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The University of Southern Mississippi

HIGH SCHOOL CULTURE, GRADUATION RATES, AND DROPOUT RATES

by

Philip L. Pearson

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

ABSTRACT

HIGH SCHOOL CULTURE, GRADUATION RATES, AND DROPOUT RATES

by Philip L. Pearson

May 2015

High school graduation rates and dropout rates have been a source of concern for many years. A number of strategies have been studied that could improve graduation rates and reduce dropout rates. School culture has been touted as an area that affects student achievement. As the culture of schools improves, student achievement has been shown to improve. The research focus of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between high school culture in public high schools in Mississippi and the graduation and dropout rates. School culture was measured by the School Culture Survey (SCS). As scores on the SCS increase, school climate improves. The SCS is divided into six different subsections: collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnerships. Teachers and counselors in 33 Mississippi public high schools took the SCS. The six subscale scores of the SCS were used as independent variables in a multiple regression analysis with the dependent variables being the graduation and dropout rates. Graduation and dropout rates were taken from the Mississippi Department of Education website.

The omnibus model demonstrated that there was a significant relationship between school culture and both graduation and dropout rates. The study found that both collegial support and learning partnerships were significant positive predictors of graduation rates. Both collegial support and learning partnerships were negative predictors of dropout rates. However, teacher collaboration was an unexpected positive

predictor of dropout rates. This study found that school culture is statistically related to graduation and dropout rates. Recommendations include: additional research involving school culture and graduation and dropout rates and inclusion of measuring culture as part of professional development and evaluations.

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A Dissertation

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Approved:

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the issue of low graduation rates and high dropout rates encountered by students in American high schools. One possible way that schools might counteract these trends is by working to improve the culture within schools. Research suggests a more positive school culture can boost student achievement (Stolp & Smith, 1995). This chapter includes a statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. It concludes with a hypothesis, research questions, definitions, assumptions, limitations, and a justification for this research.

The purpose of this study was to determine if school culture was statistically related to high school graduation and dropout rates in the state of Mississippi. Culture is a school variable that the school leadership and professional staff have the ability to influence. The independent variable was high school culture. The dependent variables were high school graduation and dropout rates. According to Hall and George (1999), school improvement is dependent on effective school leadership. “The school principal plays the significant role in establishing the climate for the school” (p. 165).

No American high school is immune to the dropout problem. Some schools suffer from dropout rates as high as fifty percent or greater (Orfield, 2004). There are many factors that research has linked to dropout rates over which schools have no control. Public schools cannot alter the race, gender, socio-economic status, family status, or country of origin of their students. A factor that public schools can influence, however, is the culture of the school. If a more favorable culture correlates with increased graduation rates or reduced dropout rates, then schools might choose to make culture improvement a part of their school improvement programs.

Organizational culture has been the subject of a good deal of study. While there may not be complete agreement for the definition of what culture is, there does seem to be consensus that culture has an important effect on performance and behavior in organizations (Thompson & Luthans, 1990). Many authors and researchers have dealt with the issue of culture in schools. According to Muhammad (2009) leadership is the key component in establishing and maintaining a positive, effective school culture. One approach to improving schools is by having schools work to improve culture (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Researchers at The National School Climate Center believe that improving the climate of schools can improve student learning and success.

Background

While the high school dropout rate in the U.S. has gone down during the past several years, it is still far from zero. In 2010, the status dropout rate was 7.4%. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). There are researchers who believe that rates provided by National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) may be tainted by data collection issues and that the actual dropout rate is higher than reported in the Common Core of Data (CCD) (Orfield, 2004). If the dropout rate suggested by NCES is accurate, that translates into millions of young people who have not completed high school through either graduation or the GED process. The GED stands for General Educational Development which is a series of tests that a young person can take to establish high school graduation equivalency. If, as suggested by some researchers, the dropout rate is higher than what the CCD indicates, then even more young people are failing to complete high school.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) indicated that in the year 2010 there were 22,040,343 young people between the ages of 15 and 19. This is the age span for the vast majority of high school students. On average, each age group (i.e., 15-year olds, 16-year olds, etc) would have about 4,408,063 members (Table 2, Population by Age and Sex: 2000 and 2010). When the graduation rate is applied to the numbers of young people per year group, an indication of the magnitude of the numbers of dropouts can be estimated. Among 48 states (no report for Idaho or Oklahoma), the Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate for 2010-2011 ranged from a high of 88% for Iowa to a low of 62% for Nevada. Mississippi was 36th out of 48 states with a graduation rate of 75%. Mississippi has one of the lower rates of high school graduation and one of the higher dropout rates of the 50 states. If the overall graduation rate for all states were 77%, then about 1,000,000 young people per year would not finish high school. This is not the dropout rate. Rather, this is simply an attempt to use known demographics in order to estimate the number of students who are dropping out of school each year. The Census Bureau (2011) indicated that in 2010 there were 224,619 people in Mississippi between the ages of 15 and 19 (Table 2. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex and Age for Mississippi: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2011). Each year group would have an average of about 45,000 young people of school age. Mississippi's graduation rate of 75% suggests that each year, on average, over 11,000 young people in Mississippi become dropouts. While these are simply projected numbers based on Census Bureau and Mississippi Department of Education demographics, they do serve to indicate the magnitude of the dropout problem of approximately 1,000,000 Americans and 11,000 Mississippians dropping out of school each year. According to New Media America (2013),

approximately 1.2 million students drop out of school each year. The Mississippi Department of Education (2005) indicated that 10,112 members of the 2001 Mississippi 9th grade cohort dropped out of school between 2001 and 2005. The estimates of approximately one million American students and 11,000 Mississippi students dropping out of school each year appear to be reasonable.

Another way to judge the magnitude of the Mississippi dropout problem can be seen in some of the estimates from *Dropout Prevention Statistics and Resources* from the Parents' Campaign (2011):

- There are more than 150,000 high school dropouts on Medicaid in Mississippi, costing the state more than \$200 million annually.
- Almost two out of three of all public assistance recipients in Mississippi have been found to be individuals who did not complete high school.
- School dropouts are more likely than graduates to go to jail. Past studies have shown that 75% of inmates in state prisons, 59% of federal prisoners and 69% of local jail inmates are high school dropouts.
- If the male high school graduation rate increased just 5%, the reduced crime rate and increased earnings would give Mississippi a combined savings and revenue of more than \$90 million annually.
- Overall, high school dropouts cost the state of Mississippi more than \$450 million annually in lost revenue and added public assistance and incarceration costs. (p. 1)

Many authors have suggested that when a strong positive culture is present, achievement is positively affected. Kotter and Heskett (1992) provided a rationale as to

why a positive climate promotes achievement. First, a strong culture encourages employees to have a shared set of goals. With aligned goals, employees are able to work cooperatively with the same ends in mind. Additionally, a strong culture tends to help instill a high level of motivation on the part of employees. Kotter and Heskett indicated a third possible connection between culture and achievement. When an organization possesses a strong culture, then the culture may provide a structure to shape employee behavior without the need for a rigid bureaucracy that might adversely affect motivation.

Dropping out of school is related to a number of negative behaviors. Saner and Ellickson (1996) conducted a study that analyzed rates of violence among adolescents with a number of different risk factors. Three levels of violence were measured: any violence, persistent hitting, and the most serious form referred to as serious, predatory violence. Dropouts were more prone to violence than were adolescents who were in school or who had graduated. This trend was true for all three levels of violence. Dropping out of school showed the strongest connection with the most serious level, predatory violence, with dropouts being twice as likely to engage in this behavior as compared to those in school or who graduated. Neely and Griffin-Williams (2013) found that dropouts were more likely to become engaged in delinquent behavior than were students who remained in school. Ikomi (2010) found that dropouts were more likely to be charged for violent felonies. Staff and Kreager (2008) found a connection between violent behavior and the likelihood of students dropping out of high school.

High school graduates tend to reap more positive social benefits than do dropouts. Dropouts tend to have higher rates of negative consequences than do graduates. These negative consequences include higher rates of incarceration, teen pregnancy, and violent

behavior. As a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the 2001 iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and subsequent federal accountability provisions approved by the Obama administration, there has been an increase in public awareness and state department of education interest in graduation and dropout rates. Research suggests that schools with a more positive culture tend to see a greater degree of student achievement than do schools with a less positive culture. Most research tends to focus on achievement outcomes such as scores on standardized tests. However, some research does link positive school culture to achievement as is manifested in reduced dropout rates including (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002).

Stolp and Smith (1995) suggested that culture helps the people in a school to recognize what is important and also how to behave. A school staff will be motivated to support programs and goals only if the staff believes in these goals and programs. A strong climate provides the opportunity for the staff to develop a belief in the school's shared goals. Stolp and Smith also suggest that leadership in a school can provide important direction that will encourage a positive climate within the organization. A more positive school climate is clearly associated with increased student achievement according to Stolp and Smith.

Zmuda, Kuklis, and Kline (2004) argue that a school's staff members need to have a shared set of beliefs in order for positive change to occur within the school. A key component is the need for the staff to work with a sense of collegiality in order to accomplish shared goals. Also, the leadership of the school should provide the driving force that will encourage the belief in a set of shared goals and the need for collegiality

within the school. When these elements are in place, then the school will see an increase in student achievement. This in turn may help improve graduation rates.

Problem Statement

As technology has continued to advance in virtually all areas, a high school diploma has become a minimum requirement for a young person to enter the labor force (Davis & Dupper, 2004; Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001; Saddler, Tyler, Maldonado, Cleveland, & Thompson, 2011). Dropouts have a harder time finding a job than do high school graduates (Davis & Dupper, 2004; Hauser, Simmons, & Pager, 2006; Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001; Miller & Porter, 2007; Saddler, Tyler, Maldonado, Cleveland, & Thompson, 2011). Stanard (2003) noted that “Fifty-six percent of high school dropouts were unemployed or were not enrolled in college as opposed to 16% of high school graduates” (p. 219). Dropouts who do find a position tend to earn less than do high school graduates. Campbell (2003) indicated that dropouts tend to earn slightly more than half as much as high school graduates (p. 16). Also, the diploma is a key to obtaining additional training or education that will also boost a young person’s employability (Hauser et al., 2006; Kaufman et al., 2001; Miller & Porter, 2007). Dropouts are more likely to receive public assistance than are those who graduate (Kaufman et al., 2001; Saddler et al., 2011). Young female dropouts tend to be single mothers at a rate higher than young women who graduate from high school. Dropouts are more likely to be in prison than are graduates. This trend includes those who are on death row (Kaufman et al., 2001; Miller & Porter, 2007). “Dropouts constitute 52% of welfare recipients, 82% of the prison population, and 85% of juvenile justice cases” (Stanard, 2003, p. 219). “Dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to

experience health problems, engage in criminal activities, and become dependent on welfare and other government programs” (Martin, Tobin, & Sugai, 2002, p. 10).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is the name given to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001. Among the requirements of NCLB is for states and districts to produce “report cards” detailing student progress. One of these requirements involves annual reporting of graduation rates for secondary school students (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Graduation rates and dropout rates across the country came under intense federal scrutiny as a result of NCLB. As the majority of states have applied for and received waivers from NCLB during the Obama administration, high expectations for improved graduation rates have not diminished. All states, the District of Columbia, and eight additional jurisdictions must report the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) as well as high school dropout data to the Common Core of Data (CCD) which is part of the National Center for Education Statistics (U. S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The Mississippi Department of Education publishes both state and district information as part of its Mississippi Report Card, including the overall graduation rate for the entire state of Mississippi. Additionally the graduation rate is disaggregated for students with IEP’s, limited English proficient students, economically disadvantaged, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American, and White students (Mississippi Department of Education, 2012). These data are available on both the State of Mississippi’s annual report cards as well as on each public school district’s annual report card. These graduation data that are reported for the state and for each district are part of the Annual Measurable Objective or AMO associated with the state’s federal

accountability plan. Since these annual report cards for the state and districts are available on the department's website, anyone who is interested can access this information.

Interested citizens can easily access a particular district's report card and can also easily compare graduation rates of various districts. Such reporting has made it easier to find out the graduation rate for any Mississippi public school district.

A number of authors have linked culture to achievement in education. Stringer (2002) indicated that organizational culture has a significant impact on performance. Stringer also suggested that leadership is crucial for the development of a positive culture. "Climate arouses motivation, and motivation determines performance" (p. 4). Leaders who can successfully use positive motivation tend to encourage persistence and influence behavior. Generalizing these conclusions to the more specific environment of P-12 schools, and high schools in particular, prompts one to consider the connections among culture variables and student achievement. Ben-Peretz, Schonmann, and Kupermintz (1999) found that culture as measured within the teachers' lounge was related to student achievement. Positive social interactions in the lounge were an indicator of strong learning communities. Strong learning communities were related to increased student achievement. Relationships within lounges were an indicator of the over-all school culture. Smith (2006) found that standardized test scores for language arts, mathematics, and reading were significantly related to scores on a test used to measure the culture of the school. Deal and Peterson (2009) found that a positive school culture was related to an improvement in effective school teaching practices as well as an improvement in achievement and a reduction of negative behaviors such as skipping

school and disruptive behaviors in the school. Deal and Peterson also noted a relationship between a positive school culture and a reduced dropout rate.

Research Questions and Related Hypotheses

The key research questions for this study were:

1. What are the attitudes of high school teachers and counselors concerning the culture of the schools in which they work?
2. Is there a positive relationship between high school graduation rate and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS?
3. Is there a negative relationship between high school dropout rate and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS?

The research hypotheses that were tested were:

1. There is a positive relationship between high school graduation rate and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS.
2. There is a negative relationship between high school dropout rate and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS.

Definitions

The following terms are used in the study and the definitions that are operationalized for this research accompany each term.

High school dropout rate: “The *status dropout rate* represents the percentage of 16- through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential such as a General Educational Development [GED] certificate.” (National Center for Educational Statistics)

School climate: “School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.” (National School Climate Center, 2013).

High school graduation rate: The rate at which young people complete high school via graduation with a diploma. The definition used by the U.S. Department of Education is: “The four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. From the beginning of 9th grade (or the earliest high school grade), students who are entering that grade for the first time form a cohort that is “adjusted” by adding any students who subsequently transfer into the cohort and subtracting any students who subsequently transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die” (U.S. Department of Education (2012). High school graduation rates and dropout rates are related. However, the graduation rate is not simply the dropout rate subtracted from one ($1 - \text{graduation rate} \neq \text{dropout rate}$). Graduation rates and

dropout rates are calculated using different methods. Although the two rates are inversely related, because different procedures are used for their determination, it cannot be assumed that adding the graduation rate to the dropout rate will result in 1 or 100%. As an example, the Mississippi Department of Education (2009) in 2009 had a graduation rate goal of 76.8% for 2012-2013, while the dropout rate goal for the same 2012-2013 school year was 13% (page 5). While the total of the graduation rate and dropout rate is only 89.9%, this apparent mathematical discrepancy simply reflects that the two rates are calculated using differing sets of metrics and are not intended to equal 100% when added together. For the purposes of this study the exact graduation rate or the exact dropout rate is not a significant issue. A more important issue is that all public school districts are required by the Mississippi's Department of Education to use the same standards when the districts calculate the graduation rates and the dropout rates. Since all districts operate under the same standards, the rates should reflect a degree of consistency that will make it possible to use these rates for statistical analysis.

