Creating a Culture of Belonging: The Significance of Student Belonging and the Ethical Frameworks That Influence High School Leaders as They Sustain and Enhance Cultures of Belonging

Patrick James Sassen

Loyola University Chicago

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

CREATING A CULTURE OF BELONGING: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDENT BELONGING AND THE ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS THAT INFLUENCE HIGH SCHOOL LEADERS AS THEY SUSTAIN AND ENHANCE CULTURES OF BELONGING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

BY

PATRICK JAMES SASSEN

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Having attended a small parochial school during my elementary years, I can recall how much I felt that I was a part of the fabric of that school. The school was safe, classes were small and remained roughly the same from year to year, the instruction was personal and individualized, and I could easily join the baseball and basketball team after school. Though I am sure it was typical of my age, I took this sense of belonging for granted, assuming that this small, Midwestern parish school was an accurate reflection of the world around me.

I began high school attending an all-boys Jesuit high school in the suburbs of Cincinnati. I quickly made connections through athletics and was able to maintain several friendships from elementary school. As I rode the long school bus ride home each day, I watched the rolling hills go by. Mid-year, however, my family moved to Chicago. I was enrolled in a mixed-gender Jesuit high school in downtown Chicago, blocks from Michigan Avenue, Pilsen, and the Maxwell Street Market. I knew no one, had a difficult time making connections, struggled to find an activity to get involved in, and felt as if I had been picked up and set down on planet Jupiter. As I walked through the rotting vegetables of the Market from the previous weekend on my way to the Metra for a train ride home through the flat Chicago landscape, for the first time in my life I experienced feeling a significant lack of belonging. I have never forgotten that feeling, and know that somewhere down deep it led me to my topic.
I wish to formally express my sincerest appreciation to my dissertation director, Dr. Marla Israel. I will never forget her words for me when I first showed her a draft of my chapter 1. “This is rather raw,” she said, and from there on I understood that I would be guided by someone who would accept nothing less than the very best I could produce. Dr. Israel’s ability to be critical and direct while maintaining a supportive and humorous disposition is more than I could have ever asked for in an advisor.

I also wish to thank my dissertation committee. I have learned immensely from the classes I was lucky to have with both Dr. Janis Fine and Dr. Susan Sostak. Their wisdom, immense experience, and above all humanity, resonate with me each day as I continue my path in educational leadership. To all of my instructors from the Doctoral Program at Loyola University, I say thank you.

My parents were the single greatest influence in my life when it comes to both education and, most importantly, how to treat people. Both educators, they instilled in me a great respect for the value of an education. Though I know they are proud, I cannot help but think that they are a bit surprised that I am here, if only for how little I progressed under my mother’s tutelage at the piano. While I thank all of my relatives for their support, I would be remiss to forget thanking Mike Kiely for his supreme assistance on my behalf.

To my wife, Betsie, I thank you for your support. Your frequent words of encouragement meant a great deal to me, and the many days you handled the household while I typed away did not go unnoticed. To my daughter, Tierney, and my son, Connell, I say thank you for being who you are and know that no matter what I accomplish going forward, you are the two greatest achievements I will ever experience in my life.
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ABSTRACT

Given the increased focus on high-stakes testing and district accountability measures evident in the world of public education today, it is understandable that school leaders would be influenced by the pressures associated with public expectations and dwindling fiscal resources. This study explored what public high school leaders do to evaluate and change programming in their schools through the lens of the Ethics of Care, Profession, Critique, and Justice. Following a sequential explanatory mixed method design, participant selection was conducted using the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) as the means for establishing schools that, according to the HSSSE, had strong cultures of belonging. From these quantitative results, four building principals were selected to participate in a semi-structured interview for qualitative data gathering. These interviews were analyzed for influences of the Ethics of Care, Profession, Critique and Justice.

High schools with strong cultures of belonging, as established by the HSSSE, reflected high levels of Cognitive/Intellectual Engagement (engagement of the mind), Emotional Engagement (engagement of the heart), and Social/Participatory Engagement (engagement in the life of the school). As principals of these schools evaluated their programming in areas that impact belonging (Academic, Activity, and Social-Emotional), they used multiple sources of data for analysis, relied heavily on student-voice to inform them on the engagement factor of current programming, and utilized the work of educational leadership to build capacity in their staff towards improving programming. In
sustaining these programs, the principals interviewed created highly effective and sustainable organizational structures, utilized a process for ongoing data evaluation, and worked to ensure efficient and equitable allocation of school resources. Throughout this work, they were strongly influenced by the Ethics of the Profession and Care when evaluating, creating, and sustaining programming that contributed to cultures of belonging in their buildings. Principals in schools that had more racially diverse populations were more influenced by the Ethic of Critique when evaluating, creating, and sustaining programming that contributed to cultures of belonging in their schools.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among Americans aged 10 to 24, and ...so called cluster suicides account for an estimated 5 percent of the deaths (Hazell & Lewin, 1993, p 102)

Every school administrator has to face the death of a student, family member, or staff member during his/her tenure. These tragic events send shock waves through the learning community and require a rapid, calculated and caring response to meet the immediate needs of all its members. The response, though crucial in its timeliness and organization, is usually complete within a week of the event. From there the recovery process begins and takes much longer and requires a higher degree of compassion, patience and coordination.

The act of a student taking his/her own life elevates this difficult, exhausting process to another level. Senseless accidents and seemingly random diseases are a fact of life, difficult to cope with and challenging the existing support structures within a learning community. But when a student commits suicide, any person or system that had a relationship with him/her instinctively reviews previous interactions for the evidence of any clues that might have been harbingers for the final act. In this regard, school personnel are no different from the friends and relatives of the deceased.

Compounding this tragedy is the stark reality that school personnel are not as expertly trained to handle such events as we would like to believe. Research indicates that at least 86% of mental health service providers in schools have been involved in at
least one critical incident (defined as a death of a student or staff member, or school safety incident) at their school involving crisis intervention (Nickerson, 2004). In addition, studies have found that the majority of school psychologists in their sample addressed at least four significant incidents, such as serious injury, death, or suicide attempts, during their career. Despite having to respond to crises as part of their role, the research literature suggests that most school psychologists have not received formal training in this intervention area (Perfect & Morris, 2011).

Questions inevitably arise from the adults in the school building. “Did the student have any behavioral or emotional problems?” “Did the student have a network of peer relationships?” “Were they involved in activities outside of the classroom?” “Did the student have any relationships with adults in the building?” “Was there ever any evidence that the student may have been a threat to him/her own self?” An epidemiological approach is all that is left when such a tragedy occurs. Ultimately, what the school leader is looking to assess is “Does every student feel a sense of belonging in my school?”

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine how high school leaders evaluated their schools as having cultures of belonging, and to examine the ethical frameworks that influenced leaders as they sustained and enhanced a culture of belonging within their schools. Student belonging can be defined as individuals’ perceptions of fitting in and belonging with others at the same institution (Anderman, 2004; Osterman, 2000). Other facets of student belonging have been described as a sense of commitment to the school, the individuals’ commitment to work in this setting, and a sense of one’s abilities being recognized by others (Smerdon, 2002). Adolescents who do not have a sense of
connection to a larger group or community likely will experience increased stress and emotional distress (Baumeister, 1995). Better perceived school relationships with teachers and peers are likely to lead to a stronger sense of belonging in school, which, in turn, is likely to lead to more positive beliefs and emotions about one’s learning, which then relates to higher academic grades and lower levels of behavioral problems (Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996).

Causal connections are varied when looking at the relationships between student belonging and academic motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 1999), student belonging and grade-point average (Roeser & Midgely, 1996), lower rates of school drop-out, and belonging and social-emotional functioning (Anderman, 2004). Some studies have shown there is not a causal relationship between student belonging and academic achievement, while maintaining a causal relationship between student belonging and absenteeism (Nichols, 2008; Osterman, 2000; Roeser, Midgely, & Urdan, 1996).

**The High School Survey of Student Engagement**

Given this evidence, and in spite of the increased emphasis on standardized test scores as an evaluative measure for school performance, models exist for evaluating whether or not factors that contribute to student belonging exist in buildings. Nine districts, including eleven high schools, in the state of Illinois administered the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) from Indiana University between the 2007 and 2012 school years. Current literature suggests that senses of belonging emerge from positive social, psychological and academic orientations (Nichols 2008). The HSSSE is designed to elicit student perception data regarding:

- Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic Engagement (engagement of the mind),
• Social/Behavioral/Participatory Engagement (engagement in the life of the school) and,

• Emotional Engagement (engagement of the heart) (Policy, 2012).

These data provide in-depth and timely feedback to school leaders at the local as well as national level. This can serve as a baseline indicator for the culture that exists within schools.

Engagement is seen as a disposition towards learning, working with others and functioning in a social institution, which is expressed in students’ feelings that they belong at school, and in their participation in school activities (Willms, 2001). Willms also found that on average, schools with high levels of engagement tend to have high levels of literacy skills. This study utilized questions designed to elicit student perception data regarding the level of Cognitive/Intellectual, Social/Participatory, and Emotional engagement they experience at school. The HSSSE questions students about their academic experiences in the school and specific to the classroom. Such questions are, “How often have you answered a question in class?” “How often have you received helpful feedback from teachers on an assignment or other class work?” “There are teachers in my school that believe I can do excellent work.” “A number of my classes challenge me” (Policy, 2012).

The HSSSE is an instrument designed to survey students about the existence of explicit factors determined to create a sense of student belonging. Studies designed to identify the factors that influence student belonging have developed multiple conclusions. What is clear is that student belonging in school is derived from as much the social environment as the cognitive environment (Vitaro, 2001). The diagram below frames
sense of belonging within the social and institutional elements within the school. Research indicates that the confluence of individual social factors and the school’s environmental factors often exist in schools with strong evidence of student sense of belonging.

Figure 1. Factors that Influence Sense of School Belonging for Students (Cemalcilar, 2010)

Several studies link student belonging and social, emotional and participatory engagement. Trusting and supportive social relationships provide emotional safety for students. This sense of safety encourages them to engage in both in- and out-of-class activities, is a motivating factor, and serves to build resiliency skills (Born, Meeuwisse, & Severin, 2010; Cemalcilar, 2010; Endo & Harpel, 1982). The HSSSE surveys students for perceptual data regarding the amount of time spent in extracurricular activities and the perceived importance of these activities in daily life. An example of a probe would be, “Hours in a typical week spent: Participating in school sponsored activities (clubs, athletics, student government, etc.)” (Policy, 2012). Additionally, the
data retrieved gives indication of opportunities students have had during their time enrolled in the high school. A series of questions focus on specific activities that students have been involved in, specifically “…Participated in community service work, participated in a work study program, taken one or more Advanced Placement (AP) courses, or courses at a college/university” (Policy, 2012).

Studies support the belief that student engagement is related to overall emotional feelings of control and belonging in school (Born, Meeuwisse, & Severeins, 2010; Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). In addition to social and academic data surveyed, the HSSSE delves deeply into perceptual data regarding the emotional engagement that students have with their school. “I feel good about this school,” “I care about this school,” “I am treated fairly at this school,” are examples of the questions that elicit data representing emotional engagement (Policy, 2012). A section of questions also seek data regarding dropping out, providing responses that link desires to drop out or actually dropping out to certain factors that exist within the school such as “I didn’t like the school,” “I didn’t see the value of the work I was being asked to do,” and “I didn’t like the teachers” (Policy, 2012).

Schools are a microcosm of society and therefore are becoming more and more diverse. The achievement gap has long been a source of contention and division in education. As school districts become more diverse, both racially and economically, they will likely face challenges of providing rigorous and culturally relevant curricula to a greater spectrum of student backgrounds (Born, Meeuwisse, & Severeins, 2010; Cemalcilar, 2010; Herrera, 2010; Nuri-Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2012). This growth in diversity is occurring at a time when accountability is higher than ever and
resources are diminishing. Here too, a culture of belonging becomes critical in meeting the needs of a changing student population as educators work to bring students to future college and career readiness with limited resources.

Studies have shown that African American students and Asian Pacific or Hispanic/Latino students feel less strongly that they belong in a program than white American students (Johnson, 2009). Studies investigating dropouts have shown that for ethnic minority students the feeling of not belonging to an academic culture is an important reason for dropping out. In studies of cultural attributes on college campuses, it is clear that most students share social and academic attributes that align to the organizational attributes of that school (Born, Meeuwisse, & Severeins, 2010; Brewster, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Those students that share common behavioral preferences are likely to feel that they belong to the institution. Students that come from different backgrounds with varying academic experiences and identities (often due to their cultural heritage) are less likely to make the adjustments necessary to fit in with the dominant peer groups (Delpit, 1995). Given the growing diversity of school populations, strong leadership is needed to provide equal access to every educational aspect in the classroom for minority students and students of lower socio-economic backgrounds. Creating a culture of belonging may improve academic achievement for these growing subgroups (Herrera, 2010).

When evaluating a culture within a school, it is important to consider multiple facets. Past research has focused on educational institutions as consisting of an academic system as well as a social system (Tinto, 1994; Tinto, 1997; Tinto, 2004). How students perceive their access to and ability to integrate with these systems highly influences their
sense of belonging and therefore their academic identity (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Studies show that there is a relationship between supportive teacher interactions and academic and social aspect and students’ sense of belonging. From an academic standpoint, more active learning environments, characterized by a focus on more collaborative and cooperative learning opportunities, promoted social integration (Born, Meeuwisse, & Severiens, 2010; Cemalcilar, 2010; Herrera, 2010).

With this in mind, the Illinois Association of School Administrators facilitated a collaborative group named Vision 20/20, which created a vision for education in Illinois for the 21st Century. One of the primary recommendations from Vision 20/20 group is to “Develop the Whole Child.”

As student outcomes expand from a pure academic focus to the “whole child,” the measures by which we evaluate school effectiveness should also change. Current social and emotional standards should be clarified and aligned with the new Illinois Learning Standards. Appropriate instructional resources should be made available to support districts interested in incorporating social and emotional learning best practices. (Partners, 2014, p. 14)

While the first purpose of this study was to determine how high school leaders evaluated their schools as having cultures of belonging, a secondary purpose of this research was to determine, through interviews and document analysis, the ethical frameworks that influenced leaders as they sustained and enhanced a culture of belonging within their schools. Studies suggest that the relationships students have with their teachers can make a difference not only on student academic performance but also on their feelings toward their school. School leaders, on the other hand, are not a very
frequently studied group in educational research in terms of their effects on students’ sense of belonging. Studies suggest that the way school leaders socialized with their students was indeed valued by the students. Not only did school leaders exhibit leadership qualities in managing their schools, but so did their social interactions with the students influence the students’ feelings towards the school (Born, Meeuwisse, & Severeins, 2010).

There is a growing body of research that strongly links administrator leadership to student achievement (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Findings reported in various reviews of research and large-scale multivariate analyses confirmed that leaders strongly influence student learning by creating and sustaining a culture that sets high expectations and enables teachers and students to learn and work productively (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Robinson, Kannapel, and Gujarati (2008) undertook a meta-analysis of leadership dimensions across 27 studies and found a moderate impact (80 indictors across nine studies) from leadership practices of planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum on student achievement. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) identified the correlations in their meta-analyses, finding modest association with measures on knowledge of, participation in, and practice of monitoring and evaluation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Based on leadership standards set forth by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC), effective school leaders must possess cultural competence and have a basic knowledge of the communities they serve to understand, appreciate, and use the community’s diverse cultural, social, and intellectual community resources (Aspiazu,
A culturally competent school leader has the ability “to understand his or her own cultural background and values and work successfully with individuals of different cultures without engaging in deficit categorization of them. Limited research suggests that programs can “enhance culturally competent practice and that the climate and culture within a school is related to school-wide cultural competence” (Young, 2012, p. 24). A school leader who understands and appreciates cultural differences while establishing strong working awareness of commonalities serves as the creator of “cultural relationships,” which are necessary for reciprocity and collaboration within schools and with community entities (Bustamante, 2009; Gaitan, 2004; Harry, 1992; Nazinga-Johnson, 2009; Tucker, 2002).

Given the research on the connection between educational leadership and student achievement in addition to the importance of student belonging as a contributing factor to achievement, this study sought to establish the ethical frameworks that influence leaders as they sustain and enhance a culture of belonging within their schools. What do school leaders do to focus attention on the existence of these critical factors that create cultures of belonging in their schools? How does the school leader maintain a focus on the importance of school belonging when there are so many other issues to focus on? Even during non-turbulent times, school leaders must carefully consider on what to focus their attention in leading their buildings. Legislative acts such as NCLB have made accountability at the principal and superintendent level greater than ever (Gross & Poliner Shapiro, 2013). What do high school leaders in schools that have established cultures of
belonging do to create and sustain the critical elements of student belonging within their buildings?

**Research Questions**

1. According to data gathered in Illinois high schools that administer the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), what are the factors that contribute to student belonging in high schools?

2. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, how do school leaders assess their learning environments to determine whether factors that contribute to student belonging are evident?

3. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, what do high school building principals do to continuously review and stress the importance of the factors that contribute to the culture?

4. According to high school principals, what ethical lenses influence them as they create and sustain cultures of belonging in their high schools?

5. What implications do the findings of this research have for leaders of high schools?

**Ethics in an Age of High Stakes Accountability**

According to Anthony Noremore (2010), there is a sense of urgency that pervades public education as school leaders find themselves at a crossroads of crises. School leaders are challenged to uphold increasing state and federal mandates while reducing the ever-persistent achievement gap. How important do school leaders view student
belonging in an age of accountability, diminished resources and high-stakes testing? As previously mentioned, school districts are under increased scrutiny for their standardized test scores. Performance evaluations of principals/assistant principals and teachers of Illinois’ school districts must include data and indicators of student growth as a “significant factor” (Performance Evaluation Reform Act, Illinois Senate, § 315-96-0861, 2010). Given the legislative pressure from the community, state and federal levels to improve standardized test scores and the growing conventional wisdom that schools are rated based on these numbers, to what extent can an administrator be driven to create and sustain cultures of belonging?

Strike maintains that there are basic ethical tenets for school leadership and that these guide the leaders towards establishing schools that enable children to flourish in a democratic society (Strike, 2007). School leaders must be mindful of the evidence surrounding the importance of and the impact of high stakes testing. An educational focus designed to align curriculum to standardized testing in order to increase student test performance under the guise of student achievement comes with a cost that is unduly felt by minority and low-income students.

High stakes testing is popular because it offers a way to identify and blame individuals without acknowledging a collective unwillingness to invest in public schools, particularly those in low income, often minority areas. The tests have taken on the dimensions of a morality tale. Failure is located in low-performing schools and failing pupils, not in systems of public education that suffer from serious inequities in the allocation of resources. (Moran, 2000, p. 116).
This raw truth is born out of actual data surrounding the importance of what student achievement on standardized tests really means. One piece of research exploring multiple relationships between testing achievement and demographic factors discovered the highest correlation existed between student scores on the SAT and family income (Gross & Poliner Shapiro, 2013; Guinier, 2002; Strike, 2007).

This necessary understanding of what the research indicates about a high-stakes testing emphasis in educational leadership is important yet not enough. Starratt (2004) challenges educational leaders to operate under both intellectual and ethical frameworks. While the intellectual approach to educational leadership is groomed through the licensing and certification procedures as determined by the state, the ethical or moral component to leadership is a relatively small element of leadership preparation programs. As a result, “many educators in leadership positions have had little or no formal exposure to ethical analysis or reflection; many lack a vocabulary to name moral issues; many lack an articulated moral landscape from which to generate a response” (p. 5). Sergiovanni (1992) makes an artful distinction between intellectual and ethical approaches in educational leadership. Essentially, either one without the other renders the leader ineffective. Foster (1986) shaped the gravity and importance of decision-making for educational School leaders when he wrote, “Each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of human life: that is why administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas” (p. 33).

Strike frames the work of the school leader as grounded in basic ethical tenets designed to create flourishing learning communities. The essence of community is one of cooperation towards the betterment of all of its members. These tenets incorporate the
different influences exerting pressure on educational decision-making while serving to guide School leaders towards the greater good more often than not. These ideals are (1) respect for persons (which one can clearly identify in the ethic of care), (2) benefit maximization (which aligns to the ethic of justice), and (3) community (a major influence within the ethic of the profession) (Strike, 2007). Remaining mindful of the responsibility that educational leaders have for all students, the ethical tenet of critique maintains a healthy focus on the layers of power, both historical and contemporary, that shape the educational landscape (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011).

Many scholars point out the fact that most professions have basic operating principles that serve as primary guidelines. For example, lawyers are required to always provide a ‘zealous representation’ to their clients and doctors above all must ‘do no harm.’ The ideal that must serve as the heart of the operational paradigm for educational leaders is ‘the best interest of the students.’ To serve in a leadership capacity in the field of education, one must align his/her actions to this tenet (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Stefkovich, 2006; Strike, 2007).

Research has indicated that establishing just what is “in the best interests of the student” in any given scenario is at best difficult. Though often used and difficult to object to or rationalize against, “the best interest of the student” can frequently misrepresent the underlying motives when used to evaluate a course of action. In fact, finding context-specific evidence to support the claim is often difficult on its own merit. An actual definition of what this statement means has eluded researchers. A study of over 71 news articles found over 20 different topics for when the justification was used,
ranging from special education placement decisions to school consolidation decisions (Stefkovich, 2002).

Stefkovich (2006) creates a model of what elements are to be ever present when educators labor under the framework of the best interests of the student. Though not a prescription for educators, the model is informed by ethical paradigms of Kant, Mills, Locke, Rousseau and Mills as well as sound practice and it is difficult to argue with its merits (Stefkovich, 2006). This model aligns professional actions to ethical frameworks while acknowledging that it is the adults who maintain the power of authority over the students whose interests they seek to protect. To this end, much of the model is designed to assist educators in maintaining an awareness of elements that are crucial to adolescent learning models. The overarching elements are rights, responsibility and respect, as illustrated in the diagram below.

![Diagram of the Best Interests Model](source: Illustration by Hector L. Sambolin, Jr., 2005, in Stefkovich, 2014, p. 28.)

*Figure 2. Best Interests Model*
Utilizing the best interests of the student model to guide one’s professional actions is critical to an educator’s success in engaging all students in growing and learning as responsible citizens. Educational leadership requires another layer of guidance when making programmatic, personnel and resource-driven decisions. An ethical framework serving as an operational paradigm for educational leadership has received increased acknowledgement in recent years with the release of the updated Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (Administration, 2008). Standard 5 requires that educational leaders act with “integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner” (p. 18) In order to achieve this benchmark, school leaders must familiarize themselves with multiple ethical frameworks and perspectives.

