

University of Nevada, Reno

Revealing Academic Optimism in a High Achieving Middle School: A Case Study

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of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Educational Leadership

by

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Abstract

This research investigated how one high achieving middle school staff demonstrated Academic Optimism as measured by the School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS) and the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (Revised) for middle schools. Twenty-seven teachers from a chosen middle school participated in the study. Additionally, qualitative data and artifacts were collected and analyzed to provide an in-depth examination and understanding. The findings uncovered a misalignment among the data sources. While the qualitative data suggested a higher than average level of Academic Optimism, student achievement data steadily declined during the three years under investigation, as did the school STAR rating. Additionally, survey results revealed that teachers perceived a lower than average level of Academic Optimism. In a high achieving school, it would be supposed that all data are in alignment, a high degree of Academic Optimism should be reflected on the surveys and the qualitative data, which is related to an increase in student achievement scores. This misalignment could be attributed to one overriding factor, the adoption of the Common Core Standards in Year Two of the study.

Upon further examination, the adoption of the Common Cores Standards by the state, conflicting messages as perceived by the staff concerning academic achievement, and various school policies and programs which did not appear to reflect the aggressive stance of the school improvement plan or mission statement regarding student achievement, may have contributed to the discord in the data. A mixed methodological examination of both qualitative and quantitative data provided a comprehensive understanding of what was occurring at the school.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

School climate is affected by many factors, both inside and outside of the classroom. As educational leaders search for ways to improve overall academic achievement, school climate is one element that continues to be investigated. McGuigan and Hoy (2006) stated “One of the most important challenges for educational researchers is to identify properties of schools that make a real difference in academic achievement and that, unlike socioeconomic status, are within the control of school leaders. Such characteristics do exist” (p. 204). By determining the factors that produce a school climate that promotes academic engagement, educational leaders may positively impact school climate, and in turn, possibly mitigate some of the negative aspects of society affecting student attainment, such as socio-economic status (Hopson & Lee, 2011).

The practices and policies in place in an educational institution can have an effect on the climate and the academic engagement of the overall school environment. Kirby and DiPaola (2010) stated:

There are limitations on schools as to how much they are able to improve student achievement. However, without systemic solutions, policies, and actions that fundamentally change the way in which education is delivered, researchers and practitioners must rely on factors that schools can control and nurture in order to increase student achievement. (p. 543)

Recent studies suggest that educators should strive to create schools that exude trust, collegiality, and cooperation, which may affect student attendance and academic attainment. A positive school climate may promote beneficial relationships among staff, teachers, and students providing a safe environment in which to collaborate and investigate potential relationships. Hoy (2012) stated that a humanistic school climate, one that encouraged student individuality, promoted self-actualized students with higher morale. He further stated that authenticity within

relationships between principal and staff fosters a collective trust within the school and improved relationships among staff members, further improving the overall climate of the school.

Teachers who feel capable, valued, and trusted to make the appropriate educational decisions may press their students for higher academic standards. Teachers may try harder to motivate students to excel if the environment is supportive and rewarding of that extra effort. Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckenooghe and Aelterman. (2008) described a positive school environment as one “in which meaningful staff development and enhanced student learning are practiced” (p. 160). Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp (1991) found that a “positive school climate has become part of the effective school rhetoric and is advocated by educational practitioners and reformers as a specific means for improving student achievement” (p. 2). In schools with positive climates, teachers trust the principal and each other, and they are confident that they can make a difference in student success. That confidence often translates into a higher level of commitment to educational attainment and excellence. Teachers who perceive that the principal makes a priority of constructing a positive school climate may exhibit a higher level of confidence and professionalism. Marks and Printy (2003) stated, “When a principal elicits high levels of commitment and professionalism from teachers and works interactively with teachers in shared instructional leadership capacity, schools have the benefit of integrated leadership; they are organizations that learn and perform at high levels” (p. 343). While the principal may have an indirect influence on student achievement, he or she does have the capability to ensure that the school operates efficiently and has a productive and pleasant atmosphere. A positive atmosphere may encourage relationships among staff members, who in turn may collaborate to provide challenging and stimulating curriculum for students with the belief that all students can learn and grow academically, thus increasing the academic press of the school.

Smith (2008), stated, “School organization plays a large role in the development of a positive climate for the school. The expectations of administrators, teachers, and students themselves play a large role in the academic success of schools and students” (p. 9). He further suggested that a positive school climate encourages teachers to establish challenging academic goals for students, who work hard to achieve. Parents and students, in turn, make education a priority and cooperate with teachers, creating reciprocal relationships of trust and respect. According to Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy (2006b), these three factors, Teacher Trust in Parents and Students, Academic Press, and Collective Efficacy comprise the concept of Academic Optimism.

Academic Optimism is a shared belief among faculty that academic achievement is important, that the faculty has the capacity to help students achieve, and that students and parents can be trusted to cooperate with them in this endeavor-in brief, a school-wide confidence that students will succeed academically. (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006, p. 204)

School Academic Optimism is one feature of a positive school climate. Academic emphasis, Faculty Trust in Parents and Students, and Collective Efficacy work together within a healthy school climate to create a highly functioning organization. Smith (2008) stated “Academic Emphasis seeks to link the positive beliefs and expectations of the school organization to student achievement” (p. 9). Academic Emphasis or Press, is the belief of teachers that all students can learn and be successful. A climate of excellence is often the result of promoting high expectations. Students expect serious, challenging goals, work hard, and respect those who achieve those goals. A school climate of educational significance, with challenging, yet reasonable goals, and the respect for high achievement provides academic success regardless of student socio-economic status (Hoy, 2012).

McGuigan and Hoy (2006) discovered that cultures of Academic Optimism were found in schools where the principals enabled the academic mission of the school. They posited that principals can structure their schools to enhance Academic Optimism. Wilson (2011) concurred, stating, “High performing schools have historically had strong leadership, namely the site principal” (p. 393). Principal behavior and School Academic Optimism are two important factors that necessitate further investigation to promote a strong, positive, and trusting school environment. Hoy and Sabo (1998) discussed the importance of school climate to academic success. It is their theory that healthy schools produce a climate conducive to learning and achieving academic success. Gurol and Kerimgil (2010) concurred, stating “Academic Emphasis, sometimes called Academic Press, is the extent to which the environment of a school makes academic achievement a central aim” (p. 930).

Statement of the Problem

A school staff can exhibit Academic Optimism in many ways. The manner in which staff perceives student, parent, and collegial support and trust can, in many instances, assist in the creation of a school climate that promotes an atmosphere in which high educational attainment and growth are valued and rewarded.

The relationship between the climate of a school and the school staff’s commitment to Academic Optimism are not well understood. While there have been numerous studies on school climate, and recent research on school Academic Optimism, little has been studied about how a school staff actually demonstrates its’ commitment to Academic Optimism. This study seeks to investigate how the staff a high achieving middle school demonstrates commitment to Academic Optimism. School structure and practices contribute to the overall school climate, which affects the Academic Optimism of the school environment. High levels of Academic

Optimism have been suggested to affect the over academic achievement of the school (Hoy, et al, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine how the staff at a high achieving middle school demonstrates Academic Optimism. This mixed methods case study will utilize the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (Revised) for Middle Schools (OCDQ-RM) to measure teacher perceptions of school climate. Teachers' perceptions of School Academic Optimism will be measured using the School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS). Additionally, qualitative data and artifacts will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted from the selected school to identify commonalities among the data sources. Analyzing both qualitative data and quantitative data will add a deeper, richer understanding to the analysis. Analysis of teachers' perceptions of both school climate and Academic Optimism may provide data about the possible connections among these two important characteristics of school climate. Such insight may allow administrators to better understand the appropriate actions needed to create a positive school climate. Commonalties across the data sources could aid academic leaders in determining methods to enhance school climate, which may, in turn, increase overall school Academic Optimism. Additionally, this study will contribute to the growing body of literature on school climate and principal leadership, and add to the growing body of research targeted at the principal behaviors that positively influence school climate and Academic Optimism.

Significance of the Study

Studies suggest that a principal's actions and the procedures he or she enact indirectly affect student attainment through the creation of school climate. Hoy, et al. (2006) found that teachers' Academic Optimism has a positive effect on student academic performance. Considering the

enormous significance placed on improving student academic achievement by state and government officials, determining the ways a school staff exhibits their commitment to enhance students' learning may lead to higher educational achievement and growth.

It is an administrator's responsibility to create a school climate conducive to academic success. "The school environment is orderly and serious; and students, as well as teachers and principals, pursue and respect academic success" (Hoy & Sabo, 1998, p. 686). Hoy, et al. (1991) stated, "The extent to which the school atmosphere promotes openness, collegiality, professionalism, trust, loyalty, commitment, pride, academic excellence, and cooperation is critical in developing a healthy work environment for teachers and administration" (p. 2). Recent studies have suggested that a trusting and cooperative relationship between teachers and the principal may produce an improved school climate, thus inspiring both teachers and students to strive for higher academic attainment. Hoy and Forsyth (1986) stated, "Teachers' performance in schools is in part determined by the atmosphere or climate in which they work" (p. 152). The difficulty lies in determining whether the school leader has developed a climate that truly reflects a commitment to academic engagement.

The results of this study may be utilized to enhance principal training programs and add additional strategies for successful school management by identifying precisely which type of school structures positively affect teachers' perceptions of school climate, thus positively affecting Academic Optimism of the school. Studies have suggested that a positive atmosphere may increase teacher efficacy and enable teachers to be more productive and enthusiastic. Studies have further suggested that an encouraging and supportive climate may be one of the factors that increase student morale and achievement by increasing teacher trust in parents and students to make education a priority in the home. Recent studies have also proposed that when

academic achievement is a priority at home, students work harder to achieve, increasing academic emphasis. Hoy and Sabo (1998) stated, “Commitment to students requires more research both to refine its conceptual underpinnings and to explore its relationships with such student outcome variables as achievement, self-efficacy, and self-esteem” (p. 49).

Research Design and Questions

The purpose of this research was to investigate how a high achieving middle school staff demonstrates commitment to Academic Optimism. This is a mixed method, non-experimental case study. Quantitative data will be gathered in the form of two surveys instruments, the OCDQ-RM and the SAOS. Qualitative data will be collected from the school, public records, and the school district website. Select demographic variables will be utilized to establish groups to determine if answers vary according to demographic groupings, such as years teaching and level of education.

Case study

A case study methodology has been chosen for this study to allow the researcher to conduct an in-depth examination of the structure and practices of a particular school in relation to the collective teachers’ Academic Optimism. Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery, and Sheikh (2011) stated “The case study approach is particularly useful to employ when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest, in its natural real-life context” (p. 2). They further stated “The case study approach lends itself well to capturing information on more explanatory ‘*how*’, ‘*what*,’ and ‘*why*’ questions...” (p. 4). They discussed how case study methodology can assist in uncovering gaps in theory or add understanding and awareness to a situation. MacNealy (1997) defined case study research as “a

humanistic, holistic understanding of a complex situation” (p. 184). She further stated “Case study research can make important contributions...if the research is carried out with rigor” (p. 182). She described the advantages of case study research as offering detailed, holistic view of a situation or event; affective information not easily obtained in more traditional research venues, and adding definition to a research question. The disadvantages, she further stated, are that they are not always generalizable to a larger problem or situation; it can be viewed as less rigorous or biased because of its subjective nature. Both MacNealy (1997) and Flyvbjerg (2011) pointed out that while case study research may have its weaknesses, so do statistical methods of research.

The mixed methods concept is a relatively new form of analysis, originating in the 1950’s (Creswell, 2014). Creswell and Plano- Clark (2007) condensed the history of mixed method research into four time periods: *The Formative Period* which began in the 1950’s and produced an initial interest in combining two forms of research methods into one study. The 1970’s and 1980’s were characterized by the *Paradigm Debate Period*, which was typified by the debate as to whether qualitative and quantitative research methods could be combined within the same research report. This period is characterized by the ongoing question of whether it was possible to combine two forms of data when they come from theoretically different viewpoints. The third period, *Procedural Developments*, shifts the focus from the debate to actually designing a mixed methods study. The final period, *Recent Indicators of Interest*, has seen a growth in the interest and use of mixed methods research.

Mixed methods research can be described as an approach to analysis that involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, then incorporating and interpreting that data. Creswell (2014) stated “The core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than

either approach alone” (p. 4). While there have been numerous philosophical debates on combining two such dissimilar methods of inquiry, studies have suggested that utilizing both methods may minimize their individual limitations. Mixed methods research allows for further, more in-depth investigation of a concept while utilizing more comprehensive evidence provided by both types of investigation. Flyvbjerg (2011) concurred, stating “a more collaborative approach is gaining ground, where scholars begin to see that different methodological approaches have different strengths and weaknesses and are essentially complementary” (p. 313).

This study will utilize a convergent parallel mixed method design (Creswell, 2014), in which the researcher will gather and interpret the data separately, then search for commonalities, themes, and subthemes among the combined data sources. Creswell (2014) discussed that the main notion with convergent parallel design is that the same concept is measured in different manners. In this case, the Academic Optimism of the school will be investigated utilizing quantitative data (in the form of anonymous surveys) and analysis of data and artifacts collected from the school itself.

Assumptions

This study includes the following assumptions:

1. The OCDQ-RM provides a valid and reliable measure of teacher’s perception of middle school climate.
2. The SAOS provides a valid and reliable measure of teachers’ perceptions of school academic optimism.
3. All teacher participants in the survey answered the questions honestly and accurately.

4. The surveys that will be utilized in the study provide valid and reliable scores for assessing principal behavior and school academic optimism.

Definition of Terms

- Academic emphasis or press: “Refers to the schools’ press for achievement. High but achievable goals are set for students; the learning environment is orderly and serious; teachers believe students can achieve; and students work hard and respect those who do well academically” (Hoy, et al., 1991, p. 81-83).
- Academic optimism: A triadic set of interactions between academic press/emphasis, teacher trust in parents and students and teacher efficacy which interact together to produce a positive influence on student achievement. (Fahy, Wu & Hoy, 2010, p. 211).
- Collective efficacy: “The perception of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students” (Fahy, et al., 2010, p.211).
- Mixed Methods Design: an approach to analysis that involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, then incorporating and interpreting that data. (Creswell, 2014)
- Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ): A Likert type survey designed to measure school climate.
- Policy: Internal rules of operation established by the institution. Such policies are developed primarily by officials of the institution as are decisions of maintaining such policies” (Holt and Campbell, 2004, p.1).
- Principal: The leader or head administrator of a school.
- School Academic Optimism Scale: A Likert type survey designed to measure the three factors of academic optimism in schools: collective efficacy, faculty trust in students and parents, and school’s academic emphasis.

- School Climate: The overall atmosphere or personality of a school.
- School Structure: How the school is organized, arranged and performs the operations necessary to achieve its goal. (Rice, 1978)
- Trust: An individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 189).

Summary

As the school leader, it is the principal's responsibility to create a school climate conducive to educational rigor and growth. But how does a school staff demonstrate its commitment to positive academic engagement? The purpose of this study is to examine how the staff and administration of a high achieving middle school exhibit Academic Optimism. This paper provides a summary of the study and is comprised of five chapters. The first chapter introduces the significance of the study and previews the research questions. The second chapter provides a review of the relevant literature on principal behavior, school climate and school Academic Optimism. This chapter also discusses the survey instruments, The School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS), the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Middle Schools (OCDQ-RM) and the collection and analysis of the data sources. The third chapter provides a detailed description of the research methodology that will be utilized and discusses the data collection and analysis. The fourth chapter will include the results of the analysis. The fifth chapter of this paper will discuss the implications of the study and future research, and provide a summary of the study.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

As demands for improved academic achievement intensify, many theorists look to educational leadership to affect student academic outcomes. Numerous studies indicate that school principals do not have a *direct* influence on student achievement, yet they suggest that principals *do* have an effect on school climate and teacher academic engagement, thus affecting student achievement (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Varner, 2007; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Williams, 2009). Williams (2009) stated, “Principal leadership has an indirect effect on student achievement. Through their role as leader of the organization, their attitudes, expectations, policies, practices, and leadership style set the tone for school climate” (p. 17). A reciprocal climate of mutual respect between principal and teachers promotes teacher collegiality and professionalism, which, in turn, augments student achievement (Hoy & Sabo, 1998).

McGuigan and Hoy (2006) explored possible leadership strategies for promoting Academic Optimism in schools and found that a culture of Academic Optimism was often found in schools where the principal enacted rules and policies which enabled the school mission. Beard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2010) discussed the importance of Academic Optimism as influential in affecting student achievement when socioeconomic status and previous achievement are controlled. The purpose of this research was to explore how a single middle school staff demonstrated Academic Optimism. The chapter provides a review of the relevant literature pertaining to principal leadership and school Academic Optimism and engagement and is divided into nine sections: Principal Leadership, School Climate, Principal Leadership and School Climate, School Academic Optimism, Organizational Structure and Policy, School Academic Optimism Scale, Principal Behavior and Academic Optimism Factors, Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Middle Schools, and Mixed Methods and Qualitative Data.

Principal Leadership

The school climate has been described as the school's personality. Central to development of a healthy school climate is the school leadership. Hoy and Hoy (2003) stated "Principals...are responsible for developing school climates that support the very best instructional practices. Thus, it is principals who should forge a partnership with teachers, with the primary goal of the improvement of teaching and learning" (p. 2). Hoy and Miskel (2001) discussed the interaction between principal and teachers as defining the climate of the school. An open and healthy relationship between principal and teachers, one where mutual trust and respect are fundamental, creates a climate conducive to trust, collegiality, and learning. An unsupportive climate with distrust, suspicion, and lack of respect between principal and teachers creates a closed climate with little collegiality or collaboration. McGuigan and Hoy (2006) studied school culture and indicated that principals affect the school environment and climate. They suggested that in order to create a productive and healthy climate, a principal should investigate school policies to determine those that hinder teacher work and those that enable their work and eliminate those that impede teaching responsibilities. They further suggested that professional development and collaboration are crucial to positive climate development. Additionally, principals should promote high academic engagement among staff and students, and positive relationships among staff and parents to further promote a healthy and productive school climate. Butterfield and Johnston (1990) suggested that an effective principal is one who is able to nurture a trusting and collegial school environment and can then project that environment as the school image to the public and school shareholders.

A successful principal is one who can motivate and lead staff, successfully implement change, establish a school vision, and have high expectations for themselves and others

(Butterfield & Johnston, 1990). The school climate consists of the school traits that affect the attitudes, actions, and accomplishments of those involved and is an important force with which a principal must understand and direct:

Indicators of favorable climate are clearly recognizable within a school: staff and students care, respect, and trust one another, resulting in high morale and continuous social and academic growth for all. The principal must be made aware of the importance of each of these areas of school climate so that effective modeling and leadership may be provided.

(Butterfield & Johnston, 1990, p. 37-38)

School leadership is vitally important in creating a successful school climate. By promoting an open, healthy climate, establishing clear mutual goals, and providing relevant professional development to attain those goals, a principal can create a climate that supports student academic growth and achievement.

School Climate

School climate is often described as the personality of the school as perceived by those affected by the work environment. Hoy and Forsyth (1986) described teachers' perception of the school climate as being affected by the principal's leadership style, and both the formal and informal organization of the school. The climate of a workplace is partly explained by the relationships between employers and employees. Positive relationships tend to promote more productive workplaces. Hellriegel and Slocum (1974) indicated that job satisfaction is often linked with productivity, and both are affected by the organization's climate. Momeni (2009) stated:

The morale and emotional behavior of a manager has an important effect on organizational climate. Research shows that more than 70% of employees' perceptions of organizational climate result directly from a manager's morale and behavior, which stimulates employees' morale, emotions, and behaviors. (p. 35)

Climate can be defined in a number of ways. Denison (1996) defined climate as "relatively temporary, subject to direct control, and largely limited to those aspects of the social environment that are consciously perceived by organizational members" (p. 624). Momeni (2009) defined organizational climate as the external aspects of the workplace culture resulting from the employee's attitudes and perceptions at any given time, while Gunbayi (2007) described climate as measured by the success of the organization. Hoy & Miskel (2008) defined school climate as:

A broad term that refers to teachers' perceptions of the general work environment of the school; the formal organization, informal organization, personalities of participants, and organizational leadership influence...school climate is a relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perceptions of behavior in schools. (p. 198)

Teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward their school are a significant indicator of the school climate. A positive organizational climate promotes healthier relationships among teachers and staff, providing a trusting, safe environment in which to collaborate and experiment with more challenging curricula. The principal's behavior has a great impact on those perceptions. According to Ashforth (1985) climate is a shared perception of the psychologically important ideas to the individuals involved in the work surroundings. He further stated that employee perceptions of a supportive and warm climate are indicative of an open climate;

conversely, a closed climate tends to be common in highly bureaucratic corporations. An open school climate can be produced by a trusting and competent principal, which may bring about an increase in teacher morale and efficacy, enhancing the organizational climate of the school.

Principals have an obligation to create a working environment conducive to openness.

Hoy (1990) described an open school climate as one where principal and faculty are sincere and candid in their relationships with one another. Teachers work together and are dedicated to the school goals. The principal of an open school climate is supportive and professional. He or she trusts that the teachers are capable of making instructional decisions based on the needs of students. Conversely, a closed school climate is one where teachers are disengaged from students and learning. The principal is described as directive, restrictive, and unsupportive of staff. Such a school tends to be highly bureaucratic with little opportunity for input from teachers and staff.

In addition to principal behaviors, other factors affect the overall climate of a school. Cohen, Pickeral, and McCloskey (2009) proposed that four major factors shape school climate: (a) safety (rules, norms and physical safety, social and emotional security), (b) relationships (interpersonal relationships, diversity, social support from adults and students), (c) teaching and learning (support for learning, social and civic learning), and (d) the institutional environment (school connectedness/engagement, physical surroundings). They stated that a successful school climate promotes students' social, emotional, ethical, and intellectual abilities by working together with parents, teachers, and administrators to promote a high quality learning environment.

Clifford, Menon, Gangi, Condon, and Hornung (2012) explained that school climate includes not only the formal organizational structures and practices, but also the goals, values

and interpersonal relationships of the staff and students. Schools, like other formal organizations, have goals, a recognized hierarchy of leadership, rules, patterns of communication, and some type of social interaction. However, according to Ross (1976), “Schools are quite unique social organisms whose behavior must be better understood if the practice of administration is to be improved” (p. 443). The overall atmosphere of the school has a large impact on educational climate or environment. Assessment of the school climate can increase the understanding of the relationship between school climate and a principal’s management philosophy. Suldo, Thalji-Raitano, Hasemeyer, Gelley, and Hoy (2012) described middle school climate in relation to the following factors: order and discipline, sharing of resources, parent involvement, peer relations, student-teacher relations, and fairness. They indicated that a positive school climate contributed to student life satisfaction.

According to Hopson and Lee (2011), a positive school climate can mitigate some of the effects of poverty for school age children. They indicated that a positive school climate can serve as a shield to some of the negative aspects of poverty, provide positive social interactions and coping mechanisms. They theorized that a caring teacher may be able to compensate for homes with little academic support. Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, and Schaps (1995) agreed, indicating that school communities that value acceptance of all students and provide supportive relationships are both beneficial and motivating for disadvantaged students.

Many factors can influence the overall climate of a school. While teachers’ perceptions and attitudes toward the workplace are significant factors, elements such as parental involvement, interpersonal relationships among staff and principal behaviors also affect the overall personality of the school. A principal who promotes an open climate promotes positive relationships and trust among staff members.

Principal Leadership and School Climate

As public educators continue the quest to improve school quality, the leadership traits of successful principals have become more significant. Gurr, Drysdale, and Mulford (2005) discovered that successful principals “promoted a culture of collegiality, collaborations, support and trust, and that this culture was firmly rooted in their democratic and social justice values and beliefs” (p. 543). Principal leadership are considered the foundation for instructional leadership at a school site (Waters, et al., 2003). According to Pulleyn (2012), “A key leadership role of principal is to put into action those ideas, beliefs, and values that inspire teachers to follow and lead students to academic success in a productive climate” (p. 14). Bandura (1993) discussed that effective leadership is important to both the development and maintenance of a successful school. He further theorized that good leaders should instill a sense of collective purpose in staff. The principal, as the school leader, is partially responsible for the tone of the school climate. As such, leadership styles are extremely important in creating an environment conducive to student learning and success. What do teachers perceive as principal behaviors that best create a climate conducive to academic achievement? According to Sweeney (1982), there are six behaviors that successful school principals exhibit:

1. **Emphasize achievement.** They foster academic success and are involved and visible in the school and classrooms;
2. **Set instructional goals.** They take part in planning and evaluating instructional decisions and strategies;
3. **Provide an orderly atmosphere.** They provide a school climate that is conducive to learning;

4. **Frequently evaluate student progress.** They set expectations and monitor achievement;
5. **Coordinate instructional programs.** They support the overall goals of the school in both the classrooms and the school as a whole;
6. **Support teachers.** They communicate and are supportive of teacher activities that improve teaching (p. 349).