School culture: For the purposes of this study, school climate and school culture have similar meanings and can be used interchangeably. Climate and culture are two terms that are used interchangeably in the education literature. Some authors talk about climate (Freiberg, 1999; Stringer, 2002), while other authors refer to culture (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Stolp & Smith, 1995; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Still other authors refer to both climate and culture and make a distinction between the two (Bulach, Lunenburg, & Potter, 2008; Gruenert, 2008; Knapp & Harrigan, 2008; Schneider, 1990). Different definitions of school culture abound in the literature. According to Bulach, Lundenburg, and Potter (2008), culture variables are psychological while climate refers to institutional

variables. Gruenert (2008) states that climate and culture are related but that the two are not the same. Gruenert indicates that climate can be likened to the organization's attitude while the culture can be likened to the organization's personality (pp. 57-58). Other researchers tend to refer only to the climate of the school and make no attempt to separate it into sub-components. Dietrich and Bailey (1996) suggest that the principal can play an important role in helping to establish and maintain a positive school climate. "Simply defined, climate boils down to the nature of interrelationships among the people in the school community physically, emotionally, and intellectually; how the people within the school treat each other" (Freiberg, 2010, p. 14). Since there are no universally accepted definitions of climate and culture, and since there is significant overlap between these two terms in the literature, this study made no attempt to differentiate between these two terms. For the purposes of this study culture will be the preferred term. It will encompass the meanings of both climate and culture as used in the literature.

Assumptions

The following assumptions will be made for the purposes of this study:

1. Participants in this study will include teachers and counselors in Mississippi public school districts.
2. All participants will understand the instrument and its definition of culture.
3. All participants will complete the instrument in an honest manner.
4. Participant responses will not be influenced by fear of retribution.

Delimitations

The following are acknowledged as factors that may limit the generalizability of study results:

1. Only Mississippi high schools were involved in this study. Whether or not findings might apply to other states cannot be predicted.
2. Teachers and counselors at public high schools were the only participants. No administrators or non-teaching staff members were surveyed.
3. Perceptions of culture were based solely on input from teachers and counselors. Administrators, students, and non-teaching staff members were not participants. Had these other groups participated, demographic information would have been collected. However, administrators, for example, would have had their anonymity compromised due to the small number of administrators in some schools, sometime as few as only one administrator in some small schools. Student participants would have increased IRB requirements beyond the scope of this study.
4. The graduation rates and dropout rates were for the cohort that graduated in May 2012. The SCS collected data from the teaching staffs and counselors of participating high schools in the fall of 2014. The graduation rates and dropout rates were cumulative rates that were the result of schooling experiences from the 2008/2009 school year through the 2011/2012 school year. The SCS cores came from a one-time survey administered in the fall of 2014. The SCS scores were not measured during the time the 2012 cohort of students was in school. It is possible that the culture within a school may change from year to year, particularly as administrators and teachers leave and replacements are assigned to the schools.

Justification

This study might provide insight as to whether school culture is an area worthy of research to determine ways in which high school graduation rates might be boosted and high school dropout rates lowered. There is a body of literature relating school culture to test scores (Stolp & Smith, 1995). Less literature has been published that relates school culture to graduation and dropout rates. Data from both the U.S. Department of Education (2012) and the Mississippi Department of Education (2012) show that a significant number of young people continue to drop out of school. Research has depicted a grim future for the dropout in multiple areas. Dropouts earn less, are more likely to receive welfare, and are more likely to commit crimes and to become incarcerated (Parents' Campaign, 2011). These few examples of the disadvantages of dropping out are both individual issues and society-wide issues. The individual dropout may be confronted with one or more of the disadvantages facing dropouts in general. When society is faced with a million or more dropouts each year, the cost to society is staggering.

Schools, districts, and educators have only limited opportunities to address the dropout problem. Public schools have no control over the demographics of their students. Some of these demographics related to high dropout rates include socio-economic status, gender, and race. However, educators have the potential to improve the culture of the school (Barr & Gibson, 2013; Dietrich & Bailey, 1996; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Fullan, 2008; Leithwood, Aitken, & Jantzi, 2006; Northouse, 2012; Schmoker, 2006). If a more positive culture encourages improved student achievement, it is possible that an improved school culture may also encourage a higher graduation rate

and a lower dropout rate. The possible advantages to an improved graduation rate include a more promising future for those students who do graduate, reduced social costs to the state and country, and a more favorable attitude of the public towards public schools. Schools can theoretically improve their culture at little or no costs. If improving culture can influence the graduation and dropout rates, then students, communities, and educators all benefit. Research has demonstrated a link between culture and academic achievement (Angelle, 2007; Barnett & McCormick, 2004; Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Payne, 2008; Saginor, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2005; Togneri & Anderson, 2002). However, little research has been conducted to see if culture is related to graduation or dropout rates. This study was worth conducting to help determine whether a positive culture in Mississippi public high schools correlates with an improved graduation rates or reduce dropout rates. If a statistical link can be demonstrated, then practitioners and policymakers may consider these results as worthy of investigation and inclusion in policy and practice decisions.

Summary

Young people dropping out of school remains a significant issue in the United States. Dropouts are subject to a number of significant social and economic disadvantages as compared to those who successfully graduate from high school. Research has suggested that a positive culture can have a significant effect on achievement in schools. While the majority of culture research in education has focused on achievement on standardized test scores, some research has suggested that a positive culture can favorably affect the graduation and dropout rates of public schools (Bryk and Thum, 1989; Burlison and MacGeorge, 2002). Culture is an area that educators may be

able to influence at little or no cost. If a more positive culture can influence graduation and dropout rates, then educators and policymakers might wish to make culture a school improvement issue. This study examined school culture in Mississippi public high schools in order to determine if culture is related to dropout and graduation rates.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature related to the culture within public schools and to examine how culture is related to student achievement, particularly achievement as manifested by high school graduation. The chapter will begin with an examination of Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and how it relates to school culture. The theoretical foundations will further review Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. How different authors and researchers define school culture will be examined. The issue of why students drop out of high school will be explored. How leadership influences school culture and student achievement will be reviewed. The six sub factors that are measured by the School Culture Score (SCS) will be explored. These factors include collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership. The final section of this chapter will be a brief summary.

Theoretical Foundations

John Dewey provided a framework for the later work of Albert Bandura in his Social Learning Theory. John Dewey recognized the importance of the environment in learning. How the individual and the environment interact has a significant effect on the learner (Hildebrand, 2008). Dewey argued "Developmental behavior shows, on the other hand, that in the higher organisms excitations are so diffusely linked with reactions that the sequel is affected by the state of the organism in relation to environment" (Dewey, 1938, p. 31). To Dewey, the process of education involved "fostering, nurturing and cultivating" (Edman, 1968, p. 100). This social environment for Dewey has an important

effect on the learner. “What he (the learner) does and what he can do depend upon the expectations, demands, approvals, and condemnations of others” Edman, 1968, p. 102). Dewey stated, “I believe that the school is primarily a social institution” (Hickman & Alexander, 1998, p. 230). Dewey’s beliefs about the importance of the social environment for learning provided a theoretical construct for Bandura’s Social Learning Theory.

Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura and Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs provide insight into why schools with positive cultures may be providing for student needs better than schools with weak cultures. Schools with strong positive cultures may be offering more to students in important areas that will encourage students to remain in school and not become dropouts. Schools with a more negative culture might be failing to provide important support to students. This, combined with other at-risk factors, might contribute to the decisions some students make to become dropouts.

Social Learning Theory

According to Albert Bandura’s social learning theory, learning is based largely on the reciprocal interaction between the learner and the learning environment. A student in school is not simply responding to the stimuli provided by the teachers in order to learn. There is an active interchange between the student and the school environment that enables learning to occur. Social learning theory suggests that symbols are important to learning and symbols provide learners with powerful tools with which to deal with the school environment. The student has great potential to deal with the learning environment through vicarious and direct experiences (Bandura, 1977, pp. 12-13). “Virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experience occur on a vicarious

basis by observing other people's behavior and its consequences" (Bandura, 1977, p. 12). This multitude of potential interchanges between the student and the learning environment is similar to what Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest when they describe a learning environment as considerably more complex than simply a "teacher/learner dyad. This points to a richly diverse field of essential actors and, with it, other forms of relationships of participation" (p. 56).

Bandura indicated that past consequences can be important motivators for future behaviors. Students who have received reinforcing consequences will learn to produce the desired behaviors as part of what Bandura referred to as anticipatory capacity. Students must recognize that their responses were rewarded for this behavior to occur. Once students do recognize the rewards that were given in response to desired behavior, then these responses show marked increases (pp. 18-19). A good deal of evidence suggests that reinforcement provides useful information and motivation to the learner rather than simply being a response strengthener (p. 21). This would seem to support the concept that schools with a positive culture will be more likely to provide quality feedback and reinforcement to students, thus taking advantage Bandura's concept of motivation and information resulting from reinforcement (p. 21).

Social learning theory suggests that learners are more likely to "adopt modeled behavior if it results in outcomes they value than if it has unrewarding or punishing effects" (p. 28). This would seem to be in line with the concept of a positive school culture that regularly provides students with positive feedback for desired behavior. Student behavior that does not receive reinforcement would be more characteristic of a school with a poor culture resulting in students not receiving motivational feedback (p.

28). “Humans do not simply respond to stimuli; they interpret them” (p. 59). According to Bandura, stimuli tend to generate expected behaviors because of the predictive function. Bandura explained that this is not the same as when behaviorists suggest that particular stimuli generate automatic responses. Rather, to Bandura, stimuli create situations in which expectations develop, not “stimulus-response connections” (p. 59). Stimuli, to Bandura, “serve as predictors of the relation between actions and outcomes” (p. 59). English (1954) suggested a similar idea when he said “Learning is, in short, the processes or activities whereby a person reorganizes his behavior or his living” (p. 21).

Bandura discussed how defensive behavior may occur in the presence of threats. The subject might react defensively due to the predictive manner of the event elicited by the perceived threat. By employing defensive behavior, undesired painful outcomes may be avoided. In the case of a school whose culture is not positive, some at-risk students might be subjected to threat situations. One possible defensive behavior option might be to become a dropout rather than continue to be subjected to negative treatment (p. 62). People cannot only be emotionally harmed directly, but they may also be harmed vicariously. People who observe others being harmed may also feel harmed. Students who are in a school with a poor culture might observe other students being subjected to negative behavior and feel fearful as a result (p. 65). This feeling is stronger if the people being subjected to negative behavior are people they identify with (fellow students) rather than if the others are strangers and not colleagues (p. 66). This might apply to students in schools with a negative culture when other students are subjected to negative behaviors by teachers, administrators, or by other students.

According to Bandura, persistence is related to how students feel about their own effectiveness. People who have a greater sense of their effectiveness are more likely to attempt to deal with difficult situations (p. 79). However, those who have a lower sense of their own effectiveness might be less inclined to deal with challenging situations (pp. 78-79). If students have a better sense of their own effectiveness they are more likely to persist in challenging situations. This sense of self-efficacy is related to the amount of anticipatory fears that people feel. A belief in the ability to accomplish tasks is related to efficacy expectations. It is likely that schools with a more positive culture will give students more opportunities to be successful and therefore the students may have a greater sense of self efficacy. When people see colleagues be successful in dealing with threatening situations, without negative consequences, they are more likely to persist (p. 81). This might relate to at-risk students who observe other at-risk students. Whether others succeed or fail may have a significant effect on the vicarious experiences of the observers. Verbal persuasion is not very effective on people who have experienced failure if the perceived result will continue to be failure. On the other hand, verbal persuasion coupled with realistic opportunities for success is more likely to result in increased persistence (p. 82).

Bandura indicated there is a connection between behavior and regulated consequences. People tend to stop engaging in behavior that is not rewarding or that is punished. Rewarded behavior tends to be retained. Anticipated rewards or anticipated punishments can have a strong effect on behavior. However, a given behavior and its consequence may not be nearly as important as the long term trend between behavior and its consequences. A consequence that only occurs occasionally may be all that is

necessary as long as the consequences are consistent when they do occur. That is, behavior can result in little or no consequence the majority of the time as long as consistent consequences are delivered occasionally that reinforce desired behavior (pp. 97-98). Social reinforcers are effective when used only occasionally as long as they are consistent. Social incentives have a positive effect on human interactions and social learning (p. 102). People will do a great deal to receive positive reinforcement from others or to avoid negative reinforcement (p. 114). Vicarious rewards and vicarious punishments have a similar result on behavior. That is, when people observe colleagues being rewarded or punished for behavior, this can have a strong effect on their own behavior. Students in school certainly are affected vicariously in terms of how other students are treated (p. 119).

Bandura proposed a more recent theory called the Social Cognitive Theory in his 1986 book called *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*. In many respects this newer theory was his original social learning theory that had been expanded and developed. A key component of his social cognitive theory is that learning and behavior are involved in a three way relationship with the environment. According to Bandura (1986):

In the social cognitive view people are neither driven by inner forces nor automatically shaped and controlled by external stimuli. Rather, human functioning is explained in terms of a model of triadic reciprocity [*sic*] in which behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other (p. 18).

This three way interaction involving behavior, cognitive, and environmental factors might be related to why some students chose to remain in school while others choose to become dropouts. In this case, the environment could be the school, but because of differing cognitive factors, one student stays and a different student leaves.

Rosenthal and Zimmerman (1978) stated that “Social learning theory views human functioning in terms of three interdependent sources of influence, namely, antecedent determinants, consequence outcomes, and cognitive determinants of behavior” (p. 74). Furthermore, Rosenthal and Zimmerman say “Social learning psychologists believe that the most important antecedent stimuli are social” (p. 74). Using this definition, it could be argued that a school’s culture represents the antecedent stimuli and the quality of the school’s culture may have a significant effect on at-risk students’ behavior.

Bandura (1972) considered modeling an important component of learning. In higher-order experiments, Bandura noted that one person’s actions could provide useful information to observers who, in turn, could learn from the modeled behavior. “Depending on how they are used, modeling influences can thus produce not only specific mimicry but also generative and innovative behavior” (p. 37). Modeling behavior would likely differ considerably between a school with a positive culture from one with a negative culture. Students whose exposure to very different kinds of modelled behavior depending on the quality of the culture of the school could be expected to differ considerably on subsequent behavior. Bandura also indicated the value of motivation and reinforcement in the success of learning through modeling behavior. “A person may acquire, retain, and possess the capabilities for skillful execution of modeled behavior,

but the learning may rarely be activated into overt performance if negative sanctions or unfavorable incentive conditions obtain” (pp. 47-48). Bandura seemed to be writing directly about what is now referred to as culture. That is, the more positive the culture, the more likely that modelled behavior will result in improved student achievement. In addition, Bandura said “People continually observe the action of others and the occasions on which they are rewarded, ignored, or punished” (p. 48). Bandura reported on research conducted on the effect of rewarded imitative behavior as well on non-rewarded imitative behavior that was similar to rewarded imitative behavior. Bandura found that the rewarded imitative behavior produced better results than did the non-reinforced behavior (pp. 54-58). This research seems to be aligned with research indicating the effects of culture on student achievement. That is, as culture improves in schools, achievement also improves.

Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow (1970) developed a hierarchy of five needs or levels of needs that include in order: physiological needs, safety needs, belonging and love needs, esteem needs, and at the top, self-actualization needs (pp. 35-46). All five of Maslow’s needs have implications for the culture within a school. When students feel these needs are being met, then it is likely the school has a positive culture. However, a school with a negative culture may be failing to meet one or more of the five Maslow needs for students. Students who arrive at school without eating and are unable to be fed at school are not having their lowest need for food being met. Students at some schools experience fear from other students or from adults in the school. This second level of lower needs, a feeling of safety, may differentiate schools with a positive culture from schools with a

negative culture. Students who attend schools with positive cultures may have a sense of belonging while students at schools with a negative culture may not feel that they belong. Schools with a positive culture are more likely to promote a feeling of self-esteem within their students while schools with a negative culture are less likely to encourage students to develop a sense of self-esteem. Students who succeed in school, who do well, and who graduate are more likely to feel a sense of self-actualization. Students who fail to complete school, who drop out, are more likely to fail to develop a sense of self-actualization. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs seems to relate well to schools with a positive culture while schools with a negative culture seem to fail to meet one or more needs of their students.

A school with a positive culture is more likely to be able to meet the needs of its students as outlined in Bandura's Social Learning Theory and in Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. When students receive positive reinforcement for behavior in school, then anticipatory capacity may be boosted. Students interpret stimuli from the school. Positive stimuli likely will be interpreted differently from negative stimuli. Threats that occur at a school with a poor culture might help convince a student to become a dropout. This would likely be related to persistence and a feeling of effectiveness. Students may tend to stop going to school in the presence of negative consequences. There seem to be many implications for at-risk students related to Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Also, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs suggests that schools with a more positive culture will likely do a better job of fulfilling the needs of the students as compared with schools with a less positive culture.

Both Bandura and Maslow provided a number of insights into how learning may be connected to and interrelated with the environment. That is, a learner is immersed in the environment and responds to that environment. The environment under consideration is the school. How a student and the school interact may have significant implications for how successful the student will be at learning, persisting, and completing the program of instruction, or, in this case, graduating from high school. As Bandura (1977) indicated, learning is related to the interaction between the student and the environment (school). The quality of the interaction between the student and the school's environment will have an effect on the success or failure of the student. Where Bandura refers to environment, one may usually substitute culture and be consistent with Bandura's concepts. Additionally, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs seem to fit well with the concept of the school's environment or culture. Schools with a more positive culture seem more likely to meet such needs among their students thus promoting achievement persistence and improved graduation rates.

Definitions of School Culture

There does not seem to be an accepted definition of the term culture or of school culture. Different authors provide many different definitions. Each author appears to have a clear definition in his or her mind as to what constitutes culture. However, there are some important differences that can be seen as various author's definitions are compared and contrasted. The term culture has been applied to schools for a long time. More than 80 years ago Waller (1932) said "Schools have a culture that is definitely their own." (p. 96). Schein (2010) has written extensively about organizational culture. He

indicated that as a concept, culture is an abstraction (p. 14). According to Schein, there are several aspects of an organizational culture including:

- **Observed behavioral regularities when people interact:** The language they use, the customs and traditions that evolve, and the rituals they employ in a wide variety of situations.
- **Group norms:** The implicit standards and values that evolve in working groups.
- **Espoused values:** The articulated publicly announced principles and values that the group claims to be trying to achieve.
- **Formal philosophy:** The broad policies and ideological principles that guide a group's actions toward, stockholders, employees, customers, and other stakeholders.
- **Rules of the game:** The implicit, unwritten rules for getting along in the organization, "the ropes" that a newcomer must learn to become an accepted member, "the way we do things around here."
- **Climate:** The feeling that is conveyed in a group by the physical layout and the way in which members of the organization interact with each other, with customers, or with other outsiders.
- **Embedded skills:** The special competencies displayed by group members in accomplishing certain tasks, the ability to make certain things that get passed on from generation to generation without necessarily being articulated in writing.

- Habits of thinking, mental models, and/or linguistic paradigms: The shared cognitive frames that guide the perceptions, thought, and language used by the members of a group and are taught to new members in the early socialization process.
- Shared meanings: The emergent understandings that are created by group members as they interact with each other. .
- Root metaphors” or integrating symbols: The ways that groups evolve to characterized themselves, which may or may not be appreciated consciously, but that get embodied in buildings, office layouts, and other material artifacts of the group. This level of the culture reflects the emotional and aesthetic response of members as contrasted with the cognitive or evaluative response.
- Formal rituals and celebrations: The ways in which a group celebrates key events that reflect important values or important “passages” by members such as promotion, completion of important projects, and milestones. (Schein, 2010, pp. 14-16)

According to Elbot and Fulton (2008), “a school’s culture has a significant impact on the lives of students” (p. 2). They discuss eight gateways to successfully dealing with school culture:

- Teaching, learning, and assessment
- Relationships
- Problem solving
- Expectations, trust, and accountability
- Voice

- Physical environment
- Markers, rituals, and transitions
- Leadership (pp. 74-100).

Barth (2002) indicated that “A school’s culture is a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization. It is the historically transmitted pattern of meaning that wields astonishing power in shaping what people think and how they act” (p. 7). Deal and Peterson (2009) indicate there are eight elements of school culture that include:

- Schools as tribes which has the power to transform
- Artifacts, architecture, and routines which are symbols of culture
- History which demonstrates the value of lore and tradition
- Myth, vision, and values that help a school discover its calling
- Stores and tales that pass along the school’s vision
- Rituals that embed purpose and meaning
- Ceremonies and traditions that represent culture in action
- The conveyors of culture including both positive and negative transmitters (pp. 19-128).

While different authors have a variety of ideas about what culture is, there appear to be some similarities among these different definitions. Most of the definitions and descriptions include something about relationships, how people in the organization work together, ceremonies, values, and traditions. It appears that the quality of a school’s culture will have the direct effect of helping to determine how the staff and

administration work together to provide learning opportunities for students. The very important indirect effect, then, is how the school's culture affects students. In a school with a strong, positive culture, it is likely students will benefit from adults who work well together, cooperate, have pride in the organization, and work to produce a quality product which is educated, competent students. However, in a school with a poor or toxic culture, students will have fewer opportunities to benefit from a high quality education and from positive, meaningful relations with the staff and administration.

Some authors distinguish between the terms climate and culture. Eller and Eller (2009) suggest that school climate is the day to day feel within a school while culture is more stable and grounded compared to climate. Climate, they assert, is a part of the culture while culture is more of a school's foundation. Climate can change more easily than can culture. Culture tends to be stable over time (pp. 2-3). According to Stringer (2002), climate and culture are different. "Culture emphasizes the unspoken assumptions that underlie an organization, whereas climate focuses on the more accessible perceptions of the organization, especially how they arouse motivation and, thus, impact performance" (p. 14). Deal and Peterson (1999) indicate that "the term culture provides a more accurate and intuitively appealing way to help school leaders better understand their school's own unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectation that seem to permeate everything: the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about or avoid talking about, whether they seek out colleagues for help or don't, and how teachers feel about their work and their students" (pp. 2-3). Stolp and Smith (1995) distinguish between culture and climate. They say that climate is "a narrower concept than culture. Climate is the term typically used to describe people's shared perceptions of the

organization or work unit, whereas culture ... embraces not only how people feel about their organization, but the assumptions, values, and beliefs that give the organization its identity and specify its standards for behavior” (p. 15).

According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), “The culture of an organization is founded upon the assumptions, beliefs, values, and habits that constitute the norms for that organization – norms that shape how people think, feel, and act” (p. 131). Fullen (2007) indicated that the key component of an effective school culture is that teachers work together during the school day as an essential part of professional development. Hoy and Miskel (2005) suggest that “organizational culture is a system of shared orientations that hold the unit together and give it a distinctive identity” (p. 165). However, they go on to say that there is little agreement on what is shared such as: “norms, values, philosophies, perspectives, beliefs, expectation, attitudes, myths, or ceremonies” (p. 165). Hoy and Miskel indicated that “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. 185). It appears there may be considerable overlap between what some authors refer to as culture and others refer to as climate. This lack of agreement about what is culture and what is climate is why, for this limited study, the two terms are treated as being essentially the same.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (2008) adopted the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders. While not specifically defining school culture, the ISLLC Standards provide a good deal of operational meaning as to what the National Policy Board for Educational Administration

thinks is important in the area of school culture. Three of the six standards relate directly to aspects of school culture:

Standard 2: An educational leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Standard 3: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Standard 4: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources (pp. 14-15).

ISLLC Standard 2 is related to the School Culture Survey factors (SCS) of Collaborative Leadership, Teachers Collaboration, Professional Development, and Collegial Support. ISLLC Standard 3 is related to the SCS factor of Unity of Purpose. The ISLLC Standard 4 is related to the SCS factor of Learning Partnership. These three ISLLC Standards are aligned with the constructs that the SCS measures.

Gorton, Alston, and Snowden (2007) define organizational culture as the “values, goals, principles, procedures, and practices” that an organization uses (p. 150). They also indicated that school culture is important because of the effect it can have “on morale, learning, and productivity. A welcoming, safe, and supportive environment can help students believe in their potential and provide motivation for success” (p. 165). Stolp and Smith (1995) define school culture as “historically transmitted patterns of meaning that

include the norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and myths understood, maybe in varying degrees, by members of the school community” (p. 13). According to Hoy and Feldman (1999), “Organizational culture refers to the shared orientations that bind the organization together and give it its distinctive identity. There is, however, substantial disagreement about what are shared-norms, values, philosophies, tacit assumptions, myths, or ceremonies” (p. 84).

Muhammad (2000) recommended that three areas of action are needed for school culture to be positive. These three areas are: “1. Develop a systematic and schoolwide focus on learning. 2. Celebrate the success of all stakeholders. 3. Create systems of support for all Tweeners (people new to the school)” (p. 99). Zmuda, Kuklis, and Kline (2004) said there six step that are necessary in order to create a culture of continuous improvement:

Step 1: Identify and clarify the core beliefs that define the school’s culture

Step 2: Create a shared vision by explicitly defining what these core beliefs will look like in practice.

Step 3: Collect accurate, detailed data and use analysis of the data to define where the school is now and to determine the gaps between the current reality and the shared vision.

Step 4: Identify the innovation(s) that will most likely close the gaps between the current reality and the shared vision.

Step 5: Develop and implement an action plan that supports teachers through the change process and integrates the innovation within each classroom and throughout the school.

Step 6: Embrace collective autonomy as the only way to close the gaps between the current reality and the shared vision, and embrace collective accountability in establishing responsibility for closing the gaps (pp. 18-19).

Reeves (2009) indicated that culture involves “behavior, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals and groups” (p. 37). According to Sergiovanni (2000), “Culture is generally thought of as the normative glue that holds a particular school together. With shared visions, values, and beliefs at its heart, culture serves as a compass setting, steering people in a common direction. It provides norms that govern the way people interact with each other. It provides a framework for deciding what does or does not make sense” (p. 1). Peterson and Deal (2009) say that “culture encompasses the complex elements of values, traditions, language, and purpose . . . Culture exists in the deeper elements of a school: the unwritten rules and assumptions, the combination of rituals and traditions, the array of symbols and artifacts, the special language and phrasing that staff and students use, and the expectations about change and learning that saturate the school’s world” (p. 9).

Marzano, Walters, and McNulty (2005) do not specifically refer to the eleven elements of their Comprehensive School Reform model as school culture. However, these elements do appear to be closely aligned with what is usually referred to as culture.

The Comprehensive School Reform includes:

School-level factors:

- Guaranteed and viable curriculum
- Challenging goals and effective feedback

- Parent and community involvement
- Safe and orderly environment
- Collegiality and professionalism

Teacher-level factors:

- Instructional strategies
- Classroom management
- Classroom curriculum design

Student-level factors

- Home environment
- Learned intelligence and background knowledge
- Motivation (pp. 76-97).

While there may not be complete agreement on what culture is or how it may differ from climate, nearly everything these various authors describe as being part of culture or climate can have an impact on how the staff and administration work together in a school. When a school is able to establish and maintain a positive climate, the staff and administration tend to enjoy working there, have productive relationships, and take pride in their efforts. Schools with poor cultures often experience teachers working in isolation, lack collaboration, and have people who may not be happy working there. Ultimately, it is the students who may suffer if the school's culture is negative. The students will not receive the support they need. For at-risk students in a school with a negative or poor culture, one solution may be to choose to drop out rather than remaining in a school that does not do an adequate job of supporting its students.

Why Students Become Dropouts

This section will review the literature about why some students become dropouts. There appear to be school culture issues that are related to why some students become dropouts. Many studies concerning dropouts seem to be related primarily to demographic attributes of the students including gender, race, and socioeconomic status. A few studies have focused instead on school-related factors. These will be the studies considered here.

According to Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) little research has been done on possible connections between school factors and dropout rates. The few studies that have investigated this possible connection have found “that dropout rates appear to vary widely depending on school factors” (p. 326). “Engagement behaviors “rivalled academic scores in forecasting future dropout rates” (p. 326). In Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson’s study, two groups of high schools in Kentucky were compared on numerous factors. Twenty high schools with low dropout rates (LDOS) were compared on twelve school factors with 20 high schools with high dropout rates (HDOS). In addition, administrator surveys, staff interviews, and in-school observations were conducted and the two groups of schools were compared. A number of school climate implications emerged from this study. Personnel in LDOS schools characterized the climate in their schools as being better than did the personnel at the HDOS schools. Staffs at LDOS schools interacted more with students than did the staffs at HDOS schools. Student engagement was higher at LDOS schools than at HDOS schools. “Students who feel a sense of belonging and are connected to school are less likely to drop out of school” (p. 333). Personnel at the HDOS schools “Described their school climates and their levels of family involvement as poor, in contrast to LDOS personnel” (p. 333). The study recommended that “Although

schools and school personnel cannot change the individual, family, and community factors that may put youth at risk for dropping out of school, they can provide protective factors that may reduce these risks by providing a positive and safe learning environment; by setting high, yet achievable academic and social expectations; and by consistently facilitating academic and social success, and thus keeping students in school” (p. 334).

Banchero (2000) found that the relationship between students and teachers was a predictor of persistence. The quality of the relationship was related to whether students remained in school or dropped out. This was the most important factor of the several that were studied. In a study of young people who had dropped out of high school, Pittman (1986) found that reasons the students dropped out tended to fall into three general categories: personal/affective, academic, and factors outside the school environment. Thirty-seven percent of the responses concerned lack of interest and dissatisfaction with teachers or principal. Former students who were unhappy with the school experience or did not feel welcome were an additional 11% of the total. When secondary students still attending school were asked what made a particular teacher the student’s favorite, 46% answered that the favorite teacher helped the student or was nice to the student. An important recommendation for this study indicated that successful dropout prevention needed to include “a large component which addresses the personal, affective aspects of the student’s life” (Pittman, p.12). There appeared to be “an incongruity between the culture of the dropout and the culture of the school” (p. 12).

Franklin and Streeter (1995) stated that “School climate, socioemotional difficulties, social stressors and dysfunctional family conditions have been explicated in the literature as being associated with dropout patterns in youth from all socioeconomic

backgrounds” (p. 434). The main reason students drop out as reported in this study involved difficulties dealing with classroom and academic issues. Many of the dropouts were characterized as “bright underachievers who didn’t get along well with the school environment” (p. 444).