This study considered four ethical frameworks by which high school educational leaders may use as guiding influences in their efforts to create and sustain cultures of belonging in their schools. School leaders should be aware of the ethics that influence them in their decision-making. These frameworks are the ethic of justice, the ethic of care, the ethic of critique and the ethic of the profession. Though easily distinguishable on their own from a theoretical perspective, often they are applied and referenced in unison with one another. This study sought to understand how school leaders in buildings with high levels of belonging as determined by their HSSSE score utilize these frameworks as operational guidelines.

**Conceptual Framework**

Research supports the assertion that effective educational leaders are influenced by ethical paradigms of both a personal and professional nature. This study sought to identify the ethical frameworks that influence building principals of high schools in
districts that scored in the top half on the HSSSE administered during the 2007-2012 school years. Building leaders were invited to participate based on the quantitative data provided by the HSSSE, the researcher gathered qualitative data from semi-structured interviews of the influential factors in sustaining and enhancing cultures of belonging.

Strike (2007) identifies four characteristics of ethical decision making:

1. The decision is supported by evidence,
2. The ends aimed at by the decision are the ends that ought to be aimed at,
3. The decision can be implemented morally,
4. The decision has been legitimately achieved. (p. 113)

The ethical lenses selected for this study encompass these characteristics. An administrator acting out of a commitment to ethical influences, whichever the framework, should make a decision that is reflective of these criteria. Additionally, as noted below, decision making influenced by an ethical framework can increase cultures that promote student belonging for all students. These ethical lenses are (1) the Ethic of Justice, (2) the Ethic of Critique, (3) the Ethic of Care, and (4) the Ethic of the Profession. These lenses comprised the conceptual framework for analysis within this study.

**Ethic of Justice**

At its core, the ethic of justice focuses on rights and law. The framework regards the individual as living within the context of a greater society and thereby held to a “communal understanding” while not required to relinquish their individual freedoms (Starratt, 1994). From an application perspective, the ethic of justice is how educational laws impact the decision-making process. Schools have considerable discretion when it comes to making decisions about their students. Often, the laws change to meet the
changing societies they shape, such as with metal detectors and the potential for registered weapons to be carried by specific school personnel (People v. Dukes, 1992).

School leaders must be highly cognizant of procedural law when making decisions. When no laws apply to the decision at hand, different ethical frameworks may serve the leader more appropriately. In scenarios where the law is clear, the administrator may find that other ethical frameworks make simply following a legal path more difficult. For example, laws have, at times, been changed to not only maintain contemporary relevance but also due to recognition on the legislation that they are not in the best interests of the greater whole of society. Jim Crow laws, for example, which were designed by Southern legislators to maintain the power imbalance established pre-Civil War between whites and blacks, as well as previous laws that allowed Mormons to take multiple wives are examples of how the Supreme Court overturned an existing law due to it quite simply being wrong. (Stefkovich, 2014) As society evolved and these laws proved outdated and immoral, the judicial process enjoined the struggle for Civil Rights and changed them.

In applying the ethic of justice, ultimately school leaders must follow legal guidelines in order to maintain the integrity of the school district in the eyes of the community and the government. In applying this framework three questions must be asked: “Is there a law, right, or policy that relates to a particular case? If there is a law, right, or policy, should it be enforced? And if there is not a law, right, or policy, should there be one?” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p. 13). The school leader may ultimately believe that his or her duty to the district and he taxpayers as well as to the protection of legal rights is the prevalent influence in their focusing on student belonging and the
elements that help sustain that culture. Figure 3 depicts the elements educational leaders must evaluate when applying the ethic of justice to a situation.

**Figure 3. Legal/Ethical Decision-Making Process**

Within the context of the ethic of justice the school leader considers three distinct perspectives when applying the ethic to school operations and educational leadership. Weighing one perspective against another is a balancing act requiring the building leader to consider each situation and the respective stakeholders in order to make the best decision. Having previously stated the importance of every school decision and the impact it has on students, the school leader influenced by the ethic of justice must weigh the impact of his or her decisions and compare them to the alternatives.

Increasingly in this economy, building principals are being asked by their school Boards to do more with less. One such perspective within the ethic of justice is the utilitarian approach to leadership. School leaders may consider in a given scenario what path will net the greatest good for the greatest number of students. Knowing that resources are increasingly restrictive, the building leader may seek to invest them in the

areas where the most students may benefit. With this perspective, a building principal may weigh the possible outcomes, for example, when deciding whether to add a new teacher in the Gifted and Talented Program (G & T) or whether to hire another Special Education teacher (Strike, 2007). If research shows that investing in G & T programming has a greater impact on student achievement, the building leader may be inclined to take that path.

An alternative perspective within the ethic of justice would be to invest resources according to the needs of the students. Similar to the ‘biggest bang for the buck’ approach, a school leader may find it difficult to affirmatively assess which students are of the greatest need within their buildings. When one considers the minority populations, the lower socio-economic status populations, and the special needs population, making a definitive judgment on the neediest population is likely to be based on highly subjective criteria (Strike, 2007).

A third perspective that a school leader may consider within the ethic of justice is to consider, as Strike asserts, each student’s “just and reasonable aspirations” (Strike, 2007, p. 81) when evaluating how to allocate resources or determine proper outcomes in a given scenario. This is more of a middle-of-the-road approach between the two previous perspectives. Though still inclined to be a subjectively measured approach, this perspective can seek to provide appropriate resources to one population without wholly denying resources to a different population.

The school leader considering these different approaches when making decisions is operating under the influence of the ethic of justice. This influence generates questions in the leader’s mind about, “who needs these resources?” or “who can benefit best from
these resources?” or even “who is mandated by law to receive these resources?” As it relates to student belonging, a fair and just resource allocation/decision-making model seeks to inhibit undue influence on the dominant population while seeking to create as level a playing field within the system as possible. It is about respecting each individual student’s needs while maintaining a vision for systemic improvement. It is likely that a student within this justice influenced culture would respond that they feel valued in their school, that someone cares for them or that they have a voice.

**Ethic of Critique**

As with any approach to leadership, a singular focus or awareness will prove ineffectual. Given the broad scope of the decisions they make, educational leaders must hold a balance of knowledge and sensibility when making decisions. To this end, a building leader who views the legal rights and responsibilities as the definitive guide to making decisions and planning the future of his or her building fails to take into account crucial perspectives that are absent in our legal system. It must be remembered that many of our laws and regulations were established with a small percentage of our country’s population represented. Often, school policies designed to serve consistently and fairly disproportionately impact and unduly influence non-dominant populations. This creates a system that perpetuates the dominant perspective and reinforces the negative stereotypes associated with the marginalized population. (Lindsey, 2009)

Arons and Lawrence (1980) observe:

Even when a school bends over backwards (as it almost never does) to provide all points of view about ideas and issues in the classroom, it barely scratches the surface of its system of value inculcation. A school must still confront its hidden
curriculum – the role models teachers provide, the structure of classrooms and of teacher-student relationships, the way in which the school is governed, the ways in which the child’s time is parceled out, learning subdivided and fragmented, attitudes rewarded and punished. Even in those areas concerned with basic skills it is clear that teaching is never value-neutral, that texts, teachers, subject matter and atmosphere convey messages about approved and rewarded values and ideas. (p. 310)

The school leader who is influenced by the ethic of critique asks the question “Whose voices are not at the table when discussing outcomes to a scenario?” The ethic of critique, which emerges from the overarching framework of critical theory, can be applied to educational settings through the lens of critical pedagogy. A course of action grounded in the tenets of the ethic of critique seeks to empower all students while avoiding the reproduction of the “isms” within the classroom context, namely classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p. 14).

Within this ethical framework the school leader operates under the belief that all populations within the school are members and that no group will be made to feel as a guest. This means that from the time a student walks into the building in the morning until the time they are delivered home in the evening they are able to identify within the school and their classrooms recognizable cultural markers. A truly multi-cultural approach to educational leadership means providing a physical and academic environment that is reflective of all of its cultures. Curriculum reflects the views of all of its students and access to a rigorous curriculum is extended to all students (Strike, 2007).
An obvious element of a multicultural community is its reliance on respectful interaction between and amongst different cultures. A community of any kind must be able to pass its commonly shared values on to future generations through interactions of new and old. Cultural awareness grows into cultural appreciation and culturally responsive teaching through the interaction of teachers, students and parents (Strike, 2007).

People and their cultures perish in isolation, but they are born and reborn in contact with other men and women, with men and women of another culture, of another creed, and another race. If we do not recognize our humanity in others, we shall not recognize it in ourselves. (Fuentes, 1992, p. 245).

Teachers who recognize their own culture and the cultures of their students are able to understand the impact of the classroom environment on individual students. Understanding and being responsive to the different cultures within a given class provides a structure that all students can grow from without leaving a piece of themselves at the classroom door. Students who are from a marginalized group must be bicultural, which is a talent in and of itself but also requires a culturally responsive environment. The diverse thought patterns that different subgroups bring to a classroom environment should be viewed as enhancing the environment rather than burdening it (Nuri-Robins et al., 2012).

It is clear that in culturally proficient learning communities there is likely to be a larger percentage of the student population that feels it belongs. When the educational environment in which a student matriculates feels familiar and connected to their cultural heritage, a student is more likely to feel a part of that environment. The unfortunate
absence of a culturally responsive environment can lead to frequent incidences where minority groups are penalized for not meeting the dominant group’s view of how a classroom environment should work. These micro aggressions result when teachers make assumptions about minority student ability levels and misidentify behaviors as defiant or uncooperative. While these micro aggressions may be seen as individual in nature, repeated incidences can build resentment and detachment in minority students (Nuri-Robins et al., 2012). Educational leaders who recognize the impact of culturally responsive teaching work to influence teachers to open their classroom environments to not only recognize but to incorporate the diverse perspectives into their classrooms.

**Ethic of Care**

“The first job of the schools is to care for our children” (Noddings, 1992, p. xiv).

Similar to the ethic of critique, the ethic of care seeks to empower the historically marginalized voice, often associated with the feminine voice, in creating a culture of nurturing and encouragement. Students are the center of this process and their immediate interests are of high priority, lending a nature of humanity to the process of education. An example of the ethic of care in the educational process would be a Restorative Justice approach to resolving disputes and behavioral violations.

School leaders emphasizing the “three C’s of Care” (caring, concern, and connection) ask themselves the questions: Who will benefit from what I decide? Who will be hurt from my actions? What are the long-term effects of a decision I make today? And if I am helped by someone now, what should I do in the future about giving back to this individual or to society in general? (Martin, 1993).
This emphasis on caring relationships translates into interactions that can openly acknowledge a spectrum of qualities, from the worthiness of an accomplishment to the existence of pain and suffering. This ethic is grounded in a sense of respect for others and the qualities that make them individuals within the greater community. A school leader that is influenced by the ethic of care is aware of the individual qualities and perspectives amongst his or her students, staff, and community and is willing to understand these multiple perspectives and encourage bringing them together when necessary for decision making (Strike, 2007).

A strong understanding of the importance of culturally relevant curriculum, both explicit and implicit, enables an administrator to emphasize these features in professional development. In emphasizing a culture of caring, concern, and connection, School leaders must grow an awareness of the influences of whiteness and power in the classroom amongst staff. Lisa Delpit (1995), in her seminal work on culturally relevant pedagogy, outlines five aspects of what she names the “culture of power” in schools”:

1. Issues of power are enacted in classrooms,
2. There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a “culture of power,
3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power,
4. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier,
5. Those with power are frequently less aware of – or least willing to acknowledge – its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (p. 25)

This awareness demands a level of reflection on practice that cannot be accomplished in one session. School leaders must be committed to giving teachers the time and access to expertise and resources to culturally responsive teaching in order to fully support the examination of their classroom cultures and adapting to meet the needs of their individual students (Delpit, 1995; Herrera, 2010; Noremore, 2010).

Research has established clear steps that school personnel can take to create a more culturally responsive environment in a school. School leaders must first establish a trusting environment within the community. Teachers must gain the trust of their students and parents through culturally responsive practices. The use of effective questioning and feedback practices combined with an ongoing evaluation of the cultural relevance of instructional materials is crucial to meeting the needs of all learners. Leadership must invest in professional development practices aimed at increasing the cultural literacy of staff. Lastly, establishing positive school-home relationships will bridge a sometimes frustrating gap (Jackson, 1994; Noremore, 2010).

Related to cuturally responsive practices in the classroom, teachers must understand that students communicate in styles that reflect their cultural heritage. If school personnel construct their own classroom cultures to enable students to bring their own identities into the classroom and feel free to take risks, learning is optimized. Student expression, encouraged without cultural boundaries or white-influenced criteria,
engages all students in a supportive and receptive environment, leaving no child behind (Herrera, 2010).

This, of course, has a desired collateral impact as teachers recognize the value of these qualities and embody this ethic within the walls of their classrooms. Students feel accepted for who they are, they feel cared for, and they feel supported to be their individual best and not another in a line of cookie-cutter products as witnessed by the standardized testing approach. It is likely that building leaders highly influenced by the ethic of care will establish and sustain cultures in which a high percentage of its students feel they belong (Herrera, 2010).

**Ethic of the Profession**

The ethic of the profession is a paradigm that maintains that school leaders must weigh their own personal code of ethics with their individual ethical lenses. In tandem with professional standards as set forth by the profession of administration, school leaders must consider the student as the center of this process while also maintaining an understanding of the community values and expectations. This multidimensional approach to viewing issues can best be described in the visual below (see Figure 4).

School leaders who evaluate different issues through the ethic of the profession are aware of the individual influences within this model, understand where they personally reside within it, and assesses which elements should emerge as most influential in the decision making process. Note in the model that the “best interests of the student” remains at the center of the paradigm. The ethic of the profession incorporates the best interests of the student model and maintains an awareness of the
previously discussed ‘three R’s’ (rights, responsibilities, and respect) in evaluating potential outcomes to a scenario (Stefkovich, 2014).


*Figure 4. Ethic of Profession*

The model of the ethic of profession is similar to the Professional Learning Community (PLC) models that have evolved over the last two decades. Championed by Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker, the PLC movement has consistently provided school systems with concrete operating models focused on student learning. Central to the model is shared values amongst staff, students and parents on what a focus on student learning
is. PLC’s work daily to share leadership and decision making, collaborate to address student needs, sustain supportive conditions and an organization that requires interdependency (DuFour, 2006).

A building leader influenced by the ethic of the profession likely subscribes to many of the attributes of a PLC. In attempting to foster these conditions, he or she seeks to establish a culture in which teachers consider themselves active participants in a collective, shared process for educating students. Sustaining this culture takes daily effort to reinforce the mission, the vision, and the active values as established through a collective process (Strike, 2007).

As Strike points out, “professional knowledge in education consists of a body of ideas, theories, and collective experience about practice that may shape practice but does not dictate it in detail” (Strike, 2007, p. 100). To this end, the lead administrator is the educational expert bringing staff along in a manner that guides rather than lectures. In this manner, a degree of self-awareness and the ability to see “the forest” are critical attributes to fostering a culture that builds capacity in all staff towards establishing a healthy PLC environment. The profession demands a fidelity to the tenets of collegiality. This collective and collegial mentality must, above all, be about the welfare of students (student learning in the PLC model) and is the central component to the actions of a building leader influenced by the ethic of the profession.

**Significance to the Field of Educational Leadership**

Studies have shown that 40-60% of high school students consistently report as being unengaged, chronically inattentive and bored (Gates, 2010; Goodenow, 1993; Marks 2000; Noremore, 2010). While student engagement most commonly refers to the
psychological investment one makes in the act of learning, belonging is better defined as feeling accepted by a group. According to Abraham Maslow (1943), a sense of belonging is needed before a person can attain higher levels of cognition and social-emotional development. Students who feel they belong to the greater school community are more likely to adopt healthy and adaptive motivational orientations toward academic achievement (Osterman, 2000; Tinto, 1997). Students who feel part of the school community are more likely to place a higher value on and have higher levels of expectations for success in the classroom (Delpit, 1995). School leaders grounded in a holistic and socially just approach must place an emphasis on creating and sustaining cultures of belonging as they balance the demands of high stakes testing in the age of accountability (Herrera, 2010).

Just as tangibly measuring what the “best interest of students” is can be difficult, measuring belonging has been a difficult task for researchers (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). All of the current assessments of belonging available are adult-generated and therefore require the subjects, who are adolescents, to adopt the mindset and the lexicon of the researcher in answering survey questions. One of the more established surveys of student belonging is known as the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSMS) (Goodenow, 1993). The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) includes specific survey questions designed to elicit data on student belonging.

Through the lenses of the ethic of care, critique, justice and the profession, this study was designed to elicit data on the ethical influences that to the greatest degree drive school leaders to sustain and enhance cultures of belonging in their schools. This study analyzed the extent to which school leaders are aware of the cultures within their schools
and the extent to which these ethical paradigms exert influence in these respective areas related to their efforts. As previously mentioned, the field of education has been impacted significantly by a troubled economy and an increased movement toward accountability via standardized test scores. Educational leaders feel pressure from their Boards, community members, corporate entities and legislators to “do more with less” while improving student achievement as measured by standardized tests (Strike, 2007).

As Noddings (1992) points out when discussing the potential dangers of community influences, there is power and safety in the group approach to challenging educational leadership. As a result, the school leader must maintain awareness of the “binding myths, ideas, and commitments” (p. 118) while being able to withstand the expectation that he or she conform to these in every situation. School leaders must balance these pressures with the ethical models that consider the needs of the student first when attempting to move stakeholders towards identifying and fostering the relationships that create cultures of belonging (Sergiovanni 1992).

A guiding principle for school leaders committed to promoting cultures of belonging is utilizing a Moral approach to authority (Sergiovanni, 1992; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Starratt, 2004). This approach focuses on keeping things personal for teachers, tapping into their beliefs about the whole student and the importance of having a sense of belonging (Fullan, 2001). Research suggests that appealing to teachers’ senses of mission and professional responsibilities can overcome the political and selfish tendencies so evident in schools (Johnson, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1992). Alternatively, subscribing to more heavy-handed models of authority tends to lead to diminished individual capacity and motivation (Hemmings, 2012; Sergiovanni, 199).
To this end, this study sought to establish the ethical paradigms that emerge as most informative and guiding for building leaders maintaining a focus on belonging amidst these contemporary political and financial pressures. This research revealed for the chosen sample the most influential ethical paradigms for educational leaders when making decisions that impact student belonging.

**Methodology**

This current study was a two-phase Sequential Explanatory study designed to collect and analyze both quantitative and perceptual data through the use of the High School Survey of Student Engagement as the survey instrument and structured interviews with existing school leaders. This study consisted of data gathered from a single point in time, rather than undertaking a longitudinal methodology that may result in findings of a greater scope. The researcher obtained HSSSE data from Indiana University utilizing the FOIA request form in Appendix A. Using Illinois districts which score in the top 50% on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) as the cut score, building principals were asked to evaluate their schools for cultures of belonging based on HSSSE and data from current literature. Eleven districts in Illinois administer the HSSSE to their students during the 2007-2012 school years. Once these scores were obtained from the respective districts, building data in the top 50% of the districts was analyzed based on all three subsections:

1. Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic Engagement,
2. Social/Participatory/Behavioral Engagement, and
3. Emotional Engagement
From data gathered via interviews, school leaders in districts with clearly established cultures of belonging as measured by the HSSSE were asked to describe specific actions they take to establish and sustain such an environment. The target was to interview five high school principals in these districts. Interviews sought to establish common leadership practices that create and sustain cultures of belonging. Areas to be considered were Academic Programming, Social-Emotional Programming, Activity Programming, and Classroom Instruction.

Qualitative data was coded with an eye on any trends that emerge related to the following factors:

Coding phase 1:
These data were analyzed and coded first based on the constructs of belonging as determined by the HSSSE data. These constructs are as follows:

1. Cognitive/Intellectual Engagement
2. Social/Participatory Engagement
3. Emotional Engagement

Coding phase 2:
These data were analyzed and coded based on the ethical frameworks as follows:

1. Ethic of Care
2. Ethic of Critique
3. Ethic of Justice
4. Ethic of the Profession

Steps of the Data Gathering Progression
Figure 5. Format of Implementation of Sequential Explanatory Strategy of Mixed Methods Research (Creswell & Plano, 2007)

Limitations to the Study

One drawback to this methodology was the lack of direct input from students. The HSSSE is an excellent instrument for providing students adult-generated prompts that reflect possible adolescent perspectives. To this end, student voice was represented in this study. Open-ended responses are not a component, however. Utilizing largely adult perspectives on what belonging is and how a culture of belonging looks resulted in data less rich or as authentic as if a portion of the data came from the students themselves. That being said, even a study that took data from students via questionnaire or interviews would contain inherent biases based on the adult-generated questions.
The researcher has worked in public education for 20 years as a teacher, administrator and coach. Throughout that time, this researcher has utilized social-emotional supports to address student disengagement, behavioral issues and academic issues. The researcher admits that he believes in the importance of providing students opportunities for social, psychological and academic integration into their schools. In order to minimize the impact of bias, this researcher maintained a reflection log throughout the process of gathering and analyzing the data. The research log served as an outlet for expressing disappointment, confusion, frustration or other reactions to the data. In addition, throughout the process of analyzing data, a sense of cognitive dissonance can develop as new understandings arise that may conflict with old paradigms. The reflection log served as the outlet for the necessary processing of these.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine how school leaders evaluate their schools as having cultures of belonging, and to examine the ethical frameworks used to emphasize sustaining and enhancing a culture of belonging within their schools. Student belonging can be defined as individuals’ perceptions of fitting in and belonging with others at the same institution (Anderman, 2004; Osterman, 2000). This chapter introduced the study and explained the basic research questions being asked in an effort to contribute to the field of educational leadership. The following questions are the basis for the study:

1. According to data gathered in Illinois high schools that administer the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), what are the factors that contribute to student belonging in high schools?
2. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, how do school leaders assess their learning environments to determine whether factors that contribute to student belonging are evident?

3. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, what do high school building principals do to continuously review and stress the importance of the factors that contribute to the culture?

4. According to high school principals, what ethical lenses influence them as they create and sustain cultures of belonging in their high schools?

5. What implications do the findings of this research have for leaders of high schools?

The study utilized a Sequential Explanatory design and examined data from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) and data mined from interviews with school leaders in high schools with high levels of student belonging as measured by the HSSSE.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The research cited in this literature review served as the philosophical foundation for this research project. In this chapter, a thorough review of the literature on school belonging, factors that contribute to student belonging, the impact of specific factors on student belonging, and educational leadership as it relates to school climate is reviewed. Major theoretical perspectives supporting or criticizing the above content are provided. This chapter will utilize the framework provided by Cemalcilar (2010) that indicate factors that influence sense of school belonging for the student.