By communicating and providing classroom support to teachers, and by encouraging teacher participation in instructional decisions, a principal demonstrates trust and a willingness to collaborate in the educational setting in addition to providing administrative leadership. DiPaola and Hoy (2008) agreed that it is the principal's responsibility to instill best instructional practices within the staff with the goal of improving teaching and learning. They further stated:

The principal is the formal leader of the school, and as such he or she has the formal obligation to show the way; effective principals do just that—they lead. They initiate structure, maintain solid interpersonal relations among teachers, forge a vision with teachers for the school, and are catalysts for change and improvement. (p. 31)

Edgerson, Kritsonis, and Herrington (2006) discussed that principals have the capability of changing teacher perceptions by improving relationships among teachers. They further indicated that teachers who perceive a quality relationship with school administrators tend to be more confident in their teaching abilities and are more effective educators. By establishing and maintaining effective relationships with school staff, principals can introduce and maintain a positive school climate where teachers can thrive, which in turn affect their relationships with one another, students, parents, and stakeholders. Styron and Nyman (2008) concurred, implying that establishing cooperation, trust, openness, pride and commitment provides an environment conducive to learning. Hoy and Forsyth (1986) stated:

The principal is the single most important individual in setting the tone or atmosphere of a school; hence, the leadership styles of principals are crucial for the development of climates in which teachers, supervisors, and administrators interact openly and authentically. (p. 12)

Hoy et al. (1991) defined the organizational climate of a school as the features that differentiate one school from another, which in turn influences teacher behavior. They further described the study of climate from the perspective of change, indicating that the difference between studies of culture and studies of climate are dependent on the reason for the study. If the purpose of the research is to describe organizational behavior with the goal of managing and changing it, then the study of climate is appropriate.

A healthy school climate is believed to foster positive relationships between staff members, students, and parents, which increases teacher efficacy, in turn providing support for academic rigor. In a positive climate, students respect their teachers and administrators and strive for academic achievement. Principals confident in teacher ability and trusting of their motives assist teachers to achieve their goals of higher academic achievement (Hoy, et al., 2002). The building principal is instrumental in creating school environment through his or her relationships with teachers, students, and stakeholders. By creating an atmosphere of trust, mutual respect, and cooperation, teachers are more confident to inject their curriculum with rigor; parents and students work to meet goals; and students trust their teachers and try harder to achieve success.

According to Smith (2008) a healthy climate not only sets the stage for higher academics, but makes for a more enjoyable setting for teachers, staff, and administrators. A comfortable, upbeat climate allows for trusting relationships to be forged and makes possible collaborative efforts. With collaboration and trust comes higher morale for those involved.

The principal is crucial in determining the school climate. To promote a positive climate, teachers must believe that the principal trusts, respects, and supports their efforts. Kelley (1980) stated “The climate of a social environment is formed by the norms, beliefs, and attitudes reflected in the conditions, events, and practices of a particular environment” (p. 2).

A positive, open, trusting climate, as perceived by teachers and staff is partially a result of principal leadership styles. A rigid, domineering principal can breed distrust and suspicion among staff members, affecting the climate. An open, trusting and respectful principal can have an opposite effect on staff members. Butterfield and Johnston (1990) determined that effective leaders develop the capacity of others without regard for personal gain. They further stated, “Principals must understand the importance of, and clearly establish with the school, shared values with which every employee identifies and to which they are committed as they carry out their daily activities” (p. 37). A principal must identify and understand the norms and values that create and enhance employee perceptions, then utilize them to create an effective and productive climate.

Hoy, et al. (2002) discussed that school leaders can improve trust by treating teachers as colleagues, not employees, being considerate, and setting reasonable goals. School climate is related to a healthy work environment. These indicators of positive school climate include openness, collegiality, professionalism, trust, loyalty, commitment, pride, academic excellence, and collaboration.

Principal-teacher interactions are vital to school climate and the academic optimism of teachers and the school. Teacher trust in the principal suggests the belief that faculty trusts that the principal will act in the best interest of the teachers and school as a whole. Studies suggest

that teacher trust in the principal creates increased academic press from teachers. Teachers trust that the principal will support their efforts, and in turn, increase academic goals for students.

School Academic Optimism

Hoy (n.d.) described school academic optimism as a collective emphasis on the three properties of academic optimism: faculty trust in students and parents, school academic emphasis, and collective efficacy of the staff. These three facets work together to promote a more positive learning and working school environment. Hoy stated that the term “optimism” contains an element of the possible which ties these three concepts into a unifying theme. According to Reivich (2010) optimism is defined as “a hopeful disposition or a conviction that good will ultimately prevail...the belief or the inclination to believe, that the world is the best of all possible worlds” (p. 10). Hoy (2012) discussed the optimistic view of both trust and efficacy, “Academic emphasis gave collective optimism in the school a focus on academics; hence, the name academic optimism” (p. 84).

The concept of academic optimism is a triumvirate of three paradigms; teacher efficacy, or the perception that teachers have a positive influence on students; trust in parents and students to support academic behavior and success; and academic press, a focus on high academic achievement and learning (Beard, et al., 2010). When these three components operate within a school, they tend to promote a positive climate and academic achievement (Fahy, et al., 2010; Hoy, et al., 2006). Further, the theory suggests that the three dimensions of academic optimism are interdependent:

In the sense that teacher trust in parents and students encourages a sense of teacher efficacy and a sense of teacher efficacy reinforces and enhances the trust. Similarly, when the teacher trusts parents, he/she can set high academic standards for students with the

confidence that they will not be undermined by parents, and high academic standards in turn reinforce the teachers trust. (Ngidi, 2012, p. 140)

Hoy (2012) theorized that the school staff with academic optimism collectively supports the notion that all students can learn, parents are supportive of teachers' efforts, and teachers are knowledgeable and dedicated. Soehner and Ryan (2011) concurred, stating:

We believe herein that elements within a school such as faculty efficacy, faculty trust in students, parent involvement, and the school's academic emphasis can be affected by the actions of the principal and other school leaders, which in turn, may counteract external influences somewhat and therefore impact student achievement. (p. 275)

These three factors: faculty efficacy, faculty trust in parents and students, and academic emphasis make up Academic Optimism, which has been found to have a significant effect on student achievement (Hoy, et al., 2006; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006).

Bandura (1993) suggested a relationship between school academic performance and perceived teacher efficacy. He stated, "Teachers' beliefs in their personal efficacy to motivate and promote learning affect the types of learning environments they create and the level of academic progress their students achieve" (p. 117). He further indicated that the staff that believes in their collective instructional efficacy can increase student achievement. In schools where the staff had strong, positive collective efficacy, student achievement rose, whereas schools where collective efficacy was low showed stagnant or lowering student achievement (Hoy, et al., 2002). Further studies (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) indicated that student achievement was also linked to faculty trust in parents and students. Gurol and Kerimgil (2010) concurred, stating, "Despite the socio-economic status of the students, the triplet structure

of academic optimism affects student achievement in a positive way” (p. 929). Additionally, Hoy and Sabo (1998) and Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000) found that academic emphasis was strongly linked to academic achievement. Studies indicated that academic optimism influenced academic achievement (Beard, et al. 2010; Gurol & Kerimgil, 2010; Hoy, 2012; Smith & Hoy, 2007).

In summary, within a school setting, the three concepts interact with one another. Teachers can emphasize high academic standards and achievement if they trust in the students and parents to do their best and support academic behavior. Faculty trust in one another promotes trust as well as efficacy that the school as a whole can positively influence student achievement. While academic optimism is comprised of three components, each component has been extensively researched individually in conjunction with positive educational climate, and in turn, has been linked to enhanced academic success. The three features of academic optimism are further described below.

Faculty Trust in Parents and Students

As described by Hoy (2012), “Faculty trust in students and parents is defined as the belief that teachers, parents, and students can cooperate to improve learning; the faculty believes in its students” (p. 85). Kirby and DiPaola (2010) defined academic optimism as collective efficacy supportive of trust among parents and students, which promotes the academic engagement of students. They further noted that studies have shown that parental involvement has been positively linked to student achievement.

Goddard and Goddard (2001) discussed society’s failing trust in schools to provide equal educational opportunities. Numerous reform measures have failed to increase academic

achievement and parental distrust of educational institutions is evidenced by the growing “home school” population. Increased inclusion of parental input in education has raised the issue of trust in parents, students and teachers, who must collaborate if educational reform is to be successful. He stated, “Not only is school-based reform frequently influenced by trust in parents, contemporary teaching methods require teacher trust in students” (p. 6).

Hosmer (1995) recognized the difficulty of defining trust, yet his research found a commonality and so defined trust as “an underlying assumption of a moral duty with a strong ethical component owed by the trusted person to the trusting individuals” (p. 381). Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) described trust as a willingness to increase vulnerability to another, and illuminated five elements of trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness:

- Benevolence is described as the confidence that one’s well-being or something one cares about will be protected by the trusted person or group.
- Reliability is described as the extent to which one can count on another to come through with what is needed.
- Competence is described as the level of skill one has to fulfill an expectation.
- Honesty is described as character, integrity, and authenticity.
- Openness is described as the extent to which relevant information is not withheld; it is a process by which individuals make themselves vulnerable by sharing information with others. (187-188)

Hoy and Miskel (2008) stated, “Faculty trust is the teachers’ willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (p. 192). Bower, Bowen, and Powers (2011) concurred, suggesting that trust is

enhanced by parents and students working collaboratively in the best educational interest of the children. When all involved parties agree and work toward a common goal, the climate becomes one of mutual cooperation and collaboration. Much research has been conducted on the issue of trust in schools. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) stated:

Trust is pivotal in efforts to improve education. And yet, trust seems ever more difficult to achieve and maintain. As changing economic realities and social problems have led to increasing expectations for schools, new standards and measures of accountability have emerged. Attention from the media has produced negative perceptions of the contribution schools are making to society and has led to increasing distrust of schools and their mission. In such a climate, the nature and meaning of trust in schools have taken on added urgency and importance. (p. 550)

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) further hypothesized that for students to learn, they must trust their teachers, and for school staff to accomplish their goals, they must trust one another. Parental trust in teachers to do their best to assist their children to excel, may allow teachers to increase the academic rigor or academic press. With parental support for education, children work harder towards the goal of excellence and success. Goddard, et al. (2001) stated, “When teachers, students, and parents trust each other and work together cooperatively, a climate of success is likely” (p. 14). Hoy and Miskel (2008) agreed, describing faculty trust in parents and students as the belief that they can depend on parents to authentically support teacher efforts. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) agreed that for schools to be successful, staff needs to have trust in one another and to trust in overall school effectiveness.

A trusting relationship between faculty and students provides an environment that supports academic risk taking and thought provoking investigation. Safe, supportive relationships may

allow for student growth both socially and academically. Goddard, et al. (2001) studied 47 urban elementary schools and found that teacher trust in students and parents outweighed the effect of socioeconomic influences. Goddard, Salloum, and Berebitsky (2009) stated, “Our review indicates that trust is a strong predictor of several important outcomes for schools, including student achievement. When schools are characterized by high levels of trust, teachers tend to feel greater responsibility and are more likely to invest themselves in the operations of the school” (p. 298). Furthermore, the results of their study indicated a strong positive relationship between trust and student academic achievement. They further theorized that low student achievement in disadvantaged populations may be attributed to strained trust relationships rather than poverty and race alone. Adams (2012) stated, “Collective trust motivates school professionals to share and explore information in ways that increase understanding about the effects of processes and practices on student learning and development” (p. 367). Hoy and Miskel (2008) stated that increasingly, studies show that trust among parents, students and teachers promotes student academic achievement.

Collective Efficacy

Collective Efficacy is described as the belief that the faculty has the resources and skills to teach all types of learners. Kirby and DiPaola (2011) described collective efficacy as the belief in the collective competency of their colleagues. They further discussed that teachers who believe they can positively affect students will choose strategies and be persistent in their work to improve student outcomes. They indicated that those who believe that they can successfully affect the academic atmosphere of a school positively affect the academic press of the school. Hoy (2012) defined the concept of collective efficacy as “The perceived collective judgment of teachers as a whole that they can organize and execute the actions required to have positive

effects on students” (p. 29). Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000), defined collective efficacy as the belief of teachers that they collectively will have a positive effect on student performance. Collective efficacy is based on Bandura’s (1986, 1997) studies on social cognitive theory. Bandura (1997) described collective efficacy beliefs as a “group’s shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments” (p. 477). Schechter and Tschannen-Moran (2006) defined collective teacher efficacy as the confidence of teachers that they can counter the negative impact of certain student circumstances with positive educational opportunities. Hoy and Miskel (2008) stated, “A culture of efficacy is a set of beliefs or social perceptions that are strengthened rather than depleted through their use and that give the school a distinctive identity” (p. 188). They identified four sources of collective efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and emotional arousal. Mastery experiences are the experiences that build teachers’ beliefs in the school, whether positive or negative. Successes build strong belief in a faculty’s collective efficacy, failures weaken it. Vicarious experiences serve to build teachers’ beliefs through the stories and accomplishments of others. Verbal persuasion in the form of workshops, feedback, and professional development further strengthen teachers’ beliefs. Emotional arousal assists in this building process through the school’s handling of stimulus, pressure, and crisis situations (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). How teachers analyze and interpret these sources of information influence school collective efficacy. Bandura (1993) stated, “School staff members who collectively judge themselves capable of promoting academic success imbue their schools with a positive atmosphere for development” (p. 141).

Bandura (1993) was one of the first researchers to associate self-efficacy with student achievement, stating that students with low self-efficacy doubt their abilities to succeed in

academic quests, leading to anxiety and low academic achievement. Accordingly, students with high self-efficacy believe in their ability to succeed in academic situations, generally resulting in higher academic achievement. As with student self-efficacy, collective faculty efficacy functions much the same way. According to Bandura (1993), “Faculties’ beliefs in their collective instructional efficacy contribute significantly to their schools’ level of academic achievement” (p. 143). Hoy and Miskel (2008), concurred, stating, “ A strong school culture of efficacy seems to promote high student achievement, in part, because it leads to the acceptance of challenging goals, strong organizational effort, and a persistence that leads to better performance” (p. 191). Schechter and Tschannen-Moran (2006) suggested that teachers in schools with high collective efficacy believe that they can counter the effects of low socioeconomic status, family background, or low skill levels of students. As a whole, collective efficacy of teachers promotes a higher belief in the schools’ mission and the teachers’ ability to achieve that mission. That collective confidence affects the entire climate of the school and allows for the attainment of more challenging goals. According to Gibson and Dembo (1984) teachers with a high sense of efficacy were more willing to employ new strategies and spend more time working with struggling students. This further commitment to try new strategies and to assist those students who struggle lends itself to a higher level of academic press. Teachers who believe that they have the capacity to positively affect student learning contribute to the overall academic press of the school.

As individual teacher self-efficacy is related to student achievement and overall school climate, so is the collective efficacy of a staff or school. Bandura (2001) asserted, “People’s shared belief in their collective power to produce desired results is a key ingredient of collective agency” (p. 14). He maintained:

The stronger the perceived collective efficacy, the higher the groups' aspirations and motivational investment in their undertakings, the stronger their staying power in the face of impediments and setbacks, the higher their moral and resilience to stressors, and the greater their performance accomplishments. (2001, p. 14)

Bandura (2000) stated that group efficacy relies on group members acting on a shared belief to influence efforts and outcomes. Goddard, et al. (2000) stated that collective efficacy "refers to the perceptions of teachers that the efforts of the faculty of a school will have a positive effect on the student achievement" (p. 486). The faculty that shares ideas, strategies, successes, and failures is likely to agree on academic strategies to promote success. According to Tschannen-Moran, et al. (1998), "Schools where teachers work together to find ways to address the learning, motivation, and behavior problems of their students are likely to enhance teachers' feelings of efficacy" (p. 221). Collective efficacy beliefs can be considered self-prophetic, as teachers expect more of their students, and as student achievement rises, teacher and school efficacy also rises, promoting additional expectations for students. Additionally, Bandura (1993) stated, "Staff's collective sense of efficacy that they can promote high levels of academic progress contributes significantly to their schools' level of academic achievement" (p. 142). Goddard and Goddard (2001) noted that collective teacher efficacy influences the social norms of a school by influencing teacher behavior.

Collective efficacy is more than a shared belief; it is a philosophy that is infused within the group dynamics. Bandura (2002) stated, "Perceived collective efficacy is not simply the sum of the efficacy beliefs of individual members. Rather, it is an emergent group-level property that embodies the coordinative and interactive dynamic of group functioning" (p. 271).

Academic Press

Academic emphasis, sometimes referenced Academic Press, is the view held by administrators and staff that academic success is the primary focus of the school. Academic achievement is viewed as imperative, achievement goals and expectations are set high but are achievable, and the learning environment is goal-oriented and serious. Hoy and his contemporaries found that academic emphasis was a significant factor for student achievement in elementary, middle, and high school. (Goddard, Sweetland, et al., 2000; Hoy et al., 1991; Hoy & Sabo, 1998)

McGuigan and Hoy (2006) stated, “Academic emphasis, sometimes called academic press, is the extent to which the environment of a school makes academic achievement a central purpose” (p. 205). Academic press is setting high academic expectations and instilling the expectancy of success; excelling is the expected norm. When the school norm becomes one of success, the students tend to respect and model those that work hard to achieve that success. Tschannen-Moran, Bankole, Mitchell, and Moore (2011) stated, “A high press environment affects the normative behavior of group members, and the normative behavior press students to achieve through the effect on their motivation, effort, and perseverance” (p. 154). Hoy and Sabo (1998) stated:

Schools with high student achievement have a strong internal press for academic excellence. Teachers and administrators set a tone that is serious, orderly, and focused on academics...Principals use their influence with superiors to get the necessary resources and support for the instructional program, teachers set reasonable academic goals for their students and go the extra mile in helping them achieve, and students accept the importance of academics and work hard to be successful” (p. 114).

Hoy, et al.'s (2002) found that academic emphasis was the only aspect of climate that promoted trust in parents and students

Kirby and DiPaola (2010) stated:

There are limitations on schools as to how much they are able to improve student achievement. However, without systemic solutions, policies, and actions that fundamentally change the way in which education is delivered, researchers and practitioners must rely on factors that schools can control and nurture in order to increase student achievement. (p. 543)

One such factor is academic press or engagement. Hoy, Hoy, and Kurz (2008) stated “Academic emphasis and academic press are used interchangeably to refer to teachers’ beliefs about academic success and their focus on academic tasks. Academic emphasis should expand the time students spend successfully and actively engaged in academic tasks...” (p. 822). Berends, Goldring, Stein, and Cravens (2010) discussed four elements of academic press: *academic instructional innovation*, which combines teachers’ incorporation of innovative teaching techniques with high expectations of student success; *time on task*, which includes teacher engagement on teaching and learning; *focus on student achievement*, which emphasizes teachers’ expectations of student academic success and a shared awareness of challenging academic standards; and *instructional program coherence* which can be explained as the alignment of intervention to student needs, alignment of classroom curriculum to standards, and content consistency across grade levels and classrooms. They suggested that there are relationships between teachers’ academic press and higher mathematics academic achievement. “Instructional conditions, such as teachers’ focus on academic achievement, are related to mathematics gains” (p. 303). Hoy, et al.'s (2008) suggested that teachers who feel uncertain about their teaching

practice are more likely to avoid changes in classroom practice, while those who experience a sense of wellbeing are more prone to job satisfaction.

Organizational Structure and Policy

The policies and procedures enacted within a school should reflect the school and staff commitment to academic excellence.

Principals, who seek input and advice from diverse sources of information and then rationally sift the data according to rubrics reflecting established organizational goals rather than personal leanings, garner trust from their staff... Such patterned behavior generates confidence and consistency with operational matters thereby creating clarity of purpose throughout the school.” (Wang & Bird, 2011, p. 138)

Hoy, et al. (2006) theorized that to create an environment that is conducive to academic success, the principal must create a school climate that commends the academic achievements of both students and faculty. Rosenholtz (1989) discussed different organizational rewards such as positive feedback for performance, increased task autonomy, and meaningful and important work. She suggested that if people believe their work will enhance the lives of others, the work becomes more meaningful and motivating. Thoonen, Slegers, Oort, Peetsma, and Geijsel (2011) studied the effect of school organizational conditions on teacher motivation. They stated that collaborative experiences, participation in decision making, and a sense of involvement in the organization contribute to teacher motivation, commitment, and engagement. “Committed teachers often feel a strong moral responsibility to improve the quality and performance of their organization by making an effort to put the organizational goals and values into their classroom practice” (p. 517).

Taylor and John (2002) described organizational loyalty and commitment as involving “Feelings of attachment that develop as individuals share experiences and values in common with other members of the group” (p. 84). Individuals then identify and adopt organizational goals as their own and take pride and ownership when the goals are realized. Teacher loyalty should manifest itself in pride in the school, students and achievements, and a push for further achievements.

Quinn (2002) stated “Pre-eminent in the principal’s role as an instructional leader is the ability to motivate and inspire teachers with the end-goal of impacting instructional practice and ultimately student achievement” (p. 451). The structure and practice of the school, as defined by the principal, affect school climate, which, in turn, affects teacher academic press. According to Taylor and John (2002), there are two kinds of leadership approaches; *initiating structure*, which reflects a leader’s attempt to organize work, goals, and work relationships. The other is *consideration*, where the leader maintains job relationships based on mutual trust, respect, and regard for others’ feelings. A leader who exhibits strong traits for both is effective in managing people and duties. Their research on school climate and teacher commitment suggested a positive relationship between school climate, principal’s leadership style, and teacher commitment.

But what are the structures and practices that positively affect school climate and in turn, academic engagement? Bogler and Somech (2004) stated “The more teachers perceive that they have opportunities for professional growth, the more they will strive to act for the good of the organization and profession” (p. 284). They further discussed that a teacher’s quality of instruction is dependent on their willingness to grow professionally. They suggested that principals who establish a work environment that allows teachers to perceive themselves to be highly competent professionals may contribute more to their commitment to the school and

students. Allowing teachers to have a say in policy decisions and providing opportunities for professional growth empowers teachers, which is reflected in their level of commitment to the school. Teachers who feel valued have been shown to have higher sense of academic press. Meister (2010) stated “Strong school cultures are built deliberately around tightly structured beliefs, values, and norms within a loosely coupled organization” (p. 882). Since teachers are rarely involved in policy decisions, they are not always committed to the changes those decisions create. If school practice is such that teachers are informed and allowed to offer opinion and their expertise to the decision, school morale is higher, as is academic press. Meister (2010) stated:

As a teacher, I found that most innovations began as top-down mandates often made by school administrators with superficial or no input from faculty. It was especially frustrating to witness the complete disregard of the collective knowledge of experienced teachers. (p. 886)

Quinn (2002) proposed that strong instructional leadership from the school principal is essential to create a school climate that strives to achieve high educational standards for all students. He further stated:

Principals must create an atmosphere of trust and patience. Teachers need to know that their efforts are valued and appreciated. Principals need to build relationships. Teachers need to know that they are free to take risks without fear of penalty. Principals need to model the value of continual learning and the ongoing pursuit of success. Teachers need opportunities to collaborate and learn from each other routinely and informally. Principals need to promote teacher participation and leadership in staff development. High

expectations should be the norm for students, teachers, administrators, parents, and all other stakeholders. (p. 462)

Research suggests that certain practices and programs within the school have done much to create and enforce academic press. Caldarella, Shatzer, Gray, Young, and Young (2011) stated that schools that have implemented the School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) “have been found to produce more strategies that are supportive, corrective, and assistive in de-escalating behavioral issues with youth rather than revert to punitive methods” (p. 3). School Wide Positive Behavior Support can be described as a behavior management system that emphasizes positive behavior support and improving life through positive strategies that focus on appropriate social behaviors (Caldarella, et al., 2011). Caldarella et al. (2011) suggested a connection between implementation of SWPBS and improved school climate, which has been found to positively impact student success. However, while student behavior and school climate improved, their study reinforced previous research in that there was no significant effect on overall school GPA.

Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, and Leaf (2009) stated that Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) “aims to systematically and consistently manage student behavior problems by creating a school-wide program that clearly articulates positive behavioral expectations, provides incentives to students meeting expectations, and encourages data-based decision-making” (p. 100).

To summarize, school policies and structures that support a positive school climate may contribute to student academic success. Policies that promote opportunities for teacher professional growth and provide a forum for teacher input in school wide decisions may

encourage higher morale among teachers. Such morale, in turn, may manifest itself in teacher allegiance and pride in the school, further promoting academic growth.

School Academic Optimism Scale

Hoy (n.d.) stated “A strong culture of academic optimism is composed of three elements: collective faculty trust in students and parents, collective efficacy, and the enactment of academic emphasis. These elements identify school conditions that foster achievement.” He further stated, “Challenging goals and cooperation among students, teachers, and parents lead to strong motivation that produces a high level of achievement, which in turn reinforces both relational trust and academic optimism.”

According to Hoy, et al. (2006) when developing the measure for Academic Optimism, each of the three factors, academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust in students and parents, was measured individually utilizing a valid and reliable measure. Academic Emphasis was measured using the academic emphasis subscale of the Organizational Health Inventory (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Collective Efficacy was measured using the short version of the Collective Efficacy Scale (Goddard, et al., 2000). Faculty trust in students and parents was measured utilizing the Omnibus Trust Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). The results of the Hoy, et al. (2006) study indicated that “The properties of academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust in students and parents work together in a unifying fashion to form a general latent construct that can be labeled as academic optimism” (p. 439).

