THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC OPTIMISM IN HIGH-ACHIEVING, LOW SOCIOECONOMIC SCHOOLS

By Katrina Sacco

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Curriculum and Instruction

Northern Arizona University

May 2023

Approved:

Vicki Ross, Ph.D., Chair

Shane Haberstroh, Ed.D.

Sheri Markel, Ph.D.

Pamela Powell, Ed.D.

ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC OPTIMISM IN HIGH-ACHIEVING,

LOW SOCIOECONOMIC SCHOOLS

KATRINA SACCO

Academic optimism is a construct which was conceptualized to explain specific aspects of school culture. The construct comprises three main components and is based on positive psychology, optimism, and social capital (Hoy et al., 2006). The three main sub-concepts are collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust. The construct consists of behavioral (academic emphasis), cognitive (collective efficacy), and affective (faculty trust) elements (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012). The three factors have interdependent relationships, supporting one another (Kirby & DiPaola, 2009). This study uses the lens of academic optimism to explore the beliefs and experiences within two schools with high student achievement and low socioeconomic status students. This study uses the case study method to examine two schools that have low socioeconomic status and high student achievement.

The findings revealed that both schools had high levels of academic optimism according to the School Academic Optimism Survey as well as the investigator's qualitative findings. The study revealed that the attributes of high-performing, low-socioeconomic-status schools are varied, but some common elements existed between the two schools studied. They both display high levels of academic optimism as measured by the SAOS. They both have procedures that are focused on guiding instruction with assessment data. These schools focus on cultivating a robust academic culture and strong relationships with their students' families. Both schools have systems in place to support struggling learners and accelerate higher achieving students. Western

Elementary School did so through their NIET systems, while Juniper Elementary School used an MTSS process to support these different needs. The findings also revealed that academic optimism was observed and frequently demonstrated within the two schools studied. Teachers and principals alike spoke about their commitment to excellence in academics (academic emphasis), their strategies to overcome challenges and grow as educators (collective efficacy), and their commitment to strong relationships with families and students (faculty trust).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all of those who have supported me over the last several years. First, thank you to my chair, Dr. Ross. Your gentle guidance through this program taught me what it felt like to have a teacher who cares. You are a true mentor and friend. A warm thank you to Dr. Haberstroh, Dr. Markell, and Dr. Powell for your guidance, support, and willingness to serve on my committee.

Thank you to my family. To my wonderful husband, Brian, your partnership helps me to know I can do anything. To my mom, Sally, for pushing me and reminding me that I'm not a quitter. To my sister, Kimberly, my biggest cheerleader; my sister, Samantha, who helps me gain perspective by allowing me to bounce ideas off of her; and my sister, Robin, who is always the first to jump up and help when help is needed. And to my father, Paul, who taught me that my education is a top priority, and his wife, Shanya. Thank you to Erin, Andrew B., Jason P., Elliott, Hayden, and Kate. I would also like to thank my husband's family, Leslie, Jim, Deanna C., Deanna P., Jason M., Christa, Avery, Kennedy, Rick, Gabby, Brad, Connie, Jenny, Kevin, Rachel, Katie K., and David for being the best in-laws I could ask for.

I began this journey as a teacher at Beaver Creek School. Now I am at Payson Unified. I am forever grateful for the staff of both districts for their support, and for their enthusiasm for serving our students. Specifically, thank you to Karin Ward for your mentorship and Allie Wheeler for your comradery as we continue to grow as professionals.

And finally, thank you to my friends who are always thoughtful and inquisitive about my progress. Katie S., Logan, Katie H., Andrew H., Dawn, and Jim. I consider myself lucky to have each of you as close friends.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study supports the work of educators engaged in overcoming and reducing the achievement gap between students from low socioeconomic status and diverse backgrounds. It is well-documented that students from those populations tend to perform at lower levels on standardized tests (Reardon, 2013). Academic optimism strongly correlates with high student achievement in students from all demographics (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012; Hoy et al., 2006; Srivastava et al., 2016). This correlation is significant because of educators' historical challenges in overcoming the divide in academic achievement between groups of students (Barton & Coley, 2007). This case study aims to explore academic optimism in real-world contexts. The study illuminates if academic optimism is visible in high-achieving schools with low socioeconomic status populations.

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study. It starts by providing the reader with the background of the study. Then the reader is introduced to each school's characteristics. The chapter then presents the statement of the problem which the study was built upon, including the research questions. The chapter also includes the significance of the study, orientation of the theoretical framework, the study's limitations, a reflexive statement about the researcher, definitions the reader may find useful, and a summary of the chapter.

Background

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) held verbiage to address the achievement gap: "to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child is left behind" (NCLB, 2001, p. 1). In 2015 the Every Student Succeeds Act was implemented as the reauthorization of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA) from 50 years prior (ESSA, 2015). ESSA focused on the achievement gap and emphasized the need for each state to

have high academic standards for all students (ESSA). However, it added an equity lens by emphasizing the opportunity gap between low-income and high-income students, particularly in early learning experiences (ESSA). As time passes, researchers have maintained the critical role of examining the gap in achievement as practitioners work to overcome the challenge. However, researchers and practitioners have yet to succeed (Barton & Coley, 2007). Teachers still need help to push students from diverse backgrounds and low socioeconomic status homes to achieve at high levels (Amrein-Beardsley, 2014). Students from lower-income homes are still less likely to have access to quality early learning experiences, which is counterproductive to long-standing academic outcomes for those students (Amrein-Beardsley, 2014; Bae, 2018). In today's modern attempt to equitably educate all students, socioeconomic status remains the leading predictor of student achievement (Reardon, 2013).

Researchers such as John Hattie and Robert Marzano have uncovered truths about schooling and how they affect student achievement in actual practice by looking to meta-analysis techniques. Professor John Hattie synthesized findings from over 80,000 studies, including 1,400 meta-analyses, in order to show practitioners what works to boost student performance (Hattie, 2009). Dr. Robert Marzano synthesized thousands of studies using meta-analysis to develop Marzano's nine strategies, ranked from least to most significant in their effect size on student achievement (Marzano, 2001). These two leaders in meta-analyses to drive school improvement are some of the most referenced researchers. However, the literature on school improvement efforts, especially regarding the achievement gap, is numerous (Hanushek et al., 2019).

As school accountability measures continue to grow and become more present in the common understanding of school effectiveness, educators are pushed to meet the expectations of these measures regardless of the demographics of the communities they serve. Teachers and

administrators engage in professional development and goal setting to support student success at a higher level. Oftentimes those professional development plans and school improvement goals focus on instructional improvement, and other times they focus on climate and culture indicators in the school setting. This study was designed to explore the latter and to deepen the understanding of how some schools succeed while others tend to struggle to support students in their academic endeavors.

Orienting the Theoretic Framework

In the early 2000s, a new construct, academic optimism, was developed using what researchers knew about teacher and collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust to further the study of teacher and organizational growth and, through that, meet student needs. Hoy and his colleagues (2006) aimed their research at finding a construct to explain and predict student achievement when controlling socioeconomic factors. They reached their goal; academic optimism was a stronger predictor of academic achievement than socioeconomic status (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012; Hoy et al., 2006; Srivastava et al., 2016). When Dr. Hoy and his colleagues first published on the subject of academic optimism in 2006, he referred to it as a construct; this study will follow suit as most studies on the topic have done.

Academic optimism is composed of three main components which were previously studied, they are based on positive psychology, optimism, and social capital (Hoy et al., 2006). The three main sub-concepts are collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust. The construct consists of behavioral (academic emphasis), cognitive (collective efficacy), and affective (faculty trust) elements (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012). The three factors have interdependent relationships which support one another (Kirby & DiPaola, 2009). Understanding each piece of this construct enables the development of a fluid and holistic knowledge of the concept of academic optimism. Each of

these three sub-components is a strong predictor of student achievement, and combined; they form a supportive relationship that is a stronger predictor of student achievement (Hoy et al., 2006). However, academic optimism remains an unknown construct rarely referenced in leadership texts or conversations on school improvement. I hope this case study helps researchers and school stakeholders understand academic optimism's role in schools so they can use the construct to support student success successfully.

Participant School Information

Each of the two schools I studied met the criteria laid out in chapter three. Each was identified by the state as high performing, with more students from low-income families than the average school in the state. Both schools qualify for Title 1 funding based on their poverty criteria.

Western Elementary School Description

Western Elementary School serves students in kindergarten through sixth grade. Their student enrollment is 714 students. It is in a small agricultural town on the United States and Mexico border, classified as rural. I chose this site because it met my search criteria of a school with low socioeconomic status students and high student achievement as measured by the results-based funding calculation and the letter grade assigned by the state, which is composed of more than 90 percent state assessment scores. Ninety percent of Western Elementary School students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 99.58 percent are Hispanic.

Juniper Elementary School Description

Juniper Elementary School is an elementary school that serves students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Their student enrollment is 434 students. The school is in a large metropolitan area in the southwestern United States. The population density is about 3,200 people per square mile, classifying it as a suburban setting. 60% of the students who attend Juniper Elementary School qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The student population has diverse demographics, including:

- 57% Hispanic
- 9% African American
- 25% White
- 3% Native American
- 5% Multiple Races

Juniper Elementary School received an A letter grade from the state accountability rating system in the 2018- 2019 school year, the final reported letter grade due to the Covid-19 pandemic causing delays in testing and letter grade assignments.

Statement of the Problem

All stakeholders in an educational setting have a shared goal of increasing student achievement among pupils (ESSA, 2015). Educators take on the critical role of pushing students to grow little by little as they move toward the goal of proficiency (ESSA, 2015). Over time data-driven instruction and results-based models have increased in popularity, making the achievement gap even more apparent to researchers and practitioners (Hattie et al., 2015; Hanushek et al., 2019).

Models of education which offer support to meet diverse student needs, such as Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), give educators hope; the tools they need to help their students gain proficiency are in sight (Forman, & Crystal, 2015). Educators can learn about specific teaching strategies or progress-monitoring tools to boost student achievement (Marzano, 2001; Pitler & Stone, 2012). However, there is no formulaic way to ensure that all students meet their targets (Hattie, 2015). Instead, educators are sometimes met with low scores even when they feel they took all the right actions in their teaching practice (Pearman & Swain, 2017).

Researchers have suggested that understanding the power behind academic optimism can support educators as they engage in the meaningful work of overcoming the achievement gap (Kirby & DiPaola, 2009). Hoy, Tarter and Woolfolk Hoy (2006) created a model to identify some less visible factors affecting a student's learning experience, which impact their learning outcomes. They combined the known concepts of collective efficacy, faculty trust, and academic emphasis (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). All three of those concepts had strong correlations with positive student achievement (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). The combination of the three concepts is now known as academic optimism (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). Academic optimism has been proven to predict student achievement outcomes (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012; Hoy et al., 2006; Srivastava et al., 2016). The results from quantitative studies have initiated interest among some education researchers on academic optimism, leaving space for qualitative research to support the detailed understanding of how academic optimism is observed and may affect schools in their daily operations.

Research Questions

1. What are the attributes of high-performing low socioeconomic status schools?

2. Are elements of academic optimism present in the experiences of teachers and principals in high-performing low socioeconomic schools?

This study uses a case study methodology to dive deeply into the attributes of these two schools. This methodology allows the researcher to develop a solid understanding of how the schools operate, what methods are being used, and how staff members feel about their work in these two school settings. The case study methodology was chosen specifically to further the depth of knowledge in the field around academic optimism as well as high-achieving, low socioeconomic status schools.

Significance of the Study

This study aims to identify observable factors in high-achieving low socioeconomic status schools and compare those factors with the known elements of academic optimism to understand any possible connections better. This study focuses on school environments and experiences that show how and why academic optimism affects student achievement.

The study extends the current knowledge of the construct by explicitly examining the experiences and environment of participants in Arizona's low socioeconomic status, high-performing schools. A deeper understanding of the perspectives that make up a school's attributes of academic optimism may help researchers and practitioners to understand better how to overcome the ever-growing achievement gap. The inequity among outcomes for learners are more apparent as schools across the United States reopened after the closures that took place during the 2020 school year, which intensifies the value of this work (Kaffenberger, 2021; Reardon, 2013). This study examines the general understanding that academic optimism's correlation with student achievement is observable and offers insight into how it shapes the

schooling experiences for students. The findings of this study help all stakeholders to understand academic optimism's place in the field and the literature.

This study is designed to explore schools that perform well and have a specific demographic of students. In order to be included in the study, the schools must serve students from low socioeconomic status homes, and the schools must have solid student achievement outcomes. I identified two schools that meet both the criteria of high performance based on the A-F Letter grade system for the state of Arizona and low socioeconomic status based on free and reduced lunch rates and ADE's performance-based results calculation. I observed each school for one day to gather data on the observable factors. Then, I administered the School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS) to the school's faculty. I interviewed select teachers and administrators from each site using a semi-structured interview. The teachers and administrators volunteered to be interviewed, with preference given to teachers and administrators who have worked at the school for at least four years. Finally, I collected written documents such as continuous improvement plans, handbooks, and parent newsletters.

The data analysis for this study used a multi-step process. First, I used a deductive coding approach by categorizing data into the three components of academic optimism, looking for threads of each piece of the construct in the data collected. I coded the observational notes, artifacts from the school (continuous improvement plans, handbooks, newsletters, and website information), and interview responses. Then, an inductive coding approach was used to explore the data's new themes. The themes gathered from both coding systems were combined to create a rich picture of each school's experiences, thoughts, and beliefs. The data collection and coding process laid the groundwork for developing a deep understanding of how these two schools function and how academic optimism may be present in their daily work.

Limitations

This research is limited by the scope in which student achievement data can accurately and holistically represent student success and the assumption that AZMerit data is reliable and accurate. The identification of schools in this study relied on standardized test scores to identify student achievement. This approach is flawed because it does not show other factors that may represent student success in schools. Some schools may support students in ways that are not easily explained through standardized test scores; those schools were not considered for participation in this study. Students and parents may value student achievement, but they may also see success through enriching activities like art, music, dance, social emotional programming, or simply providing a safe and happy place for students to spend their time.

Additionally, due to the state-wide school closures of 2020, testing and A-F report cards are outdated. Students tested in the spring of 2019, which means factors in the school environment may have changed over time before data collection. Results based funding calculation achievement data are also from 2019.

Reflexive Statement

I am a public-school administrator in rural Arizona. I began my educational career as a teacher at Beaver Creek School, a small one-school district in north-central Arizona. I taught for three years before I was asked to move into an administrative role. I have always tried to serve my community wherever I am needed, so I moved to administration. My second year as an administrator, I became the principal of Beaver Creek School. After seven years at Beaver Creek School I decided to move to another district in Arizona. I currently serve as a district administrator serving 2,300 students in Payson, Arizona. My experiences around education have been focused on assisting underperforming students in making the goals set forward by the state.

I was a principal when Arizona issued its first A-F letter grades using the model described in this study. I struggled to move my school's letter grade up and felt defeated at times when progress did not come as quickly as I hoped. There have been many ups and downs in my journey with student achievement, and I took many of those setbacks to heart. When I was a new administrator, I dreamt of making my school succeed. But, for the first few years, I was unsuccessful in achieving the letter grade I desired for my school. Finally, Beaver Creek School and Payson Unified are both performing well enough to earn B letter grades from the state, and I cried when I saw those results. As a teacher, principal, and district administrator, I have worked with various students and staff members who have shaped my views on public education. My hope in writing this dissertation is to inform and support those who share my commitment to student success. I hope to create clarity for educators who want to push student achievement forward while maintaining their commitment to each child's non-academic needs as well.

I have been critical of Arizona's funding of district schools. Arizona has been ranked the lowest in the nation or near the lowest in funding for two decades. That lack of funding forces administrators to run schools and districts with limited staff and fewer supports for students than desired. Arizona is known for having a robust variety of choices in education, including many charter schools. I know that the existence of these charter schools has made it more difficult for districts to adequately and equitably educate their students. However, the choices they offer to some students are remarkable. Arizona's public education system has the potential to be fantastic, but more work needs to be done to ensure adequate resources for all students. While I want parents to feel, their choices in their children's education are important and valued. I also know that the school choice model, which is gaining popularity, creates great inequities. I am steadfast

in my beliefs that the best way to equitably serve all students is through a public system achieves high results for all learners.