Figure 6. Factors that Influence Sense of School Belonging for Students (Cemalcilar, 2010)
Student-Teacher Relationships

Research indicates heavily the high importance of the teacher-student relationships as it relates to student belonging and academic achievement. Within the classroom, student-teacher interactions influence how students view schooling and can produce positive or negative academic outcomes (Kenyatta, 2011). Students and teachers develop a relationship beyond what is exchanged in the curriculum. For many adults looking back over their own unique classroom experiences it is the personalities of the teachers or the relational aspects of a certain class that often stand out most. What happens between student and teacher is an interpersonal exchange that serves to enhance or block student learning (Hartrick Doane, 2002; Metcalfe & Game, 2006).

As Giles, Smith and Spence (2012) observe, “While relationships can be incorrectly assumed to matter, it is critically important that educators become more attentive to how their relationship is with their students individually and collectively. Educators need to have the ability to relate to their students, as well as remain attuned to recognize how these relationships are mattering. Student—teacher relationships are felt and interpreted by those involved, whether they are consciously aware of this or not. This research inquiry found that when the teacher-student relationship matters, this can be seen and felt in each person’s way-of-being” (p. 405). Recent studies have suggested that strong relationships between the teacher and the student change student motivation (Stetson, Stetson, & Sinclair, 2012).

These relationships become increasingly important when considering the learning of minority students. Research on effective teaching of black students indicates that black students in classrooms with teachers who take the deficit model view of them will not
realize their potential (King, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lewis, Hancock, James, & Larke, 2010; Mitchell, 1998; Quiocho, 2000). This deficit model creates lower expectations in teachers of black students and negatively affects the output of the students. This can manifest itself in what is known as “stereotype threat,” resulting in an extra burden both emotional and cognitive (Steele, 1997). Sadly, it has been asserted that not only ethnic background, but also socio-economic background serves to govern how students are perceived by their teachers (Kenyatta, 2011).

Seyfried (1998) found that “student perceptions of the teacher-student relationship (coupled with) teacher practices” serve to predict student ability. This research contends that the association between teacher expectations and student outcomes warrant updated pedagogies for recognizing the impact of culture (Seyfried, 1998). Clearly, students who feel that they have supportive relationships with their teachers are likely to achieve at higher levels, demonstrate stronger critical thinking skills, and have higher levels of self-confidence in their academic abilities (Pollard, 1993). The research indicates that anywhere between 9-18 percent of variance in student achievement at the end of a school year can be attributed by teacher perceptions and the impact this has on the teacher-student relationship (Alvidrez, 1999).

No less than Bill Gates himself has echoed previous research (e.g., Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) by asserting that teacher-student relationships support academic achievement by “making sure kids have a number of adults who know them, look out for them, and push them to achieve” (Gates, 2010). Scholars have found that teacher relationships boosted academic engagement,
achievement in school and attachment to the school (Davis, 2003; Hallinan, 2008; Hughes, 2007; Klem, 2004; Muller, 2001).

Strong teacher-student relationships have been shown to improve student G.P.A., attendance, and graduation rates (Croninger, 2001; Crosnoe, 2004; Erickson, 2009; Kahne, 2008; Murdock, 1999). Supportive student-teacher relationships can improve the performance of struggling students as well (Brewster, 2004; Hamre, 2005; Muller, 2001). Lastly, and most importantly for adolescents is the connection research has made between supportive teacher-student relationships and resiliency in the face of adverse life circumstances (Werner, 1982).

As previously mentioned, teachers committed to creating a culturally responsive classroom environment must understand the cultural capital that each student brings to their class. An example of this would be the recognition of the linguistic skills that students bring to their classes. How each student communicates, as Lisa Delpit states (1995), “is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity. To suggest that this form is ‘wrong’ or, even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family” (p. 53). Acknowledging each individual student’s linguistic style and embracing it within the classroom context allows each student to feel more accepted.

Lindsey, Nuri-Robins and Terrell (2009) challenge educators to extend their relationships with students beyond merely the superficial aspects that come easily to caring teachers. To truly establish a relationship that maximizes student learning, teachers must fully acknowledge their students as individuals “within the context of their own distinctive ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds and with their own
particular genders, sexual orientations, and sensory and physical abilities” (p. 13). This
acknowledgement extends to the curriculum, in-class instructional materials, and
pedagogical strategies designed to articulate each individual student’s cultural attributes.

Student-Administrator Relationships

As of 2008, more than half of the educational School leaders in the country were
eligible for retirement. The high turnover that exists in the field of educational leadership
is a direct result of demographics as well as the growing demands on the position.
Increased accountability in the wake of decreased funding has made the profession highly
demanding (Gibbs, 2008). The charge for educational leaders is to create a continuous
improvement process that engages the entire learning community towards higher student
achievement (Darling-Hammond & McGlaughlin, 1995).

Literature supports the fact that student achievement is linked to school
leadership. Marzano (2005) found that educational leaders who utilize 21 leadership
behaviors within the school setting substantially impact student achievement. These
leadership skills focus on the relational aspects of leadership as much as they do the
curriculum, instruction, and assessment knowledge employed. This speaks to an even
greater degree about the power of relationship and how, when considered important at the
administrative level, has collateral impact on all. As has been established in research,
educational leaders are required to influence those they work with in a positive manner
and must have the social skills to do so (Schlechty, 1990).

In an interesting study composed by Maulding, Townsend, Leonard, Sparkman,
Styron, and Styron (2010), the indicators aligned to Emotional Intelligence were assessed
in building principals and then compared to achievement indicators of schools of the
participants. Some schools were low-performing and others were high-performing. The results were rather conclusive in indicating that Emotional Intelligence was not related to student achievement. The overall proposed idea here is that, while it is not a direct factor in achievement, it is likely one of many factors of leadership that, when utilized effectively, can contribute to student achievement.

Educational leaders, while charged with multiple challenging day-to-day issues that can consume their time, must maintain a vision for the greater school construct. Traditional school structures followed the agrarian economy by design. Not only was the calendar aligned to the harvest schedule, but the curriculum was designed to differentiate between those who should be ‘educated’ and those who should be ‘trained for a vocation’. A more humanistic philosophy emerged in the late 19th century under the guidance of such scholars as Francis Parker, John Dewey, and Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (Kaplan, 2011).

Makiguchi (2010) devoted his efforts to creating schools that supported “harmonious community life” (p. 51). School leaders that embody this philosophy seek to establish a culture where relationships are the fulcrum on which the curriculum rests. Curriculum, under Parker’s (1893) vision, is designed to invoke “ideal citizenship… the highest degree of knowledge, power, skill, and service” (p. xix). If school leaders are committed to an educational environment that creates and sustains caring and supportive relationships, studies suggest that student achievement will improve.

Lindsey M. Guccione (2011) did a comparative study of two similar schools that had very dissimilar cultures. One school focused on school improvement as measured by standardized tests. School leaders maintained relationships with students and staff via the
preparation, implementation, and analysis of these high-stakes tests. Morale was low and there was a high failure rate. In contrast, the second school the administration focused on healthy relationships and encouragement for growth through empowering practices and the result was a steadily improving school with high morale. In the end, Guccione makes the case that the relationships between administration and teachers and students created the environment where teachers could feel empowered and students could succeed (Kaplan, 2011).

Educational leaders committed to fostering strong student relationships must institutionalize the practice of culturally responsive instruction (Lindsey, 2009, Herrera, 2010). As a means of operationalizing this focus, school leaders lead the process of:

1. Assessing culture in the school,
2. Valuing the diversity that is revealed,
3. Managing the dynamics of difference without defaulting to the deficit model,
4. Adapting practices to incorporate the strengths of the diversity,
5. Institutionalizing cultural knowledge into daily practice. (Lindsey, 2009, p. 21)

**Student-Student Relationships**

Further evidence supports the importance of relationships in the development of adolescents. Several research-based models of adolescent development (e.g., Adams, 1997; Adams, Day, Dyk, Frede, & Rogers, 1992; Benson, 1997; Damon, 1997; Lerner, 1996, 1998, 2002; Muuss, 1996) indicate that individual variations in positive or negative developments related to adolescents’ regulatory behaviors are produced by a historical context of person-context variables.
In a study (Taylor et al., 2003) conducted utilizing both data mined from gang-involved youth and College Bound Opportunity (CBO) scholars, several data points connected the importance of peer relationships in multiple developmental categories. In regards to peer relationships, both reported the importance of having a friend to talk to. However, differences appeared in how each group sought to resolve disputes (CBO students used mediation, gang-involved youth used guns and weapons), and the reasons for going to school in the first place (CBO students seeking a better job or college while gang-involved youth were lured by friendships) (Taylor et al., 2003). In general, friendships amongst adolescent males that were gang involved tended to be of greater importance while also being of a higher level of instability. This indicates that a stronger sense of belonging to school, considered a positive culture, is strongly linked to positive and stable relationships with peers.

**Physical Features of the School Environment**

School leaders are charged through licensure requirements and a moral imperative to implement measures that create a safe and supportive educational environment. There are multiple security measures that research would indicate effectively contribute to higher levels of perceived student safety. A Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (2001) reported that “an overwhelming majority of students and staff feel safe at school” as a result of the implementation of a School Resource Officer program. Additional research suggests that ensuring fair and appropriate rule implementation is critical to the reduction of the perception of unsafe school environments. (Schreck, 2003) The enforcement of these rules do not, however, enhance feelings of safety amongst Black students if they are *unfairly* enforced (Kupchik, 2008). Garbarino (2002) cautions
against utilizing heavy-handed, jail-like security measures that rely solely on school consequences to respond to violence. At-risk youth are reported to be in danger of being provoked into outbursts of behavior against such measures at a greater rate than their classmates. Combining research-based security measures supportive resources and highly trained professionals create the environment that best supports student perceptions of safety, thereby enhancing the conditions by which all students achieve.

**Supporting Resources Within the School**

Research indicates that adolescent learners need trusting and caring relationships combined with adequate support services in order to maximize their academic abilities. While schools are increasing their security measures as a result of a perceived growing threat of violence, social, emotional, behavioral and relational support services by highly trained professionals has proven to have a greater impact on the perception of school safety (Martin, 2013). This does not diminish the importance of safety measures, however. Research strongly suggests that unsafe school environments are linked to multiple issues. Student perceptions of unsafe school environments are associated with decreased attendance, grades and participation in school-related activities (Hilarski, 2004; Hong & Eamon, 2011).

**Perceived Violence**

The issue of school safety, while never not an issue for education, has grown exponentially over the last 25 years as more and more accounts of school violence have occurred and gained media coverage. In just the year between June, 2009-June, 2010 there were reportedly 33 school-associated violent deaths (Robers, Zhang, Truman, & Snyder, 2012). While the research is mixed when it comes to the factors that can enhance
student perceptions of school safety (e.g., uniforms, School Resource Officer programs, Cameras), the research on the factors that create perceptions of school safety (peer relationships, student-centered instruction, teacher-student relationships, physical environment, fair and effectively implemented rules) are more conclusive.

Despite the fact that the Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) established a standard that reads: “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 earning environment (Administration, 2008), school leaders consistently report that school safety is an aspect of leadership that exceeds their training (Dunn, 2002; Weiler & Cray, 2011). But the concept that a safe and supportive educational environment serves as the foundation of a positive school climate is difficult to dispute. Though school violence may still be a rare occurrence, the impact of a violent event or the perception of the likelihood of violence is a tremendous deterrent to student achievement (Dinkes & Kemp, 2009; Sanchez, Yoxsimer, & Hill, 2012).

As with most other education-related data, the impact of perceptions of unsafe school environments disproportionately impacts the achievement of minority student groups. Roughly 75% of self-identified Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender (LGBT) adolescent respondents reported experiencing antigay remarks and over 50% of them reported feeling distressed by them (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Patterson, 2013). Over half of LGBT adolescent respondents reported having been threatened or harassed at school while more than 65% reported having been physically attacked at school (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Patterson, 2013).
Studies have suggested that for multiple reasons, minority students perceive their schools as less safe than White students. Amongst these reasons are an increased risk of victimization, the presence of gangs at school, and violent altercations (Bachman, Randolph, & Brown, 2010; Brown & Benedict, 2004; Hong & Eamon, 2011; Price, Telljohann, Dake, & Marisco, 2002). Most studies using a mutivariate methodology have indicated no variance in perceptions of school safety between ethnic groups (Bachman, Randolph, & Brown, 2010; Hong & Eamon, 2011; Price et al., 2002; Wallace & May, 2005). Gender studies, however, suggest that male students are 30% more likely to perceive their schools as more unsafe while students in poverty were 58% more likely to perceive their school environments as more unsafe (Hong & Eamon, 2011).

Studies indicate that the variables that are most significantly related to student perceptions of school safety are (1) ease of making friends, (2) teachers’ involvement and instructional practices, (3) observed weapon carrying, and (4) school rule enforcement (Hong & Eamon, 2011). Research suggests that students in schools with disorderly school environments are more likely to fear being victims of violence (Akiba, 2008). Schools that do not enforce the rules have students at greater risk of feeling unsafe at their school (Mijanovich & Weitzman, 2003). Akiba (2008) discovered the student-centered instruction lessened student fears of being victimized as a result of student perceptions that this type of instruction demonstrates care and concern, a feeling that has ripple affects throughout the school. Students who feel isolated form their peers are more fearful of being the victim of school violence (Wallace & May, 2005). Conversely, students with positive peer relationships report having lower perceptions that their schools are unsafe (Welsh, 2000).
School Climate

One significant and basic underlying assumption to this study is that schools are extremely humanistic entities. Though hierarchical by nature, schools are operated by educators who strive to better the lives of those they interact with daily. These goals require a level of humanity and belief in the importance of caring relationships. As a result, schools need to have caring, social and supportive climates for students to achieve at the highest levels.

While leadership is crucial to sustaining positive school climate, teachers establish the climate as it directly relates to the classroom. Teachers creating a climate of transformative educational where direct student involvement is encouraged and there are high levels of feedback contribute significantly to positive school climates (Hunt, Wiseman, & Touzel, 2009). Teachers employing instructional practices emphasizing critical thinking and metacognitive activities are the foundation for a healthy school climate (Novak, 2005; Wenglinsky, 2004). Research points to the belief that student outcomes increase when direct instruction, teacher modeling, structure and feedback are characterized by warmth, sensitivity, and emotional support (Brophy, 2004).

Within the classroom specific pedagogical practices have been shown to increase climate. Positive climates minimize off task behaviors and increase instructional time (Ratcliff et al., 2012). Preventative strategies for structuring the class reduces the time spent addressing student behavior (Prater, 1992). Activities involving critical thinking, reflection and high student relevance also increase on-task behavior, which correlates with higher achievement (Amato-Zech, Off, & Doepke, 2006; Gillies, 2006; Wakefield, 2004). Studies are revealing that more indirect teaching models that encourage critical
thinking, problem solving, and the communication of results activate student learning and increase achievement (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Newman, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995; Richards, 2005).

### School Culture

The culture of an organization can be defined as “assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, rituals, traditions, expectations, knowledge, language, norms and all the other values shared by members of an organization” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991, p. 49).

Organizational cultures “involve the norms and relationships among members of the organization and the general sense of connectedness (or not) among individuals” (Daly & Finnigan, 2012, p. 42). Culture, as it relates to schools, has been described as daily discussions, dress codes, classroom décor, and daily interpersonal interactions (Kottler, 1997; Peterson & Deal, 1994; Schein, 1985).

Cheng (1993) found a strong correlation between positive and healthy school cultures and teachers’ attitudes and job satisfaction. Additionally, there is a high correlation between positive school cultures and organizational achievement (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peterson & Deal, 1994). Unhealthy school cultures are beset by a lack of shared organizational values, petty individualism and low staff morale (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peterson & Deal, 1994). Low performing schools tend to have such climates, with high staff turnover, various reform initiatives that fail and challenges to leadership and teacher quality (Daly, 2009; Daly & Finnigan, 2012; Finnigan & Stewart, 2009; Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield, 2005).
How Leadership Impacts Climate and Culture

At the macro-level of school climate, a staff that models collaboration and expert-sharing has been shown to improve organizational effectiveness (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Mintrop, 2004; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005; Moolenaar, 2010; O'Day, 2004). The influence of collaboration on school performance can be directly related to importance of relationships within the school community and the inherent benefit of developing new knowledge between individuals (Mohrman, Tnkasi, & Mohrman, 2003). Researchers have found that the higher the density and closeness of relationships in organizations the higher the performance (Reagans & McEvily, 2001). Studies suggest that relational quality and structures within schools play a critical role in capacity for learning and improvement (Daly & Finnigan, 2012).

Collaborative schools can be characterised by basic elements such as:

1. Complex problem-solving and extensive sharing of craft knowledge.
2. Stronger professional networks to share information.
3. Greater risk-taking and experimentation (colleagues offer support and feedback).
4. A richer technical language shared by educators in the school that can transmit professional knowledge quickly.
5. A higher job satisfaction level and identification with the school.
6. More continuous and comprehensive attempts to improve the school, when combined with the improvement efforts of the staff. (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991, p. 49)
These collaborative qualities have been found to be significantly related to increased student achievement (Gruenert, 1998). Gumselli and Eryilmaz (2011) found that principal’s perceptions of the most frequently realized collaborative factors were, in descending order: professional development, collegial support, collaborative leadership, unity of purpose, teacher collaboration, and learning partnership.

Research informs school leaders as to what factors to emphasize when creating positive school climates. Studies show that leaders must engage educators in the process of risk-taking in a risk-tolerant environment in order to highly facilitate the exchange of ideas and the creation of new knowledge (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Moolenaar, 2010). Greater structures that support collaboration within the school calendar enhances staff development and capacity. Where there is fragmentation and reluctance to sharing information or accessing new information, schools stagnate (Gumselli & Eryilmaz, 2011). Research suggests that schools that have attempted to grow a more collaborative culture did so through “informal mixers at local restaurants, summer professional development at an outdoor education center, and the formation of teacher teams that included both new teachers and planning team members” (Hemmings, 2012, p. 200).

**Student Belonging**

Student belonging can be defined as individuals’ perceptions of fitting in and belonging with others at the same institution (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Osterman, 2000). Other facets of student belonging have been described as a sense of commitment to the school, the individuals’ commitment to work in this setting, and a sense of one’s abilities being recognized by others (Smerdon, 2002). Adolescents that do not have a sense of connection to a larger group or community likely will experience increased
stress and emotional distress (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Better perceived school relationships with teachers and peers are likely to lead to a stronger sense of belonging in school, which, in turn, is likely to lead to more positive beliefs and emotions about one’s learning, which then relates to higher academic grades and lower levels of behavioral problems (Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996).

Causal connections are varied when looking at the relationships between student belonging and academic motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 1999), student belonging and grade-point average (Roeser, Midgely, & Urdan, 1996), lower rates of school dropout, belonging and social-emotional functioning (Anderman, 2004). Some studies have shown there not to be a causal relationship between student belonging and academic achievement, while maintaining a causal relationship between the former and absenteeism (Nichols, 2008; Osterman, 2000; Roeser et al., 1996).

Studies support the belief that student engagement is related to overall emotional feelings of control and belonging in school (Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981; Meeuwisse, Severins, & Born, 2010; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Wentzel (1994) found that students with a greater perception of school belonging, which he defined as support from teachers, were more likely to be pro-social, which predicted better classroom behavior. In addition, Wentzel (1998) found that students’ perceptions of their teachers’ caring was significantly related to their internal control beliefs, interest in school, and academic output, most notably regardless of race or socioeconomic status. Studies also indicate that students who feel a sense of belonging, defined as adult support, are less likely to drop out, have attendance issues, or engage in at-risk behaviors like drinking and smoking (Blum & Rinehart, 1996).
Research on student belonging has sought to define just what student belonging is in as empirical a manner as possible. The highly qualitative nature of the data makes this a difficult area to quantify. Excellent studies have been done quantifying responses and comparing them across different age groups and contexts (Anderman, 2003; Born, Meeuwisse, & Severiens, 2010, Cemalcilar, 2010). Nichols (2006), however, found that student belonging could be understood more comprehensively as a “multidimensional construct” (p. 266). Using the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM2), a scale designed by Goodenow in the early nineties to elicit perceptual data on student belonging, student responses defined student belonging as having three dimensions. These dimensions can be seen to strongly parallel the subcategories within the HSSSE.

(a) interpersonal relationships, or the support they feel from peers/teachers.

(Parallels the subcategories within the Emotional Engagement component of the HSSSE,

(b) learning/academic environment, or how well supported the student feels from teachers and the school academically, parallels the HSSSE components of Cognitive/Intellectual Engagement, and

(c) school facilities and activities, which include the building as well as activity opportunities for the students, lastly paralleling the Social/Participatory Engagement component of HSSSE (Nichols, 2006).

Gaps still exist in the studies of student belonging. Research has not indicated findings on whether student sense of belonging changes over time, and if it does, in what nature and in what context is the change influenced? (Nichols, 2006). One study yielded
findings indicating that sense of belonging declined as students aged and that students with higher previous academic success predicted higher perceptions of belonging (Anderman, 2003). This study provides some evidence of the dynamic nature of belonging.

What is clear, from research that studied the interactions of students and teachers, is that student perception of teacher support, both emotionally and academically, has significant impact on perceptions of belonging (Ma, 2003). Research by Johnson (2009) provides evidence of a significant relationship between high levels of teacher support and feelings of belonging reported by students. Qualitative data from this research makes the link between a sense of belonging, as related to teacher support, and student learning (Johnson, 2009). This research bolsters the findings of Roeser, Midgely, and Urdan (1996) who found that belonging has positive effects on academic self-efficacy, academic self-consciousness, positive school affect, and grades. As research has reported finding that indicate that minority student groups have lower perceptions of belonging than the majority group in the school, these data provide insights into potential pathways for closing the achievement gap (Goodenow, 1992).

Interestingly, research seems to indicate influences on the environment that best supports student belonging. Sense of belonging has been found to be positively affected in schools “that place a greater emphasis on the developmental needs of adolescent students” (Johnson, 2009, p. 112). Additionally, schools that provided students greater autonomy of choice over the subjects they studied and provided a structured homeroom period in order to facilitate healthy teacher-student relationships resulted in a higher sense of student belonging (Smerdon, 2002). Tracking practices and higher degrees of variance
between educational experiences of students are associated with a greater variance in perceptions of belonging amongst students. This would suggest that a more homogenous approach to providing a similarly rigorous curriculum for all students would reduce the “belonging gap” as well as potentially the achievement gap (Smerdon, 2002).

**Summary**

Research indicates heavily the high importance of the teacher-student relationships as it relates to student belonging and academic achievement. Within the classroom, student-teacher interactions influence how students view schooling and can produce positive or negative academic outcomes (Kenyatta, 2011) Recent studies have suggested that strong relationships between the teacher and the student change student motivation (Stetson, Stetson, & Sinclair, 2012). These relationships become increasingly important when considering the learning of minority students. Research on effective teaching of black students indicates that black students in classrooms with teachers who take the deficit model view of them will not realize their potential (King, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mitchell, 1998; Quiocho, 2000). The research indicates that anywhere between 9-18 percent of variance in student achievement at the end of a school year can be attributed by teacher perceptions and the impact this has on the teacher-student relationship (Alvidrez, 1999). Strong teacher-student relationships have been shown to improve student G.P.A., attendance, and graduation rates (Croninger, 2001; Crosnoe, 2004; Erickson, 2009; Kahne, 2008; Murdock, 1999).