The School Academic Optimism Scale is comprised of three parts. The first part measures sense of collective efficacy, the second measures faculty trust in students and parents, and the third measures the school’s academic emphasis. It includes twelve statements on collective efficacy, ten statements on faculty trust in parents and students, and eight statements on

academic emphasis. . The SAOS is a 30-item questionnaire with a six-point Likert scale defined by the categories: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) somewhat disagree, (4) somewhat agree, (5) agree, and (6) strongly agree.

The concept of Academic Optimism has been researched extensively by Hoy and his colleagues for the last ten years. Validity for this scale has been further supported by studies from Hoy & Tarter (1997), Goddard, Hoy, et al., (2000, 2004) and Tschannen-Moran, et al. (2011). Their findings support initial research confirming high validity and reliability of the instrument, as well as indicating correlation between the three variables of academic optimism and student achievement.

Kirby and DiPaola (2011) described academic press as “a manifestation of how serious a school is about its purpose to educate all students” (p. 545). According to Hoy, et al. (2006) the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of reliability for this subscale is (.83). Academic emphasis is measured by items 23-30 on the SAOS. Sample items include:

- “The school sets high standards for performance.”
- “Students respect others who get good grades.”

Collective efficacy is the belief that the entire school staff has the skills and knowledge to teach all learners. According to Hoy, et al. (2006) the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of reliability for this subscale is (.91). Collective Efficacy will be measured by items 1-12 on the SAOS.

Sample items include:

- “Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students.”
- “If a child doesn’t want to learn teachers here give up.”

Faculty Trust is described as the belief that both the parents and students will do what is best for student learning and achievement. According to Hoy, et al. (2006), the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability for this subscale is (.94). Faculty Trust is measured by items 13-22 on the SAOS. Sample items include:

- "Teachers can count upon parental support."
- "Students here are secretive."

Studies Utilizing the SAOS

In developing the School Academic Optimism Scale, Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy (2006) assessed all three variables and the reliability of the academic emphasis scale was supported with an alpha coefficient of (.83). The alpha coefficient of collective efficacy was (.91). Construct validity has been supported by previous studies by Goddard, et al (2000, 2004) and the alpha coefficient for faculty trust in parents and students was (.94). Construct validity of the scales have been supported by studies from Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003).

McGuigan and Hoy (2006) conducted a study utilizing the Academic Optimism Scale in 40 elementary schools in Ohio and found that reliability of the academic emphasis scale was supported with an alpha coefficient of (.94); the Collective Efficacy was supported with an alpha coefficient of (.94); and Faculty Trust in Students and Parents was supported with an alpha coefficient of (.96). Reliability was supported in several factor-analytic studies (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003) and the alpha coefficient of reliability was (.96).

Smith and Hoy (2007) studied academic optimism in 99 urban elementary schools in Texas. The reliability of the academic emphasis subscale was supported with an alpha coefficient of (.89), while construct and predictive validity had been supported by Hoy et al.

(1991), and Hoy and Tarter (1997). The subscale of collective efficacy was supported with an alpha coefficient of (.91) and previous research by Goddard et al. (2000, 2004) supported the construct validity. Faculty Trust in Parents and Students was supported with an alpha coefficient of (.97) and construct validity has been supported by Hoy and Tschannen Moran in 2003.

Further evidence of validity and reliability for the SAOS was provided by Bevel and Mitchell (2012) in their study of the effect of academic optimism on elementary students' reading achievement. Their study found that the Cronbach alpha reliability of the three scales was as follows: faculty trust at (.93), collective efficacy at (.87), and academic emphasis at (.92), while predictive validity of the scale has been demonstrated by Hoy et al. (2006), McGuigan and Hoy (2006), and Smith and Hoy (2007).

Additionally, Wu, Hoy, and Tarter (2013) studied school structure, collective responsibility, and academic optimism in Taiwanese elementary schools and supported the reliability of the scales with results as follows: collective efficacy had an alpha coefficient of reliability of (.82), collective trust had an alpha coefficient of reliability of (.94), and academic emphasis had an alpha coefficient of reliability of (.92). Previous research by Wu (2012) demonstrated the construct validity of the scale in Taiwan.

Principal Behaviors and Academic Optimism Factors

McGuigan and Hoy (2006) stated that the actions of a school principal can affect school academic press, faculty trust in parents and students, and collective efficacy, the three factors of academic optimism. While they found that principals can promote academic optimism, few studies have documented principal leadership aspects that affect academic optimism, although

many have studied the relationship of principal behavior on the individual aspects of academic optimism (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006).

Principal Behavior and Collective Teacher Efficacy

According to Bandura (1997), “Collective efficacy is a shared belief of a group about organizing and managing action phases needed for producing skills an certain levels” (p. 477). Goddard defined collective teacher efficacy as teachers’ perceptions that their collective efforts can have a positive impact on student achievement. Malik, Kahn, Hussain, Noor and Rehman (2011) concurred, stating, “A principal’s effectiveness is the quality of his skills/traits and leadership behavior perceived by school population in general and faculty members in particular” (p. 344). As a former principal, Hoerr (2013) stated:

Teachers are professionals who know their curriculum and understand their students, and they need the autonomy to pursue the course that makes sense to them...I won’t always agree with their decisions, but their feelings of ownership stem from knowing that they have the right to decide. (p. 86)

According to Hoy and Sabo (1998), effective middle schools are those where:

Teachers see the principal as their ally in the improvement of instruction; the principal is friendly, open, respectful, supportive, and yet establishes and is committed to high standards of teacher performance. There is no need to coerce or restrict teacher behavior; cooperation is freely given by teacher professionals who are committed to teaching and learning. (p. 113)

Walker and Slear (2011) suggested that principals have the opportunity to influence teacher efficacy and thus impact the quality of educational instruction. Additionally, they stated:

Teachers' beliefs and expectations both for themselves and for their students provide the foundation for higher levels of academic achievement and school success. Given the relationship of efficacy to student achievement, enhancing efficacy should be a critical component in school improvement efforts. (p. 49)

Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci, and Kilinc (2012) found that when principals served as effective role models for teachers, teachers grew more efficacious and made strides to further their teaching abilities. As a result, collective efficacy of the staff grew. Bandura (2000) summarized the results of several studies of business organizations, educational institutions, and combat teams and found:

The findings taken as a whole show that the higher the perceived collective efficacy, the higher the groups' motivational investment in their undertakings, the stronger their staying power in the face of impediments and setbacks, and the greater their performance accomplishments. (p. 78)

According to Hoy and Forsyth (1986), "Supervision of instruction is the set of activities designed to improve the teaching-learning process. The purpose of supervision is neither to make judgments about the competence of teachers nor to control them but rather to work cooperatively with them" (p. 3). They further proposed five assumptions for the practice of supervision as it relates to improved academic instruction:

1. The only one who can improve instruction is the teacher him or herself.
2. Teachers need the freedom to develop their own unique teaching styles.
3. Any changes in teaching behaviors require social support as well as professional and intellectual stimulation.

4. A consistent pattern of close supervision and coercion seems unlikely to succeed in improving teaching.
5. Improvement of instruction is likely to be accomplished in a nonthreatening situation-by working with colleagues, not superiors, and by fostering in teachers a sense of inquiry and experimentation. (p. 4)

Principal Behavior and Trust

An effective principal strives to create a climate infused with collegiality and trust. O'Donnell and White (2005) stated, "Effective instructional leaders must create environments where trust is felt and taking a risk can occur with high levels of comfort. For teachers to feel appreciated and to become followers, principals must spend time and effort developing this trust" (p. 68). Edgerson, et al. (2006) stated, "One of the most important of all the relational components is that of trust. It is essential that school leaders develop the trust factor necessary for teachers to follow and support their efforts" (p. 3). Additionally, Soehner and Ryan's (2011) indicated that the principal was crucial to nurturing trust among staff members. Tschannen-Moran (2009) found that teacher trust and professionalism was strongly related to how principals wield authority; those who adopt authoritarian styles of leadership fostered distrust among staff members. She stated, "For schools to become more professional in their orientation, conditions need to be cultivated to foster greater trust between teachers and school leaders" (p. 228). She indicated that for administration to relinquish bureaucratic control teachers must demonstrate competence to assess student needs, make appropriate instructional decisions, and be accountable for those decisions. Further, a climate of open communication must be fostered to share problems and solutions for complex issues that can arise. Ultimately, Tschannen-Moran (2009) stated that administrative policies must allow for administrators the opportunity to

demonstrate trustworthy behavior, in turn providing the trust for teachers to make necessary instructional decisions based on their expertise and student needs. This provides for the creation of a community of trust. “Principals must trust that teachers will act with the best interests of students in mind, and teachers must trust in the leadership of their schools” (Tschannen-Moran, 2009, p. 233).

Principal Behavior and Academic Press

Quinn (2002) indicated that “Principals who are strong instructional leaders are a fundamental component in schools that embrace high levels of student engagement as the most effective medium to affect student achievement” (p. 462). Heck (1992) suggested that principals in high achieving schools are more effective instructional leaders than those in low achieving schools. Wilson (2011) concurred, stating “Principal leadership has been known to be pivotal to a school’s success and particularly critical in schools that have ranked persistently low performing over time; the greater the challenge, the greater the impact of leadership on teaching and learning” (p. 393). The school principal is responsible for creating a climate conducive to high academic achievement. Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) studied possible links between school leadership and student achievement and found “Weak but significant effects of leader efficacy on one of our two indicators of student learning; the proportion of students in schools reaching or exceeding the state’s proficient level” (p. 524). By setting challenging goals for themselves, school leaders expect the same level of commitment from colleagues, promoting an environment of hard work and achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Crum and Sherman (2008) discovered six themes of leadership philosophy that promote a successful learning environment: (a) developing personnel and facilitating leadership, (b) responsibly delegating and empowering the team, (c) recognizing ultimate accountability, (d) communicating and rapport, (e) facilitating

instruction, and (f) managing change. Heck and Marcoulides (1993) found that “The manner in which elementary and high school principals govern the school, build strong school climate, and organize and monitor the school’s instructional program are important predictors of academic achievement” (p. 25). These studies suggest that principals indirectly affect academic achievement by developing of a positive, motivating climate of trust that makes high achievement a priority. To investigate the principal’s effect on the study school climate, the OCDQ-RM was utilized in this study.

Organizational Climate Index (OCDQ-RM)

The Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire was originally developed by Halpin and Croft in 1962 (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). It was devised to measure important teacher-teacher and teacher-principal interaction and how those interactions affect school climate. Hoy, et al. (1991) stated “There is little doubt that the leadership of the principal is important in developing teacher commitment to the school...initiating structure and consideration are positively associated with organizational commitment of teachers...” (p. 125). They further suggested that the principal is a central component in facilitating relationships between parents, students, and teachers while developing a climate that fosters academic commitment.

The original OCDQ was designed to study elementary schools and contained eight dimensions and sixty-four questions. It has since been modified into a 42-item survey with six dimensions that describe principal and teacher behavior. Hoy and Sabo (1998) revised the early Halpin and Croft instrument to include 16 questions specific to the middle school climate. There are now three variations of the OCDQ; one for elementary school, one for middle school and one for high school. The revised instrument denoted eight facets of school climate, including three principal behaviors: Supportive, Restrictive, and Directive. Three different types of principal

behavior have been identified and are assessed as subscales (Hoy, et al., 1998). Further revisions of the OCDQ-RM by Kottkamp, Mulhern and Hoy (1987) supported the original factor structure with eigenvalues of 1.92 to 16.25, explaining 70% of the variance, confirming the instrument's high reliability coefficients of principal behavior: Supportive (.96), Directive (.88), and Restrictive (.89). Hoy and Clover (1986), who refined Halpin and Croft's original instrument, also confirmed the high reliability coefficients of the scales. Prognostic validity for the OCDQ-RM has been supported by Hoy and Sabo (1998) who studied school climates extensively. Additionally, validity has been corroborated by studies conducted by Hoy and Clover (1986) and Sweetland and Hoy (2001) who further confirmed validity in their study of school climate and educational outcomes.

Hoy and Forsyth (1986) stated that "the first component of school climate is the principal's style of interacting with teachers. Three important dimensions of principal-teacher interactions set the stage for organizational life in schools-supportive, directive, and restrictive principal behavior" (p. 148). Validity, reliability, and descriptions of each subscale of the revised OCDQ-RM are summarized below.

Supportive Principal Behavior

A Supportive principal is described as helpful, concerned, and motivating. He or she uses constructive criticism and sets examples through hard work. Teachers view a supportive principal as their partner and ally to improve student achievement and educational instruction. The principal and teachers cooperate in an atmosphere of trust between professionals with the same goals. A Supportive principal encourages teachers to take initiative to pursue new ideas and respects teacher competence and professionalism. He or she labors to free teachers from extraneous administrative paperwork (Hoy, et al., 1998). His or her behavior is focused on the

social needs and achievement of the staff. A principal who supports staff is one who is sincerely concerned about teachers. Hoy, et al. (1998) stated, “Principal support includes respecting and treating teachers as colleagues as well as using influence with superiors to help teachers get the resources they need” (p. 86). An open school climate promotes academic press by promoting an environment where faculty is dedicated to student success (Hoy, et al., 1991).

Supportive Principal Behavior is characterized by openness and caring. The principal listens to concerns and is open to suggestions. A supportive principal is helpful and motivated to assist teachers in improving student achievement and educational instruction. Supportive principal behavior promotes a climate of trust and encourages teachers to pursue new innovations. His or her behavior focuses on the social and emotional needs of his or her staff and is sincerely concerned for the wellbeing of those under his care. The Supportive Principal leads by examples of hard work. He or she is the teachers’ partner in education.

According to Fisher and Cresswell (1998):

Teachers’ assessment of the environment is affected by the principal’s leadership style and whether they are given responsibility and independence to carry out their tasks. Uncertain, aggressive and disapproving behaviors by the principal were also shown to have generally negative influences on teachers’ assessment of the environment. (p. 231)

Chen (2013) found that whereas the use of rewards and punishments had little effect on teacher performance, empathy was a more effective tool to promote positive teacher efforts. Richards (2005) theorized that while principals value administrative performance, teachers more highly value professional and emotional encouragement. Richards (2005) found that regardless of their years of teaching experience, teachers ranked their perceptions of principal support of

teachers with parents, and principal support of teachers in matters of student discipline as most important. Teachers rated principals who respect and value teachers as professionals, principals who are fair, honest, and worthy of respect, and principals with an open door policy as being as important to teachers (Richards, 2005). Richards further stated that because the degree of teacher satisfaction directly impacts the school, discovering which principal behaviors are most valued by teachers would allow principals to alter certain behaviors to encourage teacher satisfaction. Gallagher (2012) described two high achieving, high poverty schools. The teachers in both schools credit their respective principals for their school's success, principals who "create cultures of collaboration" and value teachers as "professionals empowered to make educationally sound decisions" (p. 37).

According to Hoy, et al. (1997, 1998), the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability for the Supportive Principal Subscale is (.96). Sample items for Supportive Principal Behavior include:

- "The principal uses constructive criticism."
- "The principal sets an example by working hard himself or herself."

Directive Principal Behavior

A Directive principal is described as rigid and domineering. This principal closely monitors all aspects of teacher action and behavior within the school. A directive principal is controlling; subsequently, teachers have little freedom to act independently and their activities are closely monitored and controlled. Hoy, et al. (1998) stated, "Directive behavior is starkly task oriented with little concern for the needs of the teachers" (p. 125). Hoy and Forsyth (1986) described a directive principal as controlling: "Teachers are closely checked, corrected, and coerced" (p. 148). Principal-teacher communication is generally a one-way mandate and little respect is given to teacher feedback or opinion.

A Directive principal is one who carefully monitors teacher behavior. Styron and Nyman (2008) suggested that directive principal behavior was found to score higher in schools with low student achievement, suggesting that principals should provide teachers the opportunity to make their own instructional decisions. Teachers are not encouraged to offer feedback or opinion. A Directive Principal is one who focuses on completion of the task or performance at hand rather than the needs of those performing the task. This leader closely monitors progress.

According to Hoy, et al. (1997, 1998), the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability for the Directive Principal Behavior Subscale is (.88). Sample items include:

- "The principal rules with an iron fist."
- "The principal monitors everything teachers do."

Restrictive Principal Behavior

A Restrictive principal hinders teaching responsibilities. Hoy, et al. (1998) stated, "Restrictive behavior produces impediments for teachers as they try to do their work" (p. 125). The teacher is encumbered by paperwork and other demands that hamper teaching duties. A Restrictive principal "Stresses routine, trivia, and unnecessary busywork" (Hoy, et al., 1998, p. 129). Hoy, et al. (1991) stated "Where teachers feel the paperwork is burdensome ...one would not expect to find a high level of commitment" (p. 127). They further stated that restrictive principals produce a faculty that is apathetic, suspicious, and exhibits little commitment to their jobs. Teacher perception of restrictive principal behavior created by such a climate may not be conducive to academic press.

Restrictive Principal Behavior burdens teachers with unnecessary paperwork and tasks. Hoy and Sabo (1998) found that "A lack of restrictiveness in the leadership of the principal as well as

collegial and committed teachers seem to be the elements of openness that most strongly are related to achievement” (p. 85).

Tschannen-Moran (2009) stated:

Faculty’s perceptions of a flexible administrative orientation that facilitated, rather than hampered, their efforts correlated strongly with their perceptions that teachers were more likely to take their work seriously, demonstrate a high level of commitment, and go beyond minimum expectations to meet the needs of students. (p. 239)

She further suggested that teachers were less likely to behave professionally in schools where the principal was bureaucratic and teachers were constrained by strict rules. According to Hoy, et al. (1997, 1998), the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of reliability for the Restrictive Principal Subscale is (.89). Sample items for the Restrictive Principal Subscale include:

- Teachers are burdened with busywork.
- Routine duties interfere with the job of teaching.

For a complete review of all survey questions, see survey in Appendix A.

Studies Utilizing the OCDQ

Hoy, Hoffman, Sabo, and Bliss (1996) revised the original OCDQ to target middle school populations. They stated:

Middle schools are different from either elementary schools or junior or senior high schools. Neither an instrument designed for the elementary school (e.g. OCDQ-RE) nor one developed for high schools (e.g. OCDQ-RS) is likely to be adequate for use in middle schools. (p. 28)

As such, the alpha coefficients of reliability for the revised version (OCDQ-RM) were as follows: Supportive (.096); Directive (.088); and Restrictive (.089). According to Hoy, et al. (1996) the OCDQ-RM is both valid and reliable.

Hoy (n.d) conducted a factor analysis of the OCDQ-RM and found that construct validity of the instrument has been supported by studies conducted by Hoy and Sabo, 1998, and Hoy and Tarter, 1997. Further, predictive validity has been supported by Hoy and Sabo, 1998.

Sweetland and Hoy (2000) investigated the relationship between school climate and teacher empowerment. The alpha coefficients of reliability for their sample were as follows: Supportive (.96), Directive (.88) and Restrictive (.89). The study further confirmed the high reliability of the subtests and referred to Hoy, Hoffman, Sabo and Bliss (1996).

Mixed Methods and Qualitative Data

A school's practices and procedures should reflect the sole purpose of the school, the education of children. While survey data can provide insight into a research study, providing qualitative data can offer a richer, more detailed analysis of the question. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) stated "The combination of qualitative and quantitative data provides a more complete picture by noting trends and generalizations as well as in-depth knowledge of participants' perspectives" (p. 33). Maxwell (2005) discussed qualitative data analysis as being neither linear nor sequential. He described the collection and analysis of data as "'tacking back and forth' between the different components of the design, assessing the implications of goals, theories, research questions, methods, and validity threats for one another" (p. 3). His five steps to qualitative data analysis are described as determining the goal of the study, determining the framework that will guide the study, the research questions, the methods utilized to collect and

analyze data, and determining the validity of the data. These steps link and provide an ongoing assessment in a circular fashion to ensure reliable and valid research. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) described written records and artifacts as sources for researchers to interpret and find essential meanings. They stressed the importance of studying cultural materials to discover patterns, beliefs, and intentions of a group of people. They further discussed two types of theory confirmation; correspondence and coherence. Coherence is achieved when the data sources confirm each other thus confirming the hypothesis. Correspondence occurs when the data sources do not confirm each other or are not relevant.

Summary of the Literature

Recent studies have suggested that principal behavior indirectly affects academic achievement by affecting school climate. The principal is accountable for creating the school atmosphere. As such, leadership styles are extremely important in creating an environment conducive to student learning and success. A restrictive principal overburdens teachers with demands that interfere with teaching. A directive principal constantly monitors teacher behavior. Such behavior is not favorable to an atmosphere of collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis or trusting relationships with parents, students or other staff members (Hoy, et al., 2002), the tenants of academic optimism. However, according to Hoy and Sabo (1998), a supportive principal develops a positive school climate by actively supporting teachers, encouraging dialogue and promoting trust among staff members. A positive climate is one that promotes academic optimism among staff, parents and students. Hoy and his colleagues (2006) stated that academic optimism has been found to positively affect student achievement.

While principal behavior has not been found to directly impact student achievement, principal behavior has been found to affect academic engagement, in turn affecting student

achievement. A strong principal can create a climate of trust, cooperation, academic emphasis, and efficacy to create academic optimism among staff members. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) stated, "Increasing our knowledge about what leaders do and how they have an impact on the instructional behaviors of teachers will lead us to a better understanding of how leadership has a direct relationship to improved student achievement" (p. 459).

CHAPTER THREE: Research Methods

Chapter Three examines the research methodology for the study. It is comprised of five sections. The first section describes the research design. The second section presents the background, the setting and the context of the study. The third section describes the data collection, including a description of the types of data sources. The fourth section discusses data collection methods. The fifth section contains a comprehensive discussion of the data analysis process. Limitations and delimitations of the study are described in sixth section.

Research Design

This study was an examination of how Academic Optimism was portrayed in a single middle school for the academic years 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014. This study was a case study utilizing mixed methods for analysis. The unit of analysis was the school site. Convergent, parallel, mixed methods design (Creswell, 2014) was employed, which allowed for different but complementary data to be collected and analyzed.

Case study methodology was chosen for this study to allow for analysis of Academic Optimism in the school arena. Flyvbjerg, (2011) stated “ Case studies comprise more detail, richness, completeness, and variance-that is, depth-for the unit of study than does cross unit analysis” (p. 301). Crowe, Creswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery, and Sheikh (2011) concurred, stating “The case study approach allows in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings” (p. 1).

Crowe, et al. (2011) stated:

In order to develop a thorough understanding of the case, the case study approach usually involves the collection of multiple sources of evidence, using a range of quantitative and more commonly qualitative techniques...An underling assumption is that data collected in

different ways should lead to similar conclusions, and approaching the same issue from different angles can help develop a holistic picture of the phenomenon. (p. 6)

Both quantitative data, in the form of a survey instruments, and qualitative data, in the form of various artifacts, was collected. Quantitative data was collected utilizing established survey instruments, the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for middle schools (revised) (OCDQ-RM) and the School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS). Qualitative data was collected utilizing select sources found on the school district website, on the State of Nevada Department of Education website, and from the school. The focus of the qualitative data analysis was to examine how Academic Optimism is demonstrated within the school site. Flyvbjerg (2011) stated “Case studies focus on relation to environment, that is, context” (p. 301).

This case study researched how Academic Optimism is exhibited in a select middle school. This mixed methods analysis, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods, allowed for an in-depth examination of the phenomenon in a middle school. Data was collected concurrently through the use of a survey instrument and a variety of qualitative data sources.

The Case

The focus of this case study was a middle school located in an urban area in Western United States. The School District was composed of a metropolitan area, as well as several small, outlying communities. Within the district there are sixty-three elementary schools, fourteen middle schools and thirteen comprehensive high schools, as well as eight district sponsored charter schools and one special education school. According to the district official enrollment, dated June 21, 2014, the total student population was 62,424. The middle school student population was approximately 10,769. Average class sizes for the middle schools in district were as follows: English 27; math 25; science 26; social studies 27, indicating a mean of approximately 26 students per class. Special population percentages were as follows: students

with Individual Education programs (IEP)-13.4%; students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)-16.4%; students who qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch programs (FRL)-47.3%; and the percentage of students from migrant population was less than 10%. The distribution of district student ethnicity was as follows: Asian-5.97%; Hispanic-20.42%; Black/African American-1.33%; White-66.58%; and multi-race-4.38% (2014).

The school selected for this study was established in the mid 1960's and was located in a suburban neighborhood in county and was comprised of sixth through eighth grades. Over the last eleven years total student enrollment had seen an overall decrease in population since in the school year 2003-2004. For reasons of anonymity, the exact figures have not been included.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the school had been intermittent from 2003-2012. The State replaced the AYP achievement measurement system with State School Performance Framework in 2012-2013. School performance is measured by STAR ratings as detailed in the Data Sources section in this chapter. The STAR ratings for the selected school during the three years under investigation steadily declined. For reasons of anonymity, the exact figures have not been included.