I am inspired by educators who can work in the most challenging circumstances and still empower their students to succeed. This study has helped me to continue to grow my understanding of how some low socioeconomic schools excel. I use the knowledge I've gained through this process on my journey as I continue to serve my community and students in the best way I know how.

Definitions

Academic Optimism: a collective set of beliefs about the strengths and capabilities of a school in which Optimism is the overarching theme that unifies collective efficacy and collective trust with academic emphasis (Makvandi et al., 2018).

Collective Efficacy: the shared perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will positively affect students (Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

Faculty Trust: the willingness of the faculty as a whole to risk vulnerability to parents and colleagues with confidence that both groups can be relied upon, i.e., are benevolent, competent, and open (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

Academic Emphasis: (also known as academic press)**:** the school's press for academic achievement; a school with high academic emphasis has high-achievement standards, faculty belief that all students can achieve, and an environment in which students work hard and respect those who achieve (Makvandi et al., 2018).

School Academic Optimism Scale (**SAOS)**: A research instrument developed by Wayne Hoy in 2005 to measure the academic optimism of school staff (Hoy et al., 2006).

Achievement Gap: The difference in achievement between subgroups, including socioeconomic status, ethnicity, urbanicity, language proficiency, and disability (Barton & Coley, 2010).

A-F Report Card: Arizona's way of measuring the effectiveness of schools (Azed, 2019).

Results-Based Funding AZ: The school finance department of the Arizona Department of Education uses a formula to reward high-achieving schools. For the 2019 calculation used in this study, schools had to have 44.25% of their students score proficient on state exams and have a free and reduced lunch percentage of 60% or more (Azed, 2019).

Summary

This chapter briefly overviewed the background that frames this case study. Academic optimism is a construct that researchers used to support educators in their role of overcoming the achievement gap in schools. Academic optimism may be able to help explain how low socioeconomic schools sometimes thrive while others tend to struggle to support student achievement. I observed, questioned, and analyzed school factors to elevate the common understanding of academic optimism and how it may be displayed in school settings. To overcome the achievement gap, I focused on schools with a history of high performance and low socioeconomic status. In the coming chapters, the literature on the subject of academic optimism is summarized, I describe each aspect of my methodology, present my findings, and analyze my research findings.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter explores the research and context which frame this study. First, I look at the relationship between socioeconomic status and student achievement. Then, the chapter outlines accountability measures and their historical context in the public education system of the United States. It goes on to illustrate funding and accountability, and the pitfalls of accountability measures, school choice, growth-based models, and the importance of student achievement data within the educational landscape. Then, I examine academic optimism as a feature of school culture, including details about collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust. This exploration of research and context intends to give the reader a firm understanding of academic optimism and school accountability measures.

Socioeconomic Status and Student Achievement

Overwhelming evidence shows that socioeconomic status is a leading factor in student performance on standardized tests (Coleman, 1966; Reardon, 2013). The difference in achievement between subgroups, including socioeconomic status, ethnicity, urbanity, language proficiency, and disability, is referred to as the achievement gap (Barton & Coley, 2007). Researchers estimate that site-based factors such as teacher behaviors and instructional strategies make up 30 percent of the difference in student achievement; of that 30 percent, teacher quality makes up close to 60 percent, while principal quality makes up 25 percent (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004; Rockoff, 2004; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller,2002). The current accountability measures used, which are dependent on student achievement data, can lead community members to believe schools are doing a poor job of educating their students rather than helping community members to understand the inherent challenges which shape the work of schooling children from at-risk populations (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004). However,

some schools with low socioeconomic status and large at-risk populations continue to flourish (Azed, 2021). Those schools who perform well and serve students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds have ignited curiosity in researchers, leading to a body of research on the topic.

Low Socioeconomic Status Schools with High-Achievement

Although many schools that serve low-income neighborhoods struggle to bridge the achievement gap, others overcome it to support more robust student achievement measures (Marzano et al., 2001). This anomaly leads researchers to wonder why some fail while others succeed. Research by John Hattie (2009) has separated many individual factors that may support or detract from student achievement using meta-analyses. His research includes schools with high and low socioeconomic status. Hattie (2009) found that response to intervention (RTI) has a high correlation with student achievement across demographics; students who receive individualized support based on their individual needs, measured by valid and reliable assessment tools, will grow more and perform better on standardized tests. He also found that corporal punishment, untreated attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, lack of sleep, and boredom significantly affect student achievement (Hattie, 2009). In 2009 Mid-Continental Research for Education and Learning (McREL) researchers also used meta-analyses to attempt to isolate variables to identify best practices for educators focused on overcoming the challenges of serving diverse communities of learners (Marzano et al., 2001). McRel is a large research institute based out of Denver, Colorado, who offer professional development and resources to schools so they can incorporate best practices into their instruction and leadership. McREL's model for instruction shows that cooperative learning, high-quality learning objectives, and the cultivation of a growth mindset set some instructors apart from others (Marzano et al., 2001).

From McREL's leadership model came 21 leadership responsibilities that will foster student achievement at the site level. They include leader flexibility, communication, gathering input from stakeholders, and intellectual stimulation of faculty (Marzano et al., 2001). These correlations reinforce the need for further understanding of how some schools cultivate environments that are rich in factors that will push forward student achievement despite the challenges posed by factors contributing to the achievement gap. The focus on student achievement and equity frames the landscape which surrounds school accountability.

A-F School Accountability

The Arizona Department of Education releases A-F letter grades for each school in the state yearly (Azed, 2021). Letter grades are significant to most school leaders as they can shape how the community and all stakeholders form ideas about the school's ability to serve the community (Amrein-Beardsley, 2014). The A-F letter grade system uses standardized tests as the primary source of information (Azed, 2021). At the secondary level, schools' standardized test scores account for sixty percent of the letter grade; at the K-8 level, they account for 90 percent of the letter grade (Azed, 2021).

History of School Accountability

Accountability measures for schools have long been a political topic. Beginning with A Nation at Risk, President Ronald Reagan's report on the state of education, which came out in 1983, accountability measures and ideology to support the report's findings have grown. The report introduced an idea to the American public; that American public schools are behind and will lead to our country's downfall as a world leader (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). After A Nation at Risk came No Child Left Behind, under George W. Bush's administration and Barack Obama's spin on The Every Student Succeeds Act (Every Student

Succeeds Act, 2015; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). Each of these presidential eras brought a new lens and differences in details such as whether teachers will be required to be "highly qualified," whether schools will be measured by their "adequate yearly progress," and what can be incentivized for states (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002 p. 17, p. 18). Ultimately, the political climate has continued to support the idea that schools can and should be accountable for student achievement (Amrein-Beardsley, 2014; Bae, 2018).

The A-F system was developed at the state level. Florida was the first to begin using a school rating system, and many other states are looking to them to create their own. The A-F system was first used in 1999 (Amrein-Beardsley,2014; Kane & Staiger, 2002). Some states began to use value-added models and other accountability measures to release teachers from jobs and make significant decisions about school closures and promotions of personnel (Amrein-Beardsley,2014; Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). Value-added models began to develop backlash in the early to mid-2000s, and politicians looked for new accountability models (Bae, 2018). While fewer states are using value-added models to release teachers from jobs without other supporting data, proponents of standardized test-based accountability measures continue to advance the idea that test scores measure a school's success well and should be seen as the primary measurement of a school's success (Amrein-Beardsley,2014; Schanzenbach, Bauer, & Mumford, 2016). Test scores show communities how schools are performing, sometimes they also affect the resources available to schools.

Accountability and School Funding

States are responsible for adequately and equitably educating all students within the state's boundary (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; NCLB, 2002). The state must comply with

federal requests for specific funding sources (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; NCLB, 2002). NCLB (2002) and ESSA (2015) have different ways of forcefully encouraging states to use specific guidelines. For example, President Obama and his Secretary of Education created Race to the Top, the largest competitive grant ever for education (Race to the Top, 2018). It offered 4.35 Billion dollars to states willing to comply with their expectations (McGuinn, 2012). Those expectations included standardized testing, accountability systems, and standards that they identified as leading to college and career readiness (McGuinn, 2012). This grant was the major push that supported implementing the Common Core standards (McGuinn, 2012).

At the state level, Arizona passed Proposition 301 in November of 2000 (Melnick, 2002). This proposition infused the system with additional dollars distributed to the maintenance and operations budget and into teachers' paychecks (Melnick, 2002). This incentivized system of paying teachers requires schools to set student achievement goals for teachers in order to receive the monies (Melnick, 2002). Based on what we know about students from at-risk populations, including those of low socioeconomic backgrounds, this measure is more likely to benefit teachers who work in high-SES neighborhoods (Reardon, 2013). The likelihood of benefiting high-SES teachers runs the risk of pushing forward the idea that teachers in affluent schools are "good" and teachers in low-income schools are ineffective (Amrein-Beardsley, 2014; Bae, 2018). School accountability measures are considered necessary by many, but they also have their limitations in equitably evaluating and schools.

Pitfalls of Accountability Measures

The purpose of school letter grades is to hold educators accountable and to increase transparency for families and interested community members (Bae, 2018). Socioeconomic status is the most significant factor affecting standardized tests, possibly misleading the accountability

measure (Nye et al., 2004; Reardon, 2013; Rockoff, 2004; Rowan et al., 2002). Letter grades label schools as high-quality or low-quality places for children to learn based on the income of parents living in the area (Hanushek, Peterson, Talpey, & Woessmann, 2019). When an interested home buyer looks online at a house listing on the popular real estate site Zillow, he or she can see the letter grade of the schools in the area (Zillow, 2020). This is reminiscent of the discriminatory practices in real estate, which defined the segregation of the early part of the last century (Hanushek, Peterson, Talpey, & Woessmann, 2019; Pearman & Swain, 2017). If we know standardized test scores reflect socioeconomic status, and we encourage school choice so only low socioeconomic status students are attending schools in certain areas, then we are effectively creating a system of segregation in our public education system once again (Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Hanushek et al., 2019). While there are many drawbacks to using student achievement data to rate schools, there are some models that are more equity focused than others.

Creation of an Accountability System focused on Student Growth

The Arizona Department of Education took many precautions to gather input from around the state to hear from all districts to create an equitable system (Azed,2021). The Arizona School Administrators Association, Expect More Arizona, and the Arizona Education Association have also worked hard to give voice to the smaller and underserved communities around the state (Azed,2021). The real issue is not whether schools have people speaking up for them and attempting to protect our students but whether the system and underlying thinking themselves are strong representations of school and teacher quality (Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Hanushek et al., 2019). Arizona is a leader in making efforts to mitigate the inequities illuminated by standardized testing. However, states in the country have yet to find a way to

measure student progress without bias (Hanushek et al. et al., 2019; Renzulli & Evans, 2005). Even the most holistic or growth centered models of accountability can be used to affect a school's reputation in the community which can have an impact on the reputation of a school and lead to students and parents choosing other options.

Accountability and School Choice

Race to The Top (2018) and Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) initiatives promote school choice, while accountability measures paint a picture of struggling schools. School leaders at the state level are tasked with finding adequate measures that will promote equity and inclusion rather than allowing schools with a lower socioeconomic demographic to be adversely affected by accountability measures (ESSA, 2015; Hanushek et al., 2019; McGuinn, 2012; Renzulli, & Evans, 2005). School choice can be a powerful and engaging tool for supporting learners. However, the quality of neighborhood schools for the working classes can be put at risk by school choice measures (Pearman & Swain, 2017). The 2015 Gallup Poll illustrates that stakeholders will likely have higher opinions of local educational agencies than the education system. However, as school choice booms, parents are likely to be more swayed by the letter grade of the schools in their neighborhoods, and gentrification will more likely occur in urban settings (Pearman & Swain, 2017). If schools lose students, they lose funding, and this funding is now granted based on current year numbers, meaning the stakes are high for some schools (Pearman & Swain, 2017). If competition draws students away, the budget may not allow proper support for the existing students to access an adequate education (Marcotte & Dalane, 2019). This research aims to understand how academic optimism can promote achievement in the face of difficult circumstances, including an accountability system based on standardized test scores. School staff know that student achievement is one important component to student success, the

body of research around equity and accountability illuminates the need for further development of actionable plans for those stakeholders as they work to improve outcomes.

Why Student Achievement Data Matters

School practitioners and researchers agree that student achievement is essential to schooling (Stronge, 2010). The primary purpose of educational institutions is to instill the skills and abilities in students that they will need to become successful adults who can contribute to a healthy society (Hanushek, 2003). A strong link exists between early literacy and incarceration rates and continued success as an adult, including higher earning power (Hanushek, 2003). Student achievement data help elucidate the strengths and weaknesses of individual students, teachers, schools, districts, types of schools, states, and even counties (Hanushek, 2003). Researchers identify correlations between specific subgroups, instructional strategies, educator beliefs, and school cultures to develop a strong base of knowledge to support students' achievement. That research directly addresses the achievement gap and the inequity that it perpetuates. Practitioners use that knowledge to bridge the achievement gap (Stronge, 2010). Some schools and educators tend to be more successful in their attempts to support at-risk learners in a strong enough way to overcome the gap (McGuire & Ikpa, 2008). Researchers and educators alike seek answers as to how they can shape environments to facilitate growth and increased proficiency.

School Culture

School characteristics have been known to affect student achievement. School culture and school climate are frequently conflated (Owens, 2001). School climate is “the characteristics of the total environment in a school building” (p. 139). School Culture – refers to the values, belief systems, norms, and ways of thinking that are characteristic of the people in the organization.

(pp. 140-141). Therefore, the climate is more flexible, and culture takes more time to change (Owens, 2001). Both climate and culture are malleable and can change over time; they are frequently measured by tools such as the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) (Hoy, 2003). The organizational health of a school has been positively correlated with student achievement in reading and math consistently (Henderson et al., 2005; Roney et al., 2007; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). The concept of organizational health led researchers to focus on other measures of school culture, further shaping the discussion of student achievement being formulated at the site level (Hoy, 2003). Academic optimism is one component of school culture which may affect student outcomes.

Instructional Frameworks

Systems that use a specific instructional framework tend to outperform those which do not (Marzano et al., 2001). A common set of expectations, practices, and vocabulary allow teachers and leaders to remove communication barriers and clearly express and meet expectations for instruction (Marzano et al., 2001). Instructional frameworks can guide professional development so the team stays focused on the organization's pre-determined goals. A framework can also act as a rubric for understanding teachers' professional practice during reflective self- evaluation sessions. All teachers in one school following the same instructional model can help to reduce variability between classroom practices, and performance. Evidence of strong commitment to an instructional model can increase feelings of efficacy within a site, and positively impact the climate of a school (Bandura, 1977). The framework sets forth the paragon for instruction, and supports teachers in their endeavor to improve and provide high quality instruction and affect student outcomes. Next, I outline academic optimism and its three sub-components.

Academic Optimism

In the early 2000s, a new construct was developed using what researchers knew about teacher and collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust in order to further the study of teacher and organizational growth and, through that, meet student needs. Hoy and his colleagues (2006) aimed their research at finding a concept to explain and predict student achievement when controlling socioeconomic factors. They reached their goal; academic optimism was shown to be a stronger predictor of student achievement than socioeconomic status (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012; Hoy et al., 2006; Srivastava et al., 2016; Mitchell & Tarter, 2016).

Three dissertations with small sample sizes report findings that indicated students' academic optimism was not a significant predictor of student achievement. The first two had sample sizes of 27 and 4 and were conducted in southeastern states (Alabama and Georgia, respectively) (Harper et al., 2016; McKinnon, 2012). The third sample size was 50. The only study specifically focused on rural schools was conducted in Missouri (White et al., 2016). These three studies contradict the dominant body of literature supporting this construct, leading one to wonder if sample size or location may be the source of the contradictions.