Literature supports the fact that student achievement is linked to school leadership (student-administrator relationships). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) found that educational leaders who utilize 21 leadership behaviors within the school setting
substantially impact student achievement. Makiguchi (2010) devoted his efforts to creating schools that supported “harmonious community life” (p. 51). School leaders that embody this philosophy seek to establish a culture where relationships are the fulcrum on which the curriculum rests. Curriculum, under Parker’s vision, is designed to invoke “ideal citizenship… the highest degree of knowledge, power, skill, and service” (Parker, 1893, p. xix). If school leaders are committed to an educational environment that creates and sustains caring and supportive relationships, studies suggest that student achievement will improve.

Evidence supports the importance of relationships (student-student relationships) in the development of adolescents. Several research-based models of adolescent development (e.g., Adams, 1997; Adams et al., 1992; Benson, 1997; Damon, 1997; Lerner, 1996, 1998, 2002; Muuss, 1996) indicate that individual variations in positive or negative developments related to adolescents’ regulatory behaviors are produced by a historical context of person-context variables. In general, friendships amongst adolescent males that were gang involved tended to be of greater importance while also being of a higher level of instability. This indicates that a stronger sense of belonging to school, considered a positive culture, is strongly linked to positive and stable relationships with peers (Taylor et al., 2003).

School leaders are charged through licensure requirements and a moral imperative to implement measures that create a safe and supportive educational environment (physical features of the school environment). There are multiple security measures that research would indicate effectively contribute to higher levels of perceived student safety. A Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (2001) reported that “an
overwhelming majority of students and staff feel safe at school” as a result of the implementation of a School Resource Officer program (Services, 2001). Combining research-based security measures with supportive resources and highly trained professionals create the environment that best supports student perceptions of safety, thereby enhancing the conditions by which all students achieve.

Research indicates that adolescent learners need trusting and caring relationships combined with adequate supporting resources within the school in order to maximize their academic abilities. While schools are increasing their security measures as a result of a perceived growing threat of violence, social, emotional, behavioral and relational support services by highly trained professionals has proven to have a greater impact on the perception of school safety (Martin, 2013). School leaders must remain committed to emphasizing emotional supports while remaining cognizant of the necessary security requirements that are regularly changing.

The impact of a violent event or the perception of the likelihood of violence (perceived violence) is a tremendous deterrent to student achievement (Dinkes & Kemp, 2009; Sanchez, Yoxsimer, & Hill, 2012) despite the fact that schools are relatively safe places. As with most other education-related data, the impact of perceptions of unsafe school environments disproportionately impacts the achievement of minority student groups. Over half of LGBT adolescent respondents reported having been threatened or harassed at school while more than 65% reported having been physically attacked at school (Kosciw & & Diaz, 2006; Patterson, 2013). Studies have suggested that for multiple reasons, minority students perceive their schools as less safe than White students. Amongst these reasons are an increased risk of victimization, the presence of
gangs at school, and violent altercations (Bachman, Randolph, & Brown, 2010; Brown & Benedict, 2004; Price et al., 2002; Hong & Eamon, 2011).

Schools need to have caring, social and supportive school climates for students to achieve at the highest levels. While leadership is crucial to sustaining positive school climate, teachers establish the climate as it directly relates to the classroom. Teachers creating a climate of transformative educational where direct student involvement is encouraged and there are high levels of feedback contribute significantly to positive school climates (Hunt, Wiseman, & Touzel, 2009). Within the classroom specific pedagogical practices have been shown to increase climate. Activities involving critical thinking, reflection and high student relevance also increase on-task behavior, which correlates with higher achievement (Amato-Zech, Off, & Doepke, 2006; Gillies, 2006; Wakefield, 2004). Studies reveal that more indirect teaching models that encourage critical thinking, problem solving, and the communication of results activate student learning and increase achievement (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Newman, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995; Richards, 2005).

An educational leader’s impact on school culture is directly related to his/her awareness of the factors that contribute to positive climates and his/her commitment to emphasizing these factors. Culture, as it relates to schools, has been described as daily discussions, dress codes, classroom décor, and daily interpersonal interactions (Kottler, 1997; Peterson & Deal, 1994; Schein, 1985). Cheng (1993) found a strong correlation between positive and healthy school cultures and teachers’ attitudes and job satisfaction. Additionally, there is a high correlation between positive school cultures and organizational achievement (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peterson & Deal, 1994).
Studies suggest that relational quality and structures within schools play a critical role in capacity for learning and improvement (Daly & Finnigan, 2012). Gumselli and Eryilmaz (2011) found that principal’s perceptions of the most frequently realized collaborative factors were, in descending order, professional development, collegial support, collaborative leadership, unity of purpose, teacher collaboration, and learning partnership. Studies show that leaders must engage educators in the process of risk-taking in a risk-tolerant environment in order to highly facilitate the exchange of ideas and the creation of new knowledge (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Moolenaar, 2010).

Student belonging can be defined as individuals’ perceptions of fitting in and belonging with others at the same institution (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Osterman, 2000). Better perceived school relationships with teachers and peers are likely to lead to a stronger sense of belonging in school, which, in turn, is likely to lead to more positive beliefs and emotions about one’s learning, which then relates to higher academic grades and lower levels of behavioral problems (Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). Causal connections are varied when looking at the relationships between student belonging and academic motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 1999), student belonging and grade-point average (Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996), lower rates of school drop-out), belonging and social-emotional functioning (Anderman, 2004). Studies also indicate that students who feel a sense of belonging, defined as adult support, are less likely to drop out, have attendance issues, or engage in at-risk behaviors like drinking and smoking (Blum & Rinehart, 1996).

This study looked to determine, in schools where the above components are in strong evidence based on HSSSE data, how educational leaders view these factors and
what they do to foster them. Using the ethics of Care, Critique, Justice, and the Profession as lenses through which school leaders are guided in their actions, perceptual data from the HSSSE was analyzed for connections between these and strong cultures of student belonging.

**Ethic of Justice**

At its core, the ethic of justice focuses on rights and law. The framework regards the individual as living within the context of a greater society and thereby held to a “communal understanding” while not required to relinquish their individual freedoms (Starratt, 1994). From an application perspective, the ethic of justice is how educational laws impact the decision-making process. The responses of participating educational leaders, when analyzed, may reveal that the leader makes many decisions that impact student belonging based on his/her fealty to the legal requirements of school governance. This would indicate that the Ethic of Justice highly influences his/her actions in leadership.

**Ethic of Care**

The ethic of care seeks to empower the historically marginalized voice, frequently the feminine voice, in creating a culture of nurturing and encouragement. Students are the center of this process and their immediate interests are of high priority, lending a nature of humanity to the process of education. A school leader that is influenced by the ethic of care is aware of the individual qualities and perspectives amongst his or her students, staff, and community and is willing to understand these multiple perspectives and encourage bringing them together when necessary for decision making (Strike, 2007). The responses of participating educational leaders, when analyzed, may reveal that the
leader makes many decisions that impact student belonging based on his/her concerns for the overall well-being of students and staff. This would indicate that the Ethic of Care highly influences his/her actions in leadership.

**Ethic of Critique**

A building leader who views the legal rights and responsibilities as the definitive guide to making decisions and planning the future of his or her building fails to take into account crucial perspectives that are absent in our legal system. The school leader who is influenced by the ethic of critique asks the question “Whose voices are not at the table when discussing outcomes to a scenario?” The responses of participating educational leaders, when analyzed, may reveal that the leader considers impact on all populations with a particular emphasis on marginalized voices as a primary guide when making decisions that impact student belonging. This would indicate that the Ethic of Critique influences his/her decision-making.

**Ethic of the Profession**

The ethic of the profession is a paradigm that maintains that school leaders must weigh their own personal code of ethics with their individual ethical lenses. In tandem with professional standards as set forth by the profession of administration, school leaders must consider the student as the center of this process while also maintaining an understanding of the community values and expectations. The responses of participating educational leaders, when analyzed, may reveal that the leader considers professional guidelines in conjunction with other factors such as the community values and expectations when making decisions that impact student belonging. This would indicate that the Ethic of the Profession influences his/her decision-making.
While a singular ethical framework may clearly emerge from data, it is highly likely that response data will represent aspects from multiple ethics. This would seem quite natural. Educational leaders’ choices about their actions are often impacted by an amalgam of influences, some unconsciously. Data analysis will highlight these scenarios and discuss which of the ethical frameworks may interrelate with one another.

This study sought data on the following questions:

1. According to data gathered in Illinois high schools that administer the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), what are the factors that contribute to student belonging in high schools?

2. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, how do school leaders assess their learning environments to determine whether factors that contribute to student belonging are evident?

3. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, what do high school building principals do to continuously review and stress the importance of the factors that contribute to the culture?

4. According to high school principals, what ethical lenses influence them as they create and sustain cultures of belonging in their high schools?

5. What implications do the findings of this research have for leaders of high schools?
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine how school leaders evaluate their schools as having cultures of belonging, and examined the ethical frameworks used to emphasize sustaining and enhancing a culture of belonging within their schools. “Suicide is the third leading cause of death among Americans aged 10 to 24, and ... so called cluster suicides account for an estimated 5 percent of the deaths” (Hazell & Lewin, 1993, p. 102). Causal connections are varied when looking at the relationships between student belonging and academic motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 1999), student belonging and grade-point average (Roeser & Midgely, 1996), and belonging and social-emotional functioning (Anderman, 2004). Some studies have shown there to be a relationship between student belonging and academic achievement, while maintaining a causal relationship between the former and absenteeism (Nichols, 2008; Osterman, 2000; Roeser et al., 1996). Lastly, given the emphasis on high stakes accountability from a legislative and community standpoint, School leaders must maintain a dedication and commitment to fostering cultures of belonging within their schools.

Given this evidence, school leaders must value the factors that contribute to belonging and be aware of whether or not these factors exist in their building. While the research clearly speaks to student belonging mattering when it comes to student motivation and attendance, other factors like professional development, parent relations,
student-teacher relations and curriculum and instruction also significantly impact overall achievement. It has been demonstrated that the climate within an institution has an impact on student outcomes such as academic achievement and graduation rate (Meeuwisse, 2010). Studies investigating drop-outs have shown that for minority students in particular, feeling like one does not belong is an important reason for dropping out (Bachman, Randolph, & Brown, 2010; Delpit, 1995). Research has also indicated that a hostile climate had a negative influence on Latino students’ sense of belonging (Meeuwisse, 2010).

While the first purpose of this study was to identify the factors that influence student belonging, a secondary purpose of this research was to determine, through interviews and document analysis, the ethical frameworks that influence school leaders as they work to sustain and enhance atmospheres of belonging within their schools. Quantitative data was examined for the extent to which factors that contribute to student belonging are evident within the school districts that utilize the HSSSE. Schools scoring in the top half on the HSSSE for evidence of these factors were chosen for the qualitative data gathering phase. During the qualitative gathering phase, building leaders were interviewed to examine their perceptions of the importance of student belonging. Those interviewed were asked to identify the factors that are evident in their building that they feel contributes to the level of belonging as determined by the HSSSE data.

Qualitative data provided emerging trends on the ethical influences that shape the actions of building leaders when sustaining these cultures of belonging in their buildings. Building principals that indicate high value for student belonging identified the ethical frameworks that they most often utilize when approaching an education related decision.
Qualitative data provided evidence of the factors building leaders most often consider when making decisions regarding Academic Programming, Social-Emotional Programming, Activity Programming, and Classroom Instruction with a commitment to student belonging within their schools.

**Research Questions**

1. According to data gathered in Illinois high schools that administer the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), what are the factors that contribute to student belonging in high schools?

2. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, how do school leaders assess their learning environments to determine whether factors that contribute to student belonging are evident?

3. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, what do high school building principals do to continuously review and stress the importance of the factors that contribute to the culture?

4. According to high school principals, what ethical lenses influence them as they create and sustain cultures of belonging in their high schools?

5. What implications do the findings of this research have for leaders of high schools?
Null Hypothesis

This study explored several null hypotheses, as follows:

According to data gathered in Illinois high schools that administer the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), what are the factors that contribute to student belonging in high schools?

1. There are no factors that contribute to student belonging in schools according to the data from the HSSSE.

In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, how do school leaders assess their learning environments to determine whether factors that contribute to student belonging are evident?

2a. School leaders in districts where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by HSSSE, do not assess their learning environments for whether or not their schools have cultures of belonging.

In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, what do high school building principals do to continuously review and stress the importance of the factors that contribute to the culture?

3a. School leaders in districts where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by HSSSE, do not continuously review the factors that contribute to a culture of student belonging.
3b. School leaders in districts where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by HSSSE, do not stress the importance of the factors that contribute to a culture of student belonging.

According to high school principals, what ethical lenses influence them as they create and sustain cultures of belonging in their high schools?

4a. There are no ethical lenses that influence school leaders when creating cultures of belonging in their buildings.

4b. There are no ethical lenses that influence school leaders when sustaining cultures of belonging in their buildings.

What implications do the findings of this research have for leaders of high schools?

5. There are no implications of the findings of this research for leaders of high schools.

**Research Design**

This current study was a Sequential Explanatory study through the use of quantitative data from the High School Survey of Student Engagement and qualitative data via structured interviews with existing school leaders. This study consisted of data gathered from a single point in time, rather than undertaking a longitudinal methodology that may result in findings of a greater scope. The research was conducted in multiple steps and data was analyzed in multiple steps as well. A discussion of these steps will follow.
Quantitative and Qualitative Research – Assumptions and Comparison

Quantitative research involves several assumptions which essentially define its meaning and function. First, statistical methods are based on the presupposition that numbers can be used to represent what is being measured. By that, what is real can be measured and expressed completely in numbers (Pole, 2007).

The second assumption derives from the use of ordinal, interval, or ratio scales: As a result of these self-chosen scales, all people are alike, or they are consistently clustered around a central tendency, indicating a normal distribution. For example, in constructing an instrument to measure happiness, the researcher assumes that everyone will have the same understanding of what happiness is. Furthermore, each person who reads a question will quantify the meaning identically (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The third assumption derives from random sampling (and random assignment to intervention/control groups), if needed, to make statistical inferences from a sample to a given population. When a participant drops out of a study, the researcher treats this individual as if he or she never existed (e.g., pairwise/listwise deletion or imputation of data) or randomly draws another. By this act the assumption is that each person can be replaced by another identical unit (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

A fourth assumption is that quantitative data collection occurs in predetermined categories. That is, the researcher must know what is to be measured before gathering data. For example, respondents answer questions with predetermined choices on a survey (Patton, 1997).

Quantitative research has historically been the foundation of social-science research. Purists call for researchers to “eliminate their biases, remain emotionally
detached and uninvolved with the objects of study and test or empirically justify their stated hypotheses” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Assumptions made by qualitative research center on language and the making of meaning. The first assumption is that the participant and researcher are able to communicate in the same language, both literally and figuratively. Participants must be able to access and convey the meaning-content sought by the researcher, who is then able to understand the responses and in turn analyze, code, and convey the meaning in a manner that is understood by the reader. The expectation is that language is reliable enough to convey the needed meaning-content for the research (Merriam, 2009).

A second assumption is that each person creates his or her own meaning. This relativist-constructivist perspective results from the observation that each participant has a background of experience and perception that cannot be duplicated or repeated. Therefore, each respondent—and each response—is unique. A third assumption is that in order to maximize the range and depth of meaning, sampling can be purposive rather than random as it must be in quantitative methodology (Patton, 2002); in these cases, each person is irreplaceable and cannot simply be replaced by another exact unit for the purposes of the research.

A fourth assumption is that the respondent is free to answer questions posed by the researcher without predetermined categories or responses (Patton, 1997). To the extent that the research is constructionist, the respondent and researcher are co-constructors of the experience (Gürtler, 2006). Qualitative purists “contend that multiple-constructed realities abound, that time-and context-free generalizations are neither desirable nor possible, that research is value-bound, that it is impossible to differentiate
fully causes and effects, that logic flows from specific to general and that knower and known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14).

**Mixed Methodology**

Mixed methods research is defined as “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study.” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). The debate over the validity of Mixed Methods approaches to research has been waged over the last 25 years and is known as the “paradigm wars” (Pole, 2007). Those who are firmly entrenched in the Mixed Methods camp believe that there is no one true reality but that context and individual perspectives shape an infinite number of realities. Mixed Methods approaches combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches in parallel, sequential or concurrent order (Pole, 2007).

One advantage to Mixed Methodology is the complimentary nature of the different approaches. A researcher can establish an effect on a sample through quantitative analysis and then discover the reasons behind the impact through the use of qualitative methods such as a survey or a case study. In a simple trial, quantitative methods can be utilized to confirm the success of an intervention while qualitative methods can highlight the process itself. In this manner, this study takes data determined by a standardized, norm-reference test to establish schools that have strong cultures of belonging. With this established a qualitative interview then seeks to establish the process whereby these cultures are established and sustained.
One drawback to this methodology is the lack of direct input from students. Utilizing only adult perspectives on what belonging is and how a culture of belonging looks will result in data that is not as rich or as authentic as if a portion of the data came from the students themselves. That being said, even a study that took data from students via questionnaire or interviews would contain inherent biases based on the adult-generated questions. This study will not seek data directly from students as the sample size necessary to begin drawing general conclusions would be too great.

Another drawback to the use of Mixed Methods is the contrary nature of qualitative and quantitative approaches. While a quantitative study will likely seek large sample sizes, a qualitative study is more likely to use a smaller sample. This smaller sample is likely also going to be purposefully chosen, which obviously violates a central criteria for quantitative sampling, namely that of randomization (Pole, 2007). It is important to recognize the inherent conflicts in this study.

An area in which this study can minimize these strains is in the collection of the data themselves. While the quantitative data, the raw data from the HSSSE, is easily gathered in an objective manner, the qualitative data from the interviews could be more subjectively gathered. Controls from this perspective were important in order to ensure that each school leader interviewed was asked the same questions in the same manner without deviation.

The type of mixed methodology chosen for the research depends on four factors. One must first determine if the theoretical perspective of the study will be explicitly based on a theory or implicitly based. In this regard, a research study guided firmly by a theoretical base would need to utilize a methodology more conducive to generating the
data within that framework. The second factor to consider when determining the type of mixed methodology approach would be which method would receive priority. In some models, one method is utilized to generate the bulk of the data whereas in other studies the two are utilize equally. The sequence of the data collection is the third consideration. Lastly, the researcher must consider when the data are being integrated, whether at a collection point, during analysis or interpretation, or a combination thereof (Terrell, 2012).

Based on the previous discussion of considerations this research utilized the Sequential Explanatory strategy of mixed methods. The study followed the format as delineated in Figure 7.

*Figure 7. Format of Implementation of Sequential Explanatory Strategy of Mixed Methods Research*
Quantitative Data Gathering Process

Eleven school districts in the state of Illinois utilized The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), a student survey, to gather data about its students in during the 2007-2012 school years. The HSSSE is designed to both help schools ascertain students’ beliefs about their school experience and provide assistance to schools in translating data into action. HSSSE is a research and professional development project directed by the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (CEEP) at Indiana University in Bloomington. The project has three primary purposes: (1) to help high schools explore, understand, and strengthen student engagement, (2) to work with high school teachers and School leaders on utilizing survey data to improve practices, and (3) to conduct research on student engagement (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010, p. 2).

Though researchers often attempt to identify specific student behaviors (time-on-task, attendance), student characteristics (self-efficacy), or school structures (small learning communities, presence of technology) as discrete indicators or predictors of engagement, reviews of the research literature best support a definition of student engagement that is complex and “multifaceted” (Fredricks, 2004). The High School Survey of Student Engagement utilizes three dimensions of engagement:

- Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic Engagement,
- Social/Behavioral/Participatory Engagement, and
- Emotional Engagement. (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010, p. 2)

Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic Engagement captures students’ effort, investment in work, and strategies for learning — the work students do and the ways students go about their work (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). The focus in this section is primarily
on engagement during class time and with instruction-related activities. It can be described as engagement of the mind. Survey questions that are grouped within this dimension of engagement include questions about homework, preparation for class, classroom discussions and assignments, and the level of academic challenge that students report. Students can offer perceptional data on the types of assignments and instruction that stimulate and engage their thinking while offering data on how often they are provided opportunities to access those activities. The highest score that a school can earn in the Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic dimension is 65.

Social/Behavioral/Participatory Engagement emphasizes students’ actions and participation within the school outside of instructional time, including non-academic school-based activities, social and extracurricular activities, and interactions with other students — the ways in which students interact within the school community beyond the classroom (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). This section focuses on student activities, interactions, and participation within the school community. It can be described as engagement in the life of the school. Survey questions that are grouped within this dimension of engagement include questions about extracurricular activity opportunities within the school, student interactions with other students, and student connections to the community outside of school. The highest score that a school can earn in the Social/Behavioral/Participatory dimension is 17.

Emotional Engagement encompasses students’ feelings of connection to (or disconnection from) their school — how students feel about where they are in school, the ways and workings of the school, and the people within the school (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). The focus here is on student internal perceptions of their school. It can be described as
engagement of the heart. Survey questions that are grouped within this dimension include questions about general feelings regarding the school, level of support students perceive from members of the school community, relationships with staff and student perceptions about their place in the greater school community. The highest score that a school can earn in the Emotional dimension is 39.

Using districts which score highly relative to other Illinois districts on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) as the cut score, school leaders were identified for an interview. The principals in the high schools with the five highest mean scores on the HSSSE were asked to evaluate their schools for cultures of belonging based on HSSSE data and data from current literature. From these qualitative data gathered via interviews, school leaders in districts with clearly established cultures of belonging were asked to describe specific actions they take to establish and sustain such an environment. Interviews sought to establish common leadership practices that create and sustain cultures of belonging. Areas to be considered would be an emphasis on the practice of Classroom Instruction, Social-Emotional Programming, Activity Programming, and Classroom Instruction. These explicit practices were evaluated through the lenses of the more implicit ethical frameworks of the ethics of Care, Critique, Justice, and the Profession.

**Quantitative Data Gathering Plan**

A Freedom of Information Act Request was sent to the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy at Indiana University (see Appendix A). Repeated phone calls were also made in order to hasten the release of documents related to the 2007-2012 High School Surveys of Student Engagement (HSSSE). Additionally, each district that
administered HSSSE surveys during the 2007-2012 school years was contacted and access to their data was requested (see Appendix B). Specifically requested were the District results from the 2007-2013 HSSSE surveys for participating districts in Illinois (approximately 11) and the Psychometrics for the 2007-2012 HSSSE surveys. These data were reviewed and districts with higher overall scores were identified. School districts scoring in the top half on the HSSSE were selected as potential participants for the qualitative stage. Five high school principals were selected as participants for the qualitative stage of this study.