Cassidy and Bates (2005) reported that a special school designed to educate at-risk students who had a history of criminal activity, dropping out, or being expelled found new hope at a school that emphasized caring as part of the school’s vision. One quarter of the students in the school were interviewed for this project as well as administrators and some of the teachers. The administrators felt that care was an important component of the school’s culture. The care started with how the administrators treated the teachers, and this feeling of care was then projected by the teachers to the students. “When staff members feel cared for, they give back by embracing the vision, developing caring relationships with students, and supporting administrative decision. The school becomes like a family rather than simply a place to work” (p. 79). Teachers reported that they “shared similar concepts of caring: creating the right environment, building relationships, showing respect, adapting the curriculum, being empathetic and nonreactive, and working in the youths’ best interest” (p. 82). The teachers saw a connection between caring for students and the school’s philosophy that emphasized respect and safety for students. “The teachers’ goals for the students center around valuing them for who they are, providing a place of healing, helping them discover their talents, providing them with skills for life, and giving them hope for the future” (p. 87). Students made the connection between their own school achievement and how support and respect from the teachers promoted that success. “At the core of all three groups’

(administrator, teacher, student) perceptions of caring is the importance of building respectful, responsive, and supportive relationships and, through these relationships, meeting the needs of children in flexible and insightful ways” (p. 95). At-risk students may need the support of at least one caring teacher or staff member in a school in order to resist becoming a dropout. Schools with a positive culture may be more able to provide at-risk students with the quality relationship needed to keep the student in school.

Bridgeland, DiIulio, Jr., and Morison (2006) conducted a large scale research project in 25 different locations across the United States. They interviewed 467 16- to 24-year-olds who were high school dropouts. One recommendation was that schools should “build a school climate that fosters academics” (p. 12). Seventy percent of the dropouts “favored increasing supervision in school while ... 62% felt more classroom discipline was necessary... 57 % believed their high schools did not do enough to help students feel safe from violence” (p. 12). “Seven-one percent of young people surveyed felt that one of the keys to keeping students in school was to have better communication between the parents and the school” (p. 13). One-third of the dropouts indicated that no teacher in the school cared about them, 43% indicated there was no staff member or teacher the student could talk with about school problems, and 57% indicated there was no staff member or teacher the student could talk with about personal problems (p. 5).

In their meta-analysis of the dropout issue, Strom and Boster (2007) discovered that little research had been done connecting school culture to the dropout problem. They found only seven studies that had researched this possible connection. These studies investigated whether teacher and student interactions were related to school achievement. One study found that negative comments from teachers toward students were related to a

higher dropout rate. Another study reported that the more students perceived rejection by teachers the greater the dropout rate. A third study discovered that as more students rated teachers as negative, the greater the dropout rate. Strom and Boster indicated a number of limitations that prevented a definitive answer to whether school culture is related to the dropout rate; these factors included a small sample size and a lack of descriptive statistics in many studies.

Davis and Cole-Leffel (2009) indicated that it is important for those who work in schools to focus upon the important effect school personnel have on students. They indicated that school personnel can have either a positive or a negative effect on students through the biases and beliefs of school personnel hold about their students. Students may feel “disconnected, unappreciated, and uncommitted to education” if school personnel deal with students in a negative manner (p. 191).

In a qualitative study of 14 gifted dropouts, Hansen and Toso (2007) discovered that many of the dropouts felt a lack of respect from teachers and staff members, and the students felt alone and powerless. Most felt no teacher or staff member would be an advocate for the students. Some indicated that when other students mocked them, teachers ignored the problem and allowed the mocking to continue. Most of the dropouts characterized their school experience as painful. Many indicated they needed teachers who cared about them. All of the dropouts indicated that “they emotionally gave up at school long before they dropped out” (p. 38). Among recommendations made by Hansen and Toso are: “Build and maintain strong classroom environments... Don’t let students be invisible...Build a true learning community... Insist upon respect and justice” (p. 40).

Suh and Suh (2007) examined 13 separate risk factors related to high school dropouts including two factors that would be considered part of school culture: “positive perception toward teachers” and “if student had been threatened with harm at school” (p. 299). Both of these risk factors showed a statistically significant correlation when predicting dropouts. Suh and Suh’s study also discovered that as the numbers of risk factors that an individual had increased, the likelihood the student would become a dropout increased significantly. The dropout rate for students with one risk is 17.1%, for two risks it is 32.5%, and for three risks it is 47.7%” (p. 303). While the school cannot reduce some risks such as SES or whether a student lives with both parents, there are risks the school might be able to reduce including risks related to school climate. This would decrease the total number of risks for some students and thus might help to reduce the dropout rate.

Meeker, Edmonson, and Fisher (2008) reported on a qualitative study of dropouts from high schools in Texas. Findings included that more than one-sixth of the participants had either conflicts with school staff or experienced school dysfunction or both. These two issues were important factors that contributed to the decision to drop out of school. These issues are related to the overall school culture. In a study involving 228 students who had learning disabilities and dropped out of school together with 228 students with learning disabilities who did not drop out of school, Dunn, Chambers, and Rabren (2004) made four recommendations based on their findings:

1. Teachers should value the importance of students’ perceptions of their high school experiences.

2. Teachers should gather information regarding these perceptions in order to use this information for counseling and program planning.
3. Teachers should help students see the connections between their high school curricula and their future plans.
4. Teachers need to understand the impact that they have on their students' perceptions and possible completion of school. (p. 322).

Lessard, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, and Royer (2009) studied why some at-risk students graduate instead of becoming dropouts. In both their literature review and their own study, the authors discovered that when at-risk students are able to be resilient and graduate, they usually found a teacher, a school psychologist, or some other meaningful adult with whom they could establish a meaningful relationship. The students received an important level of support from some adult which proved to be crucial for the resilience of the at-risk students.

Much of the research on the dropout issue has tended to focus on the young people who have become dropouts and the demographic factors of this group. Less research has been conducted on school factors that may have contributed to the dropout problem. The research presented in this section has considered school factors that may have been part of the reason students have dropped out of school. More specifically, the research has examined school culture issues that schools might be able to address that could reduce the number of young people choosing to become dropouts. It appears that one area that might show promise in reducing the dropout rate is for schools to work at improving the culture of the school so as to reduce some of the factors that prompt at-risk youth to become dropouts.

Leadership Effect on School Culture

Fullan (2002) stated that school leaders are essential for educational reform. “We need leaders who can create a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of schools and of the teaching profession itself” (p. 17). Fullan said that in order for the culture of schools to change, leaders must improve relationships within schools and among diverse groups of people. The principal alone cannot transform the culture of the school. Leadership is needed, according to Fullan, at many levels. Also, for improvement to be sustained there has to be an effective succession of leaders (p. 20). DuFour (2002) suggested that principals are more effective at changing the culture of the school in a positive direction when the principals emphasize that the teachers should not be focused on improving instruction but on improving learning. That is, principals need to be “learning leaders rather than instructional leaders” (p. 13). DuFour indicated the importance of principal leadership that recognizes the need to promote student and teacher learning.

Based on results from an expansive data set from over 160 schools in nine states, Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) asserted that school culture is important for schools to be successful. “School culture matters. It’s a critical element of effective leadership” (p. 52). They also found that it is key for school leaders to work on developing school culture with a focus on student learning. Louis and Wahlstrom’s study determined that the principal is the key to leading the school in developing a culture that helps to improve student learning. This leadership is instrumental in helping teachers to become part of the school’s professional community that supports all students as successful learners. Leadership in the school is also key to ensuring that trust can develop among

administrators, teachers, and parents. When teachers trust the administrators, then professional communities can develop. Louis and Wahlstrom indicated that when the culture of school changes for the positive, then the students will experience an improved learning environment (p. 56). The authors detailed how leadership in the school is required for the school culture to improve and then how the improved culture supports student learning.

Leadership, as attested to by research, can have a favorable influence on school culture. Different studies have discovered that school leadership can have a variety of approaches that may assist a school in becoming a more effective institution. This section will review some of the research on the topic of how leadership can improve the culture of a school. Goldring, Crowson, Laird, and Berk (2003) reviewed how the principals at 16 schools from a district that was dealing with court-ordered desegregation handled the challenging task of moving their schools forward through a difficult and challenging period. The administrators employed transformational leadership in order to help their schools develop a clear mission and vision for the near future. The schools needed to move during the transition period in a smooth, purposeful manner from the old segregated state to the required integrated situation while paying attention to the needs of all students to receive a quality education. According to Goldring, Crowson, Laird, and Berk “the principals viewed building relationships, a sense of place, and social capital as the focus of their initial efforts” (p. 479). The principals actively sought to develop close connections with the members of their communities including home visits when appropriate. The principals also developed partnerships within their communities in order to support the new image of the schools that was needed after the transition. This

process of change that the 16 schools went through was purposeful with a clear direction provided by the leaders.

Some authors argue that school leadership must come from more than just the principal. Lambert (2002) indicated that shared leadership includes administrators, teachers, and even some parents and students. Schools that practice shared leadership are more likely to have shared learning experiences, more program coherence, collaboration, reflective practices, and improved student performance (p. 38). White-Smith (2012) reported that transformational leadership and instructional leadership were related to student achievement. Leadership helped to ensure that that all elements of the school were engaged including teachers, parents, and students (p. 8). Weiner (2011) found that there has been a trend to increase the opportunities for teacher leadership within schools as part of the school improvement process. Principals can promote teacher leadership through having a clear vision, by the way resources are allocated, and by being a supporter of teacher leaders (p. 12).

Saginer (2006) indicated that the principal is key to altering the culture of the school. Through the efforts of the principal the school can construct “professional learning communities (and) cultivate teacher-leadership” (p. 164). In Saginer’s research, a common feature of effective schools was the presence of professional learning communities. Darling-Hammond (2008) argued for well-prepared principals who are instructional leaders, and who can “plan professional development, redesign school organizations, and manage a change process” (p. 20). “DuFour and Eaker (1998) emphasized the importance of the principal in supporting school improvement. They suggested that “creating a professional learning community is a collective effort, but that

effort has little chance of success without effective leadership from the principal” (p. 203). DuFour and Eaker believe that the principal is most effective when helping to encourage others in the school to work collaboratively in order to build consensus. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) stated that “meaningful, substantive, sustainable improvements can occur in an organization only if those improvements become anchored in the culture of the organization” (p. 90). They believe that professional learning communities are important for schools to improve. They also believe that for professional learning communities to work in schools, those schools “must engage in an intentional process to impact the culture of their schools and districts” (p. 21). DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker are clear as to what role principals should serve in the professional learning community. Principals should:

1. Be clear about their primary responsibility.
2. Disperse leadership throughout the school.
3. Bring coherence to the complexities of schooling by aligning the structure and culture of the school with its core purpose. (p. 308).

Payne (2008) offered nine practices that can help students living in poverty to increase their school achievement. Three of her nine recommended practices closely align with school culture. Her first recommended practice is to build relationships of respect. Next, she encourages educators to make beginning learning relational. “Teachers should help all students feel part of a collaborative culture” (p. 48). Payne’s last recommended practice is to forge relationships with parents. “It is essential to create a welcoming atmosphere at school for parents” (p. 51). Payne says that teachers and administrators should establish a feeling of mutual respect with their students, ensure

students know how to survive in school, and help students develop the skills necessary for success.

Angelle (2007) found that for school improvement to occur, teacher leadership is essential and can only occur when the principal is willing to share leadership with the teachers. Thus the principal's actions are key if teachers are to be empowered to become school leaders who support a culture of continuous learning, encourage collaboration, and support professional relationships. Brown (2008) agrees that teacher leadership is critical for effective schools and that it is a result of principals who consciously work to build teacher leadership capacity. Teacher leaders need training from a variety of resources at the school level, above the school level, and from above the district level. Teacher leadership training needs to be "nonthreatening, collaborative, and data-driven" (p. 30). When leadership exists throughout the school community school improvement can achieve great strides. Schmoker (2006) stated "Schools won't improve until the average building leader begins to work cooperatively with teachers to truly, meaningfully oversee and improve instructional quality" (p. 29).

Togneri and Anderson (2002) reported on a study of five high poverty school districts that successfully improved student performance. One of the keys to improvement was how these districts approached leadership. All five districts redistributed leadership so that no one tackled reform alone. Leaders at many levels were part of the successful transition to improved performance. Key leaders included board members, principals, teachers, union leaders, and community members (p. 13). Leaders at these various levels assumed ownership of the reform movements and focused on the job of improving student achievement. By working together, emphasizing leadership,

and concentrating on the single most important task of student achievement, all five districts experienced significant gains as student performance improved significantly.

Sergiovanni (2005) is a strong supporter of the importance of leadership in schools and districts. He believes that educators will have the most positive effect on the culture of schools when leadership is coupled with the virtues of hope, trust, piety, and civility (p. 112). To Sergiovanni, leadership that is expressed in the presence of these virtues has the power to improve even the most challenging schools and districts.

Saphier, King, and D'Auria (2006) indicated that school leadership should focus on three different elements: academic focus, shared beliefs and values, and productive professional relationships (p. 52). They believe that when these culture elements are strong, then students tend to experience the greatest achievement. Saphier, King, and D'Auria provide a good deal of guidance on how leaders can build productive professional relationships as this is essential for schools to be successful.

Barnett and McCormick (2004) reported that school leadership is most effective at boosting student achievement when it is combined with a positive school culture. It appears that a positive school culture boosts student motivation and achievement. Principals are able to favorably influence school culture to the advantage of both the staff and student achievement (p. 407). Angelides and Ainscow (2010) suggest that for school improvement to be successful, educators must work on the quality of school culture. Schools with positive functioning cultures tend to have the best teaching. Cunningham and Gresso (1993) say "Successful educators spend considerable time developing an effective school culture, since nothing can be accomplished if the culture works against needed reform" (p. 19).

Eilers and Camacho (2007) conducted a study of an urban school in a low-income area. Approximately 90% of the school's students qualified for free or reduced lunch, and over 90% of the students were minorities. A new principal was assigned whose goal was to change the culture of the school. The principal indicated that in order to implement new, effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment, first the culture of the school had to be improved. Two key areas of the culture that the principal changed involved creating learning communities and developing collaborative leadership. Evidence suggested the changes in the culture of the school promoted "teacher professionalism, school collaboration, and the use of evidence linked to classroom work" (p. 626). Increases in test scores indicated the school experienced a significant improvement in student achievement.

Austen found that instructional teacher leaders can boost school improvement efforts. However, these instructional teacher leaders need support from principals in order to be effective (p. 94). Muijs and Harris (2007) found that teacher leadership is an important component of school improvement and that leadership can be distributed around a school. Teacher leadership involves positive relationships and connections found among the people in a school. When there exist positive communications and relationships in the school, then leadership roles tend to be more fluid with different individuals taking on leadership roles at different times. Key to this is to develop a culture of trust among the staff in the school. With trust, collaboration can develop to the benefit of both staff and students.

MacNeil (2005) suggests that structural changes alone are insufficient to improve schools. On the other hand, when the culture of a school is improved, then measurable

improvements in student achievement will likely be noted. School leadership has the ability to improve climate and subsequently, student achievement. According to MacNeil, schools with positive climates tend to have excellent communications, share a vision and a mission throughout the school, work cooperatively, and share leadership.

Research suggests that the key for improving schools is quality leadership. While it is clear that the principal is quite important to the improvement of a school, the principal by himself or herself is not enough to make a school as good as it could be. Leadership throughout the school community is needed, particularly leadership on the part of teachers. When a school does have an effective principal and effective teacher leadership in place, then the school has a good opportunity to develop a positive school culture than can benefit students in terms of both a quality education and possibly a reduced dropout rate. Research suggests that quality leadership in a school can contribute to a positive school culture and a reduction in the dropout rate.

Six Factors Measured by School Culture Survey

The School Culture Survey (SCS) evaluates school culture by measuring six different factors that together help to make up the construct of school culture. The six factors are: collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose, and learning partnership. This section is devoted to a literature review of these six factors.