This construct is composed of three main components and is based on positive psychology, Optimism, and social capital (Hoy et al., 2006). The three main sub-concepts are collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust. The construct consists of behavioral (academic emphasis), cognitive (collective efficacy), and affective (faculty trust) elements (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012). The three factors have interdependent relationships, each supporting one another (Kirby & DiPaola, 2009). Understanding each piece of this construct enables the development of a fluid and holistic knowledge of the construct of academic optimism.

Teacher's Self Efficacy

Researchers have explored teachers' sense of self-efficacy for more than 40 years, beginning with the Rand Corporation's two survey questions: 1. "When it comes right down to it, a teacher really cannot do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment," 2. "If I try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult unmotivated students" (Armor, 1976). Armor at the Rand Corporation found that a teacher's sense of self-efficacy directly correlated with student achievement in reading scores at the elementary level. These two questions helped to initiate a conversation among researchers and practitioners on teacher efficacy with student learning. That conversation was enhanced the following year when Albert Bandura, a psychologist out of Stanford University, published his Self-efficacy theory (1977). The self-efficacy theory identified four sources of self-efficacy: Performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977). Later the definition of teacher self-efficacy was born: "the teacher's belief in his or her ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 233).

The research in the field has established that a teacher's sense of self-efficacy is a driving factor in student achievement (Allinder, 1994; Ashton &Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Meijer & Foster, 1988; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). With that understanding comes a desire to positively change a teacher's feelings and beliefs to impact self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Research later established that student and early career teachers were the most susceptible to changes in their sense of self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Researchers also examined how vicarious experiences and social persuasion are crucial to changing self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). This new information puts self-efficacy within the locus of control of site leadership. The research indicated that well-planned actions to

provide growth opportunities improve a teacher's sense of self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). A professional development plan to improve teacher efficacy should include opportunities for teachers to see effective practices and feedback on the quality of teaching practices. Teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy will be more likely to persevere in difficult times, show resilience when stressful factors are causing tensions, and put more effort into figuring out what works for each student (Bandura, 1996).

Teacher efficacy is a topic still widely researched and discussed in academic settings. Van Der Scheer and Visscher showed that leadership strategies that are intentionally used could directly impact teacher efficacy (2016). Van Der Scheer and Visscher's study specifically focused on the professional development of data-driven systems. They found that the more teachers understood the tools available to help them to serve the diverse needs of students, the stronger their sense of self-efficacy became (2016). A large-scale, longitudinal study of 642 Finnish lower secondary school teachers found that supporting a positive climate improves teachers' sense of self-efficacy, and teacher efficacy for discipline helps reduce burnout and improve job satisfaction (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016). Another study focused on using a reflective attribution tool with student teachers as they went through problematic teaching experiences (De Boer et al., 2016). The emphasis on student teachers is particularly pertinent concerning Bandura's earlier finding of student teachers and young teachers being most in need of, and most susceptible to, the enhancement of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1996). The study found a positive correlation among student teachers between the use of the attribution tool and their sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1996). The participants were able to develop a stronger sense of autonomy while using the tool because they completed the reflections independently of their mentor teachers, thereby continuously developing their own sense of self-efficacy (De Boer et

al., 2016). The development of teacher efficacy within a school is an essential factor to research, monitor, and support.

Collective Efficacy

The theoretical ideas that led to research on the teacher efficacy of individual teachers can also be applied to groups or organizations. The concept of teacher self-efficacy and its relevance to successful classroom practices eventually led Bandura (1996) to identify collective efficacy as "the groups' shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments." Organizational agency is an essential factor to consider when studying collective efficacy because it shapes how a group perceives its ability to complete a task. Organizational agency is the intentional decisions and choices a group makes based on their understanding of their ability, as a group, to accomplish specific tasks (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy Woolfolk 2004). For example, organizational agency may be illustrated when a school purposely acts to meet specific goals, then the group's perception of their ability to meet those goals will be affected. Therefore, a school that supports teachers' ability to understand goals and the plan of action to reach those goals may cultivate a stronger sense of Self-efficacy among group members by supporting organizational agency.

Collective efficacy, or collective teacher efficacy, is more than just the sum of its parts. As one experimental study points out, the combined teacher efficacy scores do not equate to an accurate representation of collective efficacy scores because collective efficacy is based on group dynamics (Goddard & LoGerfo, 2007). Those group dynamics are illustrated by a group's organizational agency, as well as the group's beliefs about their abilities surrounding specific tasks (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy Woolfolk 2004).

Collective efficacy has been identified as having an effect size of 1.57 in a meta-analysis by Rachel Jean Eells (2011). Based on Eells's meta-analysis, professor John Hattie ranked collective efficacy as the second most significant predictor of success based on his synthesis of meta-analyses (Hattie, 2015). Additionally, collective efficacy was identified as a stronger predictor of student performance than socioeconomic status when tested as a part of a larger construct (Hoy et. al., 2002). Based on these studies (and the many studies that went into Eells' meta-analysis), the concept has received continuous attention from school leaders hoping to positively impact student achievement.

When teachers have high confidence in their abilities and the abilities of the group as a whole, they are more likely to invest in their work (Bandura, 1996). These investments may come in the form of a more substantial commitment to the shared values of the organization or a stronger connection to the other group members, which may contribute to more effort, time, creativity, flexibility, or the willingness to share ideas (Moolenaar, Sleegers, & Daly, 2010; Paz, Goddard, Chambers et al., 2013)The array of positive qualities that are supported by collective efficacy connect this concept with student achievement; when teachers feel empowered to reach every student, they tend to meet that expectation (Bandura, 1996).

The strength of the collective efficacy concept lies in the continuous flow of evidence that it is directly correlated with student achievement (Bandura, 1996; Eells, 2011; Moolenaar et al., 2010; Paz, Goddard, Chambers et al., 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004; Woolfolk Hoy, 2000) The weakness of this concept is the correlation between collective efficacy and socioeconomic status (Goddard, & LoGerfo, Laura 2007; Gürol & Kerimgil, 2010). While studies have shown collective efficacy to be a stronger predictor of student achievement than socioeconomic status (when measured within the construct of academic optimism), collective

efficacy is still directly correlated with socioeconomic status (Hoy et al., 2002). That correlation is concerning because the measures of collective efficacy always include items to identify how difficult the teachers perceive a teaching assignment. Researchers are still unsure whether or not school faculty have enough control over collective efficacy to make lasting changes in their practices (Moolenaar et al., 2010). Increased collective efficacy could result in higher job satisfaction for teachers, which results in better learning experiences for students and higher achievement on tests (Donohoo, 2016).

The collective efficacy of an organization tends to stay stable, but it is possible to change (Hoy et al., 2002). In 2004 Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy argued that the construct of collective efficacy might explain why socioeconomic status has been a strong predictor of student performance. When Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2004) argued that collective efficacy might explain the correlation between student achievement and socioeconomic status, they were reversing the logic that was previously used by researchers, which implied that collective efficacy is affected by socioeconomic status. This new argument reinforced the importance of school climate and culture's impact on student achievement (Donohoo, 2016). School teams are empowered to create organizational agency and improve collective efficacy by creating a specific and intentional plan for reflection, professional development, and feedback to all instructional staff (Hattie, 2015).

Faculty Trust

Trust, in the context of schooling, has been studied extensively. This construct portrays trust as a general feeling within the school that students will try to learn, they can learn, and parents will support their learning appropriately (Beard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2010). Trust is

seen as a piece of the leadership puzzle and offers an interesting perspective to practitioners hoping to make a difference in their schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hoy et al., 2002). faculty trust is defined as a collective set of beliefs that students and parents will support academic endeavors and act in the child's best interest (Okpogba et al., 2011). Faculty trust is also seen as the willingness to show vulnerability to the other party (DiPaola &Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Hoy and Tsechannen-Moran's (1999) synthesis of the related literature claims that trust has five faces: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Trust in this construct consists of faculty trusting parents and students. When teachers and administrators trust parents, they also tend to trust students (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Smith et al., 2007).

Research supporting the notion that trust between faculty and students and their families is vital to the success of a school (and student achievement) (Bicchieri, Xiao, & Muldoon, 2011; Kochanek, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Goddard & Hoy, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001). The faculty's trust in families and students has been researched as a contributing factor to school culture and climate (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Trust continued to gain popularity in research as more evidence suggested its importance in supporting strong school performance through its effects on school culture and school climate (Hallam et al., 2010).

Academic Emphasis

Academic emphasis refers to the general understanding among staff members that academic success for all students is a priority within a school. The idea that a school culture perceived to have a solid academic emphasis would lead to higher student achievement was established almost thirty years ago (Hoy, 1990; Hoy et al., 1991). Academic emphasis continued to be a topic of research agendas throughout those thirty years, and the work done during that time supported the concept that academic emphasis is equally essential at both the school and

teacher levels (Beard et al., 2010; Hoy et al., 2006; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). Teachers prioritizing academic tasks over those not linked to academic standards tend to produce higher student achievement (Beard et al., 2010). Schools can demonstrate academic emphasis by systematically prioritizing academic successes, protecting instructional time from outside distractions and non-academic tasks, and providing professional development on standards-based teaching, emphasizing data-informed decision-making (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). Schools where personnel exert their energy on promoting academic achievement, are more successful than schools that fail to promote an emphasis on academics (Hoy, 1990). Following this discussion about each component of academic optimism, the relationship between each component will be explored.

Relationship Between Components

Understanding the supportive relationship between faculty trust, collective efficacy, and academic emphasis is critical to developing a deep understanding of academic optimism. These three elements work together to create an optimistic and successful school culture that can create more student success opportunities. School leaders should be aware that all three are valued. Therefore, they must tread lightly and keep all three concepts (collective efficacy, faculty trust, and academic emphasis) in mind as decisions to promote student achievement are made (Hoy et al., 2006). If a new program promotes academic emphasis but stifles collective efficacy, the program may not be worth the investment (Hoy, 2012). Suppose collective efficacy is valued above the other two pieces. In that case, a school's well-planned professional development may not grow the Efficacy of the staff because it needs to include the concepts of faculty trust and academic emphasis (Hoy, 2012). Like any other practical idea for school practitioners, academic

optimism takes a gentle touch to cultivate (Srivastava et al., 2016). Next, I take a closer examination of how to operationalize the idea of academic optimism in a school setting.

Measuring and Observing Academic Optimism

In order for researchers or educators to gain meaning from the discussion on academic optimism, there must be a standardized way of measuring and understanding the construct. The School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS) was created to measure stakeholders' perceptions of a school's culture and the inner workings of a school setting (Hoy et al., 2006). It asks questions about collective efficacy, faculty trust, and academic emphasis (Hoy et al., 2006). The scale consists of three subscales: The Academic Emphasis of Organizational Health Inventory (r = .83) (Hoy & Miskel, 2005), The short version of the Collective Efficacy Scale (r = .91) (Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy, 2000), and the Omnibus Trust Scale (r = .94) (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). The scale consists of 30 questions broken up into three categories: collective efficacy consists of 12 questions, faculty trust consists of 10 questions, and eight questions measure academic emphasis.

I chose few items included in the SAOS to illustrate the nature of the instrument (2006) are:

- Teachers in this school can get through to the most challenging students.
- If a child does not want to learn, teachers here give up.
- Home life provides so many advantages that students are bound to learn.
- Students in this school care about each other.
- Teachers can count on parental support.
- Teachers think that most parents do a good job.
- The school sets high standards for performance.

- Students seek extra work so they can get good grades.
- Academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the school.

These survey items are heavily focused on stakeholders' perceptions; this research is focused on observing participants and school settings to identify factors related to those perceptions. I intend to use the factors on the SAOS to identify observable attributes of academic in the school setting.

This research project aims to understand the following research questions:

1. What are the attributes of high-performing low socioeconomic status schools?
2. Are elements of academic optimism present in the experiences of teachers and principals in high-performing low socioeconomic schools?

Summary

In this chapter I examined the necessary literature to lay the foundation for this study. First, the chapter outlined the research on accountability including its history, ties to funding, pitfalls, growth-based models, school choice, and the importance of student achievement data in the educational setting. Then, school culture was examined and academic optimism was introduced along with each of its sub-components. The measurement tool was introduced and explained. Finally, the research questions for this project were introduced.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research illustrates the fine details of a situation or circumstances (Creswell et al., 2007). A qualitative researcher seeks to gain perspective on a particular topic; the research expresses how individuals construct and perceive reality. In order to choose a qualitative approach, a researcher must have an ontological assumption that reality is rooted in varying perspectives and can be constructed through multiple lenses (Creswell et al., 2007). The case study approach is one form of research that a researcher may use to illuminate those diverse realities and shed light on the negotiation of reality, which occurs within personal experience; it helps identify the common themes and divergent views that frame individuals' understanding of reality.

This chapter details the methodology for this project. First, I create a rationale for using case study as a methodology which includes an outline of the different types of case studies, the purpose of case studies, the need for bounding the case, and the development of themes through data within the case study methodology. Then, I go into the details of this case study. I restate the research questions, identify interview questions, outline the process for interviews and observations as well as data analysis. The chapter ends with a note on the how this case study is triangulated and a summary of the chapter.

Rationale for Case Study

Case studies have been used across academic disciplines with increasing popularity for decades (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2008). However, case studies can serve different research purposes within each discipline. Case study is a common qualitative methodology along with phenomenology, ethnography, narrative inquiry, and oral histories (Crotty, 1998; Creswell,

1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A case study is distinguished from other research strategies because the research focuses on a specific case or scenario. Case studies always focus on one specific case, but how researchers do that can vary based on discipline, the purpose of the research, the context of the subject matter, and access to research subjects (Creswell, 1998). I chose a case study for this project because it allowed me to take a deep dive into the happenings and culture at each of the two schools I studied. Next, I describe the different types of case study so the reader understands the options available.

Types of Case Studies

The factor that defines the case study is that it aims to explore an issue by meticulously examining one or more specific cases (Yin, 2009). However, some disagreement exists about how to classify a case study. Stake (2005) claims that a case study is a research topic. For example, a case may involve one teacher implementing a new assessment system. Most well-known researchers other than Stake have agreed to label case studies as a methodology (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Case study as a methodology is flexible; many formats exist to understand a particular subject matter better. One can conduct a quantitative or qualitative study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005). A researcher can choose to use one particular case or multiple cases; this decision should be made with the desired outcome and research goals in mind (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). For an in-depth look at the delicate nuances of a phenomenon or event, one may choose to look at only one case. In order to develop an understanding of the subtle differences between varying perspectives, one may look at several cases. Alternatively, one may research more than one case and compare to evaluate for continuity between cases.

Robert Stake (2005) identified three types of case studies, each used for a different purpose. He identified an intrinsic case study as a study driven by the researcher's desire to understand that particular case (Stake, 2005). An intrinsic case study does not seek to generalize; it is focused on the complexity of one case and only that case. An instrumental case study is designed to develop a more robust understanding of a more significant issue; it aims to gather further information that can be used to support generalization on an issue or topic (Stake, 2005). The final type of case study identified by Stake (2005) is the collective case study. A collective case study is an instrumental study that uses multiple cases; it aims to highlight similar and dissimilar features of the phenomenon being studied. The collective case study shows multiple perspectives and can support generalization (Stake, 2005). At the same time, Robert Yin (2009) focuses primarily on the distinction between single-case and multiple-case designs and unitary or multiple units of analysis.

In a case study, the researcher identifies and highlights common themes between incidents and the features of the case that are specific to that case. This delicate balance between common threads and unique characteristics is the key to understanding how the experiences of a few can add up to a larger shared reality. The context of the case is inherently important to this research methodology. The researcher must understand and develop ideas around the many factors that create the case's context. A researcher should develop an understanding of those factors, including physical, economic, ethical, aesthetic, and social justice elements of the case (Stake, 2005). In order to conduct research that is grounded in a holistic view, as Guba and Lincoln (1994) advocate, the researcher must seek out a deep and fluid understanding of these factors individually and their interdependent nature, creating the context of the case overall. Now

that the reader has been introduced to case study as a methodology and the different types of case studies, the focus shifts to the purpose of case studies.