**Qualitative Sample Selection**

High School building principals in the top 50% of the overall scores were chosen for a semi-structured interview. This interview was designed to gather perceptual data regarding their awareness of and emphasis on factors that contribute to student belonging. Interview questions were designed to elicit responses targeting awareness of the importance of student belonging and active strategies for sustaining a culture of belonging.

A semi-structured interview format has several benefits when being utilized for a qualitative method. As opposed to a strictly structured interview model, semi-structured permits the interviewer to ask follow up questions designed to go deeper into the meaning of certain answers. Additionally, this less structured format builds rapport between interviewer and respondent allows the responses to be freer flowing in nature. Having the discretion to delve more deeply into a response will create data that are richer and more detailed than through a strictly structured format (Creswell & Plano, 2007).
Semi-structured interviews also have limitations which the researcher must be aware of. From a scientific standpoint, a semi-structured format creates a freer flowing exchange of dialogue that might lead to biased questions and responses. If each interview is not administered with a certain degree of fidelity to the script, data will stand alone within each interview and generalizing them will be virtually inauthentic. There is a greater degree of skill and emphasis on fidelity necessary when using a semi-structured interview format. Additionally, as a result of the flowing nature of the dialogue, the interviewer really must analyze the data themselves because of their deeper relationship to the contextual factors that may arise. This makes the semi-structured format more time consuming for the researcher (Creswell & Plano, 2007).

The top 50% of scores on the HSSSE in the three dimensions of engagement netted five districts with which to consider for the next phase, which was the qualitative phase. Raw cut scores emerged as the state data were reviewed. Of these five districts that qualified, the goal was to interview five building leaders.

**Qualitative Data Gathering Plan**

Identified building principals were emailed a “Letter of Cooperation for Interview” (see Appendix C). This form letter was an introduction to the research being done as well as an explanation of how the recipients qualified for consideration in experiment. Additionally, the letter provided some background, explained procedures of the research, covered the risks, benefits and compensation, and also covered the basic confidentiality and voluntary guidelines as put forth by the Institutional Review Board.

Within one week four of the five Building Principals responded to the email. After one week, a First Reminder email was sent to the building principal who had not yet
responded requesting their cooperation to participate (see Appendix D). After another week, a Second Reminder email was sent to this building principal (see Appendix E). A Third Reminder email was sent to this building principal requesting cooperation to participate (see Appendix F), to no avail.

Once the researcher has received the desired number of acceptances, a Letter for Consent to be Interviewed was given to the principals that formally consented to participate at the agreed upon time of the interview (see Appendix G). Once the researcher received these consent agreements, the participating Principals were interviewed at a mutually agreed upon neutral site (see Appendix H). The questions that were utilized in a semi-structured interview format are contained in Appendix H. Once the interviews were completed, a Transcription service was hired. As this was an online service with a stated confidentiality policy, Appendix I was not needed. The Transcription service transcribed the data and returned it in desired form to the researcher in the agreed upon time.

The semi-structured interview sought data that represented the administrators’ perspectives on how each ethical influence relates to the work they do establishing elements that contribute to a culture of belonging in their buildings. School leaders provided perceptual data on their beliefs in the importance of student belonging. Data regarding their actions towards establishing and sustaining the existence of the factors that contribute to a culture of belonging in their buildings was sought. Participants were asked to compare the existence of the different elements of belonging within their buildings and which they consider most important.
Figure 8. Model of Data Analysis designed to establish emerging trends related to the utilized constructs through the process of triangulation.
Participants provided perceptional data on the influence of the aforementioned ethical frameworks on their professional practice. Great consideration was given to their prior understanding of the respective ethics. Data from participants with limited understanding of the ethical frameworks was regarded as less impactful on the findings than those data from participants with deeper understandings of the frameworks.

Steps in the qualitative analysis process sought to triangulate data as follows: (1) Reading through the data in order to make notes and initial reactions; (2) coding data by segmenting and labeling text; (3) Utilizing codes to establish groups of similar data; (4) establishing interrelated themes that emerge, if any; and (5) producing a narrative description of the established results (Creswell & Plano, 2007).

Validity, in qualitative research, is the degree to which research findings accurately reflect the situation and are supported by the evidence. Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives. Data triangulation involves using different sources of information in order to increase the validity of a study. These sources are likely to be stakeholders in a program—participants, other researchers, program staff, other community members, and so on. The qualitative data derived from the HSSSE provided the initial perspective on student belonging in schools. In-depth interviews conducted with building leaders to gain insight into their perspectives on student belonging provided access to a second perspective on student belonging. During the analysis stage, feedback from the stakeholder groups was compared to determine areas of agreement as well as areas of divergence. This type of triangulation, where the researchers use different sources, is perhaps the most popular because it is the easiest to
implement; data triangulation is particularly well suited for Sequential Explanatory models (Guion, 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Framework</th>
<th>Indicators of potential influence on school leader actions</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Ethic of Justice** | 1. Consider the laws, rights, and policies that guide decisions  
2. Respect for the equal sovereignty of all people  
3. Seeking to achieve equity, justice, liberty  
4. Is cognizant of the balance between moral absolutism vs. situational ethics  
5. Considers the rights of individual vs. the greater good  
6. Fundamental questions asked when making a decisions:
   a. What law, right, or policy applies in this case?  
   b. Should this law or policy be enforced?  
   c. Is it enforced in some places and not in others?  
   d. If there is not a law or policy, should there be one? |
| **Ethic of Critique** | 1. Who do the laws/policies apply to? Is anyone unfairly impacted by them?  
2. Concerned with privilege, power, culture and language  
3. Aware of the inequities of social classes that exist  
4. Seeking the voices of those that are silenced or unheard in the community  
5. Seeks a discourse that leads to some type of action, often political.  
6. Fundamental questions asked when making a decisions:
   a. What could make a difference to empower those that have been silenced?  
   b. What new possibilities could be presented to lean toward social justice and the making of a better society? |
| **Ethic of Care** | 1. Aims at personal relationships in which nurturance and relationships are highly valued  
2. Considers loyalty, trust, and empowerment  
3. Primary focus is the care of the children  
4. Caring, concern, connection  
5. Seeks to establish the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people  
6. Considers multiple voices in decision-making |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Encourages collaborative efforts between faculty, staff and students to promote interpersonal interactions, to deemphasize competition, increase belonging and emphasize individual skills learned from one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Focuses more on the knowledge of cultures with an emphasis on listening, observing and responding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Aims to provide attention and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Staying on them over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Allows emotions to enter into the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Fundamental questions asked when making a decisions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Restorative Justice – consider the consequences of their decisions, who will I harm/help?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>What are the long term effects of my actions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>How do I pass it on?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethic of the Profession</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Apply moral principles to ethical decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Concerned with integrity, fairness, and acting in an ethical manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>A product of Licensing Standards/exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Rely on knowledge from different professional associations to guide the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Personal moral values impact decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Awareness of learning community standards (Twitter, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Best interests of the student guide decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Fundamental questions asked when making a decisions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>What does my profession ask me to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>What do various communities expect me to accomplish?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>What do I need to take into account as it relates to the best interest of the student?</td>
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*Figure 9*. The ethical frameworks utilized to analyze the data given the following understandings (Shapiro & Gross, 2013)

**Data Analysis Example**

**SAMPLE Q**: What factors were important for you to consider when attempting improving academic programming?
SAMPLE A: The Board is serious about improving student achievement on standardized test scores (Ethic of Profession), so we have worked to ensure that all of our professional activities are designed with this in mind (Ethic of the Profession). We want all subsections of our student population to show growth, and of course to reduce the achievement gap on these tests (Ethic of Critique). We have looked at the data disaggregated by race, gender, and socio-economic status and have identified the populations that need more intensive interventions (Ethic of Critique). Our minority students score below that of our white students, as do our Special Education population (Ethic of Care). We thought that specific instructional strategies being implemented in the classroom as it relates to our population needed to be considered. I wanted to know what types of professional development would be necessary to help our teachers better understand the concept of culturally responsive teaching and the importance of being aware of the different cultures in their classes (Ethic of Justice, Critique). I am always focused on the costs associated with PD and my superintendent always wants to ensure that our PD is in alignment of our practices to the CCSS (Ethic of the Profession). And I know that our community has high expectations of our AP programs and demand that we send our students to the best colleges we can (Ethic of the Profession).

Qualitative data was coded with an eye on emerging trends related to the following:
Sequential Explanatory Methodology – Limitations and Advantages

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2009) cite multiple examples of the benefits and drawbacks of using a mixed methodology in research, as illustrated below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of Sequential Explanatory Methodology</th>
<th>Limitations of Sequential Explanatory Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words, pictures and narrative all are useful in adding meaning to the quantitative data</td>
<td>Difficult for a single researcher to carry out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative data adds clarity to the qualitative data</td>
<td>Knowledge of multiple methods necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives the ability to generate and test a grounded theory</td>
<td>Expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows answers to a deeper and more complex spectrum of questions compared to a single method</td>
<td>Takes more time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods can complement one another</td>
<td>Not considered a legitimate approach by research purists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to triangulate and converge data leads to stronger evidence</td>
<td>Many interpretive issues remain unsolved (i.e., qualitatively analyzing quantitative data or conflicting results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizability of results is enhanced and broader contribution to theory and practice is possible</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 11. Benefits and Drawbacks of Using a Mixed Methodology in Research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004)*

A sequential explanatory approach with mixed methods is useful for exploring the qualitative data in more detail. It provides a logical structure for the researcher to gather the quantitative data, analyze the data, and generate the purposive sample for qualitative data gathering. The HSSSE is a sound instrument that has been evaluated for internal validity (Policy, 2012).

**Pilot Interviews**

As a means of testing the potential yield quality of the interview questions, the researcher piloted the interview on two current high school building principals and one former high school building principal. The answers were analyzed to determine if certain characteristics of ethical influences emerged. The researcher was able to conclude after
analyzing the pilot data that there were qualities of ethical influence within the data related to each of the four ethical frameworks.

**Technical Advisory Panel**

Development of the HSSSE survey started with the creation of the HSSSE Technical Advisory Panel, consisting of experts in the fields of survey research, education, curricular development and assessment, information management and institutional research, inquiry methodology. This panel assisted in the revision process by establishing what is essential for a survey on student engagement, the effective format of a survey directed toward high school students based on survey research, and how to create new content to more effectively measure the dimensions of student engagement (Policy, 2012).

Both current and pilot HSSSE data have been through several rounds of dimensionality/factor analysis to help determine which questions are most accurately measuring engagement and which questions are not effective. Based on these results, the HSSSE team created a pilot survey that was used in several schools in Indiana during spring 2012 to collect new data. Within these schools, the HSSSE team conducted focus groups and cognitive interviews with over 150 students in the high school setting. Based upon this feedback from students, interviews with principals, and the results from the rounds of statistical analysis came the creation of the new 2012-13 HSSSE instrument (Policy, 2012).

The quantitative data is statistically significant and stable which lends credence to the qualitative element of the process (Creswell, 2003). The researcher acknowledges that though the study is seeking to generate better understanding of how to influence
adolescents, there is a complete lack of direct input from students. While this is necessary to meet the IRB requirements for Loyola University of Chicago, the research outcomes are the result of data gathered only from adult-generated quantitative data prompts and adult generated qualitative interview of adults.

The research sample was chosen from results of the HSSSE. While this survey is a highly regarded and research-supported tool (Policy, 2012), the assumption moving forward is that high scores on the HSSSE are reflective of a culture of belonging within a school. In addition to this assumption, the sample size is small and the researcher questions how representative the findings were.

**Ethical Concerns**

The researcher was required to take the appropriate steps to ensure that each participant participated voluntarily. To this end all participants signed a consent form provided by the researcher which apprised them of the purpose, procedures therein, potential benefits and impact of their presence in the study. All data collected remained confidential but not anonymous to the researcher. Quantitative data was gathered through a release form sent to Indiana University. Qualitative data was gathered by the researcher and will be maintained as such for a reasonable amount of time after the conclusion of the study. The researcher informed participants that they have a right to a copy of the results.

The researcher utilized all means necessary to ensure that the writing is free of bias towards any group (e.g., age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, race, gender, etc.). To this end the researcher discussed his bias in the following section and the plan for mitigating the impact of bias on the analysis of data and the resulting conclusions that are made. The
details of the study were carefully explained within the actual report so as to allow readers the opportunity to judge the ethical quality of the study for themselves.

One drawback to this methodology was the lack of direct input from students. Utilizing only adult perspectives on what belonging is and how a culture of belonging looks could result in data that are not as rich or as authentic as if a portion of the data came from the students themselves. One student-based aspect of the instrument is a result the HSSSE team conducting focus groups and cognitive interviews with over 150 students in the high school setting. Based upon this feedback from students, interviews with principals, and the results from the rounds of statistical analysis came the creation of the new 2012-13 HSSSE instrument. That being said, even a study that took data from students via questionnaire or interviews would contain inherent biases based on the adult-generated questions.

**Bias Limitation**

The researcher has worked in public education for 20 years as a teacher, administrator and coach. Throughout that time, this researcher has utilized social-emotional supports to address student disengagement, behavioral issues and academic issues. The researcher admits to having a strong belief in the importance of providing students opportunities for social, psychological and academic integration into their schools. In order to minimize the impact of bias, this researcher maintained a reflection log throughout the process of gathering and analyzing the data.

Additionally, several steps were taken throughout the process to ensure limitation to personal bias impacting the outcomes of the study. Participants were fully informed throughout the duration of their involvement. They had the opportunity to withdraw from
the study at any point. Secondly, participants had full access to all documents reflective of their contributions to the study. Multiple sources of data from the mixed method design also served to safeguard against researcher bias influencing the study. Lastly, the researcher relied heavily on feedback from his advisor to reflect on and modify the work as it is being done.

Summary

This study sought to augment the research base in the field of educational leadership by seeking data for the following research questions:

1. According to data gathered in Illinois high schools that administer the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), what are the factors that contribute to student belonging in high schools?

2. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, how do school leaders assess their learning environments to determine whether factors that contribute to student belonging are evident?

3. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, what do high school building principals do to continuously review and stress the importance of the factors that contribute to the culture?

4. According to high school principals, what ethical lenses influence them as they create and sustain cultures of belonging in their high schools?

5. What implications do the findings of this research have for leaders of high schools?
The research study utilized a sequential explanatory mixed methods design which was described in this chapter. Data from the HSSSE was analyzed for indicators of student belonging in schools that administered the survey. Participants were selected based on an established cut score from the HSSSE data. Participants were administered semi-structured interviews. Quantitative and qualitative phases, target populations, sampling strategies, researcher bias, benefits and limitations were all described in this chapter. Data from the interviews were coded in alignment with both the constructs of belonging identified in the HSSSE as well as the ethical frameworks of Care, Critique, Justice, and the Profession.
CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to determine how school leaders evaluate their schools as having cultures of belonging, and to examine the ethical frameworks used to emphasize sustaining and enhancing a culture of belonging within their schools.

Research Questions

1. According to data gathered in Illinois high schools that administer the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), what are the factors that contribute to student belonging in high schools?

2. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, how do school leaders assess their learning environments to determine whether factors that contribute to student belonging are evident?

3. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, what do high school building principals do to continuously review and stress the importance of the factors that contribute to the culture?

4. According to high school principals, what ethical lenses influence them as they create and sustain cultures of belonging in their high schools?

5. What implications do the findings of this research have for leaders of high schools?
This Sequential Explanatory study used quantitative data from the High School Survey of Student Engagement and qualitative data via semi-structured interviews with existing high school Principals. This study consisted of data gathered from a single point in time, rather than undertaking a longitudinal methodology that may result in findings of a greater scope. The research was conducted in multiple steps and data were analyzed in multiple steps. A discussion of these steps will follow.

Figure 12. Format of Implementation of Sequential Explanatory Strategy of Mixed Methods Research (Creswell & Plano, 2007)

**Quantitative Data Gathering Process**

The target population was any school district in the state of Illinois that had administered the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) from 2007-2013.
The researcher contacted Indiana University to determine the districts that administered the HSSSE. Indiana University representatives from the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy provided a list of districts that had administered the HSSSE during the above time frame. Additionally, they provided the researcher background and psychometric information regarding the HSSSE as well as the Code Book for scoring the test.

![Map of targeted high schools](image)

*Figure 13. Location distribution of targeted high schools*

**Response Rate**

The researcher sent a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to each of the seven school districts totaling 9 high schools in the target population. Township High
School District 113 was not solicited due to the researcher being an employee of that district. Within the target population, six school districts were public districts and one was private. Four districts were unit districts while the remaining three were high school only districts. The FOIA request solicited all district materials related to the HSSSE between 2007 and 2013. Of the seven school districts solicited, six returned materials to the researcher comprising nine schools. School 1, represented below, did not reply to solicitation and therefore no data was received or analyzed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Public/Private</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>% of Low Income Students</th>
<th>% Students of Color</th>
<th>HSSSE Data Returned?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>1,350</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>2,093</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>2,750</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>3,255</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 7</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>2,548</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 8</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>2,053</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 9</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>1,677</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The real names of all schools have been changed to maintain adherence to confidentiality.

Figure 14. Demographic Analysis of Targeted High Schools

Quantitative Data Analysis Process

Of the six districts that provided HSSSE data, only one provided data that had been analyzed and compiled for them by Indiana University at cost to the district. The remaining districts sent raw data from the HSSSE. Data were compiled in Excel spreadsheets. The researcher utilized the Code Book for the HSSSE provided by Indiana University to analyze the raw data that were sent to him.
Dimensions of Engagement

The HSSSE was analyzed within the framework of the three Dimensions of Engagement. The HSSSE provides data on three important dimensions of engagement: Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic Engagement, Social/Behavioral/Participatory Engagement, and Emotional Engagement. The three Dimensions of Engagement encompass 121 questions from the HSSSE. Each question has its own response value. The questions are summed based on the responses and the average score for each question is calculated. Once each question’s response value has been calculated, the total score is simply the sum of each question’s response value for the questions within each dimension (Policy, 2012).

Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic Engagement (65 questions)

This dimension describes students’ effort, investment, and strategies for learning – the work students do and the ways students go about their work. This dimension can be described as “engagement of the mind.” This is the largest dimension in terms of the number of questions used to calculate the mean score. If every student who answered the questions responded with the highest valued answer on each question within this dimension, the school would have a Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic Engagement score of 65.

Sample questions for Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic Engagement:

1. Hours spent in a typical week: Doing written homework.
2. Hours spent in a typical week: Reading and studying for class.
3. I am motivated to work by a desire to get good grades.
4. I am motivated to work by teachers who encourage me.
5. To what extent do you believe your high school emphasizes each of the following: memorizing facts and figures in work for classes.

6. To what extent do you believe your high school emphasizes each of the following: spending a lot of time studying and doing school work.

7. Why do you go to school: because of what I learn in classes.

8. Why do you go to school: because I want to get a degree and go to college?

9. Have you ever been held back a grade level in school?

10. Do you believe you are in danger of being held back a grade level this year?

(Policy, 2012).

Social/Behavioral/Participatory Engagement (17 questions)

This dimension captures students’ actions in social, extracurricular, and non-academic school activities, including interactions with other students, and the ways in which students interact within the school community. This dimension can be thought of as “engagement in the life of the school.” This is the smallest dimension of engagement within the HSSSE based on number of questions. If every student responded with the highest valued answer on each question within this dimension, the school would have a Social/Behavioral/Participatory Engagement score of 17.

Sample questions for Social/Behavioral/Participatory Engagement:

1. How important to you: Participating in school-sponsored activities (clubs, athletics, student government, etc.)?

2. How important to you: Practicing a sport and/or musical instrument and/or rehearsing for a performance?

3. How important to you: Doing volunteer work?
4. How often have you: had conversations or worked on a project with at least one student of a race or ethnicity different from your own?

5. How often have you: had conversations or worked on a project with at least one student who differs from you in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, income background, or personal values?

6. Why do you go to school: because of my peers/friends?

7. Have done during high school: participated in community service or volunteer work (Policy, 2012).

**Emotional Engagement (39 questions)**

This dimension emphasizes students’ feelings of connection (or dis-connection) to their school – how students feel about where they are in school, the ways and workings of the school, and the people within their school. This dimension can be described as “engagement of the heart.” If every student responded with the highest valued answer on each question within this dimension, the school would have an Emotional Engagement score of 39.

Sample questions from the Emotional Engagement dimension:

1. Overall, I feel good about being in this school.

2. I care about this school.

3. I feel safe in this school.

4. My opinions are respected in this school.

5. I am motivated to work by a desire to learn.

6. I am motivated to work by a desire to get good grades.

7. I see how the work I am doing now will help me after high school.
8. I feel good about who I am as a student.

9. I feel good about who I am as a person.

10. Have you ever been bored in class in high school? (Policy, 2012).

**Sample Responses with Assigned Values**

Each subset of questions had its own response field from which to select. Each response was assigned a value around which scoring could be calculated. Below is a sample from the HSSSE code book with response values depicted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Response Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q21a</td>
<td>Have you ever been held back a grade level in school?</td>
<td>0 = No 1 = Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q22a</td>
<td>Do you believe you are in danger of being held back a grade level this year?</td>
<td>0 = No 1 = Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QQ4a</td>
<td>How important to you: Doing written homework</td>
<td>0 = Not at all 1 = A little 2 = Somewhat important 3 = Very important 4 = Top priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QQ4b</td>
<td>How important to you: Reading and studying for class</td>
<td>0 = Not at all 1 = A little 2 = Somewhat important 3 = Very important 4 = Top priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5a</td>
<td>Overall, I feel good about being in this school</td>
<td>1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q23a</td>
<td>Have you ever been bored in class in high school?</td>
<td>0 = Never 1 = Once or twice 2 = Once in a while 3 = Every day 4 = Every class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 15. Sample Questions with Response Values (Policy, 2012)*
Scores by Dimension of Engagement from Responding Schools

Once the mean scores were calculated by dimension, the average mean for each school was calculated. Schools were ranked by their average mean score of the three dimensions of engagement. The figure below depicts all of the years that each school district submitted HSSSE data to the researcher. The schools are ranked by average mean score on the HSSSE, from highest to lowest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>C/I</th>
<th>S/P</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>Avg. Mean</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>39.83</td>
<td>9.28</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>25.84</td>
<td>30.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>38.14</td>
<td>8.96</td>
<td>28.56</td>
<td>25.22</td>
<td>29.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>1,962</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>38.51</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>26.27</td>
<td>24.47</td>
<td>29.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 7</td>
<td>1,920</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>38.72</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>25.18</td>
<td>24.04</td>
<td>30.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>1,316</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>37.57</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>23.99</td>
<td>29.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>36.42</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>26.16</td>
<td>23.49</td>
<td>28.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 8</td>
<td>1,916</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>35.92</td>
<td>7.76</td>
<td>23.89</td>
<td>22.52</td>
<td>28.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>34.08</td>
<td>7.66</td>
<td>25.45</td>
<td>22.40</td>
<td>26.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 8</td>
<td>1,846</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>34.02</td>
<td>8.93</td>
<td>24.06</td>
<td>22.34</td>
<td>25.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 9</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>35.67</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>23.44</td>
<td>22.16</td>
<td>28.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 9</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>33.94</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>21.63</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16. Average Mean Rankings by Schools Chosen for Principal Interviews

Qualitative Data Gathering Process

Principal Selection

Using districts which scored in the top half of Illinois districts on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) as the cut score, school leaders were identified for a semi-structured interview. The principals of the high schools with the top five average mean scores on the HSSSE in the state were asked to evaluate their schools for cultures of belonging based on HSSSE data and data from current literature. From these
qualitative data gathered via interviews, school leaders in districts with clearly established cultures of belonging were asked to describe specific actions they take to establish and sustain such an environment. Interviews sought to establish common leadership practices that create and sustain cultures of belonging. Leadership practices were examined through questions that identified 4 areas of school leadership: Academic Programming, Social Emotional Programming, Student Activity Programming, and Classroom Instruction. These explicit practices were then analyzed through the ethical frameworks of the ethics of Care, Critique, Justice, and the Profession.