Collaborative Leadership

According to Gruenert (1998), “collaborative leadership describes the degree to which school leaders establish and maintain collaborative relationships with school staff” (p. 89). One important way for school leaders to develop collaborative leadership is by

including teachers in the decision-making process. This can also be referred to as shared decision-making, and it is one of the six key traits of culture referred to by Goldring (2002). “Decision-making has been described as the moral fiber of culture. Both formal and informal decisions made by a group translate the values of a group into actions” (p. 33). There are techniques a principal can employ to promote collaborative leadership. Pankake and Moller (2007) provide eight specific suggestions on how the principal can encourage shared decision-making:

1. Collaboratively build and monitor an action plan.
2. Negotiate the relationship.
3. Be available.
4. Provide access to human and fiscal resources.
5. Maintain the focus on instructional leadership.
6. Help maintain balance to avoid overload.
7. Protect the coach’s relationship with peers.
8. Provide leadership development opportunities. (pp. 33-36)

Austin (2010) reported that instructional teacher leaders are important if school improvement efforts are to be successful. However, these instructional teacher leaders need administrator support and encouragement if they are to be effective. Not only should principals provide effective leadership for school improvement to work, but principals should develop and use teacher leaders as well. Principals need to let teacher leaders know that the teacher leaders are valued, as this helps to build the trust necessary for success in working together to achieve school improvement goals (p. 98). In their

book that explores how to improve schools by developing professional learning communities (PLC), Huffman and Hipp (2003) say:

In PLCs, principals are not coercive or controlling, but seek to share power and distribute leadership among staff. In turn, staff increasingly become open to changing roles and responsibilities. Principals let go of power and nurture the human side and expertise of the entire school community. Shared responsibility is apparent through broad-based decision making that reflects commitment and accountability. (p. 38)

Sergiovanni (2001) says that there are some important principles that will assist in improving schools. These principles include empowerment, responsibility, and accountability. Sergiovanni suggests that when teachers are empowered, they will have more “ownership, increased commitment, and motivation to work” (p. 117). He states that in successful schools, teachers will be empowered. Next, he says teachers want more responsibility, and when teachers actually receive responsibility, they will feel that their work is more important and significant. Successful schools, according to Sergiovanni, encourage teacher responsibility (p. 118). The third principle of accountability is closely related to both empowerment and responsibility. In schools that provide teachers with empowerment and responsibility, the teachers will feel accountable for their actions and achievements, and this is a challenge that the teachers will welcome (p. 118).

Teacher Collaboration

According to Gruenert (1998), “Teacher collaboration describes the degree to which teachers engage in constructive dialogue that furthers the educational vision of the school” (p. 89). Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) found that there has not been much research on the issue of how teacher collaboration affects student achievement. Their empirical study provided support for the concept of encouraging teacher collaboration as a means of boosting student achievement. While this study involved fourth graders and achievement in mathematics and reading, it does suggest that this is an area worthy of additional research. Gruenert (2005) agreed with Goddard et al. (2007) when he said that in spite of many authors supporting collaboration as a means of improving student achievement, “minimal empirical evidence exists to support these claims: (p. 43). In Gruenert’s empirical study, “the more collaborative schools tend to have higher student achievement” (p. 46).

Goldring (2002) reported on a survey conducted in central and northern California schools that were experiencing an improvement in student achievement at a better than average rate. This study found that teachers in these high achieving schools valued collaboration. These teachers indicated that common planning helped to boost student achievement (p. 34). Goldring defined collaboration as teachers working together in order to accomplish a task (p. 33). Sergiovanni (2004) suggests that organizational competence can make a school better at educating its students. Sergiovanni indicates that organizational competences occur when teachers work together and share their individual knowledge so that collectively the organization becomes smarter. He says that collaboration is a key for schools to be successful.

Cultural connections and covenantal relationships are the foundational pillars of collaborative cultures. The cultural connections are more covenantal than contractual; they are bargains, but they are bargains of the heart and soul based primarily on loyalty, purpose, sentiment, and commitment that obligate people to one another and to the school. (p. 20)

Saphier, King, and D'Auria (2006) say that there are three components to strong school leadership, with one of those strands being productive professional relationships. As part of productive professional relationships, Saphier et al. (2006) say that teachers in strong schools work together, experiment, collaborate, and they collectively critique their efforts (p. 55). Saphier et al. (2006) assert that "schools with strong organizational cultures produce the best results for children" (p. 52). Saginor (2006) indicates that when teachers are isolated, teaching and learning are adversely affected. Schools and students are better served when teachers use available educational data and collaborate on how best to employ that data for the improvement of education.

Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) reported on five high schools that have successfully provided quality education for a population of students who are predominately minority and low income. All five of these successful schools "allocate considerable time for teachers to collaborate, design curriculum and instruction, and learn from one another" (p. 18). Several hours per week are used for collaboration. Payne (2008) says "When an individual is learning something new, learning should happen in a supportive context. Teachers should help all students feel part of a collaborative culture" (p. 48). DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) indicate that collaboration is important, but that collaboration by itself may not be enough to improve learning. The question they

say a school should ask is not whether the school collaborates, but rather, what the school collaborates about. DuFour et al. (2008) argue that collaboration, in order to be effective, must be on issues that support teaching and learning. In her book about professional practices for teaching, Danielson (2007) indicates that the distinguished level of performance is warranted when an “instructional specialist initiates collaboration with classroom teachers in the design of instructional lessons and units, locating additional resources from sources outside the school” (p. 118).

Professional Development

According to Gruenert (1998), “Professional development describes the degree to which teachers value continuous personal development and school-wide improvement” (p. 89). Hattie (2009) synthesized over 800 meta-analyses involving student achievement. He calculated that professional development had a large effect size of .62 on student achievement (p. 109). Saginor (2006) argues that not only is professional development effective, but it is also important for principals to attend the same training as teachers to promote a fuller understanding on the part of administrators for the work teachers are doing. While professional development is important, Guskey (2002) indicates it should be evaluated on the basis of five different criteria to ensure that professional development meets its objectives. The five evaluation criteria are “1. Participant’s reactions. 2. Participants’ learning. 3. Organization support and change. 4. Participant’s use of new knowledge and skills. 5. Student learning outcomes” (p. 48). Guskey indicates that professional development evaluation should always begin with student learning outcomes as the main priority. When a school is able to achieve a culture of continuous learning, it “is sustained through ongoing, job-embedded

professional development” (Angelle, 2007, p. 57). Glickman (2002) outlined several elements that influence student learning. One of his three “elements that provide the overarching context for instructional improvement” (p. 7) is professional development.

A suburban school district developed a Professional Development Certificate program designed to encourage the professional growth of teachers. Marty, Barranco, and Van Caster (2002) reported on the value and success of this new program. In order to earn the Professional Development Certificate, an interested and qualified teacher “must develop a personal professional development plan, earn nine additional graduate credits, and develop a statement of their [sic] personal teaching philosophy and goals” (p. 69). “It has been a remarkable experience for all those involved. A subtle but distinct cultural change has taken place in the district. Professional development no longer means simply an accumulation of credits or clock hours” (p. 71).

Five high-poverty school districts agreed to participate in a study designed to improve educational outcomes. All five districts used the same six strategies for improvement, and all five districts recorded significant student achievement gains. Togneri and Anderson (2003) reported that one of the six improvement strategies was that the districts “Made professional development relevant and useful. They decreased traditional teacher training strategies and replaced them with research-based strategies to improve teacher and principal skills” (p. 13). Togneri and Anderson indicated that when the content of professional development became data-driven, teachers and principals were more likely to engage in collaboration regarding how to improve the schools.

DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) said that there are four actions that the district office can take to help shape the culture in the district’s schools. One of these four keys

is to embed “ongoing professional development in the routine work of every educator” (p. 364). According to DuFour et al. (2008):

The best professional development occurs in a social and collaborative setting rather than in isolation, is ongoing and sustained rather than infrequent and transitory, is job-embedded rather than external, occurs in the context of the real work of the school and classroom rather than in off-site workshops or courses, focuses on results (that is, evidence of improved student learning) rather than activities or perceptions, and is systematically aligned with school and district goals rather than random. In short, the best professional development takes place in professional learning communities (pp. 369-370).

Collegial Support

According to Gruenert (1998), “Collegial Support describes the degree to which teachers work together effectively” (p. 89). A key component of collegial support is trust. With trust, teachers can support each other; however, lacking trust, teachers are unlikely to be able to experience collegial support. Trust appears to be related to academic achievement according to Bryk and Schneider (2002). “Schools reporting strong positive trust levels in 1994 were three times more likely to be categorized eventually as improving in reading and mathematics than those with very weak trust reports” (p.111).

Fullan (2003) argues that trust is a key element that must be present in a school for it to be successful. Leadership must work hard to develop a culture of trust. When the school does have a strong sense of trust, then the staff can work together for effective student achievement. Osula and Ideboen (2010) say that:

Trust and relationships go together. Even though self-trust and self-confidence are important, when we speak about trusting others we do so in the context of relationships. Trust requires communication. Trust connects two or more people. The best teams or organizations are built on trust; when people come together with similar expectations and express confidence in others (p. 115).

Harris (1998) expresses a similar belief in the value and power of trust:

We live in an interdependent reality. None of us can do our best work without some reliance on the efforts of others. Before we can do anything, we rely on others and the work of others to help us. Trust is the glue that holds the sustainable organization together (p. 86).

Ridley (1996) suggested that groups that are able to cooperate are more likely to endure than are groups that are characterized by selfishness (p. 175). According to Maxwell (2010) “Trust is vital to any business. In fact, it’s vital to life itself” (p. 41). Blase and Blase (2001) state that “trust is the foundation for shared governance and teacher empowerment” (p. 21). Furthermore, they say, that trust helps to build a group’s cohesion which “fosters cooperation and effective communication, two essential aspects of empowerment” (p. 22).

Greenfield (2005) suggests there are significant differences between less effective schools and more effective schools that are related to collegial support. In less effective schools these norms might be encountered:

- Teaching is a private affair, not to be shared with others.
- Teachers have rights to pursue individual goals in their classrooms.

- Teachers feel a responsibility to support their colleagues' rights to pursue individual goals and strategies in their respective classrooms.
- Noninterference in each other's work and classroom is expected.
- Teachers have a right to exercise discretion as autonomous artisans such that each classroom in a school is functionally independent.
- The curriculum in one teacher's classroom need not be related to the curriculum in other teachers' classrooms in a given school (p. 251).

However, Greenfield suggests that more effective schools will likely have differing sets of norms:

- Frequent discussions among teachers about substantive and serious problems they are encountering in their teaching, or which students encounter as learners.
- Invitations by teachers for colleagues to observe their classrooms and their teaching in order to help them improve their practices.
- Frequent and critical discussions of what children are learning.
- A commitment to get beyond superficial conversations.
- Regularly sharing with group members one's efforts to identify and solve problems interfering with one's effective classroom instruction (p. 252).

Collegial support is based primarily on a feeling of trust among colleagues. This sense of trust underlies the relationship that will allow teachers to work together effectively, and it encourages teachers to value each other's ideas and contributions to the school. Trust is the key element that allows a group of colleagues in a school to be able

to work in a cooperative manner. With a sense of trust in each other, teachers can focus on providing for the needs of the students.

Unity of Purpose

According to Gruenert (1998), “Unity of Purpose describes the degree to which teachers work toward a common mission for the school” (p. 89). Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002) describe what a school looks like when it is able to develop a professional learning community (PLC). When a school does have a PLC in place, it will have a clearly articulated mission statement that clarifies what students will learn, how the school will know that the students are learning, and what the school will do when students are not learning (p. 13). Next, Eaker et al. (2002) state that the school in which the PLC is present will have a vision statement that is researched based, is credible, that serves as a blueprint for improvement, and is supported throughout the school by means of teacher collaboration (p. 14). The next step for a school operating as a PLC is the development of values that are based on the vision, few in number, guide improvement, and serve to guide behaviors and commitment (p. 16). Many schools focus on teaching. However, when a school operates as a PLC, then the focus becomes learning (p. 18). Collaboration is employed by the staff to agree on curriculum, assessment, and a plan to deal with students who are not learning (p. 20). When a school successfully develops a PLC, the staff will demonstrate unity of purpose.

Stemler, Bebell, and Sonnabend (2011) found that when there is a commitment to the school’s mission by the staff, then the school tends to be more effective in providing a quality education to its students (p. 391). Goldring (2002) says that “The vision of a school is a powerful picture for the future generated by all members. It offers staff

members direction and purpose for their work” (p. 33). “The presence and use of a shared vision as a unifying factor uses the strength of school culture to affect student achievement” (p. 34). Saphier, King, and D’Auria (2006) discuss what occurs in a school with academic focus. “One sees all the teachers sharing with the students the same models of work that exemplify the standards and, where appropriate, rubrics that discriminate different levels of performance relative to the standards. The same assessment tasks are used across classes or grade levels, and high school exams are the same from all teachers teaching the same subject” (p. 53). Lambert (2002) indicated that

Shared vision results in program coherence. Participants reflect on their core values and weave those values into a shared vision to which all can commit themselves. All members of the community continually ask, ‘How does this instructional practice connect to our vision?’ (p. 38).

Huffman and Hipp (2003) argue the value and importance of shared values and vision. If a school does not have a shared vision “it is impossible to develop effective policies, procedures, and strategies targeted toward a future goal and aligned to provide consistent implementation of programs” (p. 7). In their plan for the establishment of professional learning communities, they include “Shared Values and Vision” (p. 25) as one of the four key administrator and teacher actions needed to develop the plan. For a school that is establishing a professional learning community in the advanced stage, Huffman and Hipp say that teachers assume the responsibility for continuing to develop and sustain expectations (p. 42). “Visions that are co-created and purposeful are most effective in mobilizing commitment and ownership among all involved in the teaching

and learning process. A vision that is not built on shared values lacks heart and, ultimately, will be ineffective in guiding efforts” (p. 44).

According to Peterson and Deal (2009),

At the center of a school’s culture are the values that drive long-term planning, resource allocation, and daily work. Many schools have written mission statements. . . Trying to uncover a school’s authentic mission and purpose may be more difficult than reading a mission statement. . . In positive cultures, there is a strongly held purpose that verges on a sacred mission or an ennobling end (pp. 13-14).

Learning Partnership

According to Gruenert (1998), “Learning Partnership describes the degree to which teachers, parents, and students work together for the common good of the student” (p. 90). When there is a successful school-community collaboration, then certain key elements are in place according to Smink and Schargel (2004).

- Collaborative groups share a common vision, purpose and direction.
- Collaborative groups are composed of interdependent stakeholders.
- Successful collaboration is done in smaller groups rather than large groups.
- Successful collaboration requires consensus on all agreements for action.
- Collaborative groups are inclusive, drawing power from individual strengths.
- Collaboration is characterized by achieving more through the group venture than each partner could have achieved alone.
- Shared information gives power to the collaboration.

- Successful collaborative groups are self-governed with facilitative, shared leadership (pp. 70-71).

The New York State Education Department contracted the National Dropout Prevention Center to set up a special initiative dealing with low-performing schools. The goal of the initiative was to “improve student academic achievement and increase the graduation rate” (Duttweiler, 2003, p. 4). The project was based on five research themes including “Theme 4, School, Family, and Community Support Structure for Learning” (Duttweiler, p. 6). One of the five sub elements of the theme was “The school encourages and provides varied opportunities for family and parental participation in all aspects of school activities and in the student learning and assessment process” (p. 7). Ten of the twelve individual school reports from this initiative included “recommendations for schools to develop a variety of means for positive communication with parents” (p. 25). As a result of this initiative, all schools experienced a reduced dropout rate and improved academic success for their students.