Purpose of Case Studies

Conducting a qualitative case study in education is a complex task that requires careful planning and consideration of many factors to be a meaningful expression of reality. Researchers must first consider the purpose of the study. Why is it important? Then consideration of the four elements Yin (2013) outlined must be addressed before data collection begins. Each of these elements of the research plan helps the researcher gain a deeper understanding of how to move forward and create a map for the following steps. Ultimately, a rich descriptive result helps to build an understanding of a particular issue. Those detailed descriptions help to shape the realities constructed by readers and participants in the research. Case studies can be powerful tools of inquiry, but they must be well-planned to reach that result. questions

Within the case context, a researcher must develop research questions that support the desired purpose of the research plan. The research questions for a case study should reflect the complexity of the case being studied. A case study is an appropriate tool to use for a researcher who is most interested in questions that center around "why?" and "how?" (Yin, 2013). These questions are context-specific and push the researcher to develop a plan focused on a deep understanding of the issue at hand. Yin (2013) encourages researchers to create questions using three stages: 1. Review literature and narrow interest in key topics, 2. Narrow down to a few critical cases and identify the questions in those studies and how they support future research on the topic, 3. Look to another set of studies on the same topic to reinforce the relevance and importance of possible research questions for the planned study.

According to Yin (2013), the following research element to consider is what propositions are to be considered, if any. A researcher may have a proposition regarding the "why" or "how" research questions. These propositions are ideas the researcher has about possible answers to those questions. For example, a researcher may be interested in determining why teachers who score high on a Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) tend to support student achievement at higher rates. A possible proposition is that teachers who score high on the TSES are more likely to know what resources are available and develop solutions to instructional challenges using those resources. A researcher would then frame observations and interview questions around that proposition to support or rule it out. These propositions help a researcher focus on the study's overall purpose and scope and keep data from being too broad (Yin, 2013). The propositions used, or lack of propositions must drive by the study's overall purpose (Yin, 2013). Once the researcher developed the propositions for a study the case must be bound.

Bounding the Case

Yin (2013) discussed the importance of identifying a unit of analysis. In order to identify a unit of analysis, the researcher needs to identify the case and create boundaries for the case. Using the research questions and propositions, the researcher methodically identifies what data to collect. Identifying and bounding the case helps the researcher to assess the value of research questions and revisit if they need to be more specific or off-point (Yin, 2013). The unit of analysis itself can be revisited throughout the process of creating the plan and collecting data. It is crucial that the researcher always keeps in mind the purpose of the research and makes changes as needed to support that purpose (Yin, 2014).

Themes and Data

The next step in creating a quality case study research plan is linking data to propositions (Yin, 2013). The researcher has several choices in analytic techniques, including pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, or cross-case synthesis. Including the explicit method for linking data to propositions in the research plan allows the researcher to develop a definitive understanding of what type of data is needed, how to collect and store it, and how much data is be needed to ultimately link to propositions and research questions in order to support the studies purpose (Yin, 2013). The next element of the plan is closely associated with linking data to propositions: Defining criteria for interpreting a case study's findings. In order to create robust results, the researcher must define criteria for findings. One strategy for doing so is to identify rival explanations in the findings. Each time a rival explanation is ruled out strengthens the quality of the study's findings. While a researcher is creating a plan, he or she should identify and address a variety of explanations for the issue under investigation (Yin, 2013).

As qualitative case studies in education continue to grow in popularity, so does the collective understanding of how they can add to our empirical knowledge of educational practices. Case studies represent the perspectives of the many participants in educational practice and research. They help researchers and practitioners alike strive for understanding and a depth of knowledge regarding experience and best practices. Yin, Stake, Merriam, Creswell, and Lincoln & Denzin all have unique perspectives on the research strategy. However, those perspectives support one another to create a mutual understanding of how a case study can bring valuable information to the forefront of thought in the field. Now that the reader has an overview of case studies as a research methodology, I will display the specific application of this case study’s design.

Application of Case Study to Academic Optimism

This case study used a qualitative approach to explore academic optimism in Arizona schools. First, I identified two schools performing well on state accountability measures. Also, these schools have large at-risk populations, including students from lower socioeconomic categories, ethnically diverse learners, linguistically diverse learners, homeless and displaced students, and students with special needs. I requested permission from the school leader of two sites to participate in the study. Once two schools were identified, the school district approval process was followed for each of the two districts. Each of the two schools' faculty participated in a survey; then, I used a structured interview approach to develop a deeper understanding of those results.

Both schools' faculty participated in taking the school Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS), which was created in 2006 by Wayne Hoy and his colleagues. The scale consists of three subscales: The Academic Emphasis of Organizational Health Inventory (r = .83) (Hoy & Miskel, 2005), The short version of the Collective Efficacy Scale (r = .91) (Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy, 2000), and the Omnibus Trust Scale (r = .94) (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). The scale consists of 30 questions broken up into three categories: collective efficacy consists of 12 questions, faculty trust consists of 10 questions, and eight questions measure academic emphasis.

I spent one school day observing operations in each school. These observations created an opportunity for me to have a rich understanding of the happenings on an ordinary school day. I also watched professional learning community meetings, professional development sessions, and site leadership meetings. I focused on climate, culture, instruction, leadership, and student

expectations. I made connections between those areas of focus and the academic optimism construct. While I observed the school day, I attempted to gather documents such as handbooks, website information, and newsletters for further analysis of each school.

In order to understand parent and student perspectives, I requested permission to view and analyze the annual parent and student surveys which are typically administered in the spring of each school year. If I had obtained these survey results, they would have given a parent's perspective on the school and could have offered a unique view into the relationship between families and school staff. Other artifacts, such as the student and staff handbooks, monthly newsletters, and school website, were analyzed to glean information on the relationship between families and staff.

The final component of this case study was a set of semi-structured interviews with school staff. I interviewed three teachers or administrators from Juniper Elementary School and four from Western Elementary School. These interviews offered an inside view of how these schools maintain their academic success, what challenges the schools still face, and how academic optimism helps or hinders the school's culture. Once the initial interviews were transcribed and analyzed, I requested to meet with the participants again to share findings and receive feedback on my analysis of their interview. Four of my seven interview participants met with me for the second time. The participants were encouraged to add ideas or make changes as needed.

I coded the observational notes, artifacts from the school (parent surveys, handbooks, newsletters, and website information), and interview responses. I first used a deductive coding approach by categorizing data into the three components of academic optimism, looking for threads of each piece of the construct in the data collected. I organized my data by component

and whether the data indicated it was found or whether I saw something that would contradict the sub-component. Then I used an inductive coding approach to explore new themes within the data. The themes gathered from both coding systems were combined to create a rich picture of the experiences, thoughts, and beliefs in each school.

Research Questions

1. What are the attributes of high-performing low socioeconomic status schools?
2. Are elements of academic optimism present in the experiences of teachers and principals in high-performing low socioeconomic schools?

These research questions guided my observations and the development of the case study design. The research questions helped me to bound the cases and identify data sources. They gave me a direction and framework to build my case study design.

Descriptive Case Study

I chose to use the case study methodology to research the topics of academic optimism and high-achieving schools who serve low income students. I used a non-comparative multiple-case design. I chose to use case study because I wanted to explore the fine details of the culture and operations of each school I visited. I included two cases to give breadth to the study. I chose a non-comparative design because each school is unique, and my intention was to explore the delicate nuance of each case rather than evaluate or compare. I used the research questions and case study design to develop interview questions which would help me answer the research questions listed above.

Interview Questions

The participant interviews were a key part of these case studies. They allowed me to understand the thoughts and feelings of the educators who participated. I asked every interview participant eight overarching questions. Then I asked follow up questions to each participant. I created a bank of 20 follow up questions which I chose select items from for different participants. I chose to include a more flexible bank of follow up questions so that my conversation could be structured, yet fluid allowing for some flexibility in my questioning techniques while still maintaining the integrity of the study by addressing all of the overarching questions with each participant.

Overarching Questions

The overarching questions that I asked every participant were:

- What makes your school special?
- What accomplishments are most valued in your school? How do you know?
- How are social-emotional aspects of education viewed and addressed in your school?
- What does it mean to you to work in an A-rated school?
- What attributes do your school's teachers have which give you confidence in their work?
- What school-based challenges are you most proud of overcoming?
- What are relationships with families like in your school?

Follow Up Questions

My follow up questions covered many topics. I asked questions around culture such as "what teachers in your school most proud of?" I asked questions about leadership such as the teacher's knowledge of the strategic plan, vision, and mission. I asked about instructional

strategies, growth mindset, discipline procedures, and relationships with students and families. I found that the bank of questions I created allowed me to hear about many aspects of each school and offered many opportunities for teachers and administrators to share with me the information that they felt it was most important for me to understand in order to really develop a sense of their work and the school. Next, I describe the process of selecting interview participants and interviewing them.

Interviews of School Leaders and Teachers

I worked with school leaders to identify appropriate times to interview each participant. I interviewed one school leader and three teachers at Western Elementary School and one school leader and two teachers at Juniper Elementary School. I scheduled each interview for one hour during the regular work day for each participant. I worked with the school principal to recruit teachers as participants who were willing to share their experiences and observations about the school setting. Each interview was in a one-on-one setting between myself and the participant. I asked every participant each of the overarching questions. I used follow-up questions from the bank to elaborate on ideas and go deeper into the participants' thoughts on each overarching question. Once I analyzed the interview data, I shared my findings with each participant to allow them to make corrections as needed; four of the seven responded to this request. This process added to the study's credibility by ensuring the researcher accurately represented the participants' thoughts and words. After collecting data from interviews, artifacts, and observations I analyzed the data, a description of my data analysis techniques will follow.

Data Analysis

This case study illustrated two descriptive cases. No comparison between sites occurred in the data analysis of these studies; however, I used the knowledge and observations I gained

from each case to frame my understanding of academic optimism in low socioeconomic schools. This knowledge allowed me to view each case as unique and bound by its attributes and culture. I used the three components of academic optimism (collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust) to code artifacts and interviews. First, I coded artifacts looking for evidence of each component; then, I identified themes and patterns that arose from that coding. I followed the same process with my interview transcripts. Once I identified themes and patterns based on the codes, I compared those themes to the results of the participants' SAOS scales.

In order to understand and score the SAOS scales, I used guidance from Dr. Hoy's 2010 article and the guidance accompanying the scale on Dr. Hoy's website. This guidance comes with a chart to identify how schools fall within the normal curve:

Standardized Scores of SAOS from Dr. Hoy (2010):

- If the score is 200, it is lower than 99% of the schools
- If the score is 300, it is lower than 97% of the schools.
- If the score is 400, it is lower than 84% of the schools.
- If the score is 500, it is average.
- If the score is 600, it is higher than 84% of the schools.
- If the score is 700, it is higher than 97% of the schools.
- If the score is 800, it is higher than 99% of the schools.

The combination of my SAOS scores and the themes I uncovered during my data analysis make up the findings for these two case studies which are reported in detail in chapter four.

Triangulation

I triangulated two descriptive case studies using observations of the school day, SAOS survey results, interviews, and artifacts. I coded each data source using academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust to develop a deep understanding of the schools' many dimensions. I gave interview participants an opportunity to member check my data and I also had another researcher cross reference my coding to ensure the data was valid and accurate. The other researcher is also a doctoral student, and she said it was a valuable experience to dig into the data and support me with my study. This triangulation allowed me to more objectively see and share the collected data more, leading to more credible results. The triangulation of this study is intended to bolster the trustworthiness of the results. Now that the design and rational of this study have been detailed, a short summary closes the chapter on methodology.

Summary

In summary, this study looked at two different schools with high performance on state accountability measures and low socioeconomic status students. I observed daily operations, surveyed staff using the SAOS, analyzed artifacts, and interviewed stakeholders. I coded each data source using Collective Efficacy (+ and -), Academic Emphasis (+ and -), and Faculty Trust (+ and -). I then looked for themes and patterns to illustrate the uniqueness of each school site in an attempt to understand their successes better.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study examined two schools with high student achievement that serve students from low socioeconomic status homes. It used a multi-case, non- comparative case study design to explore the environment, feelings of participants, focuses of the schools, and indicators of academic optimism. This chapter relays the findings from each of the two case studies conducted.

I identified both schools through analysis of the results-based funding data published by the Arizona Department of Education. I visited two schools to collect data in the Fall of 2021. I observed for one school day in each school. During the day of observation at each school I was able to see team meetings, professional learning community meetings, a professional development mini-session, parent drop-off and pick-up, and classroom instruction. Then I interviewed teachers and administrators using a semi-structured interview protocol. Those interviews allowed me to take a deeper dive into the perspectives and feelings of each participant. Finally, I used the schools' websites, handbooks, and school improvement data to glean information about how these two particular schools function and what they each value as organizations. The process required attention to details so that I could gain the deep understanding of these two schools which is at the heart of this dissertation.

After data was collected, I coded the information into the categories within the academic optimism construct. Then, I analyzed the data a second time for emerging themes and trends. Once I coded the interviews, I gave each respondent a chance to view my interview data and give feedback. Only two interview participants added any thoughts at

that point of the process. The feedback I received from those two participants was included in my findings. Neither of those two participants had any feedback on the coding scheme the study used to analyze data. Another two participants responded but offered no input on the coding or data representation. Three participants have yet to respond to attempts to gain their input after their interviews. After the participants were given a chance to review and edit the data and coding, a fellow researcher who is also an administrator reviewed the coding to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. The data collection of this study was a critical component to gathering the information needed to understand each of these two schools.

The data coding process organized the findings of this study in a way that allowed me to develop themes and a deep understanding of the environment and happenings at these two schools. Overall, both schools exhibited strong academic emphasis scores on the SAOS which was administered to all faculty at each site. The qualitative data exhibited similar results. This chapter details my findings.

Within this chapter the reader is be presented with the findings of these two cases. It begins with a restatement of the research questions followed by a summary of the study. Then Next, I present the data beginning with Western Elementary School then moving on to Juniper Elementary School. Then, I explicitly answer the research questions, and explore themes and connections between both schools.

Restatement of the Research Questions

1. What are the attributes of high-performing low socioeconomic status schools?

2. Are elements of academic optimism present in the experiences of teachers and principals in high-performing low socioeconomic schools?

These research questions guided my observations as well as the interview and artifact analysis. The research questions helped me to identify important information within my data set so that I could remain focused on the important features of data which would complement the study's design. Next, I revisit the specific steps I took to carry out this study.

Summary of the Study

These two case studies outline the environment and happenings at two high-achieving, low income schools. This study's design was intended to develop a strong understanding of schools with students from low socioeconomic homes who perform well on student achievement measures. First, I created criteria for school selection, then I thought through how I would best be able to understand the cases I wanted to explore. Once my design was in place, I carried out the study with an open mind in an attempt to find new insight on the topic.

The search criteria for the schools was important to the success of the case study. I chose to use the state department's definitions of high performance on the A-F letter system, and qualified for low SES and high performance on the state's results-based funding formula. I ended up visiting two very schools in different parts of the state with many different characteristics from one another. One school was in an urban environment within a large metropolitan area, the other school was in a rural, border town where agriculture is the main industry.

I used multiple data sources to ensure my data revealed many school attributes and perspectives. Then, I spent an entire day observing each school, taking in everything I could from each unique experience. Next, I interviewed teachers and the principal from each school. I administered the SAOS to the faculty at each site and used that data to understand the faculty's

feelings about academic optimism in their school. Finally, I did a content analysis of written documents, including handbooks, school improvement plans, newsletters, and websites. These data sources were sufficient to provide me with the details needed to report on these two schools.

This study includes SAOS data and qualitative data which I coded. I used consistent coding through all of my qualitative data sources based on the sub-components of academic optimism. Then, I looked for other themes throughout the data., I offered interview participants a chance to see my findings and offer suggestions or corrections. Additionally, another researcher checked my coding against her own to ensure a less biased view of the data collected and to ensure each perspective was carefully considered and reported. I triangulated my data to see if the different data sources revealed similar findings. These steps were taken to elevate and maintain the trustworthiness of my data.

This multi-case, non-comparative case study was designed to gather perspectives and observations about the two schools I studied. Using multiple data sources, I was able to capture the environment, priorities, and perspectives of faculty in each setting. Next, the findings are detailed for the reader.