The Ethic of Care seeks to empower the historically marginalized voice, often associated with the feminine voice, in creating a culture of nurturing and encouragement. Students are the center of this process and their immediate interests are of high priority, lending a nature of humanity to the process of education. An example of the Ethic of Care in the educational process would be a student-led initiative designed to create educational experiences that reflect the different cultures of a school.

The Ethic of Critique, which emerges from the overarching framework of critical theory, can be applied to educational settings through the lens of critical pedagogy. A course of action grounded in the tenets of the Ethic of Critique seeks to empower all students while avoiding the reproduction of the “isms” within the classroom context, namely classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p. 14).

The Ethic of Justice focuses on rights and law. The framework regards the individual as living within the context of a greater society and thereby held to a community established code of laws while not required to relinquish their individual freedoms (Starratt, 1994). From an application perspective, the Ethic of Justice is how
educational laws impact the decision-making process. Schools have considerable discretion when it comes to making decisions about their students. Often, the laws change to meet the changing societies they shape, such as with metal detectors and the potential for registered weapons to be carried by specific school personnel (People v. Dukes, 1992).

The Ethic of the Profession is a paradigm that maintains that school leaders must weigh their own personal code of ethics with their individual ethical lenses. In tandem with professional standards as set forth by the profession of administration, school leaders must consider the student as the center of this process while also maintaining an understanding of the community values and expectations. School leaders who evaluate different issues through the Ethic of the Profession are aware of the individual influences within this model, understand where they personally reside within it, and assess which elements should emerge as most influential in the decision making process (Strike, 2007).

The researcher solicited the current principals from the top five scoring school districts on the HSSSE. An email was sent, and the Consent Letter to Participate (see Appendix C) was mailed to each principal. Four of the five principal’s responded with consent to participate within 48 hours. Reminder letters (see Appendices D, E, and F) and emails were sent to the fifth principal over the course of the following two weeks. No reply was received from the fifth principal. The four consenting principals were from schools 3, 4, 5, and 7. This sample represented the four highest scoring schools from the entire sample on the HSSSE.
**Principals from Interview Sample**

Principals 3, 4, 5, and 7 consented to participate in the interview process.

Locations were mutually agreed upon and a 45-minute timeline was suggested for the interviews to take place. The interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed via an online transcription service. Transcripts were sent to the principals who were interviewed for their review and to give consent to their words.

**Principal 3**

Principal 3 was a 57 year-old white male who had attained his Doctorate in Educational Administration. He had been in education for 35 years, serving in both the public and private sector as an English teacher, Admissions Director, Athletic Director, Assistant Principal, and Principal. He had been at his current school for 10 years, and been the principal for the last 7 years. It should be noted that the researcher worked with principal 3 for a 3-year period in the mid-nineties. Principal 3 will retire at the end of this school year. The school that is led by Principal 3 had scored the highest on the HSSSE for all schools within the state of Illinois. It is a public school within a 2-school district located on the North Shore area of Chicagoland. School 3 has a student population of 2,093, with 23% of its students from low-income families and 20% being students of color. School 3 administered the HSSSE to its freshman class in 2012.

**Principal 4**

Principal 4 is a 49 year-old white male that earned his Doctorate in Educational Administration and has been Principal at his current school for 9 years. He has been at his current school in the capacity of Math/Physics teacher, Instructional Coordinator, Assistant Principal, and Principal for 17 of his 26 years in education. The school that is led by Principal 4 had the second highest score on the HSSSE in the state of Illinois. It is a public school within a 2-school district located on the North Shore area of Chicagoland. School 4 has a student population of 2,750, with 23% of its students from low-income families and 32% being students of color. School 4 administered the HSSSE to its freshman class in 2012.

**Principal 5**

Principal 5 is a 45 year-old African American male who has a Masters in Educational Administration and is in his 7th year as principal of his current school. Prior to his current position, Principal 5 was an English teacher and then an Assistant Principal. He has worked in Northwest Illinois, on the North Shore
area of Chicagoland, and now in the western suburbs of Chicagoland. The school that is led by Principal 5 had the third highest score on the HSSSE in the state of Illinois. It is a public school within a 2-school district located on the North Shore area of Chicagoland. School 4 has a student population of 3,255, with 20% of its students from low-income families and 47% being students of color. School 5 administered the HSSSE to its freshman and sophomore classes in 2008 and 2009.

Principal 7

Principal 7 is a white male in his late 40’s with a Masters in Educational Administration. He has been the principal in his current school for 4 years. Previous to that, he was a Middle School principal in the same district. The school that is led by Principal 4 had the fourth highest score on the HSSSE in the state of Illinois. It is a public school within a unit district located in the far western suburbs of Chicagoland. School 7 has a student population of 2,548, with 16% of its students from low-income families and 21% being students of color. School 7 administered the HSSSE to its freshman and sophomore classes in 2010.

Organization and Presentation of Data

A series of interview questions were designed to ask the four identified Principals about his experiences on topics including Academic Programming, Social Emotional Programming, Activity Programming, and Instructional Practices. Within each topic, Principals were asked about what they have done to improve the area in their schools, how they assessed the need for improvement in this area, what ethical framework(s) compelled them to make improvements in this area, and how they evaluate the improvements going forward.

The responses were audio recorded and transcribed prior to being coded and analyzed for themes. The interview data are arranged by interview question, and a summary of the responses is provided after each area of research. Data were then coded through the ethical frameworks that compelled each building leader to action around supporting cultures of belonging. Each response was coded to identify if there was
evidence of (1) Ethic of Care, (2) Ethic of Critique, (3) Ethic of Justice, or (4) Ethic of Profession.

Interview Question #1 – Academic Programming

Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the academic programming in your building. How did you evaluate the current academic programs to determine the need? What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve academic programming? What areas of academic programming did you determine were in need of improvement? What actions did you take in response to this need? How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving academic programming?

Principal 3

Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the academic programming in your building.

Interesting challenge. 100% of our kids, and I'm not kidding about that, are accepted in the colleges or university. The whole concept of college readiness is something that doesn't make sense to us.

As much as ACT would like us to move in a college-readiness direction, we just didn't see a need for that. What we did see a need for was finding a way to engage kids in learning in a joyful way and that if we hire 185 teachers with very different personalities and allow them to be artists and create curriculum that's going to engage kids at a human level, we felt that that's our best way to go.

What we did very intelligently, I think, in cooperation with our district, the superintendent and administrative team decided we were going to spend energy on how to engage students in the acquisition of learning and turn the passivity of learning upside down and find ways so that our teachers who are doing all the work and filling the brains of these kids with pictures of knowledge and instead of creating ways for our kids to construct their own knowledge, the active owners of the learning itself and finding ways to connect passionately with children.

That fits with our motto which is we educate for living. That's been our motto for 60 years. It served us well. It also goes well with our mission statement which is we are a learning community dedicated to students and committed to the quality of thought, word and deed.

That's what we do. Everything that we decide to do is based upon those premises and our core beliefs very similar to the Jesuit core beliefs about Grad at Grad.
How did you evaluate the current academic programs to determine the need?

We do look briefly at ACT, the numbers, because it's really the only standardized measure that we can. We don't go with EPASS like most schools do but we look at planned ACT growth. We also look at Terra Nova and ACT growth but we really don't spend ... Like what I say, we spend time on it. We really don't. It's not something that systematically we're looking at.

I think the biggest number that schools should be paying attention to is your attendance number. Our attendance numbers are out of this world. We're at 97 point whatever. I don't know that there's another public school in the country that can come close to that.

Kids want to be here. They love block schedule. They like walking at college campus. We have a very free, open campus. Kids have opportunities to avail themselves to anyone of our 11 areas for academic support. We have a beautiful campus here. We want kids to feel free. Our teachers are excited to be here in the morning. They love doing what they're doing. We treat them like professionals.

What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve academic programming?

The health of our kids primarily. The Race to Nowhere, there's a lot of sense in that campaign. Just two weeks ago, I had a kid in my office right here with his mom. The kid crying and the mom agreeing. The kid's screaming, "I don't test well! I don't test well!!" He needed an answer on how he could test better and the mom's saying, "He does and he's a horrible test-taker," because he's stuck four times on a 31 out of 36 on the ACT. Horrible!

There's this unrealistic expectation to get into a good school. If you look at the Forbes list of the best schools in the country, by all of Chicago, previous school 300, Kentucky 301, Kansas 302. Those are three pretty good schools in my estimation. Dartmouth is in 100. Dartmouth is pretty good.

When you look at the thousand schools in our country that are really good places to go, I think our kids have a very unrealistic perspective on what a good school is and what they're going to find in their post-secondary education.

The ethical piece for me as principal, my job is to do whatever I can to keep our kids healthy, keep them balanced, keep them from looking ahead too quickly and trying to enjoy here and now. As [inaudible 00:08:12] would say, "Drinking a glass of water while drinking a glass of water."
What actions did you take in response to this need?

All or our PD is based upon student engagement and literacy. You might ask why literacy when your kids are so sophisticated and you are the national debate champions seven in the last 10 years in a row and you're renowned for the writing abilities of our kids. Right. They're great. Let's get them better because communication is the core of everything.

All of our PD has been, in taking these 90-minute blocks of instruction and finding the very best ways to create critical thinking in a classroom while providing natural transitions so that kids don't get stuck in these long blocks of time and finding kids ownership of the learning, moving away from teacher center to students center.

How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving academic programming?

My Associate Principal is a genius. She just rolled her sleeves ... She's a farm girl. She came here and she immediately saw where we were, what we were trying to do. She took the staff development committee of ... There's 12 teachers there representing all of our disciplines and they pretty much run our school right now. There is no administrator on that committee except Kris and she's silent.

Any movement we make for professional development begins with our Student Advisory Group which I meet with twice a week. They inform our Staff Development Group. They inform our Literacy Liaisons. They set the tone, the curriculum, the vision, everything. Because we do that, it all bubbles up from the people closest to the problem and they joyfully go about their work and we get out of the way

Principal 4

Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the academic programming in your building.

I’ll focus on one of the latest things that we’ve worked on, and that is adding Project Lead the Way. That’s the type of programming you’re looking for I assume. We’ve done two things to make that happen. One is we just changed our schedule to a block schedule which gives more access to students, and we really are driven by … Our leadership have something we an echo. It’s the, “Why do we exist? What do we value? What do we do? How will we succeed? What’s most important now, something that drives what we do?”

When we say, “Why do we exist?” We exist to help all students persevere through challenges, develop their strengths, and explore their passions. That
concept of exploring passions is one we obviously take very seriously and the concept of developing skills which high schools traditionally are about content and about understandings, but haven’t been as focused on the skills that give you access to those understandings. We take both sides of those very seriously and really have worked I think hard to make those become a reality in our school in many ways.

The schedule has offered more opportunity for students to take classes and explore their passions. We have infused the college readiness standards throughout the school and that concept. That’s just the tip of the iceberg. There’s all kinds of other really important skills to be paying attention to, but that’s a way to start driving that all. For us, Project Lead the Way was a program that we knew we were going to start actually several years ago. For us, it’s really about having students understand what the path is in the STEM fields.

For every graduate we have in a STEM field, there are four jobs. For every college graduate, there are in general, there’s four graduates for every job. We felt very much that we needed to take a high school at the level of this high school and strengthen that component. Certainly, we have strong math, and science, and applied technology, but we did not have a real strong path to teach kids what engineering was, and to keep females infused, and to keep … Make sure that we’re getting all kids infused in that.

*How did you evaluate the current academic programs to determine the need?*

One of the things that we put as a component of that and we’ve actually just analyzed that is looking at not just having the program, but making sure that one of our greatest strengths is the diversity of our school very much like area schools and we got to be representing in those programs exactly the population we have in the school. Not by quota, but just because we’re doing it right. I’m proud to say we are representing in those programs largely the populations that we have in the school including 20% low-income in our 14% or 12% Hispanic population. That represents our school.

The one area we’re working on getting more in there is an equal … More of an equal balanced male-female, but that is obviously a long-term preposition that they’re working with center schools on and younger kids, all kinds of things to make that happen.

*What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve academic programming?*

As I talked about, I would say … making sure that … the concept of making sure that we are getting all voices heard. We are giving a chance for all kids to be represented. I think that is one area all of our schools can do better, and it’s not
just going to be a high school thing. We got to be better as an entire education institution to make sure that the gaps that we see and have continued to see through time continue to dwindle. I, for one, completely believe that, that is appropriate and possible, and we just have to keep at it.

Especially in our communities where we … For the large portion of our kids, even our low-income kids, they’re coming from a safe area. They really can focus on school. They really can come here, and we got to be able to … In the 13 years we have them before they go to college, we got to be able to close gaps. We got to be able to get their skill level to where they can have access. For us, there’s a lot of components in that, and this is just one of many that we could talk to, but I think those were the biggest ones, and of course, profession.

The fact that you are seeing … We want to make sure kids can answer the question. That’s why when we look at exploring their passions, we have time. When I became principal, the associate or Assistant Principal in Student Services, we had a senior assembly, and he said … We had a speaker who said, “How many of you know where you’re going to college?” Every hand … This was in May. Every hand in place goes up. He said, “Okay. How many of you know why?” I’m not kidding, there were two or three hands up.

That was 600 and some kids who said they’re in the … the Assistant Principal and I looked at each other and said, “We have to change that. What can we do to impact that?” I want a kid … Not that it won’t change when they get to college, but they got to have some knowledge about the things they love, care, and those options.

*What actions did you take in response to this need?*

One change has been to provide leadership in the way that, that was brought in. We were patient in bringing it in and that we had some teachers who are retiring. We actually planned for this for years, had teachers retiring who were onboard with moving in that direction, and actually we’re pushing as to go in that direction. I felt it was very much the right thing to do. The leadership we provided has really got our Applied Tech Department working with our Science Department, working with our Math Department, and created a team looking at that curriculum and looking at that program.

We started buying equipment for it years before we started offering it. We let the teachers retire who were near the end of their careers because they were doing some really good things that just weren’t quite that systemic program we were looking for and that we were hearing Project Lead the Way was. We were very fortunate. When these very good teaches who set us up for success retired, we were able to go find experienced Project Lead The Way folks and connect them
with engineers who are currently in our Science Department and really develop this program. It is going to fabulous well actually too.

How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving academic programming?

We are continuing to build the program out, and we are also continuing … They are doing summer programs that are hitting middle school kids and elementary kids to teach them this is an option, teach them that this is something that is fun and worthy, and that they are capable. It’s funny because our kids … Our females don’t have as much confidence in science and math, but they’re every bit as talented. I think that’s the long-term work that we’re doing, but we’re also building out the program. We’re just in our second year. We right now have built out the facility, created two large lab areas with one shared production lab area. Those classes right now are running almost every period of the day, every block, so we have … That gives you room for 16 sections. We’re running 14 one semester, 15 the next, and we’re on year 2. By the time we get to year 3 and 4, we actually are going to need another classroom to share with this lab. We are already talking to the board and talking to getting money set aside for us to add that additional lab, and we are proposing the additional courses, making sure we’re going through the training. I think the most important thing that’s going on is our teachers are continuing to do a really great job. They’re working together, they’re building the program out, and they’re coordinating.

We’ve also started what we call not just Project Lead the Way, but we’ve started a program called STEM Learning Community. What it is, is kids are taking physics first, and then they’ll take a STEM class, and then second year will be chemistry with STEM, and third year will bio with a STEM program in class. Then senior year, they get into the Senior STEM class, Project Lead the Way class. We did that for two reasons. One is … I didn’t think we were going to have a ton of interest in it. It would be our top kids who want to actually commit to four years of Project Lead the Way and four years of science.

To my surprise, we had 165 kids apply for that program out of the freshmen class, only freshman. Out of a class of 760, 165 applied. We only allowed 48 into the program just because we don’t want to overwhelm the facilities, but we did that for a couple of reasons. One was to add legitimacy to that, Project Lead the Way. Now, our students and our school really see it as an engineering program. It’s not Shop. Not that Shop was every bad. Shop has been very good for kids, but there’s been a stigma with it. I think the way we have built this out, it’s removed the stigma. It’s a high-level honors class.

We give an honors credit. We have Project Lead the Way honors credit as well. I think all of those things are supporting it moving forward. I would say, as we do with all of the things in our school, we do look at growth for kids. We can
improve on that a lot, but right now, we’re still looking at EXPLORE, PLAN, ACT growth. That’s one measure that is at least a standardized measure that we can look at over time. When we started looking at this in 2006, we had … We looked at a goal of having kids make six points of growth from EXPLORE to ACT. For the class of 2006, we had 47% of our kids make that growth goal which is a good target this is on.

This past year, it was 67%. When you look at the growth that our lower achieving kids are making, we now … In English, for example, our studies, our lowest level studies kids are outperforming what our regular kids were doing in 2006, and our regular kids were outperforming what our honors kids did at 2006, and our honors kids have grown well beyond that. That’s one measure. One thing that we’re trying to do as a school is really say, “For the things you think are important, how do you know kids are getting those?” That’s true in every program.

Principal 5

*Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the academic programming in your building.*

Sure. That’s something, hopefully, people think that I provide support with on every day. One in particular I could think of is dealing specifically with our co-teaching model.

For those that don’t know, co-teaching is, in my particular building, we have a system where at times where if we have particular portions of students with special needs, that don’t necessarily … They may have an IAP but part of their IEP which deals with them being in a least restrictive environment. We have them in what we call our mainstream classes.

However, one of the things that we realize is based upon the different tracks that we have which are transition, which is our basic level, college prep, which is a majority of our students, then, you have your honors and advanced placement population. Some of those co-taught classes are sporadically placed and most of them we found were in a college prep level.

The Assistant Principal came to me and we talked about this a little bit and our concerns there and what the decision was that we made the calculative decision to place all of those co-taught classes at our lowest track level, which was our transition-level class. Met with lots of resistance but, you know, we’ll get to that another time.

Anyway, the focus of that was to say why not put the additional supports and we mean co-teaching. We’re talking about two individuals that are fully staffed and certified teachers. One with a Special Ed background, certified. The other one, a
mainstream teacher of a particular concept. Why not put those supports at the lowest level with the idea that we can push them out of that level, maybe perhaps in an aggressive standpoint, maybe after a semester but on a more consistent basis after a year.

In other words, wean them off of those supports so there can actually be a transition out of that level. I call that level, which some people call basic transitions specifically because my belief is that kids should transition out of it. It's not a home where they should be constantly. They should be able to move out of it.

We came up with a model and, again, our transition-level courses are, on the most part, in all of our division. I'm talking Math, I'm talking History, Science, Social Studies or History, World Languages, what have you.

**How did you evaluate the current academic programs to determine the need?**

When we looked at what was being offered, frankly again, some of the environments that we had those co-teaching models in were at the, again, I'm using our track level, our college prep level and our question was is this really serving the population that we felt that a co-teaching model should.

If we're going to have a special education teacher in the classroom and you're going to spend the money to do that, we might as well put that into places where we know that more of our students th

Those courses would be in the areas where our transition students would be at and also, based upon our system, we also keep those class sizes under from 16 to 18 and, to be honest, more so around 16.

You talked about getting a bang for your buck and making sure that, again, those students get the direct instruction that they need to improve their Lexile scores, to improve their deficiencies relative to how they're achieving in classes, we knew that that needed to be at that basic level opposed to the college prep level.

The college prep level, you're going to have 26 students in there. Most of those students, their Lexile scores are, I guess you would say less of a warning or less of a concern. But I'll also admit that at that college prep level, you're going to have the most range when it comes to academic abilities for kids because maybe some of those aren't ready for honors, they don't score low enough or they don't have an IAP where they're at the basic level classes. They're caught in the middle.

With that being said, we really felt strongly about putting those resources at that lower level because, again, we felt that if we did that, those kids would transition out and be better prepared and, hopefully, find the opportunities to have higher
level classes towards their junior-senior years, thus, increasing their opportunities for colleges.

What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve academic programming?

For me, every decision that I do I keep on the table. I think about what's best for kids. That's our school motto. Again, I think that as an institution, we've done a wonderful job when it comes to our advance placement curriculum. Our students that come to us that have parents at home that have their resources to get tutoring, they come school-ready. What I mean by that is they know how to play the game of school well. As a result of that, they thrive.

Some of those students frankly come with the skills that they currently have. Case in point for me is our average ACT score is around 24.6. What that means to me is we have some students frankly are that damn good and that damn intelligent where they're really pulling up their colleagues or the other students that are struggling the most.

We just have students that are that good. Because of that, we've rested on those laurels for many years in my opinion. As an agent for change, the thing that I recognize is that, again, we have the resources and we certainly have the clientele of students that have been begging for this.

We've had an achievement gap there for over 30 years. Again, me being a person of color, me with the experiences that I've also had in my own personal life relative to education and then being in different systems where I've seen other things and seen different successes, I made it my business to make sure that, again, the people that I either hire, the people that are there realize that this is a vision that I have.

Again, if our board goal, let's talk about, if our board goal speak specifically relates to racial disparities and trying to disproportionately eliminate systems or barriers for kids so that they can achieve their full academic potential, these are some of the measures and things that I felt that we needed to do.

What actions did you take in response to this need?

We came up with a model and, again, our transition-level courses are, on the most part, in all of our division. I'm talking Math, I'm talking History, Science, Social Studies or History, World Languages, what have you.