Criterion Reference Test (CRT) results for the years 2007-2013 varied. Mathematics results dipped substantially during the 2012-2013 school year. Reading scores declined in the year 2010-2011 yet rose each subsequent year. For reasons of anonymity, the exact figures have not been included.

Data Sources

Data sources analyzed for this case study were surveys, aggregate student achievement data, student discipline records, school procedures and programs, meeting agendas, the school improvement plan, school mission statement, and professional learning community agendas.

Survey School climate may be an indicator of Academic Optimism in a school. According to findings by Duyar, Gumus, and Bellibas (2012), school climate and leadership practices can positively affect teacher efficacy and job satisfaction, both indicators of Academic Press. They stated “Exploring the factors that influence teacher work attitudes can inform policy and practice about the role and significance of principal’s practices and teacher collaborative efforts in promoting teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction” (p. 701).

The surveys were administered once in the spring of 2014. Teachers’ perception of school climate was measured by the OCDQ-RM (Hoy, et al., 1991). For this study, the original survey was modified to include just the three types of Principal Behavior. As such, the instrument had three subtests: Directive Principal Behavior, Supportive Principal Behavior, and Restrictive Principal Behavior. Teachers’ perception of School Academic Optimism was measured utilizing the SAOS (Hoy, n.d.). This instrument has three subtests: Academic Emphasis, Teacher Trust in Parents and Students, and Collective Teacher Efficacy. Academic Optimism “encompasses teachers’ beliefs about themselves, their students, and their instruction” (Woolfolk Hoy, 2012, p. 93). Woolfolk Hoy (2012) theorized:

Being more academically optimistic allows teachers to set goals for themselves and their students that are specific and challenging, the kind of goals that support achievement. In addition, academically optimistic teachers accept responsibility for learning, are motivated to exert strong effort, persist in difficult tasks, and are resilient in the face of problems and failures. Finally, Academic Optimism encourages cooperation among students, teachers, and parents in matters of student learning, which enhances teacher and student motivation. (p. 95)

These surveys are described in detail in Chapter 2 and are provided in Appendix A. This information, in conjunction with other data sources, was used to provide insight into the level of Academic Optimism at this school site.

Photographs. Photographs were taken of the school classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, administrative offices, library, and other common areas. Photographs were taken once in the spring of 2014. The purpose of the photographs was to identify visual clues associated with Academic Optimism.

Analyzing photographs of such areas provided information about how Academic Press was supported. Prominent displays of student projects and artwork are often indicative of a school that values and rewards academic achievement and effort. Classroom objectives and norms posted where the students can see them provided insight into the overall climate of the school. Read (2010) stated “Young children are passionate observers of the environment and, as such, their reports of preferences for interior design principles and elements are important to understanding their perceptions of the classroom environment” (p. 76). Guardino and Fullerton (2010) stated “Modifications to the classroom environment are a feasible, minimally intrusive intervention resulting in increased Academic Engagement and decreased disruptive behavior” (p. 13). Observation of the physical design of the school is often reflective the overall climate of the school. Van Den Berg, Segers, and Cillessen’s (2011) suggested that “the classroom seating arrangement can be used as a tool to improve liking among peers and reduce peer-reported problem behaviors in the classroom” (p. 403). All identifiers, such as room numbers and name plates were removed from documents, and classroom and hallway photographs to preserve teacher and student privacy and anonymity.

Aggregate achievement data. Aggregate achievement data is relatable to both the staff and student commitment to education. Student test scores, the school STAR rating, and overall

school performance may be indicative of Academic Press. Achievement data that suggests growth may be an indicator of a school staff which values and rewards academic achievements. Such data can be accessed from the State website and the State Report Card.

A school staff, demonstrating high Academic Optimism, values and rewards academic achievement and generates an atmosphere where academics are a priority (Hoy, 2012). The School District utilized a five-star system to measure school academic performance (2013). According to the State Department of Education, STAR ratings indicate various measures of achievement. The following performance indicators comprise STAR ratings for middle school:

1. Growth Measure of Achievement/Student Growth Percentile (SGP)-measured by student performance on State assessments over time.
2. Status Measure of Achievement-measured by student performance on a single administration of the State assessment.
3. Reductions in Achievement Gaps-based on the percent of Individual Education Plan students (IEP), English Language Learners (ELL), and Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL) students who reach proficiency on State assessments.
4. Other Indicators-student average daily attendance is currently the other indicator.
(nspf.doe.nv.gov).

Each of the above indicators is worth a predetermined number of points. High scores on the above growth factors may indicate a school staff that values academic growth and attainment. A school staff that exhibits a high amount of Academic Optimism may promote student achievement, which may be reflected in the school STAR ratings. Hoy, et al. (2006) stated “Academic emphasis is a key variable in explaining student achievement, even after controlling for SES, previous achievement, and other demographic variables” (p. 427). Gurol and Kerimgil

(2010) stated “Academic emphasis...encourages student achievement by enhancing student learning” (p. 931).

A school that has a high STAR rating, with CRT scores that mirror academic achievement, may indicate the school staff’s commitment to promoting Academic Optimism. The students’ aggregate achievement data, viewed concurrently with the other data points, may be indicative of the Academic Optimism of the school staff. School personnel who value and reward academic success and effort, promote learning as a priority, and provide a positive climate conducive to achievement may contribute to higher educational attainment for students.

Student discipline records. Discipline records document the overall number of student referrals due to incidents of violence to students and staff, weapon possession and use, controlled substances, bullying, intimidation, and truancy. Such records afford understanding of the school climate and as such, may be a reflection of Academic Optimism. Research has suggested that a positive school climate may be conducive to encouraging Academic Optimism (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991). In schools where students and staff fear for their wellbeing, where discipline is perceived by the students to be harsh and unfair, individual safety may be the emphasis, not Academic Press. Positive student-teacher relationships may be a contributing factor to a strong commitment to Academic Optimism (Engels, et al., 2008). Marsh, McGee, and Williams (2014) reported that students who perceived positive school climate, with strong teacher-student relationships “have the potential to significantly reduce aggressive behaviors and pro-aggressive attitudes...” (p. 35). Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, and Gottfredson (2005) stated “Schools in which students perceived greater fairness and clarity of rules had less delinquent behavior and less student victimization” (p. 412). Fielder (2013) discussed a “culture of order” in which “adults, not students, control the environment...It is the adults who must remain in control and the adults who establish the limits or boundaries of acceptable behavior” (p. 166). He further

discussed that school uniforms, zero tolerance policies, and school-wide rules and values have been linked to positive student behavior.

McEvoy and Welker (2000) stated “antisocial behavior and academic failure reinforce one another within the context of ineffective school practices...” (p. 132). Presumably, a school where students have few discipline referrals will also have a staff and administration that possess a high commitment to a positive school climate with a high degree of Academic Press. By analyzing the aggregate student discipline records in concordance with the other data sources, one may glean the staff and administration’s commitment to Academic Press.

School procedures and programs. The school procedures and programs may reflect dedication to academic achievement as a priority. Such factors as flexible scheduling, the availability of homework clubs and tutoring, and block or traditional scheduling may indicate the level of school Academic Optimism. Investigation of the school schedule may provide an indication whether the school demonstrates support of the students in academic endeavors. For instance, if students are routinely dismissed from classes for nonacademic endeavors such as drama or sports, the message to students may be that extracurricular activities are a priority over academics.

Revealing the pacing of the schedule (i.e., block or traditional), may also assist in this determination. Haycock (2002) stated “Flexible scheduling is the foundation for collaborative planning and teaching and has an impact on student achievement” (p. 6). The focus of the school staff is in part reflective of the school calendar and schedule. Analysis of this data was used to disclose the amount of interruptions and the frequency of extra-curricular activities occurring during classroom time. Such investigation uncovered the amount of time allotted for outside homework, remediation, and tutoring for those who need or want to reinforce curriculum lessons. Sanacore (2002) stated “a local homework club can provide the type of setting that supports the

school's instructional priorities" (p. 98). Review of the school procedures and programs, along with the other data, were used to determine school staff's commitment to Academic Optimism.

Meeting agendas. An investigation of the meeting agendas obtained from the school ledgers assisted in the determining whether the meetings were productive and effective for promoting student and staff engagement. Investigation of meeting agendas disclosed the topics and discussion during meetings as well as the amount of time spent discussing those topics.

Additionally, analysis of the agendas assist in determining whether meeting norms have been established to keep staff motivated and on task, and to account for time spent. Tulipana (2007) stated that effective faculty meetings:

- Begin on time;
- Work from an agenda;
- Limit topics;
- Encourage staff input;
- Respect ending times. (p. 41)

Tulipana further stated that a focus on planning, flexibility, accountability, and data review allows for effective and productive faculty meetings. Bloomstran (2002) stated that for meetings to be effective, administrators must:

- Determine the purpose;
- Get organized;
- Set the agenda;
- Wrap up the meeting;
- Evaluate the success or failure of the meeting. (p. 16)

The amount of meeting time spent on student learning, instruction, and academic activities in contrast to the amount of time spent on administrative tasks and general discussion provided insight into the teachers' level of Academic Engagement. Investigating school meeting agendas and minutes viewed in light of the information obtained from the other data sources added to the determination of how the school staff demonstrated Academic Optimism.

School mission statement and school improvement plan (SIP). Investigation of the school mission statement and SIP determined if the mission and goals centered on student success or emphasize other objectives. While descriptions of SIP's vary, research has suggested that an effective school improvement plan may contain strategies for improved student achievement, effective utilization of funding, formulation and implementation of goals, and problem solving strategies. Fernandez (2009) indicated that even while controlling for socioeconomic factors, a sound SIP positively related to school academic improvements. Fernandez further stated that school improvement plans "attempt to improve the quality of the educational setting by increasing the efficiency of service delivery through various management techniques" (p. 342). The results of his study indicated a positive relationship between student academic achievement and the quality of the SIP. In this study, analysis determined whether the plan was developed according to the individual needs of the student population. Additional investigation explored the SIP and academic goals of the school administration, and what, if any, steps were taken place to achieve those goals. Hirsh (2006) suggested the following factors to consider when developing an effective SIP:

- The learning community-the role the school staff play in the implementation of the plan;
- Leadership-skills and knowledge the school leadership needs to possess;
- Resources-the amount of time and money needed to achieve the vision;

- Data-the data required to determine the most significant educational needs as related to the vision;
- Evaluation-determining how the school leadership will monitor progress towards the goals;
- Learning-the additional support and training for staff needed to implement the plan;
- Equity-determining whether the plan addresses all aspects of the individual school population;
- Family involvement-the role that family involvement will play in implementation and support of the plan.

The U.S. federal government offered the following guidelines for school administrators to follow in establishing a SIP:

- Directly addresses the problems that caused the school to be identified as a school in need of improvement;
- Incorporate improvement strategies based on scientific research;
- Establish specific and measurable objectives for progress and improvement;
- Identify who is responsible for implementation of strategies;
- Include strategies to promote professional development and parental involvement.

(NCLB, 2001)

Review of the SIP and mission statement, along with the information obtained from the other data sources, uncovered how the school implemented the SIP and the impacts on the school during the three-year period under investigation.

In summary, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to investigate how this school staff demonstrated Academic Optimism. Each data source was analyzed individually to

determine how it related to the Academic Optimism of the school, then coded for themes and subthemes, then compared to the other data points to gain an understanding of the staff perception of Academic Optimism.

Data Collection

Data collection was performed concurrently on several different levels. Data was collected from both quantitative and qualitative data sources. The quantitative data sources included a survey instrument given to teachers at a staff meeting. The qualitative data points were obtained from the State Department of Education, public record, the selected middle school website, and from the school itself.

The protocols of The University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the School District were followed to obtain permission to conduct research. As this research was expected to have a minimal risk to the adult participants and was conducted with informed consent, an exempt status was sought. Once IRB approval was granted, the school district was contacted to obtain permission to collect data at the middle school once during the Spring of 2014. Once the proper procedures were established, an email was sent to the principal of the selected middle school containing an introductory letter describing the study (see Appendix F), surveys (see Appendix A), the information sheet (see Appendix D), and the script (see Appendix E). The principal was contacted by email to address any questions, and to set up a time during a regularly scheduled faculty meeting to collect the data. Following principal approval, the survey was administered during a regularly scheduled faculty meeting in the spring of 2014. Teachers included were those who functioned in traditional instructional roles, including those who teach social studies, mathematics, English language arts, foreign language, science, speech, drama, computers and digital sciences, music disciplines, art, culinary arts, English as a Second Language, special education, physical education, librarians, instructional coaches, test coordinators, counselors and

resource. Not included in the survey was administrative staff, kitchen, and janitorial staff, part time staff, substitutes or school health staff. Approximately 30 teachers were invited to participate. Participants were of diverse experience, education, and age; specific demographic information per respondent was included from the survey itself.

The survey and writing utensils were distributed and the principal was asked to leave the room while the survey was conducted. Hoy (n.d) suggested that the both OCDQ-RM and the SAOS be administered and collected by someone other than the principal of the school to allow teachers to answer survey questions candidly, in a non-threatening atmosphere to reduce potential response bias. Teachers were instructed to omit their names from the survey to preserve anonymity. The script was read and teachers were asked to read the information sheet. The teachers were given the opportunity to decline participation. This was a convenience sample and participation in the survey was voluntary. Those teachers who declined to participate were asked to mark an X across the front of the survey and to deposit the survey face down in a box located near the door. After completing the survey, teachers deposited the completed forms face down in the same box. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete. No allowances were made for teachers who were out of the building on the day the survey was distributed and collected.

Qualitative data was collected from school archives and records, public record, district, and the school. All teachers were consulted before the photographs were taken and participation was voluntary. Photographs were not taken in rooms where teachers declined participation. There were no photographs of teachers, staff, or students for this study. The intention of this study was to examine how the school staff demonstrated Academic Optimism at the school. As such, student and staff photographs were not necessary and could have been conceived of as an

invasion of privacy. Photographs were taken after school when hallways and classrooms were devoid of school populous.

Qualitative data provided important information on how Academic Optimism was exhibited at the school site. Detailed examination of artifacts from the school may provide insight into whether this is a site infused with Academic Press, or whether the underlying impression the school communicates to students, faculty, parents, and administration differed from this supposition. The selected data sources are listed below.

Data Analysis

This research was a case study investigating how Academic Optimism was expressed in a single middle school. Qualitative data in the form of documents, artifacts, and aggregate achievement data were collected, analyzed, coded, and summarized. Quantitative survey data was entered into SPSS and interpreted. Each data source was analyzed and interpreted into three themes that indicated Academic Optimism; Academic Press, Collective Efficacy, and teacher Trust in Parents and Students. The results were triangulated and reviewed to develop an explanation of the student outcome data and school STAR rating.

The following established survey instruments, the School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS), and the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ-RM) were used to assess teachers' perceptions of school climate and teachers' perceptions of school Academic Optimism. Individual teacher responses to all three parts of the questionnaire were coded and entered into Excel. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized for quantitative data analysis. SPSS was chosen primarily because it is a standard in the educational research field and the program's ability to conduct data management and statistical analysis. Quantitative survey instruments used for this study have been discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Also included in this step were scoring instructions for the data collection instruments.

Specific scoring instructions for the OCDQ-RM are located in Appendix B. Scoring for the SAOS was as follows: Question numbers 1-22 were reverse scored (Hoy, n.d.). For example, score 1=6, 2=5, 3=4, 5=2, and 6=1. Questions 23-30 were scored from 1 to 4. For specific scoring instructions, see Appendix C. All quantitative data was analyzed in consideration of Academic Optimism.

Qualitative data was reviewed and described independently to develop an understanding of how this school demonstrated Academic Optimism. Documents were color coded according to which, if any, aspects of Academic Optimism were revealed; red indicated Academic Press, green indicated lack of Academic Press; blue indicated trust, orange indicated lack of trust, purple indicated Collective Efficacy, and pink indicated lack of Collective Efficacy. The following indicators were used to investigate Academic Optimism in the qualitative data:

- Academic Press: focus on student achievement, clearly displayed procedures and rules, showcase student work.
- Collective Efficacy: collaboration opportunities, opportunity for staff input, opportunities for professional growth.
- Faculty trust: opportunity for parental input, parental volunteers visible on campus, evidence that faculty attempts to communicate to student families, evidence of classroom culture.

Data was coded according to the indicators of Academic Press. The results were computed and evaluated. Each category was examined to identify the themes revealed. Data was analyzed according to the following steps:

1. The School Academic Optimism scale (SAOS) was reviewed and analyzed for a general understanding of teacher perceptions of Academic Optimism according to the three subscales: Academic Press, Collective Efficacy, and Trust in Parents and Students. The

means and standard deviations were computed to determine the average mean of teacher responses to each of the three factors. The mean assisted in determining extreme scores to lessen the chance of skewing the data while highlighting the most typical score for each subscale. Standard deviation was computed to determine how the scores varied from the mean and the average distance from the mean score. The larger the standard deviation, the further the scores differed from the mean.

2. Documents such as the school mission statement, school improvement plan (SIP), school discipline records, school procedures and programs, and meeting agendas were analyzed and color coded to identify the three aspects of Academic Optimism. Written memos described initial thoughts and ideas regarding the data. These memos became the basis for forming themes among the sources (Creswell & Clark, 2007).
3. The Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for middle school (OCDQ-RM) was analyzed and assessed for a general understanding of the teacher perception of the school climate as indicated by the principal subscales; supportive, restrictive, and directive. The means and standard deviations were computed to determine the average mean of teacher responses to each of the three factors for teacher perceptions of school climate subscales.
4. Outcome variables, including the aggregate CRT scores and school STAR rating, were studied to discover any trends in the three-year period under investigation.
5. Results from all data sources were triangulated to develop an explanation of the school outcome variables and STAR rating as they pertain to the Academic Optimism of the school staff.

Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002) stated:

The interpretive process, in fact, occurs at many points in the research process: beginning with making sense of what is heard and observed during data gathering, and then building understanding of the meaning of the data through data analysis. This is followed by development of a description of the findings that makes sense of the data as a whole, in which the writer's interpretation of the findings is embedded. (p.730)

Both the SAOS and OCDQ-RM are established survey instruments with authenticated validity through repeated administration. To safeguard reliability of qualitative analysis, several methods were utilized, including triangulation of data and close examination of both complimentary and contradicting evidence. The convergence model of triangulation (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007) was utilized. In this method data was collected and analyzed separately. The different findings from the analysis were compared during interpretation of data. Overall themes and subthemes from the combined data were examined for a deeper understanding of how this school demonstrated Academic Optimism. Triangulation not only allowed for a richer, more thorough investigation of the phenomenon but also provided a measure against researcher bias.

Oluwatyo (2012) defined qualitative reliability as "a fit between what researchers' record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched" (p. 395). Thomas and Maglivy (2011) stated "Rigor, in qualitative terms, and reliability /validity are ways to establish trust or confidence in the findings or results of a research study" (p. 151). They described the term qualitative rigor as a contradiction in terms; the Latin definition of rigor is stiff and precise, while qualitative research "is a journey of explanation and discovery that does not lend to stiff boundaries" (p. 151). Reliability for the proposed study was computed and reported utilizing Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability.

Drost (2011) defined validity as "A qualitative means of ensuring that indicators tap the meaning of a concept as defined by the researcher" (p. 118). Creswell and Miller (2000)

discussed validity in qualitative research as referring not to the data itself but to the implications drawn from the data. They further suggested establishing a lens with which to view the qualitative data to determine credibility of the study. This researcher utilized the SAOS survey responses as the lens with which to view the qualitative data results. Creswell and Miller (2000) stated “This lens suggests the importance of checking how accurately participants’ realities have been represented in the final account” (p. 125). According to Creswell and Miller (2000), employing a lens may allow the researcher to determine whether interpretations of qualitative data accurately represent the participants’ views. Fossey, et al (2002) stated:

The analytical procedure typically involves two levels of analysis: first, to review, identify and code recurrent themes within data for each participant; and second, using similar steps, to identify common themes and areas of divergence across participants. Finally, it usually entails bringing identified themes back together into meaningful relation with each other; developing, as it were, a narrative or structural synthesis of the core elements of the experiences described. (p. 728)

They further stated,

Coding, that is, labelling segments of data to identify themes, or processes, is central to effective data retrieval in two ways [6]. It enables the researcher to locate and bring together similarly labelled data for examination and to retrieve data related to more than one label when wanting to consider patterns, connections, or distinctions between them. (p. 728)

Creswell (2009) suggested that field notes be categorized and transcribed to investigate common themes, then analyzed into sub or interrelated themes. Qualitative data was reviewed, interpreted, and color coded to identify the three aspects of Academic Optimism. The data was then reviewed again to determine any patterns or inconsistencies among the individual data points. The qualitative data was integrated and compared to understand any themes across the

data, then finally compared against the quantitative data results. As expected, there were some overlapping themes as well as some contradictory statements among the different data sources. The outcomes were presented in both table format and in discussion. The results were utilized to answer the research question of how Academic Optimism was exhibited by the school staff at the selected middle school. Both complimentary and contradictory outcomes were reported and implications will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Both qualitative and quantitative data was investigated in this case study. Quantitative data was inputted into SPSS statistical software. The results of this analysis were triangulated with the other data sources to understand common themes and subthemes for further understanding of how Academic Optimism was demonstrated by the selected middle school staff. Discrepancies among the data sources was investigated and discussed in Chapter 5.

Limitations of the Study

The study was expected to have the following limitations:

1. This study was drawn from a single school and may not be applicable to other schools or districts or be representative of the larger population.
2. The number of respondents was limited to those teachers who are in attendance the day the survey is given. No accommodations were made for those teachers who will be out of the building the day the survey is conducted.
3. The focus of this study was limited to school climate, school Academic Optimism and the structure and practices of a single school and was restricted to the data collected from the SAOS, OCDQ-RM, and analysis of artifacts, and specific demographics.
4. This study did not take into effect future changes or outside influences after the survey has been completed and findings did not generalize to other time periods.

5. Respondents may have feared lack of anonymity in the work place and responses may not have reflected respondents true beliefs if he or she feared repercussions from building administrators for unfavorable responses.
6. The OCDQ-RM concerned itself with only teacher-principal behaviors without input from students.
7. Data is subjective, meaning that different teachers may feel differently or have had different experiences with the principal; one may see the principal as directive where another may see the same principal as supportive.
8. The researcher chose select qualitative data sources available at the school. Some sources of data may have been omitted.
9. The researcher was employed at the chosen school. Potential researcher bias was minimized by researcher identity memos (Creswell, 2009) to identify possible preconceptions toward the study on the part of the researcher. Awareness and reflection of impartiality allowed the researcher to limit such bias.

Bias. Mays and Pope (1995) stated that qualitative researchers should have two goals, to create such a record of method and data collection to be easily reproducible by others; and to thoroughly explain the phenomenon under study. Potential bias on the part of the researcher was minimized by what Creswell (2007) coined “researcher identity memos” to identify and bring about awareness of the perspective this researcher brings to the study. To combat the researcher’s potential for bias, this researcher did as Norris suggested and voiced potential bias for examination, as well as followed Mays and Pope’s (1995) goals of recording and thoroughly explaining both the phenomenon under examination, and data collection methods. Such awareness allowed the researcher to reflect on possible predisposition towards the research and rectify such impartiality.

As a teacher who was employed at the middle school under investigation, she was aware of the potential of bias. By clearly explaining what has been investigated and why this researcher came to the conclusions she did, she hoped to avoid the common hazards that many qualitative researchers confront. Contradictory results were either reexamined or followed up to determine the reason and impact on the research study. Additionally, both data sets were triangulated for purposes of theme development and interrelationships of themes. This review assisted the researcher in discovering any predisposition toward the study by uncovering both complimentary and conflicting themes. Contradictory results were examined to determine the source of the inconsistency to determine whether it is data related or bias on the part of the researcher. Finally, all results were reviewed by the dissertation committee to further limit potential bias and add a set of “fresh eyes” to the interpretation of data.

Delimitations of the Study

1. The researcher chose not to include staff interviews.
2. The researcher chose not to interview the principal of the school.

Summary

This case study was designed to investigate how Academic Optimism was exhibited in a single middle school site. Chapter Three described the methodology for the study in which both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analyzed. The survey instrument utilized had three sections, the OCDQ-RM (revised) for school climate; SAOS for school Academic Optimism and a third section for demographic information. Qualitative data in the form of agendas, school calendar, and aggregate achievement data was collected from the school itself and public and district record. Participants were certified teachers from the selected middle school site.