Presentation of the Data

The story of each school is unique to the context in which it exists and the human element which drives the personality of the school and staff's commitment to educational outcomes. This chapter displays the findings I uncovered from the data collection and through the analysis of the data. To answer the research questions, a case study methodology was used. However, a comparative case study approach was not part of the design for this investigation. Because these two cases are descriptive rather than comparative, I begin with Western

Elementary School's description, SAOS scores and themes, then move to Juniper Elementary School's data.

Western Elementary Description

Western Elementary School is a public institution that serves kindergarten through sixth-grade students. The student enrollment of Western Elementary School is 714 students. The school is in a small agricultural town on the United States and Mexico border, classified as rural. I chose the site because it met my search criteria of a school with low socioeconomic status students and high student achievement as measured by the results-based funding calculation and the letter grade assigned by the state, which is composed of more than 90 percent state-mandated assessment scores. Ninety percent of Western Elementary School students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 99.58 percent of them are classified as Hispanic. The demographics and location of Western Elementary School contribute to a high percentage of English learners.

English Language Learners at Western Elementary School

Almost 100 percent of students who begin attending Western Elementary School are classified as English learners. Fifteen percent of those students are reclassified each year. In Arizona, every student who enters public school must have a home language survey on file. The survey asks three specific questions:

1. What is the primary language spoken in the home regardless of the language spoken by the student?
2. What is the language most often spoken by the student?

3. What is the language that the student first acquired?

If the answer to these three questions is anything other than English, the student must enter a Structured English Immersion Program. They take the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA) to place them by their language proficiency level. Every child's goal is to become proficient on the AZELLA, which reclassifies the student from English Learner (EL) to Fluent English Proficient. The student is then taught in an integrated and targeted setting to create programming that allows the student access to all grade-level materials and explicit instruction on the Arizona English Language Proficiency standards.

Western Elementary School reclassifies students at nearly twice the rate of other schools with similar demographics in the state. This rate of reclassification indicates that their EL programming is highly effective. Arizona uses an asset-based approach that encourages schools to support learners in integrated classroom settings with EL and non-EL students. That instruction complements targeted instructional sessions which support learners using the English Language Proficiency standards set out by the state. Since 99.5% of kindergarten students at Western Elementary School are classified as ELs, the language proficiency standards are typically taught in the general education classroom as an add on to the 120-minute reading block each morning. This extra dose of English instruction supports learners in their ability to communicate effectively in English. This means less than 20% of Western Elementary School students are still classified as language learners by the time they enter fifth grade.

School Culture at Western Elementary School

Educators at Western Elementary School are committed to their growth and that of their students. When I first met with the principal, I told her I was excited to see what was different about Western Elementary School. She looked at me and said, "you'll see, it's the kids. We have amazing kids." This first comment framed my understanding of the culture at Western Elementary School. The leadership, teachers, instructional assistants, families, and students work together as a team with common goals. They support one another and dream big for their kids. They see virtue in their students rather than deficits. When I asked a teacher what her biggest challenges were, she shared that she felt all the challenges they encountered also benefited students. A student having a primary home language other than English could be seen as a deficit, but at Western Elementary School, it is seen as a strength. The team works together to build English skills to bring the student up to grade level in English while still celebrating the student's culture and ability to maintain skills to be bilingual in the future.

Every teacher has a plan to grow as a professional; every student has personal goals. The campus has yet to focus much on a growth mindset with students, but it exists in its persistent efforts to push students and teachers further each day. Many students in fifth grade at Western Elementary School go to the junior high school for advanced instruction, about half of them. The trend for learning acceleration continues once they are at the junior high school in the same district where college courses are offered. Students in 7th and 8th grade are often offered the opportunity of taking advanced pre-calculus and other college courses through a partnership with a local college. High-achieving eighth-grade students in the district also have an opportunity to attend Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth Programs. The program sends students to colleges nationwide to engage in rigorous learning

and gain college credit. These high expectations for all students set the tone at every grade level at Western Elementary School. Teachers expect their students to succeed, and they create pathways for them to do so.

During my interview with Western Elementary School's principal, Karen, she illustrated the importance of these advanced placement courses. She called her administrative assistant, Louise, into her office to talk about her experiences as a mother of a previous student at Western Elementary School. Louise's daughter, Gabby, was a sophomore who had attended Western Elementary School for grades kindergarten through sixth grade. Gabby had taken part in the advanced coursework offered to fifth and sixth graders from Western Elementary School; she continued on that path once she went to junior high school. She attended the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth Programs during the summer between 7th and 8th grade and after 8th grade. Her press for academic success did not stop there. Gabby continued to enroll in college classes during her first and second years. Her mother, Louise, was beaming when she told me she now has enough credits for her associate's degree as a sophomore in high school. Gabby's accomplishments were remarkable, the look of excitement and pride on Louise's face stuck with me. The advancement of students through accelerated coursework was impacting the outlook and beliefs of families for their children's futures. After Louise had left Karen and me alone once again, she told me that it was not uncommon to have students in that position who were once students at Western Elementary School. As a fellow administrator, I was struck by such enthusiasm and drive by the educators, students, and the mother of this young lady.

A college-going culture is prevalent in classrooms across the school. Vivid displays of college gear and nuanced discussions about the goals of students both frame the narrative that college attendance is expected of every student. I observed a teacher conferencing with an individual student about his goals to become a teacher and a whole class discussion about how the study strategies used in an assignment could be carried with the students throughout their schooling experience, including when they go to university. The students respectfully listened and contributed to the conversation as they processed and imagined the next steps.

Janet, a first-grade teacher, shared her assignments with me in a manila envelope. She had them ready for me as I walked in the door. Janet asked me if I had any questions and quietly waited while I reviewed the lessons. Once I finished reading the lessons, she asked me for feedback on the lessons provided. I was surprised in this classroom as an observer, not an evaluator or coach. However, Janet's enthusiasm for feedback allowed me to glimpse life at Western Elementary School. Teachers were excited not only to teach but to learn and grow. After I met Janet, I watched her interact with her students. Her students were also academic risk-takers interested in participating and sharing their ideas. She had several language learners in her classroom, but they did not hesitate to share their ideas in English. They raised their hands just as freely as the other students. Janet's lesson was interactive and engaged every student through cooperative learning strategies such as a think pair share and later a reciprocal learning activity. As I left Janet's room, I believed I understood how the faculty in this school felt about their students. She knew her students and was working toward the same goals, supporting one another as they forged onward.

Partnership with the National Institute of Excellence in Teaching

Academic emphasis was most apparent in conversations about the school's partnership with the National Institute of Excellence in Teaching, its pride in advanced course placement, and its partnership with Johns Hopkins University's summer program for students. Faculty trust and collective efficacy were typically discussed in more broad terms. I used the theme of school culture to explore and illustrate those sub-components.

Western Elementary School faculty began working with the National Institute of Excellence in Teaching (NIET) four years ago. The principal, Karen, attributes much of the school's success to the NIET framework. "NIET has helped to push us to the next level. Now that we are doing so well with it, students from across the district are trying to come here," Karen said. Western Elementary School's faculty participate in NIET's Teacher's Advancement Program (TAP), the observation tools, and leadership development rubrics. Karen is proud of her school's commitment to "no fluff" education; she knows that when we walk into classrooms, students will be focused on content with solid mastery-focused objectives that are well thought out and clearly articulated to students. She said, "my teachers are always focused on their objectives, and we put much work into writing the mastery-focused objectives." The district also funds two Master Teachers who share Karen's excitement for strong standards-based instruction. They begin their days with data meetings and provide professional development in staggered daily groups. This team of two master teachers and the principal drive the school's commitment to the NIET framework, which ties into every instructional decision made throughout the school. "We work together to support one another and drive all teaching conversations back to the TAP rubric; when we are all working on the same goal, it becomes easier and more fun" one of the master teachers shared with me.

NIET's Principal Standards Rubric creates a structure to push forward high-quality leadership which supports instructional practices throughout the school. The Principal Standards Rubric examines and sets best practices in the areas of:

- School Mission, Vision, and Strategic Goal Setting
- Instructional Leadership
- Capacity Building
- School Environment/ Community and Campus Climate
- Ethics and Integrity
- School Operations and Management

Karen uses this tool to promote her professional growth. This framework helps her to improve practice and model for her team. The area which was most evident in conversations with her was instructional leadership. She believes the principal is the instructional leader of the campus and takes time every day to lead in this area. "If I am not living by the model, then I can't expect them to," she said as she put her hand on the copy of the TAP rubric lying on the desk before her.

Teacher's Advancement Program Rubric

The Teacher's Advancement Program (TAP) rubric from NIET drives all conversations around instruction and data-driven instruction at Western Elementary School. The principal and master teachers coach with the TAP rubric in their hands, and they refer back to it often. The TAP rubric focuses on three domains, Instruction, Designing and Planning, and Learning Environment. Each with specific indicators.

TAP Rubric Instruction Domain. The TAP rubric's first domain identifies best practices for instruction. This domain offers guidance on standards and objectives, lesson structure and pacing, student activities, levels of questioning, teacher content, academic feedback and student grouping. Specifically, it lays out how to write and communicate standards and objectives with mini-objectives and a mastery focus included. The instruction domain helps teachers and administrators to understand what high-quality teaching looks and sounds like. This section of the rubric is clearly aligned with the principals around academic emphasis since it is explicitly focused on learning and how it will be achieved.

TAP Rubric Designing and Planning Domain. The second domain of the TAP rubric focuses on the design and planning of high-quality lessons. This section emphasizes the need for pre- planning instructional plans, identifying the expectations for student work, and defining how assessment data will be used. This portion of the rubric helps teachers to plan and prepare their lessons with results in mind. The intention of this planning is to ensure expectations are clear and well laid out for students and for teachers to know how to measure their progress. This domain supports the strengthening of collective efficacy through group problem solving with in the team planning process.

TAP Learning Environment Domain. The third domain in the TAP rubric focuses on the learning environment. It offers guidance on managing student behavior, cultivating a respectful culture, and supporting a nurturing environment for students to learn within. The rubric supports the theory of faculty trust affecting student achievement. It creates expectations for teachers to own the environment of their classroom. The teacher is in control of the classroom community and the behaviors of the students.

TAP Professional Responsibilities. In addition to these three domains, the TAP system outlines best practices for teacher professionalism and NIET responsibilities. Each indicator has criteria that allow an educator, coach, or evaluator to classify the practice. The categories are:

- Significantly Below Expectations (1) Unsatisfactory
- At Expectations (3) Proficient
- Significantly Above Expectations (5) Exemplary

NIET and Student Achievement

NIET's website shows they partner with schools nationwide to create school improvement solutions. They claim to have had success in supporting schools by growing student achievement. NIET's website states that schools that have been using NIET for more than one year have higher rates of growth in student achievement than those who do not use the NIET model or who are in their first year of implementation. That data trend was tangible for Western Elementary School; all interview participants pointed to NIET as the source of their success. They each articulated helpful components of the TAP rubric and shared how they found the structure helpful for them as teachers who are constantly refining their process. One teacher told me she began her career in a different district. When she came to Western Elementary School, she realized how much more impact she could make as a teacher when working within the expectations that the TAP rubric identified. She said, "I wish I had this structure as a beginning teacher. It would have saved me a lot of time that I spent exploring different avenues to get my kids to grow. It felt like I was hitting my head against the wall, and now I see the path forward, and I push to achieve." As an observer, I

saw elements in every classroom and in every meeting I attended as well. It was most noticeable in their objectives, sub-objectives, and mastery levels relating to their students' performance within a specific sub-objective. The practices were consistent throughout the school, and every teacher I observed or spoke to shared or demonstrated their commitment to the TAP process.

I attended one meeting before school with the instructional leaders on campus. This meeting included the principal, the two master teachers, and a team lead from each grade level. The meeting's focus was on instructional improvement. The leadership group focused on the needs of the teachers and how they planned to support them in moving their performance in the classroom as measured by the NIET rubric. Each team member had a copy of the NIET rubric in their hand; all were heavily marked with pen strokes from previous meetings and training sessions.

The following morning Nora, one of the master teachers, held a professional development session on objective mastery writing. Nora told me that they have a long-term plan for professional development but that as the team identifies new needs during their instructional improvement meetings, they try to offer options for teachers to develop as quickly as possible. This need was determined by the meeting the day before. Nora told me the mini professional development session was optional. However, most of the staff attended. I counted seventeen teachers present. The teachers who engaged in the professional development came prepared with their standards for the following week, and most had specific questions on best practices. This session fits well with the principal and

master teachers' narrative about their teachers' commitment to growth and high-quality instruction.

SAOS Scores for Western Elementary School

The SAOS was administered to faculty at both sites. This standardized instrument was scored based on the guidance of the instrument. The data was put into context by using the percentile scores provided by Dr. Wayne Hoy in in his 2010 article. The instrument and scoring directions are available in his 2010 study as well as on his website. This section shows Western Elementary Schools SAOS scores as well as their percentile rankings based on Dr. Hoy's guidance.

Table 1

SAOS Scores for Western Elementary School

Construct/Sub Construct	**Score**
Collective Efficacy	935
Faculty Trust	833
Academic Emphasis	719
Academic Optimism (Combined SAOS Score)	829

After I administered the SAOS to Western Elementary School's faculty I used Dr. Hoy's detailed instructions on how to score the SAOS for accurate results and percentile rankings. His directions involve 11 steps. First, I combined the items from the instrument for each sub-component, then I found a standard score for each, then I used an equation to combined the sub-

components into one final academic optimism score. Finally, I used a chart to identify the percentile ranking of the SAOS score based on Dr. Hoy's guidance.

Western Elementary School scored in the 99th percentile of schools on the SAOS. Which means the responses from the staff indicate a high level of academic optimism. The high scores indicate that the respondents reported high levels of collective efficacy, faculty trust, and academic emphasis.

Qualitative Data Academic Optimism Summary for Western Elementary School

I analyzed the qualitative data using the codes:

- Academic Emphasis (+)
- Academic Emphasis (-)
- Collective Efficacy (+)
- Collective Efficacy (-)
- Faculty Trust (+)
- Faculty Trust (-)

The (+) and (-) after each sub component indicate whether the component was found (+), or whether I saw something that would contradict the sub component (-). I found that all three components of the academic optimism construct were interwoven throughout the words of my interviews, my observations in the school setting, the school website, and the handbook. I was not able to obtain parent survey data at Western Elementary School because the

school did not administer it. Here is a table to show my academic optimism construct code findings:

Table 2

Code Tallies for Western Elementary School

Total Number of Data Points Related to Three Components of Academic Optimism	Positive vs. Negative Coding Score	Percentage Scores
Academic Emphasis	(+) 327	98%
	(-) 5	52%
Collective Efficacy	(+) 264	90%
	(-) 28	10%
Faculty Trust	(+) 97	72%
	(-) 38	28%

These were points of data that emerged from interviews with teachers and the principal, observations, informal conversations, and artifacts. As I coded the data from these various sources, I looked for specific instances where each of the three sub-components were noted. I coded them as a positive indicator or a negative indicator related to those factors.

In the area of academic emphasis, I found 332 examples of it including positive and negative indicators. During the first interview I had with the principal, she said, “They don’t want fluff, they teach important content” when she talked about the teachers on her campus. I coded that statement as a positive academic emphasis indicator. However, a teacher at Western Elementary School, said “Grades aren’t important, I want my kids to feel like they

belong here." This expression I coded as a negative example of academic emphasis because it represented the teacher valuing other factors over academic achievement.

Collective efficacy was noted 292 times including positive and negative indicators. One positive example was when teachers consistently spoke highly of their colleagues: "John's classroom is amazing, you have to see it!" A negative example emerged, when one teacher woefully expressed, "Our students have a lot of challenges, and it can be really hard to work here sometimes."

Faculty trust was the least prevalent component in the data set with 135 instances noted. A positive statement made by a teacher was "Our families are amazing, they always support us." Another positive example was when I first spoke to the principal over the phone. She was excited for me to visit. When I told her I was looking forward to seeing the school and understanding, their successes she said, "You'll see- It's the kids!" However, one teacher said, "Some of our kids can't count on their parents" when she was asked about the challenges their kids faced regularly.