We made that switch. We've done that probably about two years ago. The hardest part has been with the pairing of the teachers. Prior to this, there had been the cultural norms and relationships that were established with teachers and they were
comfortable in doing and teaching together but we felt that what they were doing maybe needed a little pushing and a little bit more challenging so that we can impact a greater portion of our kids.

*How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving academic programming?*

We put this program in place and again, like I said, there was a little resistance. Part of the resistance were the things that I described. Again, also in my building, there's a culture there. The school's been in existence since the 1870s. There's this huge institution of excellence but when you ask a question of who represents that excellence in a diverse population of students, where 28% of your student were African-American, you've got 10 to 12% that are Hispanic. We've got even a 13% multi-racial component to our population as well. We really have to work at keeping race on the table.

One of the things that we knew is that by providing the support, we would also be impacting and changing some of the environments for our students that we feel the struggle the most.

That's one of the examples that we've used. Our program still exists now. We consistently work with our Special Education department, our division heads relative to that model and making sure that our pairs are meeting the needs of our kids and making changes where we need to and hopefully adding additional courses in areas where we don't necessarily have many of them. That's just some of the process that we've been doing relative to co-teaching.

Principal 7

*Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the academic programming in your building.*

Four years ago, I moved from a Middle School, which is a high performing middle school in district. The superintendent came to my office and said we have a building that's borderline, falling apart. We need you to come and build the academic performance and the culture and climate. That happened about four years ago. Being since I only student taught at high school, that was the last time, and that was 15 years ago, I needed to do a lot of work on what that means and the six months I waited for the transition from when they told me to when I got there, we tried to look at data from the PSA, the Explore, the Plan, the pre-ACT, senior ACT scores seemed to be very popular with school boards, which I found out.

Attendance data, graduation data, college success, we compared ourselves to the other school in the district, so we wanted to find what academically are we
lagging behind? First of all, what does the board care about? What do parents care about? What do the teachers care about? We found some areas that we definitely lagged pretty far behind the other school. One was reading on the PSAE and the other one was math. Those were two areas that we looked at. Reading was the easiest one to apply because it hits every content area from wellness to electives, so we really focused on academic vocabulary the first year.

How are we going to improve this? We're going to look at the sub-score of the reading PSAE. I think we were at 64%, so we wanted to get to 80 in four years. I think right now, our overall reading PSA is at 77. We've made some jumps. We're not at 80 yet, so we're not satisfied, but 80% of our kids go to college, so we looked at that. That was how we looked at our current academic programs to see where we wanted to go. That answers question two and then three, another thing we added last year was discipline literacy, so we've had two years of discipline literacy, two years of academic vocabulary.

_How did you evaluate the current academic programs to determine the need?_

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_What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve academic programming?_

Because 60% is unacceptable here. We are a very I would say a high flying school district and 60% on the PSAE, even though it beats the state average, when your fellow school is in the upper 70s, there's something wrong. There's not that much difference between the two schools, so you look at peaks and valleys when you're looking at data, and there was a big valley in academic vocabulary. That's what we targeted and luckily at my other school, which is a Blue Ribbon School, we were great at academic vocabulary and it had great reading teachers that gave me good resources so I already knew some things that had worked at the middle school level.

The fear was would it transfer to the high school? People questioned it, but if you pick things that have easy victories, you pick things like just do this in your class, just have words on the wall, just teach kids how to look up words, and how they can use them in a sentence, just different ways. It works, and we got small victories every year and this year, we're only one point behind the other school
overall in PSAE. When I came, we were about eight or nine points behind, so we've jumped. They're a little bit different where we do have some socioeconomic changes here. Our Hispanic population has grown to 12%. Our free and reduced lunch has multiplied to I'd say about 20%.

Coming from ten years ago, we have board members that are your school is all white. We're all rich. That's not how it's working. We're really growing a Hispanic population here, so that's a group, when you talk about under-served, that's a group we've been trying to focus in on. How do we help the students from ELL and Hispanic backgrounds? How do we help them? They've been here for a while, but I think this is the first year that we're translating all letters into Spanish. Right now, we have a parent meeting from four to five where we have an interpreter trying just teach our Hispanic parents how to access the grade book, how to access it through their child's services.

We're just trying to reach out for a group that's new to the area. The whole world is going to be primarily Hispanic in 2052, so it's going to keep happening. It's not going to go away, so we've had to make a decision as a building, and it's just a decision I've made. We're going to help. It doesn't matter if it's 10%. We're going to translate. We're going to have translators available. It costs a lot of money because the district doesn't really recognize it yet, so we're paying Spanish teachers who want to give their free time to translate for some of our kids because our Spanish speaking families work. They're not as in tuned to what's going on, so we're trying to find ways to connect them to the school.

What actions did you take in response to this need?

We've really spent time giving the faculty books that they can use that give best practice in those areas. We looked at areas that you can really use this in every department. The high school is so departmentalized, so you've got to find things that move from one area to the other, so we looked at that. We used our department meetings sometimes, all of our faculty meetings, and our SIP days all around those goals. One goal I added in here and I didn't know it came up later was SEL. I came into a building that pretty much everybody was departmentalized. Nobody communicated. They were afraid of being written up, fear of is they had an idea that didn't work, they would get dinged or fire, so it was a very closed school.

I think when I got here, there were nine people on the SIP team. Nine. We have 200 teachers. Nine. The first thing the first summer, we asked 45 people if they would join the SIP team. That costs a lot of money, but I felt like it was worth it. I think right now, we have 38 teachers, so we represent every department, every group, every organization, so when they go back to a department meeting, they can talk about this. This is what we're doing in SIP team. When you have a
building of 200 plus people, communication has to be clear. It has to be a simple message. Academic vocabulary, those ten words on the wall right there?

People laughed at first when we talked about it, but high school kids don't know how to summarize. They'll write you 15 pages. Tell them to write it in three paragraphs. We found there's things our kids can do, things that kids can't. We do things like, kids would spell some of these words out at assembly, like goofy things to bring the kids in like this is what we're going to do, you're to learn how to read at a higher pace, so those are some of the things we did to see improvement.

How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving academic programming?

We went from academic vocabulary to discipline literacy, which moves in the right direction, and then what happened this year is what we got pretty loud and clear last year. The first I think three years, people liked the new style of SIP. They liked it. They enjoyed it, but the feedback we got a lot was we keep getting these great things, but it's like 30 minutes here, an hour here. It's just too short. We can't sustain this, so what we tried to look at is between the two high schools, we actually are doing something that's pretty neat and it's just taking it to the next level. We're going to hit still academic vocabulary. We're still going to offer those offerings.

We're going to also look at SEL. Offer those things as well and then look at some math offerings and just offerings that could anybody that teaches in the high school. Tuesday, we have our third SIP day. We have probably I'd say 15 different offerings that hit either math, we actually don't hit math or English, but whatever it is, whether it's differentiation, whether it's rigor in the classroom, all those things can be used for counselors, for elective course work, so we brought our best leaders on both of our SIP teams form both schools, and they're teaching eight hour classes, so they're going to get paid for their prep that they do.

We can't pay for them teaching when they're not getting paid. We're paying for them to teach other teachers things that may interest them. If you're a teacher, out of the 12 choices or 15 choices, you got to pick four. We could assure you one. That's all we could assure because that's the way it works. You get two classes. You get depth. Hopefully that learning can keep going, so we hope that that will continue to show results on, obviously PSA is gone, so we don't know what we're going to use, but we hope that that will show results on the senior ACT. That seems to be the one thing our community cares about, the senior ACT. Our district keeps saying when are we going to get a 24?
When are we going to get a 24? We've seen slow progressions up. I think we're at 23.5. North is at 23.7, so we've got ways to go. Our goal is to get to 24. That's easier said than done, but we keep looking at the data.

**Summary of Responses to Subsection 1 – Academic Programming**

Question 1 of each subset asked for a general overview of the issue that was to be discussed. The broad nature of the question allowed for the principals to speak in general terms about the academic programming issue they had dealt with. Each principal answered the question with a specific issue that they had or were attempting to influence in terms of the academic programming in their school. Responses tended to be more aligned with the Ethic of Profession than any other ethical framework. This is understandable, given the technical nature of academic programming and the professional responsibilities that principals have in that regard.

Of the four building principals interviewed, three responded to this question with academic-oriented issues (i.e., academic skills, discipline literacy, co-teaching) and one responded with more of an emphasis on social-emotional issues (academic engagement). The principals who responded with academic-based programming initiatives spoke to the need for all students to have the necessary skills to be successful in and possibly advance beyond high school. The principal who responded with more social-emotional concerns spoke to more of a need to be prepared for life itself beyond high school, regardless of path.

When asked what was evaluated to determine the needs in these academic programs, all building principals were quite specific about the data that were used. Multiple principals noted ACT performance was a consideration when reviewing academic programming. Also noted were the Explore, Plan, and Practice ACT
assessments. When evaluating the need for adopting a co-teaching model in mainstream classrooms, one principal noted the attention paid to the range of Lexile scores within each track. Graduation rates, attendance rates, and college success rates were also provided as data considered when evaluating academic programming needs. Two of the four cited Board of Education goal-setting as a factor that compelled action towards academic programming changes. The above examples of operating under established criteria showed evidence of how the Ethic of Justice influenced these principals in evaluating academic programming.

The actions focused on academic programming tended to be more influenced by the Ethic of the Profession. This ethical framework asks questions such as: “What does my profession ask me to do? What do I need to take into account as it relates to the best interests of the student” (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). Three of the four principals cited moral or ethical principles as factors that compelled them to make academic program changes. Two of the four cited Board of Education goals as factors that compelled action towards Academic Programming changes. As Board members are community members first, this influence is a reflection of the question, “What do various communities expect me to accomplish?” as a component of the Ethic of the Profession.

Three of the four principals gave evidence of the Ethic of Critique when discussing what compelled them to make academic programming changes. This ethical framework asks the questions: “What could make a difference to empower those that have been silenced? What new possibilities could be presented to lean toward social justice and the making of a better society?” (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). In this regard, all three principals who gave evidence of the Ethic of Critique influencing their decision-
making spoke to the racial minorities in their schools. They discussed providing better resource allocation towards minority groups (STEM classes, co-teaching models), making their schools more welcoming to the families of these minority groups (translating school communications into Spanish), and closing the achievement gap that exists between racial groups.

When asked what specific actions they had taken in making the needed changes to academic programming, the Ethic of the Profession highly influenced responses. All four principals referenced professional-development structures designed to advance the academic programming initiatives. Outside resources and Board of Education goal-setting were also mentioned as actions to change academic programming.

Another influence that was highly evident in these responses was the Ethic of Care. According to Shapiro and Gross (2013), this ethical framework encourages collaborative efforts between faculty, staff and students to promote interpersonal interactions. This was evidenced by two of the four principals who spoke to their attempts to engage the staff in not only working together to achieve the desired changes to academic programming, but in leading the way. Both of these principals alluded to the benefits that derived from the Professional Development initiatives being led by staff, as opposed to being directed from Administration.

When asked how they have sustained the progress that has been made in the academic programming, the principal group gave largely technical, Ethic of the Profession-like answers. Plans for the future of the academic programs were based upon on-going yearly evaluations of the data, responses to the emerging needs, and professional development stemming from what the data informed. Another element of
this framework was described by Principal 4 who laid out the next sequences of classes that were to be offered in the coming years, as well as the physical and staffing plans that were being made to meet the growing demands.

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| Describe a scenario...                      | They needed me to build the academic performance and climate of the school. |
| How did you evaluate...                    | We pay attention to our attendance numbers. Kids want to be here. |
| What ethical considerations were important... | I think about what’s best for kids. |
| What areas did you determine...            | For us it’s really about having students understand what the path is in the STEM fields. |
| What actions did you take...               | If you’re going to have Special Education teachers in the classroom, we might as well put them into places where we know that more of our students that are special needs, and have a reading disability in. |
| How have you sustained...                 | We continue to build our programs out and are doing summer programs. |

*Figure 17. Exemplary Chart of Responses from Interview Question #1 Aligned to Ethical Frameworks*

**Interview Question #2 – Social Emotional Programming**

"Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the social emotional programming in your building. How did you evaluate the current social emotional programs to determine the need? What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve social emotional programming? What areas of social emotional programming did you determine were in need of improvement? What actions did you take in response to this need? How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving social emotional programming?"
Principal 3

*Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the social emotional programming in your building.*

Before I was here, I taught a class, the toughest kids in our school. They were seniors and all of them had records with the law and they could not believe what was going on in town here in the hazing of 2003.

One of the best things ever happened to our school, it was before I got here but we had a great principal, who's now our Superintendent now. He took it head on. He just said, "This is beyond abhorrent behavior. We have a real serious problem in our community."

*How did you evaluate the current social emotional programs to determine the need?*

It was right there. It was on the table. It was in the front. It wasn't something hidden in the shadows. This was something where we all acknowledge that we had a problem. Let's fix this problem. Let's love each other a little bit better. People do have substance issues. Let's address that. Let's look at it.

*What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve social emotional programming?*

I think a lot of it has to do with just growing a little bit. At 56, I look at the world very differently than I did ... Gosh, I apologize to you, when I knew you as because I was so hell-bent on becoming the next Pat Riley that I had forgotten that these four years can be joyous for kids and should be fun and shouldn't just always be chasing something for the future.

Part of it was my own maturity as a leader. Part of it is I'm surrounded by arguably the best administrative staff anyone could ever have. I work for a Superintendent who's ridiculously intelligent and is completely in-tune with the importance of this four years of life for these kids right now, not as a stepping stone of something, but as a dynamic life that needs to be enjoyed right now. Drink the glass of water while you're having the glass of water.

That's what compelled us. Then, in addition to that, we have the hazing thing thrust upon us so that we were already looking at the way we treat each other and then to have to deal with these tragedies. From the tragedies, such beautiful expressions of love have occurred.
What areas of social emotional programming did you determine were in need of improvement?

We sat down. We developed a program called ... What do we call it? All School Workshop ... At least twice a year, we sit down as a school for a significant amount of time focused on an area about the social-emotional well-being of our school. Respect. How we treat one another. How we treat the world. What is our connection to the world? Why the hazing behaviors were so abhorrent? Why do we hurt ourselves with drugs and alcohol?

What actions did you take in response to this need?

All these things are part of that curriculum that we have developed over time and has lead to connect a direct steal from focus on the arcs where we shot the school down for just one day but we get our students and any faculty member or parent that wants to teach a class, a 45 or 90-minute block class, of something that they're really passionate about.

We just flip it over. The kids teach and a lot of faculty teaches and parents come in. My point is we have these constant conversations and it took up a community that was really heading towards some bad behaviors. One of the best things that happened there was the police got on board because they recognized how dramatic it was. They had to come partner with us.

Anytime they saw any abuse of alcohol or drugs or behavior in the community, they share that information with us and we're immediately able to get our counseling staff to do interventions with all these kids and families.

Our whole community was ... We didn't know what to do. Kids didn't know what to do. We didn't know what to do. We just decided all we can do is show up, reach out, get to know every kid that's maybe frail and have conversations with them and tell them how much we love them.

Out of urgency ... The person in charge of student services here is just remarkably gifted human being. He rallied his troops and got this culture of caring that we had already have established but just turned it up a notch.

There's been a lot of love and a lot of loyalty throughout. Like your place, when you hire somebody. When you hire a Social Studies teacher here, you get 1200 applicants in a week. A third of them are doctors and half of that third are sitting professors somewhere who want to come to your school. We can get the very best we can and then that goes to the theory of the number one rule in hiring somebody. Are they nice?
*How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving social emotional programming?*

It's easy to sustain because it's joyful. Again, I know you're tired of hearing that word but people are tired when they hear of organic processing. They're tired of hearing joyful. They're tired of hearing ... What else do we say a lot around here? Bubbling up ... They're tired of hearing passion and relationships but it's funny how things just come out of nowhere.

November 1st is the College Rec. That date gets being pushed off the pressure from colleges. We have teachers that are writing anywhere from 10 to sometimes 40 Letters of Rec. The reason they're being asked is because their kick-ass teachers and their kids know they're going to write them a good letter and they're going to create something fresh for each child.

Our parents saw this. Immediately, they put together this ridiculously lavish luncheon for all the teachers that are writing a Letter of Recommendation. Thousands of dollars just to thank. Then the week later, they're bringing all these desserts. Like the Korean families, they have this other lavish luncheon for us.

A lot of stuff just bubbles up. What happens when you have these places where all of your faculties are going for lunch? They sit down, they talk to each other, not within departments but across curricula and they're talking to parents.

We have a booster club event this spring here, Pat, that's unbelievable. It's just fun and its parents and coaches. Usually, you try to separate those but, I think, everyone takes a night off of any kind of ... We just have a blast. It's a weird community like that. Community learns that we need something. They'll find a way.

That helps to sustain it. The other thing is, like anything else, our teachers are creating the curriculum that we're trying to develop as professional development. It also helps that we have one of the best technological minds, I think, in Illinois, maybe the country that for whatever reason, he's turned down million-dollar contracts with Apple and Google to stay with us. He stirs the technological piece to all these so that our staff ... The term is agility.

We're just always agile. We never land. We know that technology's going to keep moving us so we're trying instead of fighting it, we're trying to use it to the best of our ability. If we keep things passionate and the kids bring learning to us, it all helps. It all works. It just works.
Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the social emotional programming in your building.

We’ve done a lot of things on that as well. Remember, I’m proud of actually the support that we provide there. It’s continued now with our current Assistant Principal, but there was an analysis truly of every program we offer. We have a guided study program. We have social work programs that we have grouped, groups that we offer. We have all types of things that we offer to support kids. We basically went through and asked how do we know that it’s succeeding, what are the goals of each one, and then how do we know that we’re meeting those goals or not.

How did you evaluate the current social emotional programs to determine the need?

For example, what we do with Guided Study, the goal is to get kids out of Guided Study. The goal is to give them support. As for many kids who don’t have a kitchen table at home, the parents are both working, or they just have a lot going on in their lives, and they need somebody who can be contact and teachers, and following up, and making sure that they’re moving forward in doing their homework. We looked at before and after grades. We looked at how long it was taking us to move kids out. We basically analyzed every program that we had.

From that came a need analysis that we needed to expand what we were doing there, and we actually added a program called Transitional Studies which is instead of certified teacher, it’s one level below with an IA, but there was a group of kids that weren’t getting … Needed that kind of support, but only for a semester, maximum for a year. Guided Study, we were having kids with issues that really spilled over from one year to the next which is why a certified teacher is so important for that consistency of experience with the kid.

What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve social emotional programming?

Yeah. I think it’s really focused around care and truly justice. I think there were groups of kids we weren’t serving as we should have. I think those were the keys for us moving forward and paying attention to make sure that all kids again are being cared for and being … Given a chance to be successful in this high school. What areas of social emotional programming did you determine were in need of improvement?

The key thing it is providing is that academic support, but it most … Almost all those kids are getting some social and emotional work, and the Guided Study...
teacher is in constant contact with the social worker working with the kid. We are working to … Other things that were eliminated were when we get kids who are hospitalized and transitioning back in. That is a group that we need to continue to serve. We actually have expanded our social work service, and by adding more room in Guided Study, have been able to respond to that … To those needs.

**What actions did you take in response to this need?**

We have over the last several years actually added to our psych social work support, so that we can do more with kids. That was a direct result of that analysis that we did on the program, and we continue to just step back and ask what our kids that aren’t having their needs met. You probably know as well as I do that there used to be … If a kid had some kind of psychological issues going on, they would be hospitalized and really be cared for in the hospital. Now, what happens is insurance gets them in and out so fast that they end up back with us. We just can’t ignore that. We’ve got to also then say, “What support are we going to be providing kids?” That’s one example.

**How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving social emotional programming?**

We continue to basically do the same kind of analysis that we’ve done in the past to make sure that what we’re doing is working. As I’ve said, we’ve also expanded the second social work support that’s there. It’s based on the needs that are being identified and how they are working. We now have teams. Some that also grew out of that work is that every guidance counselor we have as a guidance counselor for our student for four years, of course. Then when they get a brother or sister, we already know the family, they stay with that guidance counselor.

That guidance counselor is also partnered with a dean, so they have the same dean for four years through. There’s also a psych and a social worker on that team. There is a team that’s looking out for that 250 kids that guidance counselor has. We used to do things in real goofy ways. We used to have psychs and social workers that were upstairs in Special Ed, and then psychs and social workers that were downstairs in Regular Ed. There, the two shall cross. If it’s a Special Ed kid and they came down in crisis, they have to get them up to the Special Ed folks.

It didn’t allow the teams to be made the way that we wanted them to function, and it created all kinds of conflict as to it just was not a good model. We literally moved all our psychs and social workers down together in the Guidance Department. We use now instead of there being psychs and social workers that are just Special Ed, they are all having a Special Ed case load and a Regular Ed case load. Again, what it allows is those teams to be created and sustained through time. That gives us a ton of analysis. That is … For us, that grew out of
the work that we did with RTI which I very much embraced as a concept of school improvement and serving all kids.

If we’re going to have truly RTI interventions and have a problem-solving team that is truly authorized to assign resources in the school, it’s got to be some strong mind to really know the kids and know the resources that are in the school. That problem-solving team is the one I just described. We have a process. When a kid is struggling, that kid is referred, and it’s usually shown up in the Guidance Department through attendance or in the Dean’s Office through discipline. When those things occur, we now once a week are sitting down saying, “All right, we all have the same kid.”

If there is a … If we’re talking about a Special Ed kid, then the case manager is also part of that team. Again, those teams stayed in place. The case manager when that … If we’re assigning a kid to Special Ed, it gets assigned to the case manager that also determines who that kid’s dean and guidance counselor will be. That just makes sense. Now, that case manager keeps that kid for four years. That guidance counselor keeps that kid for four years, that dean, psych, social worker.

Now when that kid comes up, we have a team that we really authorize to assign the resources that we have, included Guided Studies and others, based on need. They have given us all kinds of insights of things that are working wrong and things that we need to continue. I think that team itself is probably one of the strongest resources we have to sustain what we’re doing and continue to improve what we’re doing.

Principal 5

Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the social emotional programming in your building.

Sure. I can talk about the relationship building that I feel that's needed in our building. One of the gifts and curses of our school is that we're extremely big. We have a one hundred thousand square foot campus. We have 3300 students. When you have 3300 students from all walks of life with very different socio economic backgrounds, different needs, it's an eclectic group. I have, frankly 240 teachers, certified teachers.

If you can imagine trying to manage that and lead that, it gets pretty intense and difficult at times.
How did you evaluate the current social emotional programs to determine the need?