In their book *Educating At-Risk Students*, McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan, and Legters (2002) talk about reform models for low-performing schools that include developing “new structures to involve families and community representatives in high school operations” (p. 161). Sander, Allen-Jones, and Abel (2002) state that:

Family and community involvement in schools is viewed as particularly important and urgent for poor and minority students. Indeed, it is viewed as so critical for the success of these students that many reform programs that target historically underserved student populations include a family component in their school improvement strategies (pp. 171-172).

Payne (2006) says that when teachers contact parents about discipline issues in the classroom, there are five common types of parents: “overprotective, hands-off approach, concerned and appropriate, unavailable, and caring but unable to help” (p. 6). Payne suggests that not only is it quite important for teachers to have contact with parents, it is also important for teachers to understand these different types of parents so that the teachers will use the appropriate approach. Deal and Peterson (2009) state that “In a perfect world, the communication channels between home and school would be buzzing with information, chatter, and news of the day. Unfortunately in many situations there is a shortage of connection” (p. 185). Deal and Peterson also say that:

Only when a solid and positive partnership prevails between schools and parents will education flourish. . . Schools need strong, organic linkages between schools and parents. They need parents who see the importance of schools and impart this to their children. On the other side, parents need schools that understand their perspectives and help them with their children (p. 132).

Summary

This chapter provided a review of several issues relating to school culture and high school dropouts. The chapter started with a review of Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and of Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Next was a section devoted to how school culture is defined in the literature. The third part of the chapter dealt with reasons some students become dropouts with a focus on how school culture may play a significant role. How school leadership can have a positive influence on reducing the dropout rate was reviewed. The final section of this chapter reviewed each of the six factors that are measured by the School Culture Survey. These six factors

include: collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose, and learning partnership. This literature review provided a theoretical framework for how school culture can affect the high school dropout rate, what school culture is, why students become dropouts, how leadership can reduce the dropout problem, and how the six factors measured by the SCS are related to school culture.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides the method by which this study investigated whether there is a relationship between the culture of Mississippi public high schools and the graduation and dropout rates of those schools. The instrument that was used to determine high school culture is the School Culture Survey (SCS). The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) tracks both graduation and dropout rates for all Mississippi public high schools. These rates are available to the public on the MDE website. This chapter also provides the details on how the survey was conducted, who the participants were, and how the data were analyzed.

The SCS is a 35-question survey instrument that has six sub scores representing six different factors of school culture. The six sub scores were statistically compared with both the graduation and dropout rates of the Mississippi public high schools that participated in this study. A significant body of research suggests that culture is related to achievement scores in schools (Angelle, 2007; Barnett & McCormick, 2004; Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Payne, 2008; Saginor, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2005; Togneri & Anderson, 2002). This study investigated whether school culture may be related to graduation and dropout rates.

Both the graduation rate and the dropout rate were examined in this study since the two rates are calculated using differing metrics. While the two rates are related, one is not simply one hundred percent minus the other one. That is, graduation rate plus dropout rate do not equal one hundred percent (graduation rate + dropout rate \neq 1). The calculated graduation rate for all of Mississippi for the class graduating in the spring of 2012 was 75.5 % while the dropout rate for the same class was 13.9 % (Mississippi

Department of Education, 2014, a). The graduation rate (75.5 %) plus the dropout rate (13.9 %) totals only 89.4 %. This is not a mathematical error. That the two rates total to considerably less than one hundred percent is a reflection that differing sets of metrics are used to calculate these different rates. This differing set of metrics used to calculate the graduation rate and the dropout rate suggests that it may be useful to compare the SCS scores with both rates to investigate whether school culture might be related to either or both rates.

Research Design

The School Culture Survey (SCS) was used to collect data for this study. The survey was administered to the teaching staffs and counselors of 33 Mississippi public high schools. The six subscale scores of the SCS were correlated with both the graduation rate and the dropout rate of the participating high schools. The six subscale scores of the SCS represent six different culture factors. The six culture factors are: collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership. Each culture factor subscale score was correlated with both the graduation rate and the dropout rate of the participating high schools.

The six subscale scores of the SCS were used as independent variables in a multiple regression analysis with the dependent variables being the graduation and dropout rates of Mississippi public high schools. The graduation and dropout rates by school are available on a Mississippi Department of Education website (Mississippi Department of Education, 2014a). The website lists both rates for each high school for

the ninth grade cohort beginning in the 2008/2009 school year. This group graduated in May 2012. These were the latest graduation and dropout rates that were available.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In order to explore the variables identified in this study, the following research questions were examined:

1. What are the attitudes of high school teachers and counselors concerning the culture of the schools in which they work?
2. Is there a positive relationship between high school graduation rate and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS?
3. Is there a negative relationship between high school dropout rate and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS?

Research questions 2 and 3 are appropriate questions for construction of related hypotheses. The following hypotheses were addressed:

1. There is a positive relationship between high school graduation rate and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS.
2. There is a negative relationship between high school dropout rate and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration,

professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS.

Participants

The survey was administered to the teaching staffs and counselors in Mississippi public high schools in districts where the district superintendent provided written permission that the district's teachers and counselors may take part in the study. Administrators were not participants. The role of the administrator is quite different from the role of the teacher or counselor. It is also arguable that principals' opinions about culture within their schools might be less objective than those of the teachers and counselors. The limited scope of this study was suited to investigating attitudes of only the teachers and counselors without the challenge of adding a fundamentally different group of respondents that would have required additional demographic questions and an analysis of differences between these two groups. Some small schools have only a single administrator. It would not have been possible to identify questionnaires from administrators and maintain anonymity.

There were 155 public school districts in Mississippi. One district did not have a high school, three were agricultural high schools districts that did not serve specified areas, and four districts involved specialized schools including Mississippi schools for math and science, blind, deaf, and for the arts. All of the remaining 147 districts were contacted for permission from the superintendents. These 147 Mississippi public school districts had a total of 244 high schools. Of these 147 districts, 98 had one high school each, while the other 49 districts had two or more high schools. Forty-nine superintendents provided signed consent forms authorizing this research project. All high

school principals in these 49 districts were contacted and 47 principals provided consent forms. School Culture Survey questionnaires and cover sheets were sent to all 47 schools. Thirty-eight schools returned completed questionnaires. Thirty-three schools returned 20% or more of their questionnaires. The teachers and counselors from these 33 schools were the participants in this study.

Instrumentation

The School Culture Survey (SCS) was developed by Steve Gruenert as part of his doctoral dissertation in 1998. Permission to use the SCS appears in Appendix A. The SCS appears in Appendix B. The intent of Gruenert's "study was to develop a valid and reliable instrument to assess the collaborative nature of a school culture. The instrument was based upon a review of the literature on school culture, effective school cultures, and collaborative school cultures" (Gruenert, 1998, p. 86). The result is a 35-question instrument that focuses on the collaborative nature of a school culture. The SCS uses a Likert-type scale for each of the 35 questions. Each question uses a five point scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The SCS has been used for both school improvement efforts and research studies many times. The SCS analyzes school culture using six factors. Each factor produces a subscale score.

Collaborative leadership describes the degree to which school leaders establish and maintain collaborative relationships with school staff. The SCS items that are included in this factor include item numbers: 2, 7, 11, 14, 18, 20, 22, 26, 28, 32, and 34.

Teacher Collaboration describes the degree to which teachers engage in constructive dialogue that furthers the educational vision of the school. The SCS items that are included in this factor include item numbers: 3, 8, 15, 23, 29, and 33.

Professional Development describes the degree to which teachers value continuous personal development and school-wide improvement. The SCS items that are included in this factor include item numbers: 1, 9, 16, 24, and 30.

Unity of Purpose describes the degree to which teachers work toward a common mission for the school. The SCS items that are included in this factor include item numbers: 5, 12, 19, 27, and 31.

Collegial Support describes the degree to which teachers work together effectively. The SCS items that are included in this factor include item numbers: 4, 10, 17, and 25.

Learning Partnerships describes the degree to which teachers, parents, and students work together for the common good of the student. The SCS items that are included in this factor include item numbers: 6, 13, 21, and 35. (Gruenert, 1998, p. iii-iv).

Reliability of Instrument

Reliability of the School Culture Survey (SCS) was first measured by its author (Gruenert, 1998). Gruenert's Cronbach Alpha coefficients appear below in Table 1. Cronbach Alpha coefficients were also calculated for this study and also appear in Table 1 under the heading: Pearson, 2014. The author's coefficients and the coefficients

calculated for this study are similar and all of the coefficients in the present study were above .70. These findings suggest that the SCS is an internally consistent instrument.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha: Factor Reliability Coefficients

Factor	Gruenert (1998)	Pearson (2014)
Collaborative Leadership	.91	.92
Teacher Collaboration	.83	.81
Unity of Purpose	.82	.83
Professional Development	.87	.74
Collegial Support	.80	.71
Learning Partnerships	.66	.74

Validity of Instrument

According to Gruenert (1998), he developed the School Culture Survey to be a “valid and reliable instrument to measure school culture. The instrument (SCS) was based on a review of the literature on school culture, effective school cultures, and collaborative school cultures (p. 56). Gruenert used the following data analysis procedures to develop the culture survey:

1. Develop from a thorough review of existing literature and research concepts for an initial set of constructs and items to be tested.
2. Survey a population of teachers to obtain adequate data for factor analysis.

4. Perform an item analysis for purposes of reducing weak items.
5. Run correlations with total scores and all other items to delete weak items.
6. Perform a scree test to determine the recommended number of factors.
7. Run varimax rotations according to the scree test findings.
8. Establish criteria for factors, retain the factors that meet the criteria.
9. Run internal correlations among retained factor items.
10. Label the new factors according to the retained items.
11. Revise the instrument.
12. Confirmation of the integrity of the instrument, correlating school culture scores with an established climate survey. (pp. 57-58)

A large group of teachers completed the theoretical version of the SCS and similar established instruments. Results were verified by data analysis to see how well the SCS measured culture. “The original instrument contained 79 items within nine theoretical constructs. The instrument was administered to 632 teachers from the state of Missouri. Those data were analyzed using the data reduction technique factor analysis. The item reduction process reduced the number of items from 79 to 35” (p. 86). After data analysis was completed, Gruenert retained six factors:

- Factor 1: Collaborative leadership. This factor contained eleven items. These items came from the following theoretical constructs: Instruction, Leadership, and Decision Making.
- Factor 2: Teacher Collaboration. This factor contained six items. These items came from the theoretical construct Collegiality. The notion that teachers are aware of the activities of other teachers is supported through a variety of

means, such as observing each other planning together, and participating in critical discourse with each other. A limitation of this factor may be in determining the degree to which formal structures or policies mandate these activities (contrived) as opposed to the teachers voluntarily seeking opportunities to collaborate.

- Factor 3: Professional Development. This factor contained five items. These items came from two theoretical constructs, Professional Development and Values, Beliefs, Traditions. Teachers in collaborative cultures are curious about learning and seek opportunities to further develop their effectiveness. The peer pressure that exists among teachers in a collaborative culture contributes to an organization committed to learning.
- Factor 4: Unity of Purpose. This factor contained five items. These items came from two theoretical constructs, School Mission and Instruction. A strong, collaborative culture will have a shared sense of purpose among the majority of its members. In this type of culture, teachers have opportunities to participate in framing the mission of the school as they pursue its essence.
- 5: Collegial Support. This factor contained four items. These items came from the theoretical construct Collegiality. The heart of a collaborative culture is the deep trust that emanates from the interdependence that exists among faculty members.
- Factor 6: Learning Partnership. This factor contained four items. These items came for the theoretical construct Parent, Student, Teacher Relations.

Collaborative school cultures will value external relations with parents and use them as allies to benefit student achievement. (pp. 87-88)

The original version of the SCS developed by Gruenert is the version that was used in this study. There were no additions, deletions, or alterations to Gruenert's SCS. In light of the extensive validation process in which the original author engaged, and in light of the fact that the instrument was unaltered for use in the present study, no further validation measures were deemed necessary.

Procedures

Implementation of the Study

This study was conducted with permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of The University of Southern Mississippi (Appendix C). Superintendents of public school districts with one or more high schools were contacted for their permission to contact the principals of the high schools. The template for the contact letters is provided as Appendix D. Names and addresses of all Mississippi public school district superintendents were available on a Mississippi Department of Education web site (Mississippi Department of Education, 2014b). High school principals were contacted for permission to survey the teachers and counselors on the staff. A contact person was recruited at those Mississippi public high schools where both the district superintendent and the principal granted permission to survey the staff. Principals at participating schools were asked to announce that a contact person was needed to distribute the SCS, collect the completed SCS and then to mail the SCS to the researcher. The contact person was given a financial consideration.

Principals were asked to provide the number of teachers and counselors who worked in their schools. The exact number of questionnaires was mailed directly to the contact person at each school based on the numbers provided by the principals. There was no identifying information on the questionnaires. Each individual's completed questionnaire was anonymous and confidential. An SCS packet for each school was mailed directly to the school's contact person. The packet included detailed instructions for handing, distribution, collection, and return of completed questionnaires. The preferred method of distribution was to hand out these questionnaires during a faculty meeting where the distribution, completion, and collection could be accomplished at one time. The contact person was to read instructions to staff indicating that the survey is strictly voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Instructions for the school contact person appear as Appendix E. Each questionnaire was attached to a cover sheet explaining all necessary IRB requirements. The questionnaire cover sheet appears as Appendix F. The cover sheet included a statement that no person, no school, and no district would be identified in any written research documents or publications related to this research. A staff member could refuse to complete a questionnaire without consequence. When the contact person collected the completed questionnaires he/she then placed them in the provided envelope without reviewing them. The contact person then completed a form certifying the questionnaires were distributed to and collected from the teachers and counselors of the appropriate school. The certificate is part of Appendix E. Upon receipt of the completed questionnaires from the teachers and counselors, the contact person sealed the envelope and mailed it back to the researcher.

The researcher was able to identify the school and district by the return address on the envelopes in which the completed questionnaires were returned. This was necessary for correlational analyses. However, no marks were placed on any questionnaires themselves. When not being entered in to SPSS, the completed questionnaires remained in their school/district marked envelopes and were secured in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's residence. Once all questionnaires were entered into SPSS, the questionnaires were destroyed. No person, school, or district will be identified in research documents or publications related to this research. At the end of the project a summary of the results was provided to participating districts and schools. These results did not include scores or results for individual schools or districts. Any individual teacher in a participating school was informed that he or she could request a study summary.

Procurement of High School Graduation and Dropout Data

The Mississippi Department of Education (2014 a) on its public website listed the 4-year school-level graduation rate and the 4-year school-level dropout rate for the 2008/2009 9th grade cohort. This cohort was for the students who started the 2008/2009 school year as 9th graders. This is the group that graduated in the spring of 2012. Graduation and dropout rates for this 2008/2009 9th grade cohort were used in this study. The rates were available for each public high school in Mississippi, and the data were available in Excel format. Graduation and dropout rates by school were taken from this Mississippi Department of Education website and entered into SPSS for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using several statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were computed for the study variables and included the minimums, maximums, means, and standard deviations. The two hypotheses were tested by means of multiple regression. There were six independent variables. These variables were the six SCS subscale scores of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnerships). The two dependent variables were graduation rate and dropout rate. The alpha level was set at 0.05.