Overwhelmingly, these results revealed a high sense of academic optimism from many data sources. I found a few statements within the entire set of data that contradicted the idea of academic emphasis. Collective efficacy and faculty trust were found on many occasions, however they each had more contradictions as well. Ultimately, the qualitative data showed the lowest prevalence of faculty trust within the school, but trends for expressing trust in students and families were still high at 97 occurrences within the data set.

Western Elementary School's educators have created an environment which is focused on academic proficiency and growth. The goals of the school are known by all, and they are championed by staff and students alike. Western Elementary School's culture shaped by its faculty's commitment to achieving high standards and their ability to focus on student success.

Juniper Elementary School Description

Juniper Elementary School is a public school that serves students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Their student enrollment is 434 students. It is located in a large metropolitan area in the southwestern United States. The population density is about 3,200 people per square mile which classifies it as a suburban setting. 60% of the students who attend Juniper Elementary School qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The student population is made up of diverse demographics including:

- 57% Hispanic
- 9% African American
- 25% White
- 3% Native American
- 5% Multiple Races

Juniper Elementary School received an A letter grade from the state accountability rating system in the 2018- 2019 school year which was the last reported letter grade due to the Covid-19 pandemic causing delays in testing and letter grade assignment. The two teachers I interviewed at Juniper Elementary School were in their late twenties to early thirties. However, both mentioned their team leads having more than 20 years of experience

at the school, and both pointed to the longevity of school staff supporting the success of their school.

School Improvement Plan on Display at Juniper Elementary School

Juniper's growth mindset culture was evident in the words and actions of the teachers, administrators, and students. This climate was also displayed on bulletin boards around the school. For example, I saw boards with individual class goals, boards that explicitly taught students to have a growth mindset through perseverance, and posters cheering students on.

One board in the main office was a colorful display of the school's continuous improvement plan. The state requires all schools that receive federal Title I funding to create a continuous improvement plan each year. The state provides a rubric of best practices for the school's stakeholders to evaluate their systems over the course of the year. Then, the staff used the rubric to identify areas of improvement. Those areas of improvement are then the focal point for the yearly goals and action steps within the plan. The state's improvement plans are broken down into six principles: 1) Effective leadership, 2) Effective Teachers and Instruction, 3) Effective Organization of Time, 4) Effective Curriculum, 5) Conditions, Climate, and Culture, and 6) Family and Community Engagement.

The bulletin board in the main office had stars cut out with each of the six principals, then hanging below the stars were the school's desired outcomes, Specific Measurable Attainable Relevant Timely (SMART) goals, and action steps. Juniper's improvement plan included two SMART goals:

1. Juniper will have a cohesive plan to strengthen and maintain positive partnerships among families, community, and school as measured by surveys, sign-in sheets, and following the created plan.

2. All teachers will consistently implement evidence-based, rigorous instruction as evidenced by monthly classroom observations.

Some of the actions steps I saw pertained directly to academic emphasis, faculty trust, and collective efficacy. Several were coded under more than one sub-component, they are represented here in the area that they best represent.

Action steps that directly relate to academic emphasis:

- MTSS model training and implementation
- Student data notebooks and goal setting
- Create master schedule with tiers of instruction
- Narrowed focused professional development
- Analysis of benchmarks and assessments
- Create and utilize common formative assessments
- Grade level essential standards
- Differentiated instruction
- Planned, monthly walk throughs

Action steps that directly relate to collective efficacy:

- Use evaluation system to identify areas of support and professional development needed.
- Utilize job embedded professional development.
- Schedule and conduct grade level and individual data meetings.

- Professional learning communities/accountable and collaborative teams
- Scheduled time in the day for professional development and peer to peer observations
- Peer to peer observations

Action steps that directly relate to faculty trust:

- Conduct climate survey
- Increase number of parent events

I had already reviewed the school's improvement plan when I saw the bulletin board, however, the experience of seeing the plan prominently displayed in the main artery of the school made me take a closer look. Students, parents, teachers, classified staff and administrators are reminded of their commitments and goals each day.

Inclusivity at Juniper Elementary School

Juniper Elementary School has a reputation for being very inclusive to all. The current principal of two years attributes that reputation to the previous principal and her philosophy about education. Juniper Elementary School is in a neighborhood surrounded by affluent homes, however, many of the local students apply for open enrollment in other schools within the district. That creates room for Juniper Elementary School to accept open enrollment applications from students who live outside of the district boundaries. The variety of students who live in the boundaries and those who attend through open enrollment makes for a vibrant melding of cultures within the school community. The teachers at the school are proud that they serve a population of students who are diverse, and who may have economic challenges which affect their experiences in school and at home. One teacher told me "I have kids from around the world, I love learning from them and their parents!"

When I arrived at Juniper Elementary School, the first staff member I was greeted by was Danielle, the Community Liaison. Danielle stood at the gate ready to greet each child as they entered the campus. She proudly explained to me her role as an extra support to make sure parents feel included in the schooling process for their children. Danielle spends her days planning community and family events, following up with families who need support, and translating oral or written communication when possible. Each staff member I spoke to at Juniper Elementary School was excited to share about the diversity of their student population with students and families from Africa, Central America, South America, Europe, and Asia. Lisa, one teacher whom I interviewed, described her school in the following way:

> We are a very diverse school. We are a kind of weird school. I would say we're in a rich area with poor families, or underprivileged families, which makes it a little more unique. I feel like we are just different than a regular kind of Title I school because as a district, you know, I have everything I could ask for, as far as supplies and technology. But, our families are more needy. I really like the diversity of our school, that our different kind of kiddos bring in and bring to the table because it's just, it's very different than the other places I've worked.

Juniper Elementary School has students with many different primary languages, so providing communication that all families easily understand can sometimes be challenging. However, the district has a translation department that can help overcome the challenges faced by staff. Members of that department translate written documents and attend parent events upon request. This focused attention on ensuring communication between families and school

personnel supports teachers and students in moving forward as a team. Juniper Elementary School uses a variety of strategies to meet the needs of all learners.

Data-Driven and Evidence-Based

Juniper Elementary School uses a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to meet every student's needs while promoting inclusive classroom practices. MTSS uses a data-driven approach to identify which students are in the most need of additional interventions in the areas of academics and social-emotional learning. Educators use a variety of information sources to identify tier one, two, and three students in both areas. Tier one students are on track and receive only the core instruction. Tier two students require additional support, and tier three students require the most intense and individualized support. These groupings or labels are flexible and responsive as the student progresses. Students may develop the skills needed to be successful in the classroom, then they should be moved back to tier one. Every student is monitored using school wide data points. Juniper Elementary School uses its benchmark and formative assessments as academic data points for the MTSS process.

A balanced assessment system helps the school to strive toward a complete understanding of the student's progress and mastery of content. Kindergartners through fifth graders use FastBridge, which measures literacy and numeracy skills. FastBridge encompasses a diagnostic assessment, progress monitoring tools, and benchmark assessments, however the year I visited the school they chose not to use the benchmark assessment portion of the program. 3rd through 5th graders use School City, an assessment used to measure students' progress toward mastery of the state standards. All students at Juniper Elementary School use I Ready, which diagnoses areas of need and gives skills practice. And finally, each grade level uses common formative assessments to measure understanding of the current or most recent standard or skill taught. Each

participant I interviewed referred specifically to these assessment tools. The names of the tools were woven into each conversation I had about student performance at Juniper Elementary School. These data points are analyzed during each team's grade-level professional learning community (PLC) meetings.

DuFour's Model

Juniper Elementary School's PLC system is based on the DuFour model (DuFour, 2010). That means their weekly grade-level conversations about data surround the following four questions:

- What do we want all students to know and be able to do?
- How will we know if they learn it?
- How will we respond when some students do not learn?
- How will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient?

Each week grade level teams meet to discuss these questions concerning the content they are currently covering. The principal, Jane, attends each of these PLC meetings as well. The principal's role is to guide conversation when it gets off track and offer expertise as issues arise. A teacher I interviewed named Sandy shared her thoughts on the PLC process and her principal's role in their improvement at Juniper Elementary School:

> Our principal helped us become more data driven. Our PLCs became much more focused on students and data when she came. Maybe, that focus of changing to look at how the kids are performing and being able to talk in PLC groups with our other teachers affected our outcomes. I mean, I know our principal wants us to do well. So, that must be the part of what helps schools achieve because that does feel like the biggest change that kind of happened. It didn't happen over one year. It must have been something that built, and we

worked at it, and we didn’t see the fruits of the labor that year. We had to keep working before we got that validation.

I attended the fifth grade PLC. The topic of discussion for the day was adding fractions with unlike denominators. The teachers were looking at their formative data to make instructional decisions for the following week. At this particular PLC, Principal Jane was a quiet bystander as her teachers discussed data in a focused conversation driven by DuFour's four questions. The team recognized that the top two classes had used a hands-on activity that came from outside of their curriculum to supplement their instruction on adding fractions with unlike denominators. So, the team decided to use the supplemental activity with the students who did not score at least 70 percent on the formative assessment during tier 2 instruction the following week. They worked together to create an enrichment plan for the students who had mastered the skill, intending to solidify their thinking and take them to the next level. The enrichment activity they went with was heavy with word problems, and they decided that students would work in teams to accomplish the task.

Specific Reading Approach

Juniper Elementary School is committed to ensuring all students are instructed using the science of reading approach. The science of reading is sometimes called a structured literacy approach (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013). It is systematic and explicit reading instruction based on brain research with a specific scope and sequence. Many teachers in the United States are using an alternate method called a balanced literacy approach which includes the three-cueing system (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013). The three-cueing system relies on the logic that students will learn words if they can figure out the meaning, structure, and shape of the word (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013). However, this system has been proven to be detrimental to

students' reading growth (Moats, 2000). Instead, Juniper Elementary School focuses on the structured approach, which combines The Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer,1986) and Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001). I found the staff of Juniper Elementary School very interested in making sure I knew which reading philosophy they used. They believe their success in creating good readers is based on this research and understanding. They also use an adopted curriculum and a supplemental intervention that aligns with the principles of the science of reading.

When I visited one first-grade classroom, I watched a lesson on reading. The teacher brought me her scripted directions so I could follow along with them as the students worked their way through the lesson. The teacher, Mrs. Jones, spoke to me after the students finished the lesson and asked about my familiarity with literacy instruction. She was excited to share her expertise and even recommended specific resources for me to learn. She first noticed the structured literacy approach about five years ago, significantly changing her practice with her students. This particular teacher had worked in another district, and when she came to Juniper Elementary School, she engaged in professional development, which changed her approach to teaching reading. She said it was hard to catch herself returning to her old ways of thinking; the scripted program helped her to see how she should be instructing. "I love seeing my kids grow with this program now that I'm used to it!" she said.

Juniper Elementary School was committed to academic achievement. They held high expectations for their students and provided tiered interventions to support those students who were behind. Teachers were intensely focused on the data they used to guide their instructional decisions including the flexible and responsive groups for struggling learners. These attributes

indicate the school has a high level of academic optimism. The SAOS was used as a standardized instrument to examine the level of academic optimism in this school setting.

SAOS Scores for Juniper Elementary School

The SAOS was administered to faculty at both sites. This standardized instrument was scored based on the guidance of the instrument. The data was put into context by using the percentile scores provided by Dr. Wayne Hoy in in his 2010 article. The instrument and scoring directions are available in his 2010 study as well as on his website. This section shows Juniper Elementary Schools SAOS scores as well as their percentile rankings based on Dr. Hoy's guidance.

Table 3

SAOS Scores for Juniper Elementary School

Construct/Sub Construct	**Score**
Collective Efficacy	733
Faculty Trust	707
Academic Emphasis	525
Academic Optimism (Combined SAOS Score)	655 (higher than 84 percent of schools)

After I administered the SAOS to Juniper Elementary School's faculty I followed the same steps to score it as I did with Western Elementary School's data. I used Dr. Hoy's detailed instructions on how to score the SAOS for accurate results and percentile rankings. His directions involve 11 steps. First, I combined the items from the instrument for each sub-component, then I found a standard score for each, then I used an equation to combined the sub-

components into one final academic optimism score. Finally, I used a chart to identify the percentile ranking of the SAOS score based on Dr. Hoy's guidance.

Juniper Elementary School scored in the 84th percentile of schools on the SAOS which means the responses from staff indicate a high level of academic optimism. The score of 655 on the SAOS indicates that teachers had high levels of academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust in addition to high academic optimism. This SAOS data matches the qualitative observations, interviews, and artifact analysis completed.

Qualitative Data Academic Optimism Summary for Juniper Elementary School

When I analyzed Juniper Elementary School's qualitative data I used the same codes as I listed before:

- Academic Emphasis (+)
- Academic (-)
- Collective Efficacy (+)
- Collective Efficacy (-)
- Faculty Trust (+)
- Faculty Trust (-)

The (+) and (-) after each sub component indicate whether the component was found (+), or whether I saw something that would contradict the sub component (-). I found both positive and negative indicators in the data I collected from Juniper Elementary School's. The positive indicators far outweighed the negative ones. My data included interview transcripts, my observations in the school setting, the school's yearly improvement goals, the school website, and the handbook. The principal, Jane, did not agree to share yearly

parent survey data with me. The following table shows my academic optimism construct code findings:

Table 4

Code Tallies for Juniper Elementary School

Total Number of Data Points Related to Three Components of Academic Optimism	Positive vs. Negative Coding Score	Percentage Scores
Academic Emphasis	(+) 267	95%
	(-) 13	5%
Collective Efficacy	(+) 238	85%
	(-) 41	15%
Faculty Trust	(+) 197	84%
	(-) 37	16%

I counted 280 indicators of academic emphasis in the data I collected from Juniper Elementary School. One teacher described her team's strategy as "we are always learning; trying new ways to make student learning successful" I coded that statement as a positive example. One negative example of academic optimism was when the same teacher said "I'm most proud of my students winning the spirit award last year, we had so much fun!" which indicated she valued the spirit award over the academic achievements that her students made in that particular moment.

When I combined the positive and negative indicators for collective efficacy within the data I collected at Juniper Elementary School, I recorded 279 instances. The data included positive statements like "PLCs drive our instruction," which indicates a strong sense of assurance

within a team of teachers. I also captured less assured statements like “I’m not sure how our kids will score this year” which were marked as negative.

The data from Juniper Elementary School accounted for 234 instances of faculty trust. One teacher described her school’s inclusive culture, saying “We welcome all students and families. We want them to feel at home here.” Her statement clearly demonstrated a positive example of faculty trust. A different teacher who was touring me around her intervention classroom said “Well, the pandemic stopped us from sending home the reading kids but, parents barely noticed since they usually didn’t use them anyway.” That statement was marked as illustrating negative faculty trust because the teacher’s perception was that the parents were not interested in the materials being sent home to improve their children’s reading abilities.

Western Elementary School and Juniper Elementary School had high levels of academic optimism based on the SOAS, and they both displayed many attributes of academic optimism within the data set. As I revisited the data while coding the second time I was able to see the connections between elements within the data set and the known attributes of academic optimism. Slowly, as the data became more organized, themes developed, and the answers to my research questions became more clear.

Research Questions Answered

This study focused on two research questions. The first was: What are the attributes of high-performing, low socioeconomic status schools? I found that the attributes of high-performing, low socioeconomic status schools are varied, but some common elements exist between the two schools I studied. They both display high levels of academic optimism as measured by the SAOS. They both have procedures that are focused on guiding instruction with

assessment data. These schools are focused on cultivating a robust academic culture and strong relationships with the families of their students. Both schools have systems in place to support struggling learners and accelerate higher achieving students. Western Elementary School did so through their NIET systems, while Juniper Elementary School used a MTSS process to support these different needs.

Western Elementary School was very organized in their instructional practices and expectations. Their instructional design and leadership methods were directly tied to their work with NIET. Each classroom teacher was held to the standards within the NIET framework and TAP rubric. This common language and set of expectations were the guidepost for their work as individual teachers and also as teams worked to push their students forward on their learning journeys. The faculty at Western Elementary School had high expectations for all learners. The teachers, principal, and classified staff took pride in the advanced coursework their students were able to complete. They pushed students to rise above grade level expectations to advance them on a trajectory which includes dual enrollment and advanced coursework.