CHAPTER FOUR: Results

This study investigated how Academic Optimism was expressed in a high achieving middle school. Data was collected by means of two survey instruments and artifacts from the State Department of Education, the State Report Card, and the middle school. This mixed methods case study utilized the School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS) to evaluate teachers' perceptions of Academic Optimism, which consists of the dimensions of Academic Press, Collective Efficacy, and Trust in Parents and Students. The SAOS was complemented by the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (Revised) for Middle Schools (OCDQ-RM) to measure teachers' perceptions of school climate. This instrument was revised for this study and measured teachers' perceptions of three dimensions of Principal Behavior; Supportive, Restrictive, and Directive. Qualitative data in the form of documents, artifacts, and aggregate achievement data were collected, analyzed, coded, and summarized.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The SAOS was reviewed and analyzed for a general understanding of teacher perceptions of Academic Optimism with respect to the three subscales: Academic Press, Collective Efficacy, and Trust in Parents and Students. The SAOS included twelve statements on Collective Efficacy, ten statements on Faculty Trust in Parents and Students, and eight statements on Academic Press. Results for the OCDQ-RM were compared to the dimensions of Academic Optimism. Means, standard deviations, and frequencies were computed, and correlations computed across each of the three subscales of Academic Optimism and each of the three scales of Principal Behavior from the OCDQ-RM: Supportive Principal Behavior, Restrictive Principal Behavior, and Directive Principal Behavior. Correlation results were analyzed to determine if there were linear relationships among the six subscales.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data was reviewed and described independently from the survey data to develop an understanding of how Academic Optimism was revealed at the school site. Documents were color coded according to which, if any, aspects of Academic Optimism were revealed; red signified the presence of Academic Press, green signaled the lack of Academic Press; blue signified the presence of Trust, orange signaled the lack of Trust; purple signified the presence of Collective Efficacy, pink signaled the lack of Collective Efficacy. If the data analysis revealed an absence of the indicators, they were coded accordingly. For instance, if the analysis reflected that rules and school norms were not clearly posted, or not posted at all, the data was coded green for lack of Academic Press. The following components of Academic Optimism were used to investigate the qualitative data:

- Academic Press: focus on student achievement, clearly displayed procedures and rules, showcase student work.
- Collective Efficacy: collaboration opportunities, opportunity for staff input, opportunities for professional growth.
- Faculty trust: opportunity for parental input, parental volunteers visible on campus, evidence that faculty attempts to communicate to student families, evidence that the staff attempts to create a positive school climate.

Table 1 provides a summary of the color coding procedure for the qualitative data.

Table 1
Summary of Color Coding Procedure for Qualitative Data

Coding		
Indicator	Present	Lacking
Academic Press	Red	Green
Efficacy	Purple	Pink
Trust	Blue	Orange

Once coded, each data source was analyzed and interpreted with respect to the three components of Academic Optimism: Academic Press, Collective Efficacy, and Trust in Parents and Students. Coded sections of the documents were categorized and assessed collectively, then re-assessed to develop a perception of similarities and/or discrepancies among the data. Once independently analyzed, each category was examined and then compared to the SAOS dimensions to determine if the indicators of Academic Optimism were present within each data source. Next, aggregate achievement data was reviewed to determine if the student outcomes and school STAR ratings reflected the three dimensions of Academic Optimism. The results were further triangulated and reviewed to develop an understanding of the student outcome data and school STAR rating. All the data was then reviewed and analyzed collectively to develop and understanding of how this school demonstrated Academic Optimism. This chapter presents the results of the data analysis.

Results

SAOS Survey Response Data

As a result of the small sample size for this study ($n=27$) traditional statistical analysis could not be conducted. However, frequency distributions and Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient correlational analysis were computed. Additionally, the means and standard deviations were computed to determine the descriptive statistics for teacher responses to each of the three dimensions. Hoy (n.d) developed standardized Academic Optimism normative scores; for the purposes of this study, the subscale normative means and standard deviations were used as comparison data. Employing the method developed by Hoy, et al. (2006) scores were computed for each subscale. Analysis revealed that the teacher perceptions for the subscales varied from Hoy's established normative group scores. The mean scores for both Academic Press and Trust

in Parents and Students as perceived by the teachers were lower than the corresponding normative group values. The study group mean response to the Academic Press questions was interpreted to be low as compared to the normative group mean. Also considered low was the study group mean response to the Trust questions as compared to the normative group mean.. Considered higher than the norm value, however, was the study group mean for Collective Efficacy score as compared to the normative group mean. The standard deviations for all three subscales were higher for the study group than the corresponding values for the normative group, indicating that there was a wider range of responses in the study group than what was considered standard. Table 2 summarizes the subscale means and standard deviations for both Hoy's normative group and the study group.

Table 2

Summary of the Means and Standard Deviations for Hoy's Normative Group Values and Corresponding Values of the Study Group

Subscale	*Hoy's Norming Values		Study Values	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Academic Press	2.75	0.26	2.36	0.44
Collective Efficacy	3.96	0.33	4.43	0.69
Trust in Parents and Students	3.65	0.39	3.49	0.71

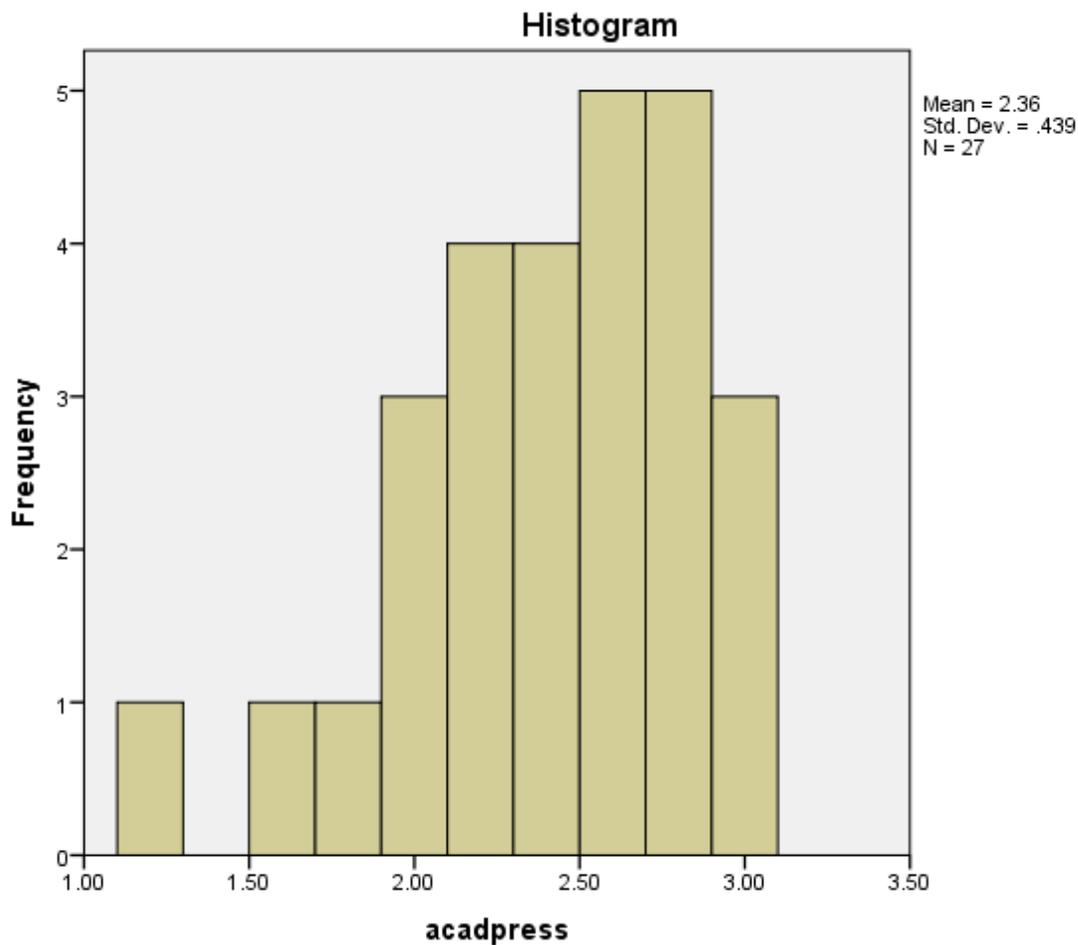
Note. *Hoy, et al. (2006).

Academic press. Frequencies for the three scales of Academic Optimism are represented in Figures 1, 2, and 3. Figure 1 summarizes the mean teacher responses to the eight survey items reflecting Academic Press. Scores ranged from: (1) rarely; (2) sometimes; (3) often; and (4) very often. The number of respondents was 27. According to Hoy (2006) the mean normative score for Academic Press is 2.75 while the study group mean score for the Academic Press questions was 2.36. This indicated that the study group average response was lower than the normative average response; that is, that the teachers in this study perceived Academic Press to be lower

than the normative group. This mean reflected the study group response as between sometimes and often, while the normative group response was closer to often. The standard deviation for Hoy's norm was .26, while the standard deviation for the present study was .44. The study group score of 2.36 was 1.5 standard deviations above Hoy's normative mean. Of the 27 surveyed, the mean reply for three, or approximately 11% of the respondents was "rarely," the mean reply for 21, or approximately 78% of the respondents was "sometimes," and the mean response for three or approximately 11% of the respondents was "often." None of those surveyed replied "very often" to the Academic Press questions. The study group mean responses for the Academic Press questions were skewed left, indicating that the mean of 2.36 was lower than the median response of 2.30 from the study group.

Figure 1

Summary of Study Group Frequencies of Mean Responses for Academic Press

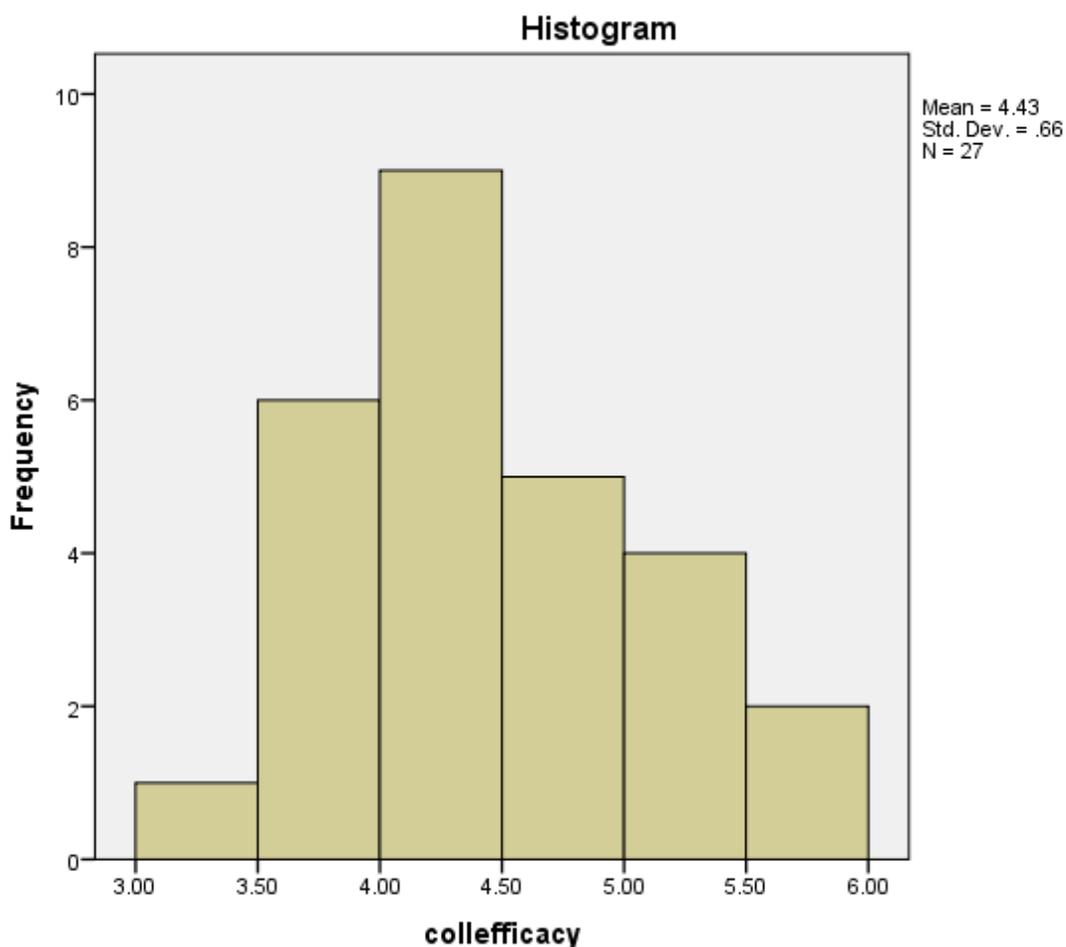


Collective efficacy. Figure 2 summarizes the mean study group responses to the 12 survey questions indicating Collective Efficacy. Scores ranged from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) somewhat disagree, (4) somewhat agree, (5) agree, and (6) strongly agree. According to Hoy (2006) the mean study group scores for the subscale Collective Efficacy was 3.96. The standard deviation for the study group was higher than the norm, .69 as compared to the norm of .33. Thus, the score of 4.43 is 1.42 standard deviations above Hoy's normative group mean. Of the 27 respondents, 7 responded "somewhat disagree," 14 responded "somewhat agree," and 6

responded “agree” to the Collective Efficacy questions. No one responded somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree. There was no skew in the data indicating that there were an equal number of responses on either side of the mean. Twenty-one, or approximately 78%, responded with answers between “somewhat disagree” and “agree,” and all 27, or 100%, responded between “somewhat disagree” and “strongly agree.”

Figure 2

Summary of Study Group Frequencies of Mean Responses for Collective Efficacy

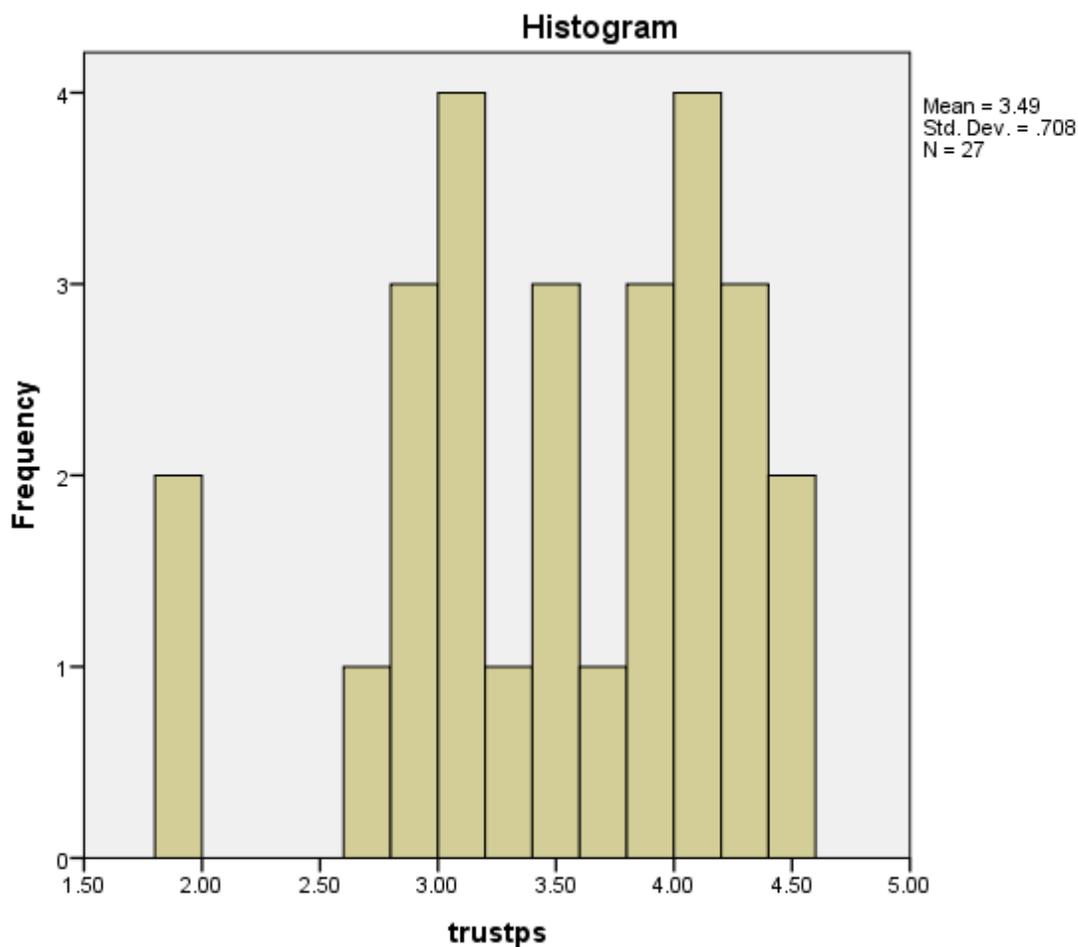


Trust in parents and students. Figure 3 summarizes the study group mean responses to the 10 survey items that addressed Faculty Trust in Parents and Students. The responses ranged from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) somewhat disagree, (4) somewhat agree, (5) agree, and (6)

strongly agree. According to Hoy's (2006) calculations, the norm score for trust was 3.65. This investigation revealed the mean teacher response to the trust questions was 3.49, reflecting a slightly lower average teacher response to the trust questions. The average teacher response was between somewhat disagree and somewhat agree. The standard deviation for the study group was .71 as compared to Hoy's normative group score of .39. Thus, the study group score of 3.49 was .41 standard deviations below the mean. Of the 27 respondents, 6, or approximately 22%, responded "disagree," 12, or approximately 44%, responded "somewhat disagree," and 9, or approximately 33%, responded "somewhat agree." No one responded agree or strongly agree to the Trust in Parents and Students questions. There was no skew in the data, indicating that the mean of 3.49 is close to the median of 3.50 and that there were an equal number of responses on either side of the mean.

Figure 3

Summary of Study Group Frequencies of Mean Responses for Trust in Parents and Students



Qualitative Data

Once the SAOS responses had been computed, the qualitative data was coded and analyzed according to the three dimensions of Academic Optimism: Academic Press, Collective Efficacy, and Trust in Parents and Students. The results are summarized below.

School improvement plan (SIP). Theoretically, an SIP should be developed based on the beliefs, values, and goals of school staff and administration. Furthermore, an SIP should provide a plan to promote student growth and learning. Dunaway, Do-Hong, and Szad (2012) stated that

an SIP should be established utilizing “Scientifically based research, policies, and practices related to core academic areas, professional development, measurable objectives, and parental involvement are typically evident” (p. 159). Analysis of the school improvement plan (SIP) for all three years included evidence of Academic Press, Efficacy, and Trust in Parents and Students.

Academic Press. Academic Press is exhibited by a focus on student academic achievement as the priority of both staff and administration. The administration and staff collaboration related to the SIP indicated a commitment to student achievement in all three years under investigation.

Year one. In Year One, indicators of Academic Press were observed 28 times in the SIP. Academic Press was suggested in statements such as “a highly challenging math curriculum to all students that requires increased rigor at all levels while maintaining the expectation of success for all students” (p. 3) and “Provide extensive opportunities to improve reading comprehension in all content areas offering challenging curriculum for all students and appropriate support for continuous improvement...” (p. 4). Additionally, statements relating to specific academic subjects were also tallied: English Language Arts was mentioned 13 times; mathematics was mentioned 17 times; science was mentioned 3 times, and social studies was mentioned 2 times.

Year two. In Year Two, indicators of Academic Press were observed 69 times in the SIP. The school administration elaborated on the SIP in Year Two by further expanding several of the Priority Concerns found in Year One. For example, Priority Concern 2 was expanded from Year One to further indicate Academic Press with the statement “Our capacity for delivering a highly challenging, comprehensive math curriculum to all students, which requires increased rigor at all levels without sacrificing high expectations for all students” (p. 9). Another example was provided in Goal One:

Teachers will provide extensive opportunities to improve student literacy in all content areas by offering challenging curriculum for all students and appropriate support for continuous

improvement, which will result in a two to seven point increase on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) reading RIT scores and a median growth percentile of 60 percent or greater across all sub populations on Nevada CRTs. (p. 7)

Additionally, statements relating to specific academic subjects were also tallied: English Language Arts was mentioned 15 times; mathematics was mentioned 21 times; science was mentioned 5 times; and social studies was mentioned 6 times. In each case, the number of references increased from Year One.

Year three. In Year Three, indicators of Academic Press were observed 71 times in the SIP. Emphasis on student success and academic attainment became more explicit in the SIP for Year Three. For example, Goal 1 stated “that all students show significant growth in learning the grade level mathematical content required by the Nevada Academic Content Standards (NVACS) and learn to apply the eight mathematical practices to solve problems at higher cognitive levels” (p. 2). Goal 2 stated “to improve all students’ ability to understand and explain deeper meaning from complex texts by employing the shifts of the Nevada Academic Content Standards in language arts and literacy...” (p. 5). The SIP exhibited indicators of Academic Press by focusing on the NVACS and proposing strategies for student growth to meet those standards. Additionally, statements relating to specific academic subjects were also tallied: mention of English Language Arts increased to 21 times; mathematics decreased to 17 times, as did science, once, and social studies, twice.

Collective Efficacy. Collective Efficacy of a staff is evidenced by opportunities for professional development, collaboration among staff members, and staff input into decisions (Tschannen-Moran, et al., 1998). The investigation of the SIP indicated Collective Efficacy in all three years.

Year one. In Year One, indicators of Collective Efficacy were observed 16 times in the SIP. Statements referring to school staff's "Ability to provide job-imbedded ongoing professional development for teachers, enabling them to meet the literacy demands of the Common Core State Standards" (p. 9) in Year One indicated the presence of Collective Efficacy by promoting professional development for teachers to improve their practice. Evidence of collaboration and professional development of staff was further exhibited by the commitment to provide "Specialized professional development focused on implementation of the Springboard curriculum..." (p. 6). The statement "New teachers also receive support and guidance from their academic core teams...within this structure new teaches are supported by veteran teachers and advised on issues of classroom management" (p. 11) provided evidence of collaboration.

Year two. In Year Two, indicators of Collective Efficacy were observed 18 times in the SIP. The Year Two SIP reiterated the prior year. For example, Efficacy was exhibited in Priority Concern 1, which reiterated from Year One the need for the "Ability to provide job-imbedded ongoing professional development for teachers, enabling them to meet the literacy demands of the Common Core State Standards" (p. 9) and added the words "Provide ongoing differentiated professional development for all content areas to facilitate implementation of the common core state standards and the Teacher Professional Growth System" offered evidence of increased Collective Efficacy.

Year three. In Year Three, indicators of Collective Efficacy were observed 45 times in the SIP. Collective Efficacy was further evidenced in the Action Plan of Goals 1 and 2, entitled "Professional Development." The statements "Weekly math department collaboration to align math content, lesson planning, instruction, and assessments with the expectations of the NVACS and SBAC test items" (p. 4) and "ongoing professional development for all math teachers that

trains them in matching learning and teaching practice with the demands of the NVACS” (p. 3) further indicated opportunity for professional development as did the statement “Professional development will need to focus on strategic lesson planning, delivering higher level content, increasing student cognitive engagement, aligning assessments, and motivating students to persist and succeed in learning at the new level of expectation.”

Trust in Parents and Students. Trust in Parents and Students is the belief of staff that parents are supportive of their efforts, and that students take their education seriously and are working hard to achieve (Hoy, et al., 2006). Communication with parents, opportunities for parental input, and promotion of positive school climate within the classroom are ways in which trust can be demonstrated within a school. This investigation of the SIP indicated that Trust was a goal for all three years.

Year one. In Year One, indicators of Trust in Parents and Students were observed 29 times in the SIP. Concern 3 stated that the school needed to “create and maintain an environment in which students feel safe and appreciated...” (p. 3). Priority Concern 4 stated the need to “be able to communicate our essential learnings to our diverse parent population and to the community” as did the statement that the school administration will “provide information on the changes and increased rigor of the common core standards to parents through special evening events that focus on mathematics curriculum and expectations and through the Parent Newsletter” (p. 11). These statements indicated Trust by including communication with parents and acknowledging the diversity within the school. Additionally, promoting student safety and student appreciation contributed to the school environment.

Year two. In Year Two, indicators of Trust in Parents and Students dropped to 10 times in the SIP. The statement “to improve reciprocal communication with school families by providing

opportunities for parents to understand transitions...their child’s progress, and to assist parents in supporting their students at home” (p. 10) provided evidence of the staff’s desire to improve relations with parents and included an expectation of two-way communication.

Year three. In Year Three, indicators of Trust in Parents and Students dramatically increased to 64 times in the SIP. Trust in Parents and Students became more explicit in the section entitled “Family Engagement Action Steps.” Statements such as “Improve 2-way communication with our second-language and/or Hispanic parents; informing them regarding the instructional program, academic expectations, and measures of academic progress” and repeated “to improve reciprocal communication with school families by providing opportunities for parents to understand transitions...their child’s progress, and to assist parents in supporting their students at home” (p. 10). Further evidence of Trust in Parents and Students was exhibited by the statement “Our school community needs to understand the impact of a challenging curriculum and the need for a mutual partnership between Johnson Middle School and our families.” The SIP evidenced all three indicators of Academic Optimism for the three years under investigation. Table 3 summarizes the results of the analysis of the SIP data.

Table 3

Summary of Indicators of Academic Optimism Noted in the School Improvement Plan

School Improvement Plan			
Year	Academic Press	Efficacy	Trust
Year One	28	16	29
Year Two	69	18	10
Year Three	71	45	64

Mission statement. As with the SIP, the school mission statement is considered a communication tool between the school staff and the school stakeholders. According to Stemler, Bebell, and Sonnabend, (2010) “Mission statements represent an important summation or

distillation of an organization's core goals" and "tend to be publically available and easily accessible" (p. 391). A school mission statement may contain information about student achievement, funding, and school goals which can be disseminated to the community.