Summary

This chapter provided the plan by which the culture of Mississippi public high schools was assessed and then correlated with the high school graduation and dropout rates of those schools to determine whether there was a statistical relationship. School culture was measured using the School Culture Survey (SCS) that measures school culture on six separate factors. Each factor produced a subscale score that was statistically compared with graduation and dropout rates. The graduation and dropout rates came from the Mississippi Department of Education. The research questions, hypotheses, participants and instrument were defined. The reliability of the instrument was provided as well as how the validity was established. Procedures for administering and collecting the instrument were detailed. This chapter explained how this study was conducted.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

High schools are under scrutiny to increase graduation rates and reduce dropout rates. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the results of the data analysis used to examine high school culture, graduation rates, and dropout rates. Thirty-three high schools in Mississippi participated in the study. The School Culture Survey (SCS) was completed by 852 teachers and counselors. The unit of analysis was the individual school. School average results on each of the six factors of the SCS (collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose, and learning partnerships) were statistically correlated with the graduation and dropout rates of the schools.

Each public school district superintendent in Mississippi received a written request for permission to conduct this study in his or her district. There were 147 superintendents who received requests for participation. Forty-nine superintendents (33%) provided written consent forms. There were 65 high schools in these 49 districts. All 65 principals received requests to participate. Forty-seven principals in 33 districts provided written consent forms; this was 72% of the total eligible principals based on superintendent consent forms. The participating principals were asked to identify a school employee who would be the school-level volunteer who would assist with the research project. Principals were also asked to provide the number of teachers and counselors in their schools. Packets containing the number of questionnaires equal to the number of teachers and counselors in the school were sent to all 47 schools that had agreed to participate. Thirty-eight schools (81%) returned completed questionnaires. Of those 38 schools that returned questionnaires, 33 returned 20% or more of the

questionnaires. Five schools had a return rate of less than 20% and were not included in the analysis. A participation rate of less than 20% was considered too low to have confidence in the validity of findings. There was a total of 1582 teachers and counselors in the 33 schools that participated in this study; the responses from 852 of these individuals constituted a return rate of 56%. The 33 participant schools represented 13.5% of all of Mississippi's public high schools. The school volunteers distributed the questionnaires and cover sheets, collected the completed questionnaires, and then mailed the completed questionnaires to the researcher in self-addressed, stamped envelopes supplied by the researcher. Each return envelope contained the return address of the school so that the participating schools could be identified.

The SCS is a two-sided questionnaire. Some participants completed only the front side of the questionnaire. The questionnaires that were not filled out on the back side were excluded from consideration. One school included a number of photocopies of an original questionnaire. These photocopies were excluded. The SCS is a 35-item instrument that uses a five point Likert-type scale. A few items had two responses selected. All individual items with multiple responses were excluded.

Few empirical studies have attempted to determine whether school culture has an impact on graduation and dropout rates. This study explored the relationship of the six factors of the SCS with graduation and dropout rates. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. The results of the analyses are provided in the following sections.

Statistical Analyses

A total of 852 respondents (teachers and counselors) from 33 different Mississippi high schools participated in this study. Response rates among teachers and counselors

from the 33 high schools ranged from a low of 23% to a high of 100% with a mean return rate of 61%. Graduation rates from the school year 2012-2013 ranged from a low of 45.2% to a high of 92.2% for the participating schools. The graduation rates for all state schools ranged from 45.2% to 93.7%. The mean graduation rate for the 33 participating high schools was 75.1%. The state average graduation rate for all schools was 75.5%. Dropout rates ranged from a low of 5% to a high of 28.2% for the 33 participating schools. The dropout rate for all state high schools ranged from 5% to 38.7%. The state website listed no dropout rates lower than 5%. The term used on the state web site was “ ≤ 5 ”. For those participating schools that were listed on the state web site as having a dropout rate of ≤ 5 the value used for this study was 5%. The state average dropout rate was listed as 13.9%. The mean dropout rate for the participating 33 high schools was 11.8%. Table 2 displays the graduation and dropout means and ranges for the 33 schools in this study as well as those for the entire state. The table provides evidence that the graduation rate mean and range for the 33 school sample is similar to those of the state. The dropout rate mean and range for the 33 schools as compared to those for the state may suggest that schools with higher dropout rates might have been slightly under represented in the 33 school sample.

Table 2

Graduation and Dropout Rate Ranges and Means

Range	Participant Schools	All State High Schools
Graduation Rate Range	45.2% to 92.2%	45.2% to 93.7%
Mean Graduation Rate	75.1%	75.5%
Dropout Range	5.0 % to 28.2%	5.0 % to 38.7%
Mean Dropout Rate	11.8%	13.9%

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed for the study variables, including subscales associated with the six factors of the SCS. Descriptive statistics for the six factors of the SCS are listed in Table 2 below. The descriptive statistics include the minimums, maximums, means, and standard deviations of the six factors for all 33 participant schools. The values in the table are based on the five point Likert-type scale used in the SCS: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. A higher score indicated a more positive level of school culture for the factors.

Table 3
Factor Descriptive Statistics

Factor	<i>n</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Collaborative Leadership	33	2.96	4.32	3.64	0.36
Teacher Collaboration	33	2.42	3.74	3.27	0.30
Professional Development	33	3.45	4.31	3.94	0.23
Unity of Purpose	33	3.47	4.39	3.99	0.26
Collegial Support	33	3.42	4.27	3.91	0.22
Learning Partnerships	33	2.53	3.85	3.25	0.30

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Undecided, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

The means for all six factors ranged from just above a 3 or undecided (3.25 for Learning Partnerships) to nearly a 4 or Agree (3.99 for Unity of Purpose). The participants in total rated the culture of their schools between undecided and agree, which suggests that the participants tended to have a generally favorable impression of these six factors of school culture. The minimums, maximums, and standard deviations suggested that there was a range of culture in the 33 participant schools.

The factor with the largest range was collaborative leadership at 1.36 (2.96 to 3.46). Tied for second were teacher collaboration (2.42 to 3.74) and learning partnerships (2.53 to 3.25) with a range of 1.32 for each. Next came unity of purpose with a range of 0.92 (3.47 to 3.99). Professional development had the next to smallest range of 0.86

(3.45 to 4.31). The factor with the smallest range was collegial support at 0.85 (3.42 to 3.91). The ranges of these six factors demonstrated the extent of the differences in culture in the participant schools. The scale was measured using a five point scale. Three of the six factors had ranges well over a point with the smallest range at 0.85.

The lowest score for any participant school for any of the six factors was a 2.42 for both teacher collaboration and collegial support. These low scores suggest that the faculty and counselors in these schools rate these factors as less than satisfactory. The highest score for any school on any factor was a 4.39 for unity of purpose. The teachers and counselors in that school were likely quite pleased with this culture factor for their school.

Swindler (2009) used the School Culture Survey in her dissertation study, which involved 415 participants in 47 different schools in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Her means are similar to those found in this study and are listed in Table 4. Not only are the means in the Swindler study similar to the means in this study, the order of the six factors from high to low are nearly the same in both studies. The similarity of these two studies in factor means and mean order might suggest a degree of reliability of the SCS over different populations of teachers.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics from Swindler (2009)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Collaborative Leadership	3.39	0.49
Teacher Collaboration	3.27	0.51
Professional Development	3.89	0.54
Unity of Purpose	3.81	0.58
Collegial Support	3.85	0.39
Learning Partnerships	3.24	0.47

Note. Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree (Swindler, 2009, p. 88)

Results Related to Research Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were developed for this study. Research Hypothesis 1 was: There is a positive relationship between high school graduation rates and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS.

Multiple regression was used to determine whether the six factor model of the SCS was statistically related to graduation rates. The model demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between school culture and graduation rates. The study found

that both collegial support and learning partnerships were significant predictors of graduation rates. Results of the multiple regression were $F(6, 26) = 5.025, p = .002$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.43$. Adjusted R^2 of 0.43 suggested that 43% of the graduation rate variance was attributed to school culture. Results of this analysis supported Hypothesis 1. Coefficients for graduation rates and the six factors of the SCS are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

ANOVA Coefficients for Graduation Rates

Factor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Collaborative Leadership	-9.75	7.20	-0.35	-1.35	0.19
Teacher Collaboration	-8.74	6.23	-0.26	-1.40	0.17
Professional Development	-8.49	11.83	-0.20	-0.72	0.48
Unity of Purpose	-9.78	11.27	-0.26	-0.87	0.39
Collegial Support	30.62	10.21	0.68	3.00	0.006
Learning Partnerships	22.98	6.78	0.70	3.39	0.002

$F(6, 26) = 5.025, p = .002, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.43$

Research Hypothesis 2 was: There is a negative relationship between high school dropout rates and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS.

Multiple regression was used to determine whether the six factor model of the SCS was statistically related to dropout rates. The model demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between school culture and dropout rates. The factors of collegial support and learning partnerships were negative predictors of dropout rate while teacher collaboration was a positive predictor of dropout rate. Results of the multiple regression were $F(6, 26) = 6.246, p < .001, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.496$. Adjusted R^2 of 0.49 suggested that 49% of the dropout rate variance was attributed to school culture. Results of the study partially supported Hypothesis 2. The two factors that were negative predictors of dropout rates supported Hypothesis 2. Teacher collaboration as a positive predictor of dropout rates was not expected. Coefficients for graduation rates and the six factors of the SCS are listed in Table 6.

Table 6
ANOVA Coefficients for Dropout Rates

Factor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Collaborative Leadership	2.14	4.85	0.11	0.44	0.66
Teacher Collaboration	11.80	4.19	0.49	2.82	0.009
Professional Development	2.25	7.96	0.07	0.28	0.78
Unity of Purpose	9.32	7.59	0.34	1.23	0.23
Collegial Support	-19.57	6.87	-0.61	-2.85	0.008
Learning Partnerships	-17.84	4.06	-0.76	-3.91	0.001

$F(6, 26) = 6.246, p < .001, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.496$

Summary

The results of this study conducted in 33 Mississippi high schools which used the responses of 852 participant teachers and counselors provided support for the hypothesis that culture in schools has a significant effect on graduation rates and dropout rates. Two cultural factors of collegial support and learning partnerships were statistically significantly related to both graduation and dropout rates. As scores on these two school culture factors increased, graduation rates increased and dropout rates declined. The

additional factor of teacher collaboration was found to be statistically significantly related to the dropout rate even though it was directly related to the dropout rate as opposed to the inverse relationship that was expected.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The epidemic of large numbers of students dropping out of American public high schools remains an important issue. Many people have sought ways to increase graduation rates and reduce dropout rates. Due to a gap in the literature, this study was designed to explore possible links between school culture and the graduation and dropout rates in public high schools in Mississippi. This study focused on both graduation rates and dropout rates since these two rates have been calculated using two different sets of metrics. When the graduation rate and dropout rate for a given school, district, or the entire state are added together, the sum is not 100%, nor were they intended to be so. As a result, the relationships of both graduation rates and dropout rates to school culture were statistically analyzed.

A considerable body of research has linked a strong positive culture to achievement. Kotter and Heskett (1992) outlined reasons why a positive culture promotes achievement. Stolp and Smith (1995) provided a rationale as to how school culture helps the staff to support goals and programs and how this promotes student achievement. Zmuda, Kuklis, and Kline (2005) argued that a school climate can be positively influenced by the school's leadership which will boost student achievement. This study was designed to investigate three questions involving school culture, graduation rates, and dropout rates.

1. What are the thoughts of high school teachers and counselors concerning the culture of the schools in which they work?
2. Is there a positive relationship between high school graduation rates and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration,

professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS?

3. Is there a negative relationship between high school dropout rates and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS?

This study investigated whether school culture was statistically related to graduation rates and dropout rates in 33 Mississippi high schools. For this study, school culture was measured using the School Culture Survey (SCS). The SCS is a 35-item questionnaire that uses a five point Likert-type scale that measures six specific factors of school culture: collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose, and learning partnerships. Factor scores were calculated for each school. These school mean factor scores were statistically compared to the graduation rates and dropout rates for the participant schools. Questions on the SCS were worded so that as scores increased, culture would be more positive.

Major Findings

Analyses of culture scores, graduation rates, and dropout rates in the participating schools demonstrated that as the culture scores of collegial support and learning partnerships increased, graduation rates improved and dropout rates declined. In addition, as culture scores increased on the factor of teacher collaboration, dropout rates also increased. This last finding was the opposite of what was anticipated by the researcher. The expected result was that as culture scores increased, dropout rates would drop.

Research Question 1 was: “What are the perceptions of high school teachers and counselors concerning the culture of the schools in which they work?” Data show that teachers and counselors in the participating 33 high schools demonstrated a range of attitudes towards school culture. The factor with the highest rating was unity of purpose which was closely followed by professional development and collegial support. Attitudes towards collaborative leadership were somewhat lower than those for the top three factors. The two lowest rated factors were teacher collaboration and learning partnerships with learning partnerships being slightly lower than teacher collaboration. The study found that the range in attitudes on the six factors demonstrated that there was a notable difference in attitudes between the school with the lowest score and the school with the highest score. This suggested that attitudes vary greatly towards school culture between schools with a more positive culture and those with a less positive culture.

Research Question 2 was: “Is there a positive relationship between high school graduation rates and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership as measured by the SCS?” The results provided evidence that school culture is related to graduation rates. The overall six factor model was clearly related to graduation rates. As scores on collegial support and learning partnerships increased, graduation rates improved. These two factors were found to be significant predictors of graduation rates.

Research Question 3 was: “Is there a negative relationship between high school dropout rates and one or more culture variables of collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning

partnership as measured by the SCS?" The results provided evidence that school culture is related to dropout rates. The overall six factor model was clearly related to dropout rates. Three factors were found to be significant predictors of dropout rates. As scores on the factors of collegial support and learning partnerships increased, dropout rates declined.

A number of authors have argued that collegial support and learning partnerships are key to student achievement in schools. Greenfield (2005) indicated that collegial support is a key difference between less effective and more effective schools. Duttweiler (2003) reported that learning partnerships were an important component of an initiative that helped reduce dropout rates. Teacher collaboration was also linked to dropout rates. However, teacher collaboration was a positive predictor of dropout rates rather than the negative predictor that was expected. That is, as scores on teacher collaboration went up, graduation rates also went up. Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) and Gruenert (2005) both indicated that there have been few studies linking teacher collaboration to student achievement. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) indicated that collaboration is important but only if it is targeted on teaching and learning. That is, collaboration may not be effective in promoting student achievement if the collaboration is not clearly focused. Perhaps some participants may have mistaken socializing to be collaboration. Additionally, it is useful to note that dropout rates were taken from 2012 archival data, while the study was conducted in 2104. It is difficult to know whether this time difference between when dropout data were calculated and when the survey was administered could have an influence on the results is not known. Whatever caused teacher collaboration to be a positive predictor of dropout rates, a finding that seemingly

contradicts extant literature on the relationship between culture and positive student performance indices, might be resolved by further research.

Trust is an important element of collegial support. Trust is related to academic achievement according to Bryk and Schneider (2002). Fullan (2003) indicated that a key element necessary for school success is trust. Trust is closely related to good communications and positive relationships according to Osula and Ideboen (2010). Blase and Blase (2001) indicated that “trust is the foundation for shared governance and teacher empowerment” (p. 21). Many authors have argued that collegial support is an important element of school success. The analysis conducted in this study provides additional support to the argument that collegial support promotes school improvement in graduation rates and reduces dropout rates.