Juniper Elementary School's faculty was focused on MTSS, data driven instructional practices, and structured literacy instruction. The faculty were systematic in their understanding of how to use assessment data to make informed instructional decisions. The MTSS process included strong and consistent PLCs where educators could problem solve and plan together. Teachers are expected to work together to refine their lessons and explore data to better understand how their work can improve. The team had a firmly held commitment to explicit reading instruction that followed a structured approach. They were experts in the areas of literacy instruction, inclusive practices within the MTSS structure, and data driven instruction.

The second research question for this study was: Are elements of academic optimism present in the experiences of teachers and principals in high-performing low socioeconomic schools? Yes, elements of academic optimism were present in the experiences of teachers and principals at these schools. I found that academic optimism was easily observed and frequently demonstrated within my data set. Teachers and principals alike spoke about their commitment to excellence in academics (academic emphasis), their strategies to overcome challenges and grow as educators (collective efficacy), and their commitment to strong relationships with families and students (faculty trust).

Common Themes and Connections at Both Schools

As a school district administrator, I often find myself in classrooms which span between preschool and twelfth grades. When I visited both Western Elementary School and Juniper Elementary School, experience I had differed from the regular visits I have made to many other schools. From the moment I set foot on each campus, I was met with signs of academic optimism. I found an emphasis on growth, commitment to an instructional model, tiered support as a part of a data-driven system, and educators who were open and willing to collaborate when problems arose to find the answers they needed for their students. Although the participants in this study would not know they were creating a culture in which I could detect these elements, they were doing so in many ways.

Academic emphasis was the most easily observable component. I saw data-driven instruction, academic culture, continued emphasis on growth and overcoming obstacles, high expectations for all learners, and high-quality support for those who needed them. Both schools' staff members were proud of their student's abilities and wanted to share their experiences, stretching their students to do more high-quality work. Academic emphasis was also prevalent in

the school improvement plans and strategic plans I analyzed. Both schools have explicitly planned for improvement in student achievement even though they both perform well on statewide measures.

Faculty trust in students and parents was observed in conversations and interviews with faculty and administrators. Every time I brought up student outcomes during this process, I was met with a gentle reminder of how much these educators value their partnership with their students. Teachers believe their students want to do well and that their parents want the same. They know they can count on their students' parents to partner with them to reach the mutual goal of student success.

Collective efficacy was best observed in Juniper Elementary School's professional learning communities and Western Elementary School's professional development meetings. Every team member engaged and collaborated to improve their instruction. Each team member took an active role in receiving feedback and providing tips and ideas. Each person came prepared to share their data and experiences in the classroom. There were no members of the team who refused or ignored the purpose of the meetings. They worked together to overcome obstacles and supported the weakest on the team.

In summary, the data clearly showed how special these two schools were. They were full of faculty who were driven to support their students using evidence-based practices. The faculty at these schools were collaborative, and interested in growing to become better educators over time. They showed their determination to help students succeed through their daily commitment to their instruction. Those attributes supported a high level of academic optimism as measured by the SAOS scores of each school. Ultimately, it was inspiring to see these educators seamlessly

weave their knowledge of best practices with their passion for supporting student success, and the outcomes they managed to create.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

In chapter four, I shared the data collected while studying two high-achieving, low socioeconomic status schools. In the previous chapter, analysis of the data was presented and findings outlined. Some important findings I reported included Juniper Elementary School's focus on early literacy and MTSS, and Western Elementary School's focus on NIET and advanced placement coursework.

This chapter revisits my experience and situates my findings in the context of current research and practice. First, restating what I found looking specifically at each school as well as discussing the common themes from both schools. Then, providing the reader with an update on the 2022 student achievement data for both schools, followed by implementations for practice, research, and policy. The chapter and study conclude with recommendations for future research, limitations to this study, and a conclusion.

This research project aimed to understand the following research questions:

1. What are the attributes of high-performing low socioeconomic status schools?
2. Are elements of academic optimism present in the experiences of teachers and principals in high-performing low socioeconomic schools?

Discussion of Findings as Related to Current Research and Practice

This study used academic optimism and its three subcomponents as a lens to view school culture in higher performing schools. The schools at the heart of this study both had high scores on measures of academic optimism according to the SAOS administered. To understand how academic optimism was apparent in these two schools, the data I collected for this investigation of academic optimism included artifacts, school and classroom observations, and interviews with administrators and teachers at both research sites. These two schools displayed high levels of

academic optimism and each sub-component to varying degrees. The two schools differed in their environments, one is rural, one is suburban and their ethnicity stratification is dissimilar. They shared characteristics such as using assessment data to drive decisions, having a high sense of teacher efficacy, and emphasizing growth-minded instruction and goal setting.

Western Elementary School Findings Revisited

Western Elementary School displayed high indicators of academic optimism throughout the entire data set. Western Elementary School scored in the 99th percentile on the SAOS which measures academic optimism. The deductive coding process tallied many occurrences of positive academic emphasis as well as collective efficacy. While faculty trust was also highly rated, lower than the other sub-components measured. A follow up inductive coding process supported the findings from the deductive coding process and the SAOS results.

The experience of conducting research at Western Elementary School was remarkable. Students, teachers, staff, administration, and families contributed to an overall culture that champions students as capable learners expected to do well and advance academically. I consistently found evidence of academic optimism throughout the data sources I analyzed for this school site.

Juniper Elementary School Findings Revisited

Juniper Elementary School scored in the 84th percentile of academic optimism based on the SAOS that the faculty completed. Juniper Elementary School had a strong emphasis on data-driven instruction, MTSS, and explicit instructional strategies related to early literacy. The deductive and inductive coding I applied to the data I collected revealed many academic optimism indicators and indicators of each sub-component.

Summary of Findings as Related to Current Research and Practice

This study contributes to the conversation and understanding of schools that perform well while serving populations of students who do not traditionally perform well on standardized assessments (Reardon, 2013). I accomplished that goal by identifying specific attributes of academic optimism in these two specific school sites. I found that both schools were intensely focused on supporting students in their academic achievement. I observed teachers who engage in productive struggle alongside their students and students who were excited to make goals and achieve them. I found two distinct school cultures thriving and displaying high levels of academic optimism through their practices, procedures and reported beliefs about their role in their school setting.

The achievement gap has grown according to the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2022). The political climate for education has also changed over the last three years. Critical Race Theory has taken a front seat in the national conversations about K-12 public education (Morgan, 2022). According to Morgan (2022) teachers and administrators are more frequently finding themselves amidst political debates about race and racism in the classroom. The prevalence of these debates and scrutiny add to the pressure that administrators and teachers feel to overcome the achievement gap. With the added scrutiny on education systems budding, this research may be even more needed. These two cases show that overcoming challenges within a school community is within reach for any committed faculty with the support of their stakeholders.

2022 Data Update for Both Schools

I selected these two schools for this study based on the state assessment results from the Spring of 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic kept schools from testing in 2020. Schools administered

state assessments in the spring of 2021, but the state did not issue letter grades based on that data. After an uninterrupted year of instruction, all schools in the state tested in the Spring of 2022, and the following autumn, they were awarded new letter grades and state funding based on the results of those assessments.

Based on the 2022 data, both schools are still high-achieving and have low socioeconomic status students. Both schools performed in the top 13 percent of all schools in the state and had more than 60 percent of students qualified for free and reduced-price lunches. Both schools' scores and demographic data indicated high S.A. and low SES. Test data reveal that post pandemic demographics and student achievement scores for both schools are similar to pre-pandemic levels.

The Covid-19 pandemic school closures affected districts across the nation adversely in their goals to support student achievement (NAEP, 2022). The schools I studied exhibited many attributes of academic optimism while overcoming the challenges the pandemic presented. They maintained high expectations for staff and students as they continued to strive for academic excellence for their students. Many schools around the state and nation had large drops in student performance during the "pandemic years" of 2020, 2021, and 2022 (NAEP, 2022). These two schools were able to come out of the closure era without losing the progress they had made in the years leading up to the Covid-19 pandemic. Knowing the success that each of these schools experienced before and after the pandemic era closures leads this researcher to look to implications for practice in a variety of settings for various stakeholders.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study may have implications for many different stakeholders. Using a micro lens, implications for myself as a researcher come into focus. Applying a macro lens, a

variety of implications may affect students, teachers and administrators, and communities as those stakeholders continue to work toward the goals of overcoming the achievement gap. The achievement gap is a name for the difference in achievement between subgroups of students (ESSA, 2015 & NCLB, 2001). For more information on the achievement gap, see page 14 in chapter two. Further, a broader lens may implicate the work of scholars who focus on academic optimism, other education researchers, and policymakers.

Implications for Self

My curiosity as a researcher and drive for excellence as a school administrator fueled my motivation to investigate schools that perform well on state assessments while overcoming difficulties that their context creates. I find deep meaning in working with populations of learners who need extra support, and I know they often have different needs than other students. Administrators and teachers are tasked with raising student achievement to meet the targets laid out by state and federal accountability measures. I, like many other faculty members, wondered what made some schools in low socioeconomic status communities thrive while others flounder.

Implications for Principals

The principals of these two schools set the tone for the practices and influenced the beliefs of staff members in their individual settings. Their impact on the schools' progress and performance cannot be overlooked. These findings support the idea that a principal has influence over the culture and happenings at any given site. All principals should take note of their intended and unintended communication to all stakeholders of their schools. Principals can shape the outcomes of their school site, so their responsibilities are great. Principals should have a clearly identified set of beliefs and goals to communicate to staff using a variety of formal and informal methods in order to promote the success of students in their school's care.

Implications for Students, Teachers, and Administrators

This study's findings may be used to push forward the instructional and leadership practices of school leaders and teachers in challenging settings. These case studies add to the body of research which connects a strong sense of academic optimism with high performance, even in the face of challenging circumstances. The evidence I collected from both of these schools showed that they are committed to the tenets that academic optimism represents. The school cultures of both sites engender a strong sense of academic optimism along with academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust. The leadership in both schools sets a tone for a culture focused on promoting student achievement while supporting teachers as they grow as high-quality instructors.

This study may provide support for school leaders as they shape their school culture over time. Each school administrator has the important responsibility of creating and shifting school culture. Academic optimism is one lens school administrators might use to understand school cultures. Once the administrator has a strong understanding of how their staff perceive their role and abilities in promoting student achievement, then he or she can use intentional strategies to boost teachers' sense of self-efficacy, collective efficacy, the academic emphasis throughout the organization. An administrator may also employ strategies to bolster staff's trust in parents and students.

Implications for Communities

These two case studies present stories of hope for low socioeconomic communities. These two schools sit within a context that is challenging, however, the children in these two schools have outsized anticipated achievement results, and overcome the achievement gap. These outcomes illustrate how low-income communities can have excellent educational options for

their children. While the achievement gap is difficult to overcome, communities can support school faculty as they grow and learn from their experiences. Families and community members can take an active role in understanding how their schools can improve and support students as they overcome challenges. This study shows the importance of cultivating a robust academic culture paired with trusting relationships between students and their families and the school's staff. We know from the literature that there is a strong relationship between academic optimism and student achievement (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012; Hoy et al., 2006; Srivastava et al., 2016: Mitchel & Tarter, 2016). Now, this study helps to illustrate how behaviors and beliefs may impact a school setting and improve student outcomes. As school choice continues to grow across the field, this research indicates that the support of all stakeholders who are focused on academic outcomes for students has the power to impact change and overcome the achievement gap within a community (Pearman & Swain, 2017).

Implications for Scholars who focus on Academic Optimism and Other Education Researchers

These case studies add to the body of research around academic optimism by specifically examining academic optimism in the context of low socioeconomic status, high-achieving schools. This investigation furthers the understanding that academic optimism is observable, which is significant to researchers interested in understanding how academic optimism may manifest in the school setting (Mishoe, 2013; Pikero, 2015 Ruyle, 2014). This study documented that two schools performing well above expectations based on their demographics exhibited high academic optimism. Other researchers may conduct similar studies to broaden our collective understanding of how the academic optimism construct is observable in other low-income, high-achieving schools.

A Need for More Qualitative and Quantitative Work

Research on Academic Optimism is varied. In 2006, when academic optimism was first emerging, it was mainly focused on quantitative effects on student achievement (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012; Hoy et al., 2006; Srivastava et al., 2016; Mitchell & Tarter, 2016). Then, more case studies such as this one began to surface (Mishoe, 2013; Pikero, 2015 Ruyle, 2014). The addition of case studies to the research on academic optimism have offered detailed nuance to the conversation and understanding of the construct. As the field continues to deepen our knowledge through qualitative studies which explore the experiences within these schools, quantitative studies broaden our understanding by quantifying the relationship between student achievement and academic optimism. The field needs qualitative and quantitative research on academic optimism and on schools who perform well while serving students from low socioeconomic status homes.

Quantitative Needs. Two meta-analyses combine the findings of less than 20 studies on Academic Optimism and its correlation with student achievement (Ateş, & Ünal, 2021; Aulia, 2016). Both existing meta-analyses have very few studies included; therefore, they are inconclusive. This field of research needs more case studies to explore how academic optimism manifests in school settings to support those who want to replicate conditions to improve outcomes in other school settings. A large-scale meta-analysis that includes the bulk of the quantitative studies with academic optimism and student achievement as variables are long overdue.

Qualitative Needs. More case studies of schools who are overcoming the achievement gap are needed. The field of research needs more studies to support our understanding of how schools work to meet student needs. The field of research would benefit from many more case studies so that we can learn about academic optimism in many settings throughout the world.

Implications for Policy Makers

The ongoing goals set out by federal and state-level accountability measures make the findings from this study essential to policymakers. Lawmakers are interested in accountability for schools because they intend to support parents in their understanding of school effectiveness (Pearman & Swain, 2017). Policymakers have an opportunity to use the research around academic optimism in low socioeconomic status schools to empower leaders and teachers to work within their communities to overcome the achievement gap. This research adds to the narrative that school stakeholders can influence student achievement through academic optimism, which can be flexible based on climate indicators. Policy makers can use this research to understand the conditions in which these two schools exist and have promoted high levels of student achievement for their students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Academic optimism is a new area of research. It was first conceptualized in 2006; therefore, much remains to be studied. Both qualitative and quantitative research in this area are needed. Additionally, more research needs to explore high-performing schools where students from low socioeconomic status homes attend. The field would benefit from additional case studies to understand how academic optimism presents in various settings including low socioeconomic status, high performing schools. These case studies help researchers and other stakeholders to understand how these schools perform well in challenging circumstances. The field also needs more current and generalizable results from quantitative studies, including studies of schools that serve low socioeconomic status students.

The description of Juniper Elementary School also included several references to the science of reading, a term for the most current methods of teaching reading (Bingham & Hall-

Kenyon, 2013). The reading wars of the last century have been well documented as the pendulum moved from whole language, whole word, and phonics-based approaches (Moats, 2000). Currently, the state of Arizona along with many others across the nation are investing in large-scale efforts to train teachers in the science of reading approach to teaching. The field needs to continue to research and evaluate this push toward new training for classroom teachers so we can better understand the movement's effectiveness. Additionally, the field would benefit from further studies and discussion detailing the historical influences of this new reading movement and the political and financial implications of these professional development courses.

Limitations of This Study

These case studies are limited in scope due to the nature of their design. The findings of this research cannot be generalized to other schools, they can only be used to understand these two cases. This study was also limited by the Covid-19 pandemic. This research took place during the Fall of 2021 which was in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. This may have affected the researcher's experiences in observing schools, as well as the interview participant's responses about specific topics. I included pre and post pandemic data in order to overcome this limitation, however the closures of the pandemic must be considered when understanding any research that took place in schools during the pandemic.

Conclusion

This study explored two unique cases of high-achieving schools with a high percentage of students who come from low socioeconomic homes. It focused on the observable factors that led to the success of each school and also examined academic optimism in those settings. The findings demonstrated a high level of academic optimism in both settings. This research shows

how some schools successfully overcome the achievement gap to expand those practices in the field.