Years one and two. The mission statement for the school under study was unchanged in Years One and Two and read as follows:

The mission of Johnson Middle School is to prepare all students with the academic skills to successfully complete the required coursework to graduate on time being college and career ready. We will provide extensive opportunities, challenges, and support for continuous academic success. As a result, our students will have the confidence and ability to enroll in advance placement courses in eleventh and twelfth grade.

Year three. The mission statement was changed in Year Three and it read as follows:

The mission of Johnson Middle School is to prepare our students for success in high school and to build the opportunity for all students to be college or career ready upon graduation, resulting in a community of informed and educated citizens. A function of our mission is a commitment to continuous improvement and to developing organizational structures and processes that will ensure academic excellence, be responsive to the unique developmental needs of our students, and be socially equitable. Each student will be provided a safe and nurturing community of learners where diversity is celebrated, mutual respect among adults and children is evident, and families are seen as valued partners in laying the foundation of life-long learning.

Like the SIP, the school mission statement became more explicit in Year Three. The revisions included mention that the school staff will continuously evolve to meet the changing needs of the diverse student population. The inclusion of this statement, along with the

statement “Each student will be provided a safe and nurturing community of learners where diversity is celebrated, mutual respect among adults and children is evident, and families are seen as valued partners in laying the foundation of life-long learning” provided support that the school staff recognized the importance of families as part of student learning, while acknowledging the value of student diversity within the school.

Academic press. Years one and two. In Years One and Two indicators of Academic Press were observed four times. Analysis of the school mission statement revealed Academic Press in the statement “to prepare all students with the academic skills to successfully complete required coursework to graduate on time being college and career ready.” An additional example was the statement “We will provide extensive opportunities, challenges, and support for continuous academic success.” Academic Press was demonstrated by these statements by emphasizing academic achievement and a goal to academically prepare students for their futures.

Year three. In Year Three, indicators of Academic Press were observed four times. The mission statement was revised and expanded in Year Three. The revision included improving the school “organizational structures and processes to ensure academic excellence...which provided evidence of Academic Press, as did the statement “A function of our mission is a commitment to continuous improvement and to developing organizational structures and processes that will ensure academic excellence...” further exhibiting Academic Press by stressing the importance of student achievement and the school staff’s role in encouraging student success.

Collective efficacy. Year one and two. In Years One and Two, indicators of Collective Efficacy were observed once. While Collective Efficacy was not expressed in the mission statement itself, analysis of meeting minutes exhibited invitations for staff and administration to provide input in the creation of the mission statement. The mission statement was a

collaboration of ideas from school administration and staff who met after school and as such provided evidence of Collective Efficacy. The final mission statement was a collaborative effort of administration and the school leadership team, while other staff members were invited to add input during staff meetings and online. According to Hoy, et al., (2006), collaborative opportunity and the opportunity for staff input reflect Collective Efficacy.

Year three. In Year Three, indicators of Collective Efficacy were observed once. Analysis of meeting minutes revealed that the revision of the mission statement for Year Three was also a collaborative effort of administration, school leadership team, and staff. Analysis of meeting minutes provided evidence that staff and administration was invited to provide input and feedback in the creation of the mission statement. This collaborative opportunity and the opportunity for staff input reflected Collective Efficacy.

Trust in parents and students. *Year one two.* In Years One and Two, the mission statement lacked activities that could be associated with Trust in Parents and Students and as such there was no evidence of communication with parents or evidence of promoting a positive school climate (Hoy, et al, 2006).

Year three. In Year Three, indicators of Trust in Parents and Students were observed four times. While the mission statement for Years One and Two did not indicate Trust in Parents and Students, Year Three revisions of the mission statement appear to have added the dimension of Trust in Parents and Students. As revised, it addressed the partnership of family and school, and student diversity. The statement “each student will be provided a safe and nurturing community of learners where diversity is celebrated, mutual respect among adults and children is evident, and families are seen as valued partners...” (p. 1) was one such example. A further example in Year Three was evidenced by the statement that a function of the mission was to “be responsive

to the unique developmental needs of our students, and be socially equitable.” Table 4 summarizes the analysis of the school mission statement.

Table 4

Summary of Indicators of Academic Optimism Noted in the School Mission Statements

Year	School Mission Statement		
	Academic Press	Efficacy	Trust
Year One/Two	4	1	0
Year Three	4	2	4

Photographs. The majority of the photographs of the school common areas and classrooms exhibited evidence of Academic Press and Trust in Parents and Students but only one area exhibited all three aspects of Academic Optimism, the school entryway.

Academic press. Academic Press was exhibited in classrooms by focusing on academic achievement, displaying student work, posting school and classroom procedures and rules clearly. Of the 143 areas photographed within the school, 79 or approximately 55% of those areas indicated Academic Press. For example, some of the areas exhibited student papers and artwork on walls and hallways and had the school rules posted in clearly visible areas. Also visible were samples of high scoring student tests and assignments with stars and stickers attached to reward achievement. Several rooms displayed “What I learned” boards, where the students had the opportunity to share what they had learned when they had completed a chapter or lesson. A few of the rooms displayed contests between classes with a reward offered at the end of the quarter for the highest scoring class. Classroom rules and procedures were also in evidence and clearly posted, as were the school rules, the TRACE Qualities matrix; the acronym, Tolerance, Respect, Active Learning, Character, and Empathy are the qualities the school staff promotes and rewards when exhibited by the students.

The remaining 64 or approximately 45% of the areas did not demonstrate Academic Press. For example, the office conference room, where parent meetings are often held, had little adornment, had no student work or school procedures posted. The technology room lacked indication of student work or school norms, and the computer labs also lacked student work but displayed rules for effective computer use.

Collective efficacy. The only area in the school that reflected Collective Efficacy was the school entryway. This represented approximately .06% of the photographs taken. Collective Efficacy was exhibited through collaborative efforts among the staff and the school community Partner in Education (PIE). There were large photographs on the walls portraying donations the school received from the PIE. Pictures of the staff from both the school and the PIE were displayed, as were pictures of graduate classes from the past ten years. The entryway exhibited Collective Efficacy as evidence of staff collaboration with the PIE, and collections of school and staff photographs displayed. The other 142 areas, 99.3% of the areas were devoid of evidence of Collective Efficacy as witnessed by the absence of teacher collaboration or professional development throughout the classrooms and hallways. Additionally, the remaining 142 areas showed no opportunity for professional growth or staff input. For instance, Collective Efficacy could have been demonstrated by offering evidence of professional collaboration, such as district professional development meeting reminders or flyers for off campus activities for available for staff participation.

Trust in parents and students. Of the 143 areas photographed, 62, approximately 43%, provided evidence of Trust in Parents and Students. For example, the school entryway had clearly posted information and instructions for parent volunteers and visitors. Additionally, a number of photographs provided evidence of promoting a positive classroom culture of trust by

highlighting team pictures and fun thematic collages. For example, two of the classrooms had beanbag chairs and soft lighting conducive to quiet reading, while another teacher had strung Christmas lights to provide a festive atmosphere. Furthermore, the library posted schedules for parental volunteers to assist in a variety of library projects. The remaining 81 areas, approximately 57%, photographed evidenced a lack of Trust in Parents and Students by the absence of classroom culture or of opportunity for parental input or communication. Several areas also indicated the absence of classroom culture such as the computer labs, which displayed no adornment beyond posting school and class norms. Additionally, there was no evidence of parent involvement, such as parent helpers or volunteers in the areas photographed. Table 5 summarizes the analysis of the school photographs.

Table 5

Summary of SAOS Indicators Investigated in the School Photographs

Indicator	Photographs		
	Academic Press	Efficacy	Trust
Evidence of	79	1	62
Lacked	64	142	81

School programs. The programs offered at a school may reflect administration and staff commitment to Academic Optimism. Programs that are chosen to enhance student success may reflect support of student accomplishments. Factors such as class scheduling, awards, student incentives, tutoring, school clubs, and sports may indicate school Academic Optimism. Investigation of the school programs may provide an indication whether the school demonstrates support of the students in academic endeavors. The programs instituted during the three-year period under investigation exhibited Academic Press, Efficacy, and Trust in Parents and Students.

Academic press. The following programs provided evidence Academic Press by promoting and rewarding academic achievement and success:

- Self- manager program. Quarterly passes were awarded to students who maintained A's in citizenship and work ethic to encourage positive behavior and reward educational effort. Students were required to submit an application and a short written essay declaring why he or she was deserving of a self-manager pass. This application also required approval of all of the student's teachers, plus school librarian verification that the student had no outstanding book fines. All essays were read by the vice principal, who approved or rejected the student's application. Self-manager passes allowed students early entrance into the school in the morning and early dismissal for lunch and at the end of the day. Free dress wrist bands were awarded by the school vice principal as were random awards throughout the quarter, such as snacks and stickers. The passes were valid for a quarter and students must re-apply each quarter. The self-manager program rewarded student good citizenship, student responsibility, and work ethic and as such provided evidence of Academic Press.
- Homework club. The after school homework club met on Tuesdays and Fridays after school and was a time for students to complete homework and get additional help on subjects with which they struggle. The club was staffed by an ELA teacher and a mathematics or science teacher. Busses took students after 4:30 and returned them to their zoned elementary school. This program was conducted on a drop-in basis. Students had the option of attending regularly or stop by when they need specific help. The homework club promoted Academic Press by assisting students to improve their

understanding and, in turn, earning better grades thereby promoting student achievement and success.

- Rotating schedule. During the three years under investigation this school utilized a modified block schedule which rotated to allowed students to attend five of seven classes each day for an hour. The exception was Wednesdays, which was reserved for district early release days mandated by the school district. On Wednesdays, the five classes were shortened to forty-three minutes per class and the students were released early to provide professional development time for teachers. Every day, with the exception of Wednesdays, there was a thirteen minute “advisory “time for students to hear the daily announcements, gather information for the day, and check in with their teacher. There were three morning classes, then an enrichment class for specialized instruction and tutoring in math and English Language Arts, and for review of the school behavior plan, the TRACE qualities. For students not enrolled in additional tutoring, enrichment classes were scheduled to encompass the following: a silent reading (SSR) period, homework day, viewing CNN student news, a logic puzzle day, and a free day. Panther plan agendas were checked and graded for completeness and parental signatures. The rotating schedule provided evidence of Academic Press by providing longer class periods for students to further their understanding of their subjects. Enrichment classes allowed for students to supplement their education with structured activities or tutoring sessions and further promoted Academic Press.
- Afterschool sports program. After school sports were organized and teams competed against other local middle schools in volleyball, basketball, wrestling, track and field, and cross country. Students were required to try-out for positions and maintain a 2.0 grade point average through-out the season to participate. By requiring a 2.0 grade point

average, the school district demanded academic achievement through participation in sports, and therefore promoted Academic Press.

Collective efficacy. The following program evidenced Collective Efficacy by provided collaboration and input among teachers:

- **Teaming.** The staff was divided into teams. Each team had a science, social studies, and an ELA teacher, as well as a math and an elective teacher. Team teachers shared a preparatory time for planning and conferencing. Analysis of meeting minutes revealed that curricular planning, student behavior, and grades were common areas for discussion during the planning period. Each team had a 7th and 8th grade sister team, which choose their own names, cheers, team shirts, and colors. Team assemblies were conducted quarterly, which allowed for the teams to compete against other teams in a variety of games and cheers. Included was at least one “teacher challenge” where teachers competed against each other and against the students in spirit assemblies. Teachers collaborated on grades, student discipline and homework, which provided evidence of Collective Efficacy.

Trust in parents and students. The following programs provided evidence of Trust in Parents and Students by promoting positive school culture and positive behavior among students:

- **Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS).** The PBIS committee was responsible for devising ways to institute positive behavior supports. This committee met once per quarter and reviewed successes and challenges of the programs in place. They monitored and adjusted the supports as needed. The primary supports the PBIS committee had in place were the TRACE Qualities program and the Self-Manager

program. The PBIS program promoted school and classroom culture by endorsing and rewarding positive behavior.

- **TRACE qualities matrix.** The acronym stands for Tolerance, Respect, Active Learning, Character, and Empathy. Each classroom was required to display a poster with each of the five aspects and how to demonstrate those traits in different areas of the school. Teachers were required to discuss the TRACE behaviors frequently to reinforce positive behaviors. Teachers and school staff awarded tickets to students for positive behavior that mirrored the TRACE traits. Tickets could be accrued and submitted for rewards such as free dress days, raffle tickets, yogurt coupons, extended lunch with a friend, and entrance into dances. The TRACE matrix promoted school and classroom culture by promoting and rewarding positive behavior and as such was an example of Collective Efficacy.
- **Clubs.** There were several student clubs in place during the three years investigated. These clubs: chess, bridge, math, yearbook, and art provided the opportunity for students to collaborate and share common interests. The school clubs provided evidence of school culture and as such promoted Trust in Students.

Meetings. For the purposes of this study, the weekly faculty meetings minutes were analyzed. Over the three year period, there were 96 faculty meetings. Faculty meetings consisted of the entire teaching faculty, the vice principal, principal, and school counselors. Analysis of the meeting minutes elucidated an increase of indicators of Academic Optimism from Year One to Year Three. While indicators for Collective Efficacy and Trust in Parents and Students decreased in Year Two, both increased in Year Three. Table 6 summarizes the percentage of meeting agendas that exhibited indicators of Academic Optimism.

Table 6

Summary of Percentage of Meeting Agendas with Academic Optimism Indicators

Indicators	Years		
	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Academic Press	56%	68%	67%
Efficacy	84%	28%	81%
Trust	39%	19%	56%

Academic press. Academic Press was exhibited by demonstrating a focus on academic attainment and achievement. Of the 96 faculty meetings over the three year period, agendas reflected that indicators of Academic Press were observed a total of 152 times. In Year One, indicators of Academic Press were observed 59 times; In Year Two, 47 times; and in Year Three, 46 times. For example, in Year One, a staff meeting agenda began with testing schedule and discussion of common assessments. A Year Two August staff meeting agenda focused on expectations for rigor, embedded assessments, and expectations. Over the three year period, fourteen of the staff meetings focused on the Common Core Standard adoption by the state, and eight meetings discussed the new Nevada School Performance Framework. Additionally, eight of meetings centered on the field test for the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) in math. In Year Three, eight of the meetings discussed the effective effort of students and two of those linked those to the school performance plan. In Year Three, three meetings discussed the book *Mindset* by C. Dweck and how to adopt a growth mindset for students. Also in Year Three, one meeting discussed effective effort and Goal Two of the SIP. It further tied in Dweck's mindset theory.

Of the 96 faculty meetings over the three year period, there was an absence of Academic Press in 18 meeting agenda items. In Year One, out of 33 faculty meetings, Academic Press was not revealed in 7 meeting agenda items; in Year Two, of 32 faculty meetings, did not reveal

Academic Press in 3 meeting agenda items, and in Year Three, of 31 faculty meetings, Academic Press was not revealed in 8 meeting agenda items. In other words, the focus of those meetings were on topics other than academic attainment or student success. For instance, meeting agendas for two staff meetings in Year Two centered on Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) and staff collaborated on ideas to reward positive behaviors in the classroom.

Collective efficacy. Of the 96 faculty meetings over the three year period, meeting agendas reflected indicators of Collective Efficacy 62 times. Examples of Collective Efficacy indicators were found in collaborative opportunities for the staff, instances of professional growth, and occasions for staff input. In Year One, of 33 faculty meetings, indicators of Collective Efficacy were observed 28 times; in Year Two, of 32 faculty meetings, indicators of Collective Efficacy was observed 9 times; and in Year Three, of 31 faculty meetings, indicators of Collective Efficacy were observed 25 times. Agendas from these meetings reflected time for the faculty to work among departments and table groups to discuss material and ideas. For example, in Year One, a meeting agenda reflected collaboration by citing time allocated for departments to meet and discuss assessments, and to devise an assessment notebook. In Year Two, two staff meetings focused on Positive Behavior Intervention Supports program (PBIS) which offered the opportunity for teachers to share information among departments. In Year Three, two faculty meetings promoted discussion of teacher efficacy and the connection to student learning. These meetings promoted Collective Efficacy by providing time for teachers and staff members to work together to share ideas, strategies, and professional growth opportunities.

Over the three year period, there were 96 faculty meetings. Collective Efficacy was not observed in 93 meeting agenda items. In Year One, of 33 meetings, Collective Efficacy was not observed in 38 meeting agenda items; in Year Two of 32 meetings, Collective Efficacy was not

in evidence in 39 meeting agenda items, and in Year Three, out of 31 meetings, agenda meeting items did not reveal Collective Efficacy 16 times. The meeting agendas reflected a lack of Collective Efficacy by not offering the staff time to collaborate on ideas. For instance, four of the initial meetings introducing the Common Core Standards did not provide time for discussion or collaboration among staff members.

Trust in parents and students. Trust in Parents and Students was reflected in faculty meeting agendas which include communication with parents and efforts to create a positive school climate for the students (Hoy, et al., 2006). During the three year period there were a total of 96 faculty meetings. Of the 96 meetings, agendas that reflected indicators of Trust in Parents and Students were observed a total of 36 times. In Year One, out of 33 meetings, agenda items with indicators of Trust in Parents and Students was observed 13 times, In Year Two, out of 32 meetings, agenda items with indicators of Trust in Parents and Students was observed 6 times, and in Year Three, out of 31 meetings, agenda items with indicators of Trust in Parents and Students was observed 17 times. For example, two staff meetings focused on Positive Behavior Intervention Supports program (PBIS) in Year One. These meetings exhibited trust by focusing on creating a positive school climate throughout the school. The November 14th meeting agenda involved PBIS activity with staff recognition and rewards, a review of an upcoming parent/staff meeting and testing data. This meeting exhibited Trust in Parents and Students by inviting parental input and involvement in the testing process. In Year Two, two meeting agendas exhibited Trust in Parents and Students by highlighting the importance of communication with parents about homework policies and academic expectations. In Year Three, one meeting agenda reflected the importance of informing and collaborating with parents over the rigors of

curriculum and assessments. Additionally, two meetings agendas in Year Three reflected discussion about recruiting more parental support in class and on campus.

Over the three year period, 96 meeting agenda items lacked indicators of Trust in Parents and Students. In Year One, out of 33 meetings, Trust in Parents and Students was not revealed in 55 meeting agenda items; in Year Two, out of 32 meetings, Trust in Parents and Students was not observed in 41 meeting agenda items; and in Year Three, out of 31 meetings, Trust in Parents and Students was not observed in 27 meeting agenda items. These agendas did not reflect any type of communication between staff and parents or creating a positive school culture for students.

Table 7 summarizes the Academic Optimism Indicators observed in the school faculty meetings agendas.

Table 7

Summary of Academic Optimism Indicators Investigated in the School Faculty Meetings

Indicators	Years			Total
	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	
Academic Press	59	47	46	152
Efficacy	28	9	25	62
Trust	13	6	17	36
Lack of Academic Press	7	3	8	18
Lack of Efficacy	38	39	16	93
Lack of Trust	55	41	27	123

Student discipline records. Analysis of the school discipline records reflected the indicators of Collective Efficacy, but lacked indicators of Academic Press or Trust in Parents and Students. Over the three- year period under investigation, the student discipline records revealed that while violence to students by other students declined over the three year period, use of

weapons increased, as did incidents of bullying. Studies have suggested that a lack of Academic Press is associated with the rise in bullying incidences, which may have indicated a lack of focus on student achievement. The Student Discipline Records were the topic of discussion in two staff meetings which reviewed the PBIS programs in place and strategies to improve student behavior. Additionally, indicators of Collective Efficacy were observed through the TRACE behavior matrix, a set of positive behavior expectations for students. These examples offer evidence of collaborative opportunities among staff regarding school discipline. The student discipline records lacked indicators of Trust in Parents and Students with increased episodes of bullying within the school. An increase in bullying does not promote trust that parents and students are supportive of educational efforts. Table 8 summarizes the student discipline over the three years investigated.

Table 8

Summary of Discipline Records for the Study Group

Year	Student Discipline				
	Violence to Students	Weapons	Dist. Controlled Substances	Poss/Use of Alcohol	Bullying
Year One	38	0	1	0	4
Year Two	34	0	0	0	8
Year Three	23	4	0	0	20

OCDQ-RM survey response data. Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Middle School (OCDQ-RM) (revised) was devised to measure teacher-teacher and teacher-principal interaction that relate to school climate. As revised, the questionnaire contained three subtests: Supportive Principal Behavior, Restrictive Principal Behavior, and Directive Principal Behavior. The results of the OCDQ-RM indicated that the study group means for Supportive Principal Behavior of 22.7 were lower than Hoy's (2006) normative mean of 29.3. Furthermore, analysis revealed that the study group mean of 9.7 for Restrictive Principal Behavior was higher than Hoy's normative mean of 9.1, and the study group mean of 11.0 for Directive Principal

Behavior was lower than Hoy's normative mean of 12.1. Table 9 summarizes the study group mean responses on the OCDQ-RM. Hoy's Norm Values are the mean norm scores for the three subscales from the OCDQ-RM utilized for this study: Supportive Principal Behavior, Restrictive Principal Behavior, and Directive Principal Behavior. School Scale scores were the mean teacher responses for the study group, while the norm values were the average teacher response provided by Hoy (2006).

Table 9

Summary of OCDQ-RM Means and Standard Deviations for Hoy's Normative Values and Corresponding Values for Study Group

Scale	OCDQ-RM			
	Hoy's Norm Values	SD	Study Scale Values	SD
Supportive	29.3	4.61	22.7	6.16
Restrictive	9.1	1.52	9.7	2.57
Directive	12.1	2.40	11.0	3.45

Frequencies for the three scales of Principal Behavior for the OCDQ-RM are represented in Figures 4, 5, and 6. Figure 4 summarizes the mean study group responses to the 11 survey questions indicating Supportive Principal Behavior. Responses ranged from: (1) rarely; (2) sometimes; (3) often; and (4) very frequently. The number of respondents was 27 and the mean study group responses to the Supportive Principal Behavior questions was 22.27, lower than Hoy's (2006) subscale norm of 29.3. The study group score of 22.7 was approximately 1.43 standard deviations below Hoy's mean. The minimum score possible for Supportive Principal was 11, while the maximum score possible was 44. Of the 27 respondents, 24, or 89% responded with scores between 15 and 30, while 2 or 7% responded with scores between 10 and 15. Three respondents or 11%, scored from 30 to 40. The data was skewed to the right, indicating that the mean response of 22.7 was slightly higher than the median response of 21.

These replies indicated that the teachers perceived the principal to be slightly less supportive than the norm group according to Hoy.

Figure 4

Summary of Study Group Frequencies of Mean Responses for Supportive Principal Behavior

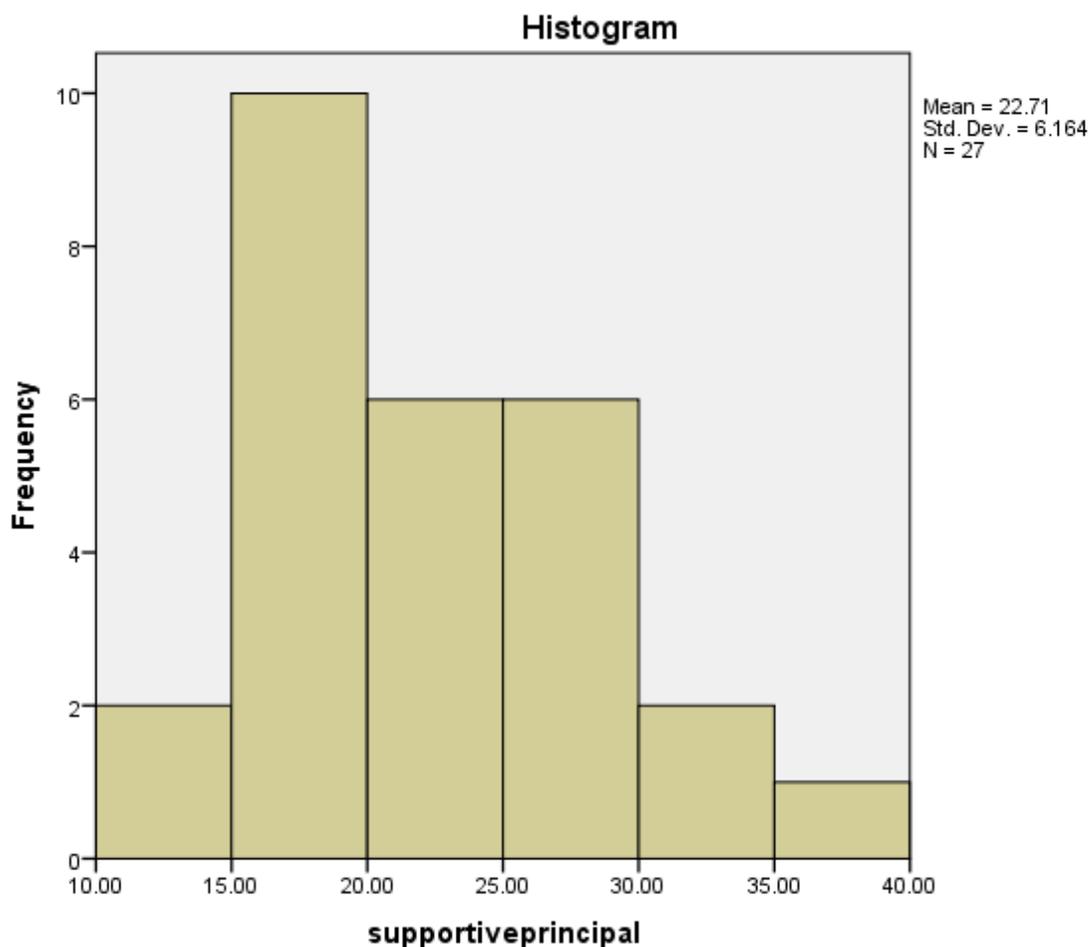


Figure 5 summarizes the mean study group responses to the 4 survey questions indicating Restrictive Principal Behavior. Scores ranged from: (1) rarely; (2) sometimes; (3) often; and (4) very frequently. The mean study group response to the Restrictive Principal Behavior questions was 9.7, higher than the Hoy's (2006) subscale norm of 9.11. The study group score of 9.7 was approximately .39 standard deviations above Hoy's mean. The minimum score possible for Restrictive Principal was 4, while the maximum score possible was 16. Of the 27 respondents,

13 or 48% responded with scores from 6 to 9, another 13, or 48% responded with from 10-13, while 1, or 2% respondent with a score of 5. The data was slightly skewed to the right, which indicated that the mean response of 9.69 is lower than the median response of 9.50. These responses indicated that the teachers perceived the principal to be slightly more restrictive than the normative mean according to Hoy.