Learning partnerships involve good communications between the school and the home. Deal and Peterson (2009) argued that “Only when a solid and positive partnership prevails between schools and parents will education flourish” (p. 132). McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan, and Legters (2002) presented a reform model for school improvement that emphasized the importance of involving community members and families as integral to the process. Duttweiler (2003) reported on an initiative that boosted achievement in low-performing schools that found a key element to be the involvement of parents in multiple school activities. Smerk and Schargel (2004) provided a number of important elements that support school-community collaboration in order to improve school achievement. Several authors have supported the importance of learning partnerships as a critical element for school achievement. The results of this study are in

agreement with these authors who support school improvement through encouraging learning partnerships.

A number of authors have argued that improving school culture increases student achievement. Graduation is a very important benchmark, one of the most important in the P-12 student achievement continuum. Barnette and McCormick (2004) found that student achievement was improved when it was encouraged through positive school culture. Angelides and Ainscow (2010) indicated the need for educators to improve school culture in order to improve student achievement. Cunningham and Gresso (1993) argued that effective school culture is essential in order to improve schools. MacNeil (2005) found improving school culture was related to improved student achievement. These representative authors are a few of the many who have argued the importance of boosting school culture in order to improvement student achievement. The analysis done in the present study added additional support to the argument that as culture scores improved the graduation rates improved and the dropout rates declined with the one exception of the relationship between teacher collaboration and dropout rates.

Limitations

Several factors limit the generalizability of the findings from this study. The sample size in this study was only 33 schools. A larger sample size would be desirable. Only public high schools in Mississippi participated in this project. While it is worthwhile to examine the issue of relationships among culture, graduation rates, and dropout rates exclusively within a state that struggles with high attrition among students, a more representative study could include public high schools from additional states. Some schools returned one hundred percent of their questionnaires. Most of the 33

schools in the study returned fewer than 100% of the questionnaires with 23% being the lowest return rate that was included in the study. Schools with a relatively low rate of return may not have returned a representative sample of the teachers and counselors. A lower return rate could adversely affect the confidence that those schools' responses could be assumed to accurately reflect the school's true evaluation of the culture of the school. As was noted previously, graduation and dropout rates were taken from 2012 archival data, while the study was conducted in 2014. While it is worthwhile to note this limitation, it should be noted that it is difficult to resolve this issue, as final data on graduation rates and dropout rates of necessity are not calculated until months after the end of the school year in which they occur.

While the intent was for all teachers and counselors to have the right to volunteer or decline to participate and that all participants should remain completely anonymous, it cannot be ruled out that in some schools procedures may have been followed that allowed the volunteer to know who did or did not complete and submit the questionnaires. If some participants in school schools believed that their responses might have been scrutinized for submission, it might have been possible that those participants felt less than fully free to complete the questionnaires as they wished. That is, some participants may have felt they needed to give the school a better rating than might have occurred if the participants had felt their responses were anonymous. There was no evidence presented that any participants felt their anonymity may have been compromised. However, future studies might wish to devise a collection method that would assure all participants that their responses are truly anonymous.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The results of this study support the hypothesis that school culture is linked to high school graduation and dropout rates. This is consistent with the literature review on the topic. As a consequence, the following recommendations for policy and practice are proposed:

- Measure culture within schools and learning communities. Then use this information to improve school culture.
- Provide professional development for all educators in implementing and supporting ways to boost school culture.
- Work with parents and community leaders to improve culture.
- Make culture an important part of administrator and teacher evaluations.
- Provide training to school board members to promote an understanding of culture, its importance, its relationship to school outcomes, and how to support a positive culture throughout the district.
- Track culture within individual schools and be aware of long-term trends involving culture.
- Expand research to include how administrators, parents, and students view school culture.
- Measure culture in elementary and middle school levels.
- Look closely at boosting school culture in schools and districts the areas of collegial support and learning partnerships in order to boost graduation rates.

- In light of the effect size of the findings further explore school culture as an area of interest as schools, districts, and parent groups seek solutions to the issue of reducing dropout rates.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study did support the concept that school culture is clearly linked to graduation and dropout rates, the number of participant schools was only 33, all of which were in Mississippi. A study involving more schools and schools in other states could boost the generalizability of the findings. The unexpected finding that teacher collaboration was positively correlated with dropout rate could warrant additional research. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) suggested that to be effective, teacher collaboration needs to be focused on teaching and learning. Additional research could differentiate between teacher collaboration in general and teacher collaboration that has as its goal the improvement of teaching and learning. Only focused teacher collaboration that directly involves teaching and learning should be measured in future studies. This study involved only a quantitative measure of school culture. There may be qualitative studies that could add to the understanding of culture and how it promotes student achievement including graduation rates.

Two of the culture factors, collegial support and learning partnerships, predicted graduation rates while three culture factors, collegial support, learning partnerships, and teacher collaboration, predicted dropout rates. The factors of collegial support and learning partnerships predicted graduation rates and dropout rates as expected. Teacher collaboration was a positive predictor of dropout rates instead of being a negative predictor of dropout rates as was expected. Additional research could confirm these

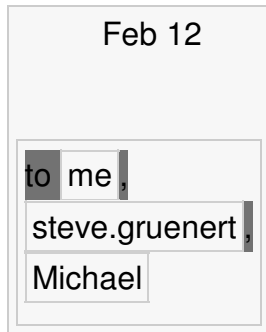
findings or provide additional insight into which culture factors are most important in promoting graduation rates while reducing dropout rates.

Summary

A number of researchers and educational authors have looked at school culture and argued that it is important for student achievement. Some of these authors have also indicated that a positive school culture promotes graduation rates and reduces dropout rates. This study found that a positive school culture promoted graduation rates and reduced dropout rates in the small sample of schools in Mississippi that participated in this research study. There will continue to be a good deal of interest in promoting the high school graduation rate for American public high school students. The literature on school culture as well as the results of this study promote the concept that a positive school culture can increase graduation rates and reduce dropout rates.

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION TO USE SURVEY INSTRUMENT



Phillip Pearson:

You have permission to use the School Culture Survey, as described in your request, in your doctoral research at USM. Dr. Gruenert and I wish you the very best of luck with your study and look forward to reading your findings.

Jerry Valentine

**Jerry W. Valentine, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus
University of Missouri
1266 Sunset Drive
Columbia, MO 65203
(573) 356-8948
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www.ipistudentengagement.com
www.education.missouri.edu/orgs/mlc**

APPENDIX B

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

School Culture Survey

Indicate the degree to which each statement describes conditions in your school.

Please use the following scale:

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Undecided
4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
1. Teachers utilize professional networks to obtain information and resources for classroom instruction.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. Leaders value teachers' ideas.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. Teachers trust each other.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. Teachers support the mission of the school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. Leaders in this school trust the professional judgments of teachers.	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. Teachers spend considerable time planning together.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. Teachers regularly seek ideas from seminars, colleagues, and conferences.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. Teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem.	①	②	③	④	⑤
11. Leaders take time to praise teachers that perform well.	①	②	③	④	⑤
12. The school mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers.	①	②	③	④	⑤
13. Parents trust teachers' professional judgments.	①	②	③	④	⑤
14. Teachers are involved in the decision-making process.	①	②	③	④	⑤
15. Teachers take time to observe each other teaching.	①	②	③	④	⑤
16. Professional development is valued by the faculty.	①	②	③	④	⑤
17. Teachers' ideas are valued by other teachers.	①	②	③	④	⑤
18. Leaders in our school facilitate teachers working together.	①	②	③	④	⑤
19. Teachers understand the mission of the school.	①	②	③	④	⑤

20. Teachers are kept informed on current issues in the school. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Please continue on the back of this survey.

	1=Strongly Disagree	2=Disagree	3=Undecided	4=Agree	5=Strongly Agree	
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	
21.	Teachers and parents communicate frequently about student performance.	①	②	③	④	⑤
22.	My involvement in policy or decision making is taken seriously.	①	②	③	④	⑤
23.	Teachers are generally aware of what other teachers are teaching.	①	②	③	④	⑤
24.	Teachers maintain a current knowledge base about the learning process.	①	②	③	④	⑤
25.	Teachers work cooperatively in groups.	①	②	③	④	⑤
26.	Teachers are rewarded for experimenting with new ideas and techniques.	①	②	③	④	⑤
27.	The school mission statement reflects the values of the community.	①	②	③	④	⑤
28.	Leaders support risk-taking and innovation in teaching.	①	②	③	④	⑤
29.	Teachers work together to develop and evaluate programs and projects.	①	②	③	④	⑤
30.	The faculty values school improvement.	①	②	③	④	⑤
31.	Teaching performance reflects the mission of the school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
32.	Administrators protect instruction and planning time.	①	②	③	④	⑤
33.	Teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed.	①	②	③	④	⑤
34.	Teachers are encouraged to share ideas.	①	②	③	④	⑤
35.	Students generally accept responsibility for their schooling, for example they engage mentally in class and complete homework assignments.	①	②	③	④	⑤

Steve Gruenert and Jerry Valentine, Middle Level Leadership Center, University of Missouri, 1998.

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APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 14061902
PROJECT TITLE: High School Culture, Graduation Rates, and Dropout Rates
PROJECT TYPE: New Project
RESEARCHER(S): Philip L. Pearson
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership and School Counseling
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 08/01/2014 to 07/31/2015

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX D

REQUEST FOR SUPERINTENDENT PERMISSION

Philip L. Pearson

The University of Southern Mississippi

118 College Dr. #5536

Hattiesburg, MS 39406

March 28, 2014

Name of Superintendent

Name of School District

Address

Dear Superintendent _____:

My name is Philip L. Pearson, and I am currently enrolled in the Educational Leadership doctoral program at The University of Southern Mississippi. In order to fulfill the requirements of my dissertation, I must conduct a survey that focuses on my topic of research. The goal of my survey is to gather and examine high school staff members' perceptions of the culture of their school. I will use the School Culture Survey to determine the state of culture within public high schools in Mississippi. These results will be statistically compared to the graduation and dropout rates of the participating high schools to see if there is a link between high school culture and the graduation and dropout rates. The information I will gather through my research may provide educational leaders, administrators, and fellow educators with insights into how school culture is related to graduation and dropout rates.

The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to survey the high school staff members of your district. With your approval, I will contact the principal(s) of the high school(s) in your district for permission to conduct a short survey (35 questions) of the teachers and counselors. It is important to note that no staff member, no school, and no district will be identified anywhere in my research and findings. All staff members, schools, and districts will remain completely anonymous.

I will ask the high school principal(s) to identify a volunteer on the staff to distribute the questionnaires, collect the completed questionnaires, and then mail the questionnaires back to me. The volunteer will receive \$50 plus postage upon my receipt of the school's completed questionnaires. Questionnaires will be administered during the fall of the 2014-2015 school year, with a target of September 2014.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns at 601-297-8769 or at philip.pearson@eagles.usm.edu. My dissertation committee chair is Dr. Michael Ward, who can be contacted at mike.ward@usm.edu.

If you agree to my request, please sign and return the form in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Alternatively, you may submit a signed letter of permission on your

district's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this survey within your school district.

Sincerely,

Philip L. Pearson

Consent Form

By signing and returning this form, I give Philip L. Pearson, a doctoral candidate at The University of Southern Mississippi, permission to conduct a research study in the _____ District. I acknowledge that Philip L. Pearson may contact the high school principal(s) and upon approval from the principal(s), Philip L. Pearson will deliver consent forms and questionnaires to high school teachers and counselors during the fall of the 2014-2015 school year.

Approved by:

Signature

Date

Superintendent

Name

District

Address

APPENDIX E

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADMINISTERING THE SCHOOL CULTURE SURVEY (SCS)

TO: _____, XXX HS, XXX District

Enclosed are XX copies of the School Culture Survey (SCS) together with an equal number of cover sheets. At an appropriate time please distribute the SCS and cover sheets to the teachers and counselors in your school. Please inform the participants they are to return the completed questionnaires to you. A suitable time may be during a faculty meeting. However, the timing is entirely up to you and your principal. You need to collect only the questionnaires. The cover sheets do not need to be returned. The questionnaire is strictly voluntary. However, please do your best to return all questionnaires whether or not they have been completed.

When distributing the SCS questionnaires to the teachers and counselors of your school please explain this is part of a research project that will investigate school culture, graduation rates and dropout rates in Mississippi public high schools. Please ask the participants to review the cover sheet and then to answer the 35 questions carefully as the results of the survey rely on the accuracy of the answers on the questionnaires. You may provide the introduction or the information may come from the principal. **Please remind everyone the SCS has two sides.**

No individual, school, or district will be identified in the results of this study. I will need to know what school your questionnaires are from in order to match up the scores with graduation and dropout rates. From that point on, the name of the school will not be used in any way. The published results will not include any school or district name.

While completing the questionnaire is strictly voluntary, as the number of faculty and counselors who complete questionnaires increases, the accuracy of the study increases. Please try to get as good a return rate as possible keeping in mind that participation is voluntary.

Once you have collected all questionnaires (completed or not) please mail them to me in the enclosed envelope. If you have any questions please call, text, or email: 601.297.8769 or philip.pearson@eagles.usm.edu.

Thank you for your assistance. This research project would not be possible without your help.

Philip L. Pearson

Please return this form with the School Culture Survey questionnaires.

CERTIFICATE

I certify that the School Culture Survey questionnaires were distributed to and collected from teachers and counselors of XXX HS.

Signature	Date
-----------	------

Name

School

Address

_____ Questionnaires and cover sheets sent to school

_____ Questionnaires returned

APPENDIX F
QUESTIONNAIRE COVER SHEET

September 15, 2014

Dear Participant,

The purpose of this study is to determine whether there is a statistical link between school culture and graduation and dropout rates in Mississippi public high schools. Your help in completing the attached questionnaire about school culture is key to the success of this study. The data that your school will contribute combined with data from other Mississippi high schools will be statistically compared with the graduation and dropout rates that appear on the Mississippi Department of Education website.

Participants will have an opportunity to reflect on issues involved with school culture. The results of this study may provide insight into how school culture may be related to graduation and dropout rates. Educators and administrators may find the results of this study to be of interest as it applies to the design of professional development opportunities. Policymakers may find the results of the study to be useful as they consider measures to improve graduation rates and reduce dropout rates.

The attached questionnaire covers issues related to school culture. Completion of the questionnaire should take no more than 20 minutes. All data collected will be completely anonymous; therefore, please do not write your name or place any other identifying information on the questionnaire. Data will be aggregated, statistically compared with graduation and dropout rates, and used to complete a doctoral dissertation at the University of Southern Mississippi. Results may also be presented at conferences and symposiums. No participants will be identified in the summary report. Schools and districts will not be identified in the results of the study. All participants, schools, and districts will remain anonymous in the results. Upon completion of data compilation, all questionnaires will be destroyed. Any information inadvertently obtained during the course of this study will remain confidential. Participation in this project is completely voluntary. Please feel free to decline participation or to discontinue your participation at any point without concern over penalty, prejudice, or any other negative consequence. If you have questions concerning this research, please contact Philip Pearson at (601) 297-8769 or at philip.pearson@eagles.usm.edu. This research is being conducted under the supervision of the dissertation committee chair Michael Ward, Ed. D., mike.ward@usm.edu.

A summary of findings will be provided to your principal and superintendent. Any participant may also request a copy of the summary findings by contacting the researcher at 118 College Dr. #5536, Hattiesburg, MS 39406 or philip.pearson@eagles.usm.edu.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be

directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

By completing and returning the attached questionnaire the respondent gives permission for this anonymous and confidential data to be used for the purposes described above. Thank you for your consideration and help with this project.

Sincerely,

Philip L. Pearson

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