promote pride. We have 1800 students that are spread all over temporary buildings and main buildings, next year will be better.
10. Consistency among discipline with consequences and all students equal.
11. Teachers at <school> are committed to the academic success of the students. In order to ensure that all student achieve their highest potential most teachers offer tutorials before and after school. Student may attend tutorials at 7:45 AM and 3:40-4:30 PM. Many students consistently attend these sessions.
12. <School> is a wonderful school with a super staff and administration. It has a great atmosphere and lots of activities to interest each student.
13. The survey was difficult to fill out. How a student defines "feel a part of a school" and how a teacher may interpret a student's "feel of partness" are difficult to measure. The survey might be more insightful if these terms were better defined.
14. <School> is a school with few cliques and rivalries among students.
15. I feel very proud to work at this school and with these children.

Teachers who worked at the schools were also allowed to make other comments they felt were important to the survey about students' sense of belonging.

Nine teachers at acceptable and low-performing campuses made the following open-ended comments.

1. I feel most teachers here foster a sense of belonging but we need more activities to encourage this for staff as well as students.
2. My students are beginning ESL students, therefore, my perspective may be quite different than that of others.
3. I think you must keep in mind that this is a middle school and kids are much more concerned with being cool than they are with anything else. That sometimes makes "being themselves" very difficult!
4. I think that the few students who may feel as though they don't really belong are ones who come from a non-middle class American background. It may take a while for students from other countries to feel as though they belong. Mainly, I think that the lower socioeconomic kids feel as though the school is a foreign place. I think that most of the teachers are middle-class and can't relate to the mentality of these students to even know how to make them feel like the school is as much theirs as anyone's.
5. We need more clubs/opportunities for our students.
6. <school> is not a neighborhood school. Children are bussed over a wide area and have difficulty identifying with the school. 40% of our students are transient which I believe plays a part in some of the answers on the survey.
7. Morale and motivation. Teachers are not supported fully concerning discipline.
8. Morale and motivation are at an all-time low. 1. Teachers don't feel supported, Esp. w/discipline and parent conferences. 2. Therefore the student doesn't feel supported.
9. I think as a whole <school> has very good students and the students enjoy attending <school>.

## VITA

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### EDUCATION

- |      |                                                                                                      |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2003 | Doctor of Philosophy, Educational Administration<br>Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas     |
| 1997 | Master of Education, Educational Administration<br>Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, Texas |
| 1994 | Bachelor of Science, Biology<br>Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, Texas                    |

- CERTIFICATIONS** Superintendent Certification  
Professional Mid-Management Certification  
Science Composite Teaching Certificate

### EXPERIENCE

- |                   |                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2000 -<br>Present | Intermediate School Principal<br>Sealy Independent School District, Sealy, Texas                                           |
| 1998 - 2000       | Elementary Assistant Principal<br>Wichita Falls Independent School District, Wichita Falls, Texas                          |
| 1995 - 1998       | High School Biology Teacher<br>Wichita Falls High School, Wichita Falls Independent School District, Wichita Falls, Texas  |
| 1994 - 1995       | Junior High Science Teacher<br>Barwise Junior High School, Wichita Falls Independent School District, Wichita Falls, Texas |

This dissertation was edited and formatted by Ann Weaver Hart, Bryan, Texas.