Figure 5

Summary of Study Group Frequencies of Mean Responses for Restrictive Principal Behavior

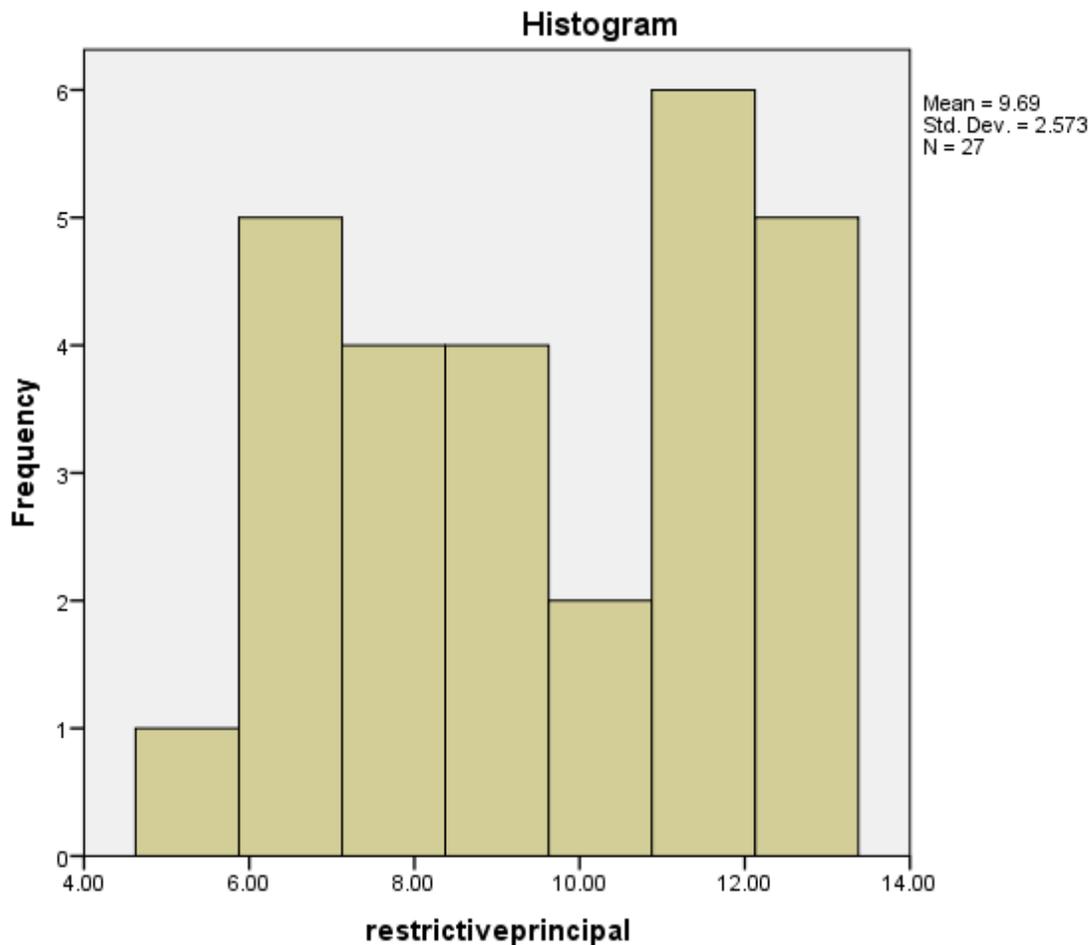
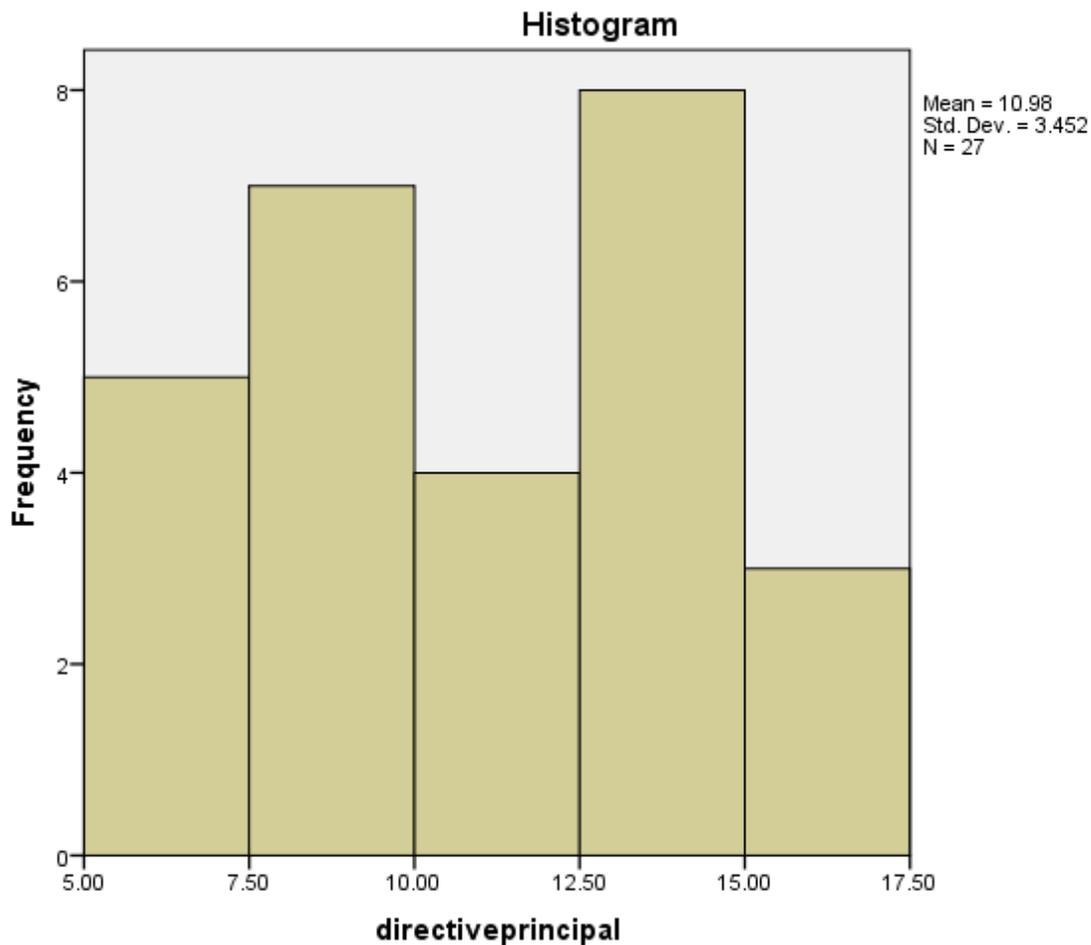


Figure 6 summarizes the mean study group responses to the 6 survey questions indicating Directive Principal Behavior. Scores ranged from: (1) rarely; (2) sometimes; (3) often; and (4)

very frequently. The mean study group response to the Supportive Principal Behavior questions was 11, reflecting the average study group response to Directive Principal Behavior as lower than Hoy's subscale norm of 12.1. The study group scale score of 11 was approximately .46 standard deviations below Hoy's mean. The minimum score possible for Directive Principal was 6; the maximum score possible was 24. Of the 27 respondents, 16, or approximately 59% responded with scores between 5 and 13. Eleven of the respondents, or approximately 41%, responded with scores between 13 and 17. The data was skewed slightly to the left, indicating that the study group mean response of 10.98 was slightly lower than the median response of 11.2. These responses indicated that the teachers perceived the principal to be slightly less directive than the average according to Hoy.

Figure 6

Summary of Study Group Frequencies of Mean Responses for Directive Principal Behavior



Correlational analysis. To study the relationships among teachers' perceptions of the principal's leadership style across the three subscales of Academic Optimism, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was utilized. Correlations were computed to determine the potential relationships that exist and the strength of the relationships. The closer the correlation coefficient is to 1 the stronger the linear relationship is between the two variables, the closer the correlation coefficient is to zero, the weaker the linear association is between the two variables. A value of 1 implies a positive relationship among the variable, as one variable increases, so

does the other. A value of -1 implies a negative correlations, meaning as one variable increases, the other variable decreases.

There was a positive correlation associated among all three subscales of the SAOS. For Academic Press and Collective Efficacy ($r = .749$, $n = 7$, $p < .001$) the correlation was high. This correlation indicated a strong linear relationship between Academic Press and Collective Efficacy. Thus, approximately 56% of the variance in Academic Press could be explained by the variance in Collective Efficacy, suggesting that a strong perception of Collective Efficacy may be associated with a strong perception of Academic Press. For Collective Efficacy and Trust in Parents and Students ($r = .642$, $n = 27$, $p < .001$), the correlation was also strong. Thus, approximately 41% of the variance in Collective Efficacy could be explained by the variance of Trust in Parents and Students, suggesting that a strong perception of Collective Efficacy may indicate a strong perception of Trust in Parents and Students. For Academic Press and Trust in Parents and Students ($r = .569$, $n = 27$, $p < .001$) the correlation was moderate. Thus, approximately 32% of the variation in Academic Press could be explained by the variation of Trust in Parents and Students, suggesting that the perceptions of Trust in Parents and Students have a moderate linear relation with the perceptions of Academic Press. Overall, there were strong, positive correlations between the subscales of the SAOS. Increases in one subscale correlated with increases in the other subscales (as shown in Table 10).

To address possible relationships that existed among the subscales of the OCDQ-RM, Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient correlations were computed across the three subscales of Principal Behavior: Supportive Principal Behavior, Restrictive Principal Behavior, and Directive Principal Behavior. These statistics indicated that positive, weak linear relationships existed among the three subscales of the OCDQ-RM. For Supportive Principal Behavior and Restrictive

Principal Behavior ($r = .293$, $n = 27$, $p < .001$) the correlation indicated a weak, positive linear relationship. Thus, approximately 9% of the variation in the perception of Supportive Principal Behavior could be explained by the perception of Restrictive Principal Behavior, suggesting that the perception of Supportive Principal Behavior was not related to the perception of Restrictive Principal Behavior. For Supportive Principal Behavior and Directive Principal Behavior ($r = .22$, $n = 27$, $p < .001$) the analysis indicated a very weak, positive linear relationship. Thus, approximately 5% of the variance in Supportive Principal Behavior could be explained by the variance in Directive Principal Behavior, suggesting that the perception of Supportive Principal Behavior was not related to the perception of Directive Principal Behavior. For Directive Principal Behavior and Restrictive Principal Behavior ($r = .349$, $n = 27$, $p < .001$) the analysis indicated a weak, positive linear relationship. Thus, approximately 12% of the variance in perception of Directive Principal Behavior may explain the variance in the perception of Restrictive Principal Behavior, indicating that the perception of Directive Principal Behavior may be slightly related to the perception of Restrictive Principal Behavior. Overall, there was a positive but weak linear relationship among the subscales of Principal Behavior.

To address possible relationships that existed among teachers' perceptions of Principal Behavior and teachers' perception of Academic Optimism, Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient correlations across the six subscales of the two instruments were analyzed. Correlations ranged from slight ($- .156$) to moderate ($.349$) with both positive and negative relationships between the variables. These correlations accounted for approximately 2% to 12% of the shared variance. Only five significant relationships were uncovered. Supportive Principal Behavior was positively related and significant to all three of the SAOS subscales. Restrictive Principal Behavior was negatively related to all three of the SAOS subscales. Directive Principal Behavior was negatively related to all three of the SAOS subscales. Directive Principal

Behavior was positively correlated to all three of the SAOS subscales. For Supportive Principal Behavior and Academic Press ($r = .457, n = 27, p < .001$), the analysis indicated a moderate, positive linear relationship. Thus, 21% of the variance in Academic Press could be explained by the perception of a Supportive Principal, indicating that the perception of a Supportive Principal may be slightly related to the perception of Academic Press. For Supportive Principal Behavior and Collective Efficacy ($r = .408, n = 25, p < .001$), the analysis indicated a low moderate, positive linear relationship. Thus approximately 17% of the variance in Collective Efficacy could be explained by the variance in Supportive Principal Behavior, indicating that the perception of Supportive Principal Behavior may be slightly related to the perception of Collective Efficacy. For Supportive Principal Behavior and Trust in Parents and Students ($r = .275, n = 27, p < .001$), the analysis indicated a positive, weak linear relationship between Supportive Principal Behavior and Trust in Parents and Students. Thus, approximately 8% of the variance in Trust in Parents and Students could be explained by the perception of Supportive Principal Behavior, indicating that the perception of Supportive Principal Behavior was not related to the perception of Trust in Parents and Students. For Restrictive Principal Behavior and Academic Press ($r = -.062, n = 27, p < .001$), analysis indicated a strong, negative linear relationship between Restrictive Principal Behavior and Academic Press. Thus, approximately 38% of the variance in Academic Press could be explained by Restrictive Principal Behavior, indicating that the perception of Restrictive Principal Behavior may be negatively related to the perception of Academic Press. For Restrictive Principal Behavior and Collective Efficacy ($r = -.093, n = 25, p < .001$), analysis indicated a weak, negative linear relationship. Thus, approximately 9% of the variance in Collective Efficacy could be explained by Restrictive Principal Behavior, indicating that the perception of Restrictive Principal Behavior was not

related to the perception of Collective Efficacy. For Restrictive Principal Behavior and Trust in Parents and Students ($r = .293, n = 27, p < .001$), analysis indicated a weak, negative linear relationship. Thus, approximately 9% of the variance in Trust in Parents and Students could be explained by the variance in Restrictive Principal Behavior, indicating that the perception of a Restrictive Principal was not related to the perception of Trust in Parents and Students. For Directive Principal Behavior and Academic Press ($r = .321, n = 27, p < .001$), analysis indicated a weak, positive linear relationship. Thus, approximately 10% of the variance in Academic Press could be explained by the variance in Directive Principal Behavior, indicating that the perception of a Directive Principal may have been slightly related to the perception of Academic Press. For Directive Principal Behavior and Collective Efficacy ($r = .329, n = 25, p < .001$) analysis indicated a weak, positive linear relationship. Thus approximately 11% of the variance in Collective Efficacy could be explained by the variance in Directive Principal Behavior, indicating that the perception of Directive Principal Behavior may be slightly related to the perception of Collective Efficacy. For Directive Principal Behavior and Trust in Parents and Students ($r = .246, n = 27, p < .001$) analysis indicated a weak, positive linear relationship. Thus, approximately 6% of the variance in Trust in Parents and Students could be explained by the variance in Directive Principal Behavior, indicating that the perception of a Directive Principal may be slightly related to the perception of Trust in Parents and Students. Table 10 summarizes the results of the inter-correlations for the SAOS and OCDQ-RM.

Table 10
Summary of Results of the Inter-Correlations for the SAOS and OCDQ-RM Subscales

	Academic Press	Efficacy	Trust	Supportive	Restrictive	Directive
Academic Press	1	.749**	.569**	.457*	-0.062	0.321
Efficacy		1	.642**	.408*	-0.093	0.329
Trust			1	0.275	-0.293	0.246
Supportive				1	-0.156	0.22
Restrictive					1	0.349
Directive						1

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). N=27

Aggregate achievement data. During the three years under investigation, academic achievement declined slightly according to the state Criterion Reference Tests (CRT), as did the school STAR rating. In Year Two, the school STAR rating of 4, while still considered high achieving, declined from 5 STARS in Year One; the rating remained 4 STARS in Year Three, while the overall Index Score declined from 81 in Year One to 71 in Year Three. Scores for the CRT in both Mathematics and Reading for seventh and eighth grades declined during the three years under investigation. This decline may be indicative of a lack of Academic Optimism. Studies suggest that the three dimensions of Academic Optimism interrelate to positively affect student achievement. A decline in student achievement may indicate that Academic Press, Collective Efficacy, and Trust in Parents and Students declined in the school. Table 11 summarizes the school STAR ratings from Year One to Year Three. Index score is a combination of several performance indicators, such as school median growth percentiles and overall percentage of students meeting adequate growth. Median growth percentile (MGP) is a measure of performance on the state assessments over time. Percentage proficiency in math is the percentage of students who were determined proficient in math, while percentage proficiency in reading is the percentage of students who were determined proficient in reading. The data summarized in Table 11 indicates a decline in all areas.

Table 11

Summary of Study Group School Star Ratings, Index Score, MGP, and Proficiency Ratings for Years One - Three

Year	School Star Rating			MGP-Reading	% Prof-Math	% Prof-Reading
	Stars	Index Score	MGP-Math			
Year One	5	81	48.5	54.0	84.8	75.1
Year Two	4	75	47.0	50.0	63.7	74.4
Year Three	4	71	43.0	40.0	57.1	73.5

Note. MGP=median growth percentile; Prof=percentage of students proficient.

Criterion reference test (CRT) assessment scores. The Criterion Reference Test (CRT) is a normed state assessment designed to evaluate student learning and performance against a predetermined set of criteria. For the years under investigation, percentages of proficient students declined for both 7th and 8th grade. The number of 7th grade students tested decreased from 357 to 311. The number of 7th grade students who scored proficient in Reading declined from 263 in Year One to 231 in Year Three although the percentage of proficient students in reading remained consistent at approximately 74%. The number of 7th grade mathematics students tested decreased from 357 to 343. The percentage of proficient students declined from Year One to Year Two from 304 to 232. The proficiency rate decreased from 85.2% to 67.6%. However, from Year One to Year Two the baseline score for proficiency in mathematics was raised from 260 to 300. This may be the reason the percentage of proficient students decreased so dramatically. Students in 7th grade did not take the mathematics CRT in Year Three. Table 12 summarizes the 7th grade CRT scores.

Table 12

Summary of Study Group CRT Assessment Results for 7th Grade

Group	Year	Grade	Number Tested	% Proficient
Mathematics	Year One	7	357	85.2
	Year Two	7	343	67.6
	Year Three	7	-	-
Reading	Year One	7	357	73.7
	Year Two	7	343	75.8
	Year Three	7	311	74.3

Note. 7th grader students in 2013-2014 participated in the Smarter Balance Field test and did not take the CRT.

Percentage of proficiency for 8th grader in both Mathematics and Reading declined over the three year period under investigation. The number of 8th grade students tested remained relatively the same, with 345 students in Year One, 353 students in Year Two, and 343 students in Year Three. The number of students proficient in mathematics decreased from 282 in Year One to 183 in Year Two to 173 in Year Three. The percentage of proficient students in Mathematics declined from 81.7% in Year One, to 51.8% in Year Two, to 50.4% in Year Three. However, from Year One to Year Two the baseline score for proficiency in mathematics was raised from 260 to 300. Additionally, the overall difficulty of the test was increased. This may be the reason the percentage of proficient students decreased so dramatically. The number of students proficient in reading declined from 253 in Year One, to 235 in Year Two, to 227 in Year Three. The percentage of proficient students in reading also declined, from 73.5% in Year One, to 66.6% in Year Two, to 66.2% in Year Three. Table 13 summarizes the 8th grade CRT results.

Table 13

Summary of Study Group CRT Assessment Results for 8th Grade

Group	Year	Grade	Number Tested	Number Proficient	% Proficient
Mathematics	Year One	8	345	282	81.7
	Year Two	8	353	183	51.8
	Year Three	8	343	173	50.4
Reading	Year One	8	344	253	73.5
	Year Two	8	353	235	66.6
	Year Three	8	343	227	66.2

Summary

While analysis of the qualitative data suggested the presence of Academic Optimism within the school, the results of the School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS) indicated a lower than average staff perception of Academic Optimism. Additionally, the school staff perceived the principal to be slightly more Restrictive than the norm. Correlational analysis suggested that there is a negative correlation among Restrictive Principal Behavior and the three dimensions of Academic Optimism. As perception of Restrictive Principal Behavior increases, perception of Academic Optimism decreases. Table 14 summarizes the qualitative data analysis. Analysis of the SAOS revealed a higher than average means for Collective Efficacy among the staff, yet a lower than average mean for Academic Press and Trust in Parents and Students. Analysis of the qualitative data indicated high presence of Academic Press and Collective Efficacy, with a moderate presence of Trust in Parents and Students.

Table 14

Summary of Study Group Data Analysis

Data Sources	Qualitative Data Analysis		
	Academic Press	Efficacy	Trust
SAOS		x	
SIP	x	x	x
Mission Statement	x	x	x
Photos	x	x	
Programs	x	x	x
Meetings	x	x	

Additionally, the OCDQ-RM indicated a higher than average perception of Restrictive Principal Behavior, and a lower than average perception of Supportive and Directive Principal Behavior (See Table 8).

As school student achievement progressively declined, school faculty meetings and department meetings emphasized the three indicators of Academic Optimism. Faculty meeting agendas were reviewed and described to uncover any themes within the data. Analysis of the meeting agendas indicated an increased emphasis in Academic Press, Collective Efficacy and Trust in Parents and Students. A review of the aggregate achievement data and student outcomes, however, indicated a yearly decrease in student test scores and the school STAR rating. The school STAR rating dropped from 5-stars to 4-stars, while CRT data signified a percentage decrease in both reading and mathematics. Over the three year period under investigation, 7th grade mathematics percentage of proficient students declined from 85.2% in Year One to 67.6% in Year Two. In Year Three, 7th grade students participated in the Smarter Balance Field test and did not take the mathematics CRT. 7th grade CRT reading percentage of proficient students stayed approximately the same, from 73.7% in Year One to 74.3% in Year Three.

During the three years under investigation, school leaders endeavored to improve teacher Trust in Parents and Students with a number of programs that addressed enhanced parent-teacher communication and parental involvement within the school itself, yet staff meetings rarely addressed communication with parents. Analysis of the school mission statements and the SIPs revealed an increase in communication to parents and students, yet analysis of the photographs show little evidence of parental communication or involvement. The SIP, school mission statements, faculty meeting agendas, and photographs were reviewed and described to uncover any themes within the data.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

In the preceding chapter, the presentation and results of data analysis were reported. This chapter consists of a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and conclusions. The preceding chapters reported the investigation of how a high achieving middle school exhibited Academic Optimism. This chapter begins with a summary of the purpose and structure of the study and followed by the findings related to Academic Optimism. A discussion of the findings follows. Finally, implications for practice and recommendations for further research are presented.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how one high achieving middle school exhibited Academic Optimism. Data were collected by means of two survey instruments and artifacts from the State Department of Education, the State Report Card, and the school. This mixed methods case study utilized the School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS) to assess teachers' perceptions of Academic Optimism. To measure the level of perceived Academic Optimism in the school, twenty-seven staff members completed a two-part survey which assessed teacher perceptions of Academic Optimism and teacher perceptions of school climate. The SAOS measured teachers' perceptions of Academic Press, Collective Efficacy, and Trust in Parents and Students. The second part of the survey utilized the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (Revised) for Middle Schools (OCDQ-RM) to measure teacher perceptions of school climate. This instrument measured teachers' perceptions of three dimensions of Principal Behavior which are Supportive, Directive, and Restrictive. Pearson Product Moment Correlational analysis was conducted across the subscales to determine what, if any, linear relationships existed and the strength of those relationships. Qualitative data in the

form of documents, artifacts, and aggregate achievement data were collected, coded, analyzed, and summarized. Each data source was analyzed and interpreted in relationship to three themes that indicate Academic Optimism: Academic Press, Collective Efficacy, and Teacher Trust in Parents and Students. The results were triangulated and reviewed in relationship to student achievement outcome data and the school STAR rating. Findings that emerged from the analysis are discussed below.