The faculty and staff in both settings were very committed to their students and had a high sense of confidence in their abilities to overcome obstacles to help their students succeed. I hope this research supports other administrators and teachers who want to mimic the conditions of these two cases to create similar results among students in public schools nationwide.

REFERENCES

Allinder, R. M. (1994). The relationship between Efficacy and the instructional practices of special education teachers and consultants. *Teacher education and special education*, *17*(2), 86-95.

Amrein-Beardsley, A. (2014). *Rethinking value-added models in education: Critical perspectives on tests and assessment-based accountability*. Routledge.

Armor, D. (1976). Analysis of the school preferred reading program in selected Los Angeles minority schools.

Ashton, P. T. & Webb, R. B. (1986). Teachers' sense of Efficacy, classroom behavior, and student achievement. In P. T. Ashton and R. B. Webb (Eds.), Teachers' sense of Efficacy and student achievement (pp. 125- 144). New York & London, Longman

Ateş, A., & Ünal, A. (2021). The relationship between teacher academic optimism and student academic achievement: A meta-analysis.

Aulia, F. (2016). Hubungan Optimisme dan Prestasi Akademik: Sebuah Meta Analisis.

Azed.gov. (2021). *HomePage*. [online] Available at: http://www.azed.gov [Accessed 13 February. 2021].

Bae, S. (2018). Redesigning systems of school accountability: A multiple measures approach to accountability and support. Education policy analysis archives, 26, 8. Doi:https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.26.2920

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological review*, *84*(2), 191.

Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Multifaceted Impact of Self-Efficacy Beliefs on Academic Functioning. Child Development, 67(3), 1206-1222.

Barton, P. E., & Coley, R. J. (2007). The Family: America's Smallest School. Policy Information Report. *Educational Testing Service*.

Barton, P. E., & Coley, R. J. (2010). The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped. Policy Information Report. *Educational Testing Service*.

Beard, K. S., Hoy, W. K., & Hoy, A. W. (2010). Academic Optimism of individual teachers: Confirming a new construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *26*(5), 1136-1144.

Bicchieri, C., Xiao, E., & Muldoon, R. (2011). Trustworthiness is a social norm, but trusting is not. *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, *10*(2), 170-187.

Bingham, G. E., & Hall-Kenyon, K. M. (2013). Examining teachers' beliefs about and implementation of a balanced literacy framework. *Journal of Research in Reading*, *36*(1), 14-28.

Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Coleman, J. S. (1966). Equality of educational opportunity. College Record, 104(8), 1525-1567;

Creswell, J. (1998). W.(1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*, 2.

Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The counseling psychologist*, *35*(2), 236-264.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage.

de Boer, E., Janssen, F. J., & van Driel, J. H. (2016). Using an attribution support tool to enhance the teacher efficacy of student science teachers. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, *27*(3), 303-324.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). The Sage handbook of qualitative research. *Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication*, 695-728.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (Vol. 2). Sage.

DiPaola, Michael, & Tschannen-Moran, Megan. (2003). The Principalship at a Crossroads: A Study of the Conditions and Concerns of Principals. *NASSP Bulletin, 87*(634), 43–65. https://doi.org/10.1177/019263650308763404

Donohoo, J. (2016). *Collective Efficacy: How educators' beliefs impact student learning*. Corwin Press.

DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2010). Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Gough, P. B., & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and special education*, *7*(1), 6-10.

Eells, R. J. (2011). *Meta-analysis of the relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement* (Doctoral dissertation, Loyola University Chicago).

Erichsen, K., & Reynolds, J. (2020). Public school accountability, workplace culture, and teacher morale. *Social Science Research*, *85*, 102347.

Every Student Succeeds Act, 20 USC § 6301 (2015). https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1177

Forman, S. G., & Crystal, C. D. (2015). Systems consultation for multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS): Implementation issues. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *25*(2-3), 276-285.

Gibson, S. & Dembo, M. H. (1984). Teacher efficacy: A construct validation. Journal of Educational Psychology 76(4), 569-582.

Goddard, R. (2002). A theoretical and empirical analysis of the measurement of Collective Efficacy: The development of a short form. *Educational and Psychological measurement*, *62*(1), 97-110.

Goddard, R. D., & LoGerfo, L. F. (2007). Measuring emergent organizational properties: A structural equation modeling test of self-versus group-referent perceptions. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, *67*(5), 845-858.

Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Hoy, A. W. (2004). Collective Efficacy beliefs: Theoretical developments, empirical evidence, and future directions. *Educational researcher*, *33*(3), 3-13.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, *2*(163-194), 105.

Gürol, M., & Kerimgil, S. (2010). Academic Optimism. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *9*, 929-932.

Hallam, P. R., Smith, H. R., Hite, J. M., Hite, S. J., & Wilcox, B. R. (2015). Trust and collaboration in PLC teams: Teacher relationships, principal support, and collaborative benefits. *NASSP Bulletin*, *99*(3), 193-216.

Hanushek, E. (2003). The Failure of Input-Based Schooling Policies. *The Economic Journal, 113*(485), F64-F98. Retrieved October 19, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3590139

Hanushek, E. A., Peterson, P. E., Talpey, L. M., & Woessmann, L. (2019). *The unwavering ses achievement gap: Trends in us student performance* (No. w25648). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Harper, W., Peters, Gary, Ivankova, Nataliya, Collins, Loucrecia, Gurley, Keith, O'Neal, Marcia, & Shores, Melanie. (2016). Exploring the Role of the Principal in Creating a Culture of Academic Optimism: A Sequential Quan → Qual Mixed Methods Study, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses

Hattie, J. (2009). Visible learning. Hattie ranking: Influences and effect sizes related to student achievement. *Retrieved September 28*, 2019.

Hattie, J., Gurung, Regan A. R., & Landrum, R. Eric. (2015). The Applicability of Visible Learning to Higher Education. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology, 1(1), 79-91.

Henderson, C. L., Buehler, A. E., Stein, W. L., Dalton, J. E., Robinson, T. R., & Anfara Jr, V. A. (2005). Organizational health and student achievement in Tennessee middle level schools. *NASSP bulletin*, *89*(644), 54-75.

Hoy, A. W. (2000, April). Changes in teacher efficacy during the early years of teaching. In *annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA*.

Hoy, A. W., Hoy, W. K., & Kurz, N. M. (2008). Teacher's Academic Optimism: The development and test of a new construct. *Teaching and teacher education*, *24*(4), 821-835.

Hoy, Tarter, Kottkamp, Tarter, Clemens John, & Kottkamp, Robert B. (1991). Open schools, healthy schools: Measuring organizational climate. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Hoy, W. K. (1990). Organizational climate and culture: A conceptual analysis of the school workplace. *Journal of educational and psychological consultation, 1*(2), 149-168.

Hoy, W. K. (2003). The Organizational Health Inventory for Elementary Schools (OHI-E).

Hoy, W. K., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (1999). Five faces of trust: An empirical confirmation in urban elementary schools. *Journal of School leadership, 9*, 184-208.

Hoy, W. K., Sweetland, S. R., & Smith, P. A. (2002). Toward an organizational model of achievement in high schools: The significance of Collective Efficacy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *38*(1), 77-93.

Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C. J., & Hoy, A. W. (2006). Academic Optimism of schools: A force for student achievement. *American educational research journal*, *43*(3), 425-446.

Hoy, W., & Miskel, C. (2005). Education administration: Theroy, research, and practice (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill

Kaffenberger, M. (2021). Modelling the long-run learning impact of the Covid-19 learning shock: Actions to (more than) mitigate loss. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *81*, 102326.

Kane, Thomas, J., and Douglas O. Staiger. 2002. "The Promise and Pitfalls of Using Imprecise School Accountability Measures." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 16 (4): 91-114.

Kirby, M., & Paola, Michael F. Di. (2009). Academic Optimism and Community Engagement in Urban Elementary Schools, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

Kochanek, J. R. (2005). *Building trust for better schools: Research-based practices*. Corwin Press.

Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., Anderson, S. E., Michlin, M., & Mascall, B. (2010). Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning. *Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement/University of Minnesota and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto*, *42*, 50.

Makvandi, A., Naderi, F., Makvandi, B., Pasha, R., & Ehteshamzadeh, P. (2018). Academic Optimism and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour amongst Secondary School Teachers. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, *10*(1), 164-166.

Malinen, O. P., & Savolainen, H. (2016). The effect of perceived school climate and teacher efficacy in behavior management on job satisfaction and burnout: A longitudinal study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *60*, 144-152.

Marcotte, D. E., & Dalane, K. (2019). Socioeconomic segregation and school choice in American public schools. *Educational Researcher*, *48*(8), 493-503.

Marzano, Robert J. (2001). Classroom instruction that works: research-based strategies for increasing student achievement. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development,

McGuinn, P. (2012). Stimulating reform: Race to the Top, competitive grants and the Obama education agenda. *Educational Policy*, *26*(1), 136-159.

McGuire, C. K., & Ikpa, V. W. (Eds.). (2008). *Policy, leadership, and student achievement: Implications for urban communities*. IAP.

McKinnon, Pamela J., "Academic Optimism of Schools and Student Achievement" (2012). *Electronic Theses & Dissertations*. 794.

Meijer, C. & Foster, S. (1988) The effect of teacher self-efficacy on referral chance. Journal of Special Education, 22, 378-385.

Melnick, R. (2002). Proposition 301: Promises, Progress, and Prospects. Issues in Brief. *Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Arizona State University*.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. Revised and Expanded from" Case Study Research in Education."*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome St, San Francisco, CA 94104.

Mishoe, J. N. (2013). Academic optimism and academic success: An explanatory case study.

Mitchell, R. M., & Tarter, C. J. (2016). A path analysis of the effects of principal professional orientation towards leadership, professional teacher behavior, and school academic optimism on school reading achievement. *Societies*, *6*(1), 5.

Moats, L. C. (2000). *Whole language lives on: The illusion of" balanced" reading instruction*. DIANE Publishing.

Moolenaar, N. M., Daly, A. J., & Sleegers, P. J. (2010). Occupying the principal position: Examining relationships between transformational leadership, social network position, and schools' innovative climate. *Educational administration quarterly*, *46*(5), 623-670.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform. *The Elementary School Journal*, *84*(2), 113-130.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 101, Stat. 1425 (2002).

Nye, B., Konstantopoulos, S., & Hedges, L.V. (2004). How large are teacher effects? Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 26(3), 237-257;

Okpogba, D. (2011). *Organizational Structure, Collegial Trust, and College Faculty Efficacy: a Case Study* (Doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University).

Owens, R. G. (2001). Organizational behavior in education: Instructional leadership and school reform.

Paz, D. F. (2013). *A comparative analysis of collective efficacy measurement and the effects collective efficacy beliefs have on student achievement in select texas suburban elementary schools*. Texas A&M University.

Pearman, F. A., & Swain, W. A. (2017). School choice, gentrification, and the variable significance of racial stratification in urban neighborhoods. *Sociology of Education*, *90*(3), 213-235.

Pikero, L. E. (2015). *Revealing Academic Optimism in a High Achieving Middle School: A Case Study*. University of Nevada, Reno.

Pitler, H., & Stone, B. J. (2012). *A handbook for classroom instruction that works*. Ascd.

Reardon, S. F. (2013). The widening income achievement gap. *Educational Leadership*, *70*(8), 10-16.

Renzulli, L. A., & Evans, L. (2005). School choice, charter schools, and white flight. *Social problems*, *52*(3), 398-418.

Rockoff, J.E. (2004). The impact of individual teachers on student achievement: Evidence from panel data. The American Economic Review, 94(2), 247-252.

Roney, K., Coleman, H., & Schlichting, K. A. (2007). Linking the organizational health of middle grades schools to student achievement. *NASSP Bulletin*, *91*(4), 289-321.

Rowan, B., Correnti, R., & Miller, R. (2002). What large-scale survey research tells us about teacher effects on student achievement: Insights from the Prospects Study of Elementary Schools. Teachers

Ruyle, M. A. (2014). *Student engagement, academic optimism, and leadership: A case study of performance-based schools*. Montana State University.

Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook for research in early literacy* (pp. 97–110). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Schanzenbach, D. W., Bauer, L., & Mumford, M. (2016). Lessons for broadening school accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act. *The Hamilton Project: the Brookings Institute*, 1-27.

Smith, P. A., & Hoy, W. K. (2007). Academic Optimism and student achievement in urban elementary schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *45*(5), 556-568.

Srivastava, A. P., & Dhar, R. L. (2016). Impact of Leader member exchange, human resource management practices and psychological empowerment on extra role performances: the mediating role of organisational commitment. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, *65*(3), 351-377.

Stake, R. (2005). e.(2005). Qualitative case studies. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, 443-466.

Stronge, J. H. (2010). *Effective Teachers=Student Achievement: What the Research Says*. Routledge.

Sweetland, S. R., & Hoy, W. K. (2000). School characteristics and educational outcomes: Toward an organizational model of student achievement in middle schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *36*(5), 703-729.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Barr, M. (2004). Fostering student learning: The relationship of collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 3*(3), 189-209.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and teacher education, 17*(7), 783-805.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, W. K. (2003). The conceptualization and measurement of Faculty Trust in schools: the Omnibus-T-Scale. *Studies in Leading and Organizing Schools, Information Age Press, Greenwich, CT*.

Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. W., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of educational research, 68*(2), 202-248.

Van der Scheer, E. A., & Visscher, A. J. (2016). Effects of an intensive data-based decision making intervention on teacher efficacy. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 60*, 34-43.

White, J., Arnold, Michael David, Hedgepeth, Pamela, & Truelove, James. (2016). The Impact of Academic Optimism on Elementary English Language Arts Achievement in Rural Missouri Schools, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2012). Academic Optimism and teacher education. *The Teacher Educator, 47*(2), 91-100.

Woolfolk, A. E., & Hoy, W. K. (1990). Prospective teachers' sense of Efficacy and beliefs about control. *Journal of educational Psychology, 82*(1), 81.

Www2.ed.gov. (2018). *Race to the Top Fund*. [online] Available at: https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html [Accessed 13 Oct. 2018].

Yin, R. K. (2003). Case study research: design and methods, Applied social research methods series. *Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. Afacan, Y., & Erbug, C.(2009). An*

interdisciplinary heuristic evaluation method for universal building design. Journal of Applied Ergonomics, 40, 731-744.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles: Sage

Yin, R. K. (2013). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Sage publications.

Zillow.com. (2020). Retrieved 3 August 2020, from https://www.zillow.com/.

APENDIX

Interview Questions

Overarching Questions
What makes your school special? What accomplishments are most valued in your school? How do you know?
How are social-emotional aspects of education viewed and addressed in your school?
What does it mean to you to work in an A-rated school?
What attributes do your school's teachers have which give you confidence in their work?
What school-based challenges are you most proud of overcoming?
What are relationships with families like in your school?
Are teacher-student relationships valued in this school? How do you know?
What are the biggest challenges your students face, and how do they overcome them?

Follow Up Questions
What are teachers in your school most proud of? And how do you know?
Describe the discipline process, procedures, and expectations in your school.
How are students' academic achievements celebrated in your school?
What are students in your school most proud of? And how do you know?
How do teachers at your school encourage students to be interested and excited about their schoolwork?
How well do teachers identify with the vision and mission of the school? And district?
Is teachers' input gathered in your school? If so, how?
What challenges have you helped your colleagues to overcome?
Do you feel supported by your administration regarding student behavior? Can you explain your answer?

In what ways do you feel that you are able to contribute to raising (or maintain) your school's accountability rating?
Do school leaders encourage a growth mindset in instructional practices? Explain how.
Are professional learning communities required at your school? If so, describe the process and outcomes.
What makes your teachers excited to learn new instructional practices?
How do you define success for your students?
Do students feel respected by teachers in your school? Furthermore, how do you know?
How much professional development time has focused on the relationship between teachers and students?
What are the biggest challenges your parents face, and how do they overcome them?
In these next questions, I am trying to understand the relationships in the school. Let us begin by saying in your experience as a teacher in this school- typically, How do students in your school treat one another?
How are parents supportive of students?
How are teachers supportive of parents?