Discussion

Analysis suggested an incongruity between survey results and the artifacts collected from the school. While survey data indicated relatively low Academic Press, qualitative data suggested a high level of Academic Press in some areas. Overall analysis revealed that while Academic Press was promoted in the school, survey results indicated that the teachers did not perceive a high level of Academic Press. Accordingly, the decrease in aggregate achievement data suggested a low level of Academic Press. Both the school STAR rating and Criterion Reference Test (CRT) scores declined during the three years of investigation. However, analysis of the qualitative data indicated the presence of Academic Press. The school mission statement and School Improvement Plan (SIP) indicated Academic Press for all three years by increasing emphasis on academically preparing students for higher education and academic success. Additionally, the concept of teacher teaming, a rotating class schedule, and extensive professional development exhibited commitment to student academic excellence.

Presumably, in a high achieving school, one would expect all data to be in alignment. A high degree of Academic Press should be reflected in both the surveys as well as in the qualitative data, which should result in increasing achievement scores. However, analysis uncovered misalignment. This discord in results could be attributed to an overriding contextual

factor: The adoption of the Common Core Standards. It may also be attributed to the lack of strong congruence between the aggressive statements reflected in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and mission statement and the actual programs offered at the school.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were adopted by the state in Year Two of the study. This state-led, initiative was designed to establish clear educational standards for kindergarten through twelfth grade in English Language Arts and mathematics. The standards were intended to ensure that high school graduates were prepared for entrance into either college or the workforce. The CCSS were designed to provide a clear and concise set of expectations that aligned to the requirements of college and careers. (Department of Education, 2013). Danielson (2013) stated “This [Common Core Standard initiative] is a big initiative, and it is going to require a major reorientation in how many people think about instruction and student learning” (p. 12).

The school implemented CCSS in Year Two of the study. Implementation of the CCSS required strict execution of rigorous curricula, corresponding instruction, and assessment procedures, which may have been perceived as burdensome for the principal and controlling for the teachers, particularly in a previously high achieving school. Additionally, a school with decreasing achievement scores (as was the case with this school) faces potential district and state penalties, which may have resulted in the principal more strictly adhering to the CCSS, as well as designing increasingly precise goals for the SIP and the mission statement. With the increased demands of the CCSS, and faced with decreasing academic scores, the specificity of the SIP was strengthened to reflect the commitment to student academic achievement. The teachers’ survey responses indicated that the principal was Restrictive, which could be interpreted as teacher

frustration as a result of the new demands associated with the CCSS; this frustration may have been directed toward the principal, as the administrator of the building.

The situation was compounded because, in addition to the implementation of the CCSS, this school was a pilot school for the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) mathematic test in Year Two. The SBAC was a newly designed assessment that was aligned to the CCSS. This was a computerized adaptive test which included online administration for the assessment, instead of the traditional paper-pencil test commonly used in the past. This, too, may have caused frustration for the teachers, who had the task of preparing the students for a new, unknown system, and the principal, who had to procure the necessary equipment to allow for the online testing and administration of the assessment.

These factors may have influenced how the teachers perceived the principal. The teachers' responses may have been associated with frustration at being required to implement the new state standards when the school had a long history of high academic achievement. The adoption of new standards resulted in additional work and stress on the teachers to create and apply new standards which had not been thoroughly implemented within the district. Teachers were required to create instructional materials even though mentoring and exemplars were sparsely included in the rollout of the new requirements. Gewertz (2013) stated "Even as the Common Core State Standards are being put into practice across most of the country, nearly half of teachers feel unprepared to teach them" (p. 1).

Additionally, there was inconsistency between the Collective Efficacy indicators and the Academic Press indicators. The Collective Efficacy results were higher than the norm, while Academic Press results indicated a lower than average perception of Academic Press. According to Hoy (2006) a positive linear relationship would be expected among the two factors. Research

(e.g., Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy et al., 2002) suggests that if Collective Efficacy is high, Academic Press would also be high, yet that was not the case in this study. Teachers may have been somewhat conflicted because school performance under the prior standards was high achieving. The teachers' perception of Collective Efficacy may have been based on past student success even though the three most recent years indicated a decrease in academic achievement. The decrease in achievement scores may not have actually been acknowledged or believed by the teachers in this school. Based on analysis of the Collective Efficacy responses, the teachers indicated that they had the tools to teach all students; however, this perception may have been based on prior school performance. Chong, Klassen, Huan, Wong, and Kates (2010) suggested that a high perception of Collective Efficacy is influenced by teachers' past successes with students. Chong, et al. further stated "Teachers' beliefs about the task of meeting the challenges in teaching are shaped in part by the attitudes of other teachers about specific resources and constraints available to facilitate their work, and organizational expectations, and goals" (p. 188). Furthermore, Collective Efficacy may have been high because of the extensive professional development and teacher teaming, as well as the history of the school and staff as exhibiting high achieving performance.

Another factor which may have resulted in the misalignment could have been the discord between the explicit language and goals found in the SIP and mission statement as compared to the programs and policies actually in place at the school. The SIP called for aggressive efforts to increase student achievement, yet with the exception of the rotating schedule, teaming, and extensive professional development of the staff, few of the programs implemented at the school appeared to be designed to aggressively address the decrease in academic achievement.

The SIP and mission statement documented proactive effort to address the academic achievement of all students. The SIP increased the emphasis on academic achievement throughout the three years under investigation. The specific wording of goals, such as “to improve all students’ ability to understand and explain deeper meaning from complex texts by employing the shifts of the [State] Academic Content Standards in language arts and literacy...” (p. 5) demonstrated aggressive and measurable academic goals for all students. The SIP addressed the changing educational climate throughout the three years. The adoption of the CCSS was addressed in the SIP in Years Two and Three and was tied to the change in state standards. Additionally, the school mission statement addressed the changed academic standards in Year Three, and all three years of the mission statement exhibited a higher emphasis on academic achievement than the other two factors of Academic Optimism. While SIP Years One and Two addressed preparing students to be college and career ready, Year Three SIP was revised to include more specific goals which addressed enhancing the school structure and policies to complement the commitment to academic excellence for all students.

The rotating schedule with corresponding enrichment classes and tutoring offered evidence of Academic Press, as did the rotating block school schedule. Block scheduling has been described by Gable and Manning (1997) as a scheduling option that “give teachers and students longer periods of time for study and more opportunity for individualized instruction” (p. 59). Further, they stated “Block scheduling relieves the fast-paced, pressurized atmosphere of many middle schools and offers teachers and students innovative ways to interact and to accomplish their objectives” (p. 59). Haycock (2008) concurred, stating “Flexible scheduling is the foundation for collaborative planning and teaching and has an impact on student achievement” (p. 6).

The extensive professional development and corresponding teacher teaming appeared to have been designed for teachers to become more proficient at their craft and to collaborate with one another within the team structure; yet other structures within the school did not reinforce this aggressive stance. For instance, the homework club was conducted on a voluntary, drop-in basis with little indication of how those students who were not successful academically or who did not attend were supported. It appeared to be the responsibility of the student to succeed rather than the school staff's responsibility. Additionally, the self-manager program and sports clubs offered incentives for those who were failing to bring grades to passing, but did not provide any incentive for those already passing to improve their grades.

Conversely, there was little evidence that all of the school programs were intentionally aligned with the specific goals of the SIP and mission statement. The activities and programs in place at the school tended to address the underachieving students and as such were passively aligned with the goals of the SIP, but did not proactively address the needs of all of the students. The SIP identified specific, measurable goals to increase overall academic achievement, yet few of the programs addressed increasing academic success for those students who were middle or high achieving. Additionally, with the exception of chess club, there was little indication of academically based clubs, such as a science club. Overall, while the initial data analysis indicated a low level of Academic Press, contradictory evidence suggested that external demands, such as the CCSS adoption may have influenced the research results.

Additionally, although the teachers indicated a high perception of Collective Efficacy, student achievement continued to decline. This, too, may be indicative of the importance of the three traits of Academic Optimism as interwoven constructs associated with student success. Ngidi (2012) suggested that the three factors of Academic Optimism interact with one another to

promote academic achievement. By isolating Collective Efficacy from the other two factors, the school staff may have unintentionally decreased the overall Academic Optimism of the school.

While the teachers believed that they could successfully educate the students, they did not appear to perceive that they had the support of the administration, the parents, or the students themselves. Staff perception that the principal was Restrictive may be indicative of a climate that was not conducive to Academic Optimism. Karadag, Kilicoglu, and Yilmaz (2014) asserted “Teachers’ thoughts about discrepancies in their schools, their doubtful approaches to planned implementations, disbeliefs in the policies and goals of the schools, and negative feelings toward their schools may have reflections on academic achievement” (p. 110). The data suggested that the negative effect of the perception that the principal was Restrictive may have outweighed the positive relationship between Academic Press and Collective Efficacy, which, in turn, may not have been conducive to a high level of staff Academic Optimism.

Implications for Practice

Student achievement and success are among the biggest challenges educators face today. If educational leaders are able determine the factors that contribute to Academic Optimism, they may be able to positively impact student achievement. Research suggests that Academic Optimism may promote academic success (Hoy, et al., 2006; Hopson & Lee, 2011, Hoy, 2012). Further, research has suggested that the school climate, principal behaviors, school programs and policies impact staff Academic Optimism (Hoy & Sabo, 2000; Smith, 2008). Discovering the school practices that promote a healthy school climate and thus Academic Optimism may facilitate a successful learning environment.

Understanding the potential misalignment between the new expectations and programs that have been successful under previous standards, may assist school leaders as they support school

staff and adjust to the changing landscape of education. Programs such as the homework club and the self-manager program may have been sufficient to address the needs of the students in prior years but as the school population changed, and student needs appear to have varied, suggesting that new, more aggressive programs designed to address the decline in student achievement were required. The stronger wording of the SIP and mission statement corresponded with the adoption of the new standards, but the development of new programming did not follow.

Gathering a wide variety of data from different areas allowed for a more complete picture of the character of the school. Surveys alone would have given a very different picture of what was occurring within the school. Survey results indicated a previously high achieving school with low Academic Press and low Trust in Parents and Students with the overall perception of teachers that the Principal was Restrictive. The addition of qualitative data analysis offered a more in-depth and complete picture, showing that additional factors contributed to those perceptions. School leaders should consider both quantitative and qualitative data.

This study suggests that teacher perception of principal behavior may be related to the school climate, which, in turn, may be related to teacher performance and motivation, indirectly affecting student performance. Correlational analysis suggested that Restrictive Principal Behavior had a strong, negative relationship to Academic Press. Thus, to improve academic success, principals may wish to guard against such perceptions by striving to create a trusting environment with increased communication about state and district changes. Bilgic and Gumuseli (2012) stated “The success and efficiency of schools depend mostly on the trust between and among teachers, student, and parents. Lack of trust in colleagues, students, and parents damages the relations between them and prevents cooperation at schools” (p. 5470).

They theorized that “teachers’ level of trust toward their colleagues is found higher than the level of trust towards the parents and the students” (p. 5473). Goddard, et al., (2001) stated:

Decades of school reform have led to calls for devolution of decision making, power, and authority to students and their parents. For schools to realize the kinds of positive transformation envisioned by these reform efforts, they must pay attention to teacher trust in both students and parents. (p. 6)

Research suggests that the three dimensions of Academic Optimism are contingent and reliant on one another (Beard, et al.,2010; Ngidi, 2012). The results of this study suggest that all three factors promote Academic Optimism in the school environment. High levels of all three factors of Academic Optimism may enhance student achievement through promoting Academic Press, Collective Efficacy, and Trust in Parents and Students.

In congruence with research, the findings have implications for methods to improve school climate and corresponding improvement of student success. School administrators may be able to improve school climate by promoting trust among faculty and administration, promoting teacher participation in school-wide decision making, and creating a school culture that emphasizes accountability and high ethical standards, which, in turn may be associated with student achievement (Karadag, et al., 2014). Adams and Forsyth (2006) stated “School structure, student characteristics, and school level are environmental conditions of schools that influence the teaching task and ultimately shape teacher perceptions of the control over desired outcomes” (p. 639). They further stated “Schools can configure their formal organizational structure so it produces the type social networks and interactions necessary for efficacy formation. Or, inversely, school structures could hinder the existence of normative conditions that influence efficacy beliefs” (p. 604). Adams and Forsyth (2006) stated:

Both teacher efficacy and collective teacher efficacy are functions of a teacher's perceived control over the reinforcement of student teaching... These teacher beliefs can lead to greater risk taking, to the incorporation of more innovative pedagogy, to more perseverance, or to higher expectations for student achievement. (p. 629)

Recommendations for Further Research

The goal of this study was to examine how one high achieving middle school demonstrated Academic Optimism. Quantitative data was collected in the form of surveys, while qualitative data was collected from the State Department of Education, public record, and from the school. The following recommendations are directed toward schools that are similar in size, demographics, and location to this study.

Larger sample size. This research was conducted on a case study of one school in the district. By extending the research to other schools may provide additional insight into Principal leadership, school climate, and Academic Optimism.

Teacher interviews. A study utilizing open ended feedback along with the SAOS and OCDQ-RM would elicit more detailed information about the school climate and principal leadership style. Giving teachers the opportunity to express their views may provide valuable information.

Student input. This study did not include student feedback or participation. Allowing students to provide input may offer valuable information about the school climate.

Conclusion

The findings of this study expanded upon the work of previous researchers in the area of Academic Optimism, school climate, and student achievement. By analyzing a wide variety of

data, both qualitative and quantitative, this research provided an in-depth look at Academic Optimism within a single school. The adoption and implementation of CCSS into what had previously been a high achieving school may have created discord among teachers and administrators, coupled with programs which appeared to conflict with the school policies. The teachers' perspective of the principal as being Restrictive may have been a result of the frustration level of teachers and lack of state support from the implementation. The addition of declining test scores and the possibility of state sanctions may have required the principal to adhere to the new standards, which may have further reinforced the teachers' viewpoint. Additionally, several passive policies and programs within the school that appeared to provide mixed messages to the teachers, who were receiving extensive professional development and the venue to collaborate with one another, again may have reinforced the frustration and confusion brought about by a lack of communication throughout the building.

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Appendix A

Teacher Survey

Teacher Survey

Directions: Below are twenty-one statements describing various leadership behaviors. Please read each statement carefully. Then look at the rating scale and decide how frequently this leader engages in the behavior described.

4 = very frequently

3 = often

2 = sometimes

1 = rarely

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. The principal compliments the teachers. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. The principal encourages teacher autonomy. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. The principal rules with an iron fist. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. Routine duties interfere with the job of teaching. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 5. The principal goes out of his/her way to help teachers. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 6. The principal corrects teachers' mistakes. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 7. The principal is available after school to help teachers when assistance is needed. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 8. Assigned non-teaching duties are excessive. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 9. The principal supervises teachers closely. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 10. The principal sets an example by working hard himself/herself. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 11. The principal closely checks teacher activities. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 12. Administrative paperwork is burdensome at this school. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 13. The principal monitors everything teachers do. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 14. The principal accepts and implements ideas suggested by faculty members. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 15. The principal goes out of his/her way to show appreciation to teachers. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 16. The principal treats teachers like equals. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 17. The principal keeps a close check on sign-in times. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 18. The principal listens to and accepts teachers' suggestions. | 1 2 3 4 |

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 19. Teachers are burdened with busywork. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 20. The principal looks out for the personal welfare of the faculty. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 21. The principal uses constructive criticism. | 1 2 3 4 |

Directions: The following are statements about your school. Please indicate your degree of agreement with each of the statements from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

6=strongly agree

5=agree

4=somewhat agree

3=somewhat disagree

2=disagree

1=strongly disagree

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| 1. Teachers in this school are able to get through to the most difficult students. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 2. Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 3. If a child doesn't want to learn teachers here give up. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 4. Teachers here don't have the skills needed to produce meaningful results. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 5. Teachers in this school believe that every child can learn. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 6. These students come to school ready to learn. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 7. Home life provides so many advantages that students are bound to learn. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 8. Students here just aren't motivated to learn. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 9. Teachers in this school do not have the skills to deal with student disciplinary problems. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 10. The opportunities in this community help ensure that these students will learn. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 11. Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about their safety. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 12. Drug and alcohol abuse in the community make learning difficult for students here. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 13. Teachers in this school trust their students. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 14. Teachers in this school trust the parents. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 15. Students in this school care about each other. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 16. Parents in this school are reliable in their commitments. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 17. Students in this school can be counted upon to do their work. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 18. Teachers can count upon parental support. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 19. Teachers here believe that students are competent learners. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 20. Teachers can believe what parents tell them. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 21. Students here are secretive. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |

Directions: Please indicate the degree to which the following statements characterize your school from Rarely Occurs to Very Often Occurs.

4=very often

3=often

2=sometimes

1=rarely

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 23. The school sets high standards for performance. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 24. Students respect others who get good grades. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 25. Students seek extra work so they can get good grades. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 26. Academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the school. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 27. Students try hard to improve on previous work. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 28. The learning environment is orderly and serious. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 29. The students in this school can achieve the goals that have been set for them. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 30. Teachers in this school believe that their students have the ability to achieve academically. | 1 2 3 4 |

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Please circle the answer which best applies:

Gender

Male

Female

Years teaching:

0-2 3-5 6+

Years teaching with current principal:

1-5 6-10 11+

Highest level of education you have attained:

College degree Some Masters credits Master's degree Master's +

Appendix B
OCDQ-RM (Revised) Scoring Guide

There are twenty-one questions on the OCDQ-RM in total as adjusted. Questions will be scored on a 4-point scale, answers ranging from 1-“rarely occurs”; 2-“sometimes occurs”; 3-“often occurs” and 4-“very frequently occurs.”

On the adjusted survey instrument, supportive principal behavior is measured by questions 1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21. Directive principal behavior is measured by questions 3, 6, 9, 11, 13, 17. Restrictive principal behavior is measured by questions 4, 8, 12, 19.

According to Hoy (1998), to convert the OCDQ-RM scores to standardized scores:

First: Convert the school subtest scores to standardized scores with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10, which we call SdS scores. Use the following formulas:

$$\text{SdS for Sup} = 10 \times (\text{Sup} - 29.39) / 4.61 + 50$$

Then compute the difference between your school score on Sup and the mean of 29.39 for the normative sample (Sup-29.39). Then multiply the difference by 10 [100 X (S-29.39)]. Next divide the product by standard deviation of the normative sample (4.61). Then add 50 to the result. You have computed a standardized score (SdS) for the supportive behavior subscale (Sup).

Next: Repeat the process for each dimension as follows:

$$\text{SdS for Dir} = 10 \times (\text{Dir} - 12.09) / 2.40 + 50$$

$$\text{SdS for Res} = 10 \times (\text{Res} - 9.11) / 1.52 + 50$$

Appendix C

Scoring for the School Academic Optimism Scale (SAOS)

I. Collective Efficacy (CE) of the School (items 1-12)

1. First, reverse scores on the following items: 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, that is, score 1=6, 2=5, 3=4, 4=3 5=2, 6=1.
2. Next, compute the average score for each individual on the first 12 items; that is, for each person, sum all the scores on the first 12 items and divide by the number of items for which you have responses.
3. Finally, sum the average individual scores for all teachers and divide by the number of teachers in the school who responded; this is the average collective efficacy (CE) score for the school and will be between 1 and 6.

II. Faculty Trust (FT) in Parents and Teachers (items 13-22)

1. First, reverse scores on item 22 that is, 1=6, 2=5, 3=4, 4=3 5=2, 6=1.
2. Next, compute the average score for each individual on the items 13 through 22; that is, for each person, sum all the scores on those 10 items and divide by the number of items for which you have responses.
3. Finally, sum the average individual scores for all teachers and divide by the number of teachers in the school who responded; this is the average Faculty Trust in Parents and Teachers score (FT) score for the school and will be between 1 and 6.

III. Academic Emphasis (AE) of the School (items 23-30)

1. Score all the items with a score from 1 to 4.
2. Next, compute the average score for each individual on the items 23 through 30; that is, for each person, sum all the scores on those 8 items and divide by the number of items for which you have responses.
3. Finally, sum the average individual scores for all teachers and divide by the number of teachers in the school who responded; this is the average Faculty Trust in Parents and Teachers score (AE) score for the school and will be between 1 and 4.

Appendix D
Information Sheet

TITLE OF STUDY: Revealing Academic Optimism in a High Achieving Middle School: A Case Study

INVESTIGATOR(S): Bill Thornton, PhD., (775) 682-9096; Lynn Pikero (775) 771-2569

PURPOSE

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine if there are significant relationships among teachers' perceptions of principal behavior and school academic optimism.

PARTICIPANTS

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a middle school teacher employed by the Washoe County School District. A sample of 27 middle school teachers are included in the study.

PROCEDURES

You will be given a survey with questions concerning your perceptions of the leadership practices of your principal, and your perceptions of your school climate. If you agree to participate in this study, then please complete all three parts of the survey. This is a onetime administration and completing the survey will take approximately 20 minutes. I have placed a box at the table near the exit. When you complete the survey, please place the survey face down in the box before leaving. If you should choose not to participate, then please mark an X across the front page of the survey and place it face down in the box. **Do not include your name on the survey.**

DISCOMFORTS, INCONVENIENCES, AND/OR RISKS

This is a minimal risk study with no personal identifiers that can link your responses to you to ensure confidentiality. The school code in the upper left corner designates the middle school being surveyed. Please do not write your name on the survey.

BENEFITS

There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. This study may provide information to educators about the relationships between teachers' perceptions of principal leadership practices and teachers' perceptions of school climate.

CONFIDENTIALITY

There are no personal identifiers that would link you to your completed survey. The completed surveys will be stored in a locked cabinet for the duration of the study. Upon completion of the study and the dissertation defense all completed surveys will be shredded.

RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW

You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. If the study design or use of the data is to be changed, you will be so informed and your consent re-obtained. You will be told of any significant new findings developed during the course of this study, which may relate to your willingness to continue participation. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study without penalty and your principal will not know who did or did not participate.

QUESTIONS

If you have questions about this study, please contact Bill Thornton, PhD. At (775) 682-9096 or Lynn Pikero (775) 771-2569.

You may ask about your rights as a research subject or you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any comments, concerns, or complaints to the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board, telephone number (775) 327-2368, or by addressing a letter to the Chair of the Board, c/o UNR Office of Human Research Protection, 205 Ross Hall / 331, University of Nevada, Reno, Reno, Nevada, 89557.

Appendix E
Script

TITLE OF STUDY: Revealing Academic Optimism in a High Achieving Middle School: A Case Study

INVESTIGATOR(S): Bill Thornton, PhD., (775) 682-9096; Lynn Pikero (775) 771-2569

SCRIPT

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine if there are significant relationships between teachers' perceptions of leadership practices of middle school principals and teachers' perceptions of school academic optimism. This is a minimal risk study with no personal identifiers that can link your responses to you; thus ensuring confidentiality. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary. This is a one-time administration and completing the survey will take approximately 20 minutes. The survey is comprised of three parts. The first part is the revised Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire- for middle schools instrument. The second part is comprised of the School Academic Optimism instrument. The third part consists of five demographic questions. Please read all directions carefully and respond to each item. Please do not collaborate during the administration of the survey; the accuracy of the survey data depends upon individual responses. Once you complete the survey, please place the survey face down in the box near the exit before leaving. If you choose not to participate, then please mark an X in the upper right hand corner of the survey and simply place your blank survey face down in the box. Before beginning the survey we will review the Information Sheet (Handout the Information Sheet and the survey and go through the Information Sheet step-by-step).

Are there any questions?

Please keep the information sheet for your own records. Now take out the survey. Do not write your name on the survey and remember that taking the survey is strictly voluntary. After completing the survey please place your survey face down in the box near the exit before leaving

the session. If you have chosen not to participate, please mark an X in the upper right hand corner and place your blank survey face down in the box near the exit before leaving the session.

Thank you very much for your time and effort.

Appendix F
Contact Letter Sent to Principal

Date

School Name

Principal Name

Middle School Address

Reno, NV

Dear Principal,

A few days from now, I will be calling to request your help in a study of leadership practices and school academic optimism. This study is part of an effort to better understand the relationships between principal leadership practices and school academic optimism through the perceptions of middle school teachers. I am contacting you because I plan to collect information from a select middle school in the School District. Your school has been selected to participate in this study because of its demographics and size of student population.

Results from this study will be used to assist educators in understanding how leadership practices affect school academic optimism. Schools with positive and supportive academic optimism: efficacy, academic emphasis and teacher trust can significantly impact the degree of academic success experienced by teachers and students.

The responses of your staff will be completely confidential and will be released only as summaries in which no individual's answers can be identified. Participation in this study is voluntary. However, you and your school can help by taking a few minutes to share your opinions. If for some reason you prefer not to participate, please let me know when I call.

I am writing in advance because I have found many people like to know ahead of time that they will be contacted. I will call in a couple of days to answer any questions you may have concerning this study.

Thank you for your time and consideration. It's only with the generous help of people like you and your staff that our research can be successful.

Sincerely,

Lynn E. Pikero

Appendix G
Permission Letter

Hi Lynn-

You have my permission to use the School Academic Optimism survey and the any or all of the OCDQ for middle schools in your research.

Good luck in your work.

Wayne

Wayne K. Hoy

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