We have reports that we do annually for our Board of Education and look at the discipline stats. For example, let's talk about discipline. Look at the discipline stats. When we look at those and just segregate our data by race for years, again, this happened before, during, after ... hopefully not after my time ... There certainly seems a disparity for students of color. Again, granted they make up 28 to 30% of our student body ... Actually, I'll say about 40%, about 30% when you think about all different racial demographics besides white.

That being said, when it comes to our discipline stats, they're dominating. You can directly see our students of color in them. Then, when you look at those two, assuming they pull their grades up, what do you think that you see? You see a correlation between students who are not achieving in classes that are in your discipline system, that are your students of color who are lacking these relationships.

When I look at that, I recognize that, again, through some of the things that we were trying to do, it began with relationships. We have a modified close campus. In order to continue to have a modified close campus where we have incentives where juniors and seniors can leave the building during lunch, I had to come up with

The first thing was parent permission. You have to have less than five tardies in a four and a half week period, you have to have not be failing any classes and you can't have any infractions to get you to the point where you're suspended out of school. Again, those we set every four and a half weeks but, again, they wear IDs.

Let's talk about that rule. When we started to mandate students to wear IDs, my biggest issue was helping faculty understand the reasons why we needed to do that. It wasn't even the kids. It was more so the faculty. The hard part was because faculty resistance. What do you think the kids would do?

However, let's go back to race, let's go back to our tracks that I was talking to you about. What do you think happens in a class where a teacher needs structure and order and deals with discipline issues? That's your college prep classes and your basic classes.

When those kids came to classes and didn't have their IDs, then, they'll be met with disciplinary refractions. Maybe that didn't happen for our honors classes or advanced placement classes.
What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve social emotional programming?

Social emotional learning, model being what's best for kids. When I'm in an environment and having lived the experience of knowing how important relationships were for me especially when I was in classes that I struggled, I can only imagine what it's like in a building of 3300 kids and you being in a classroom not understanding material but then afraid to say something to your teacher because you don't know them or afraid to raise your hand or afraid to get called on because you think your friends are going to think you're stupid.

It's important for me to, at least, highlight that for the faculty and then ask ourselves to really reflect and think differently. We pride ourselves of being life-long learners. We pride ourselves as being the crème de la crème relative to teaching and being on the cutting edge and being this professional learning community as a faculty. Let's reflect on what our craft is. Let's go back to those things.

Those are the things that, for me and my core, I knew helped me reach the kids that maybe couldn't have been reached by other teachers. That's what I carry with me in my frame of leadership. Again, always in the best interest of the kids, that in any decision I make, I think about students first. Again, having to keep race on the table. Having to keep equity on the table. Those things are important. If I'm not doing those things, then I certainly know that the gaps that we currently have are going to persist.

What areas of social emotional programming did you determine were in need of improvement?

Unfortunately, our school at times wants to operate where we are a mini college. What I mean by that is there's been a lot of autonomy and we've been fortunate to hire people that aren't necessarily coming in to us with a BA for example. They're not just fresh out of college and I don't mean that disparagingly but this school really sought out professor-like individuals that had done work and had done research and, again, the pay is at such that you attract those particular people.

However when that happens, I think that at times people expect students to come to them being school-ready, not lacking or not in positions where they lack the social skills to be successful in classes.

I use the phrase background noise. I believe that a significant portion of our student population based upon their home conditions come to school frankly not necessarily thinking about school when they walk in the door.
If the teacher hasn't built a relationship with them, that student is thinking about those things and the background noise is imagine a student with a walk-man or, as they use right now, the Beats by Dre headphones and having those in ten in the middle of a lesson where a teacher's trying to teach the formula for slope or having conversations about the Great Gatsby.

They've got all these noise going in their heads and really what it is is just thinking about their backgrounds and what's happening at home. Maybe they're hungry. Maybe they just witnessed some unfortunate situations in their home life. They're thinking about a brother and sister. They have other things on their mind and so they're tuned out.

Because of the lack of relationship building that's happening and you have an instructor that thinks about content, maybe versus being student first and what the kid needs, then there's this wall that's put up. That wall that's there create scenarios where there's not relationships. Because of those relationships, those students find themselves ... If they're fortunate enough to be able to play the game a little bit, that's a student that maybe is able to deal and maybe get Bs or Cs and not really become a nuisance in a class. But those students that can't do that, obviously, become discipline issues.

Then they become discipline issues and then part of that is because of the lack of relationship in my opinion that they have with the instructor. More importantly, they're not gaining anything in class because they can't do the work instead of having the dialog with the teacher about getting that additional help that they need, they end up acting out because, again, they've got a reputation. They want to make sure their friends know that they're still cool and so then they become this power struggle in the classroom where the student's always going to lose. What we've tried to do is develop systems in place and put things in place where we really ask our teachers to take a step back and think about the relationship building and starting from that. Thinking about making sure that their taking risk in humanizing themselves so that students see them as people, so that there's a relationship that's established.

Go to a game, ask a student about their weekend, be attentive, find some things out about them, talk about your families a little bit so that, again, you have this culture of caring and as a result of that, students go for a brick wall for you, I believe, when they feel that they believe in them. When you show that passion and compassion for them and concerns for what's happening with their lives outside of school, they resonate with that. That really makes them want to do things differently for you.
What actions did you take in response to this need?

Again, Safe and Civil Schools is a program that really starts to talk about respect, to talk about talking to students versus at students. It really provided teachers tool kits about, just again, relationship building. Instead of when the student maybe doesn't have an assignment, instead of just automatically giving them a zero, asking them what happened, asking them if time would be helpful for them. What could I do differently as a teacher to help that student get that homework assignment done?

If a student is misbehaving in class, maybe instead of having a power struggle publicly in front of that student, maybe reflecting a bit and thinking about the things that maybe I could be doing differently to make my lessons a little bit more engaging. Is it culturally relevant? Does this material make sense to that kid? Is this something to them that is just not anything relative to an actual experience that they would have in the real world? Can you apply this knowledge in the real world and does that resonate and make sense with the students?

If those things are done, I just feel that you have a better opportunity for students to be successful. From the social-emotional perspective, those are some of the things that we do. Strictly related to an initiative for an example.

How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving social emotional programming?

Our professional development model that we have for teachers, it consists of five different strands. There's a seven strategies of effective teaching strand. There's a using data to inform decision-making and problem-solving strand. There's a literacy strand. There's a strand on racial equity. Also, there's a strand on social and emotional learning.

These strands are actually lead by faculty members. We pay them an honorarium. We provide professional development over the summer directly related to that professional development strand and my hope is that through a five-year period, all of our entire faculty goes to each one of those strands.

With two of the most significant strands are the social and emotional learning strand and the racial equity strand. Because of the racial dynamics and the achievement disparities of our students of color, it's important to me that we continue to keep race on the table.

I would love to be in a situation where that racial equity strand wouldn't exist because everybody has that lens and is thinking that way who's not in the room. Again, from the racial lens, I'm speaking directly but that also includes gender. That also includes sexuality. That also includes socio-economic disparities.
If we're thinking about those things as we educate our students, we have just a better ability to reach them and understand maybe why they're having some of the issues that they're having. Again, from the social-emotional learning perspective, again, providing those tools for teachers to just help them think differently, to plan differently, to again be reflective and maybe not always think that the issue starts with the student. What is it that I could do differently to better that scenario for students?

Those are some ways that exactly we deal with social emotional learning.

Principal 7

*Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the social emotional programming in your building.*

Our building was just dysfunctional, so SEL was we noticed that kids didn't feel as connected to school, parents didn't, and staff, the morale was low.

*How did you evaluate the current social emotional programs to determine the need?*

We have an annual survey that we use. At first we just targeted SEL at the middle school we hit it pretty hard, have they hit it at high school and we found they didn't really even know what SEL was, so the first step was just what is SEL?

*What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve social emotional programming?*

Just because I look at data, the kids I expel. We give them algebra. We failed them. We give them algebra again. We failed them. We failed them three times. Look at the kids who aren't making it. Kids at this school that don't do very well are Special Ed. and Hispanic. How do we connect to those kids, so we've worked really hard on ELL, how to incorporate ELL strategies in mainstream classroom. How do we connect to Hispanic students? I had an intern that did a whole semester on talking to our Hispanic students, about 30 of them. We thought they weren't connected. They're not connected. They're not coming to homecoming. They're not here. They're connected. They're just connected in their own ways.

What clubs do they want? They don't want a club. If they want to join a club, they'll join a club. We thought maybe Latinos Unidos or whether it be some club that they want and they're like no, we feel connected with each other. We don't really get into what you guys do, so we're trying to find that balance. What club could we get them into because then they have to come to homecoming. We're trying to learn from both sides. They could learn from us and we could learn from
them as well, so we're still in that fusion type, how do we bring in the Hispanic population? They feel connected within themselves, but they're isolated away from everybody else. They sit together at the lunchroom. They really are connected together, but not in the building, so we notice that.

Ethically, how do we get them to be connected? How do we make them feel more welcome? We started this year with translating everything and having parent nights and student nights and childcare.

*What areas of social emotional programming did you determine were in need of improvement?*

We're not perfect. That's how we started. It's hard for me to remember how we got to Capturing Kids Hearts, but it was obvious that people at high school really know their content. Their content, incredible content, but the disconnect in some cases was you know your content, but you're not connecting your kids. If you're not connecting your kids, then what are you doing? We looked at how can we help that? Here's some strategies that work in the classroom and then it led us to Capturing Kids Hearts. That's a weird way we got to that, but it was just trying to set up what's going to be our common language, academic vocabulary if I talk to teachers, they know what we're talking about.

*What actions did you take in response to this need?*

We found a program called Capturing Kids Hearts and it sounds lame and people even make fun of it here. It's a guy who's a high school teacher. He created this basically behavioral program to help kids be successful. I was sent to the training because my boss knew the guy. It was the best training I ever had.

When I went with some other teachers, they loved it as well, so we went from three people being trained, and now we're at 125 people have been trained, so we're trying to make it a building-wide effort. It just comes down to the classroom. Do the kids feel comfortable in your class? Really all it is do you make a kid feel comfortable? Do you connect with the kid? If you connect with them, they will learn whatever topic you're trying to teach them. So we've been trying to look at that and the survey keeps pointing out that the teachers feel more connected. The kids feel more connected.

*How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving social emotional programming?*

Parents feel very satisfied. The data just keeps telling us that what we're doing is right, so we try and not only just get stagnant, but keep moving. Our goal is this summer to train 15 more teachers we'll be really close to getting almost 90% of the staff. At some point, we'll have to force the end of the group, and I don't know
who that trainer is going to be because the one that have gone so far, your go-getters, the ones that are probably good at it already, so we're trying to fuse in the ones that are really anti-kids, should have retired 15 years ago, so we're trying to strategically pick people and say you really need to go to this.

We're noticing in Danielson that you really don't connect and your cultural learning is really low. You should go to this and people will go. There's variations of utilization of it, but overall it's becoming our vocabulary for SEL is going to be Capturing Kids Hearts.

**Summary of Responses to Subsection 2 – Social-Emotional Programming**

The responses to question 1 in subsection 2, Social Emotional Programming, were greatly varied. One principal identified “relationships” between students and staff as the area that he focused on. Another principal spoke of a culture of disrespect (previous to his arrival) that permeated the students, staff, and parent community that was the target for his school. A third principal related that students in his school did not feel connected to the school and that staff morale was low prior to his arrival. The last principal identified how he and his staff evaluated the formal supports that students outside of Special Education received in his school, and the efforts he and his staff made to improve the organization of these to better serve students both academically and emotionally.

Not only were the areas of identification varied, but the narratives took on a variety of characteristics as well, especially when principals were asked to discuss how they determined a certain area of Social-Emotional programming needed attention. One principal gave a very detailed example of the structures that existed within his school, how a needs assessment was done to determine gaps in services, and specifically detailed the current and future program structures and how they align to the vision of his school. Another principal gave lesser detail when describing the needs, repeatedly referring to “SEL” in a generic sense while detailing specific examples of the actions taken to remedy
the identified needs. A third principal highlighted the discipline statistics relative to the different racial groups within his school as a means of explaining how relationships within his large school had become strained.

Not surprisingly, the ethical frameworks that were most evident in regards to the push for Social-Emotional programming changes were the Ethics of Care and Critique. Building leaders interviewed all spoke of the need to provide caring, nurturing environments for every member of the learning community. Multiple respondents spoke of the importance of relationships between staff and students as being a prerequisite to the learning process. In fact, the importance for strong relationships extended to the parent community for two of the building principals who were interviewed.

In regards to the Ethic of Critique, race came up in two of the four interviews, with the principals explaining that their buildings needed to be more responsive to their students of color. A beginning understanding of Culturally Responsive instruction is imperative a building leader to move this process forward (Herrera, 2010). Both principals were acutely aware of the racial demographics in their buildings (they alluded to the demographics in multiple responses) and could speak to explicit efforts that were being made to reach out to these populations of color as a first means to closing the achievement gap. As mentioned previously, educational leaders who recognize the impact of culturally responsive environments work to identify and break down traditional power structures within organizations and lead efforts to incorporate all cultural perspectives in the running of the organization (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Another element that emerged in one of the building principals interviewed was the Ethic of Justice. This principal spoke in detail of how the legal implications of Special
Education demand that schools organize in order to get the most services to the most students in as efficient a manner as possible. This served as the impetus for aligning Social-Emotional programming in his school for mainstream students to the Special Education model. Through thoughtful analysis of current resources and existing needs combined with a desire to provide the best programming to the most students possible, he worked to restructure the Counseling Department and teacher supervision model to achieve his goal.

When asked to delineate specific actions they took to improve Social-Emotional programming in their schools, answers varied but trended more towards the Ethic of the Profession. All four principals related actions taken around professional development for staff. Three of the four principals utilized best practice approaches by finding research based programs that were incorporated into their schools to improve this area. Again, however, when discussing Professional Development efforts, the Ethic of Care came through in three of the four interviews, with principals maintaining that the buy-in of staff, students, and community, as well as the staff-led aspects of the programming were the major reason behind current successes and sustainability of the programs.
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<th><strong>Examples of the Ethic of Care in Responses to Question #2 – Social-Emotional Programming</strong></th>
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<td>Describe a scenario…</td>
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Examples of the Ethic of the Profession in Responses to Question #2
– Social-Emotional Programming

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<tr>
<th>Describe a scenario…</th>
<th>We added a program called Transition Studies, which because of its structure we can maintain at lower costs.</th>
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<td>How did you evaluate…</td>
<td>We basically went through and asked how do we know that it’s succeeding, what are the goals of each one, and then how do we know that we’re meeting those goals or not.</td>
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<td>What ethical considerations were important…</td>
<td>I look at the data of kids we expel and ask, how do we make them feel more connected?</td>
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<td>What areas did you determine…</td>
<td>Our first step was to just understand what a good SEL program was</td>
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<td>What actions did you take…</td>
<td>We found a program called Capturing Kids Hearts. (a research based program)</td>
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<td>How have you sustained…</td>
<td>We’ve created what’s going to be our common language, if I talk to teachers they know what I’m talking about.</td>
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Figure 18. Exemplary Chart of Responses from Interview Question #2 Aligned to Ethical Frameworks

Interview Question #3 – Activity Programming

Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the activity programming in your building. How did you evaluate the current activity programs to determine the need? What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve activity programming? What areas of activity programming did you determine were in need of improvement? What actions did you take in response to this need? How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving activity programming?

Principal 3

Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the activity programming in your building.

We have a person-in-charge for student activities. As soon as the kids say, "What are we going to do?" What are you going to do? It's all of them. Sometimes it has great success. Sometimes it falls flat on his face but everyone knows it's the kids and the kids like that.

When you talk about what you're trying to do extracurricular or with student activities, I think the first part has to be the kids have to really own it.
How did you evaluate the current activity programs to determine the need?

It's like Solomon. Listen to what the kids want. It's their school. A campus for the kids. If you just listen to them, they'll tell you. When you're running your own show someday, make sure that you meet with a nice diverse cross-section of kids twice a month to just give you a sense on what you might think things are flying and they'll show you things that's translating down and transferring down at my end. That's important too.

The sensitivity to the needs of our kids and our staff, we really have a high level of trust here. I'm guessing that when you look at low-performing schools, because of all of the extraneous mandates and corruption in some cases, there's just some level of trust.

I inherited all that. I wish I could take credit for it but I just don't want to screw it up.

What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve activity programming?

Every year, our dance is outgrowing the spaces that it is housed. Kids show up. They want to be here. They want to be at ... Our variety shows sells out. Our concerts sell out. Kids want to be here. They want to celebrate the talents of their classmates.

I told you we're national leaders in a lot of things. Our school newspaper was just acknowledged again as one of the best. They have this team of people that are in the paper. They want to be in the paper.

What areas of activity programming did you determine were in need of improvement?

We were at a place in a previous school where we couldn't talk two dozen kids that are coming to a dance. They just didn't want to come to our dance. How did that happen? I think we had someone in charge of the dances that was so over-the-top controlling that she scared everybody away. No one wanted to do it.

What actions did you take in response to this need?

We find adults that want to do these stuff too so ethically what drives us? We realize the pressures of school and life for high school kids. We feel that it is essential that we provide them opportunities for meaningful relationships outside the classroom because we know that a lot of these kids, these are going to be life-long friendships. We also want them to enjoy the here and now.
We have a community that's willing to support it to the level of facility they see around here. Our facilities, Patrick, there's just nothing like it.

*How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving social emotional programming?*

We know it works and you're going to ask me how do I know it works and I'm going to tell you in the faces of our kids and the attendance and things.

Principal 4

*Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the activity programming in your building.*

Yeah. We believe in connecting kids. As you kids, connected kids are often … If they’re connected outside of the classroom, they’re usually successful inside the classroom. We want to connect them to their passion. Let’s say, the number one thing we have done is really advocated for … As our student population, but right now, 2,900 students. A few years ago, we were 2,600 students. For the lifetime of this high school, we’ve been 2,300. We’ve grown, and we’re going up to 3,100 over the next couple of years. I’ve advocated strongly that we maintain what we’ve done in the past and that is that there is a component of our budget that’s tied to student population.

As we get more kids, we have expanded the budget of our Student Activities Office to expand the number of clubs and opportunities we have. We also literally tell kids when they walk in the doors, “Leave your fingerprints on this place. Tell us what you want to get involved in.” I charge the assistant principal in student activities which he doesn’t really need my charge at this. This is who the guy is to his toes is connecting kids, so if he needs another club, add it. If you need … Get these things going. If we sustained them for a two-year period with 20 kids, we fund them. We’re finding ways to make that happen and make it successful.

*How did you evaluate the current activity programs to determine the need?*

Obviously, with a large student population, another real important thing for us is expanding the intramural Program because not all kids are going to make teams, but that’s a huge connect for kids. We continue to expand that and connect based on kids’ interests. We now have a fencing team. We didn’t have it before. We have those types of things that connect kids and do all kinds of things. He does a survey every two years. He’ll survey kids very formally to do a needs analysis, a needs assessment on what … How things are working. Everything from dances and how those dances are working for kids to the activities that we offer and how much engagement they feel and what they feel is missing. He’s very active at constantly working with kids.
What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve activity programming?

I think we have … I think our building in general is one that is really contentious about what kids aren’t engaged and how do we give them a voice in that. Like all schools, we need to continue to improve that. We still have kids who are not reaching, but it’s not for a lack of trying. We’re really conscious I think about that in the building. It’s constantly the question, and we’re going to do that. This year, our rally … We have a main goal that we have every year, and our main goal this year is transitioning to the block, and it’s key.

What areas of activity programming did you determine were in need of improvement?

I’m confident in the conversations that we’ve had as administrative team that our rally cry next year is probably going to revolve around this concept of all students of … And we’re going to …

What actions did you take in response to this need?

I know as a team, we’re going to analyze the heck out of what we do to find out where are we missing kids and in a much more nuanced way than we have in a past. Then, we are going to work as a team to start putting in responsive actions to that because we can do … If we work together and really put our entire organization behind this, we can solve that to a much higher level than we have in the past. I’m confident just based on our conversations that, that’s where we’re going to be transitioning to as we go forward next year.

How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving activity programming?

Key is the funding piece, but it’s also … the Assistant Principal there. He just does a phenomenal job. He is working with people all the time. As I find real strong teachers, we are telling him, “Hey, you reach out. I saw this fabulous new teacher, and I don’t think she’s involved. Get her involved. Reach out to her and get her involved.” We tell our teachers obviously that their job … Everybody needs to be connecting with kids in the classroom and out of the classroom. Even I have a club. I run club in this school, and I expect everybody to. I expect everybody to be doing something to connect with kids.
Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the activity programming in your building.

All right. From an activity, club and sports, perspective. We have over 70 clubs in our building. Seventy. We have over 29 different sports. What I mean by 29 sports, I was talking freshman through senior year. The beauty and the beast of that is that we've got 70, we've got 29. We have the ability to engage a lot of kids but, believe it or not and again, building of 3300 kids, you're not going to reach every kid.

The question is how do you evaluate your programming and services on an annual basis to make sure that you're keeping up with the trends, making sure that you're keeping up with the needs and desires of the students in your building especially when they come and go in a four-year time frame.

We work pretty hard at trying to evaluate what we have making sure that, again, it's supporting the learning environment and supporting the needs of the students.

How did you evaluate the current activity programs to determine the need?

We have a review committee that actually goes through the process every year of looking at our numbers and looking at the goals and missions of our clubs and activities. If the attendance dips, those are conversations that we have to have because, again, we have 70 of them.

The answer isn't always we're just adding one. Sometimes when you add one, you might want to take something off that isn't functioning. In the last few years, for example, we had a new teacher that came in and liked hip hop himself, talked to a couple of kids, looked through our list of clubs and activities, realized that for this particular niche of students, we really didn't have anything that was offered for them so we came up with the Hip Hop Club.

We put it on a probation for a year. What we mean by probation, it's every club goes through that process before it becomes a bona fide club that's recognized in the way that all the other clubs are but, again, they have to monitor their attendance, they have to make sure that they have goals and missions.

Again, through that work, we were able to actually put that club in a situation where now it's one that's thriving. It's got the membership that existed and it's no longer probationary club. It's bona fide and there you go.

We always try to find different ways but, again, what I love about my institution is student advocacy. Kids know that they have places to go and if there's
something that they don't see that they want, they can certainly begin the process of advocating from a student body perspective to see that become a reality.

*What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve activity programming?*

I feel that I'm fortunate to be at one of the best high schools in the nation. I think that the resources that we have and the adults that are there that care about kids, we have the opportunity to be a beacon of light.

What I like is that I have been fortunate to be in different organizations and see different things and had been able to pull from those different organizations to create the best of both worlds.

The difficult task that I have is that, again, our culture is one that has been resting on tradition and resting on its laurels and isn't always willing to change and then, again, change for the needs of the students. Some folks, if I've got teachers that just teach model Middle Eastern for example, honors ... Couldn't even get the name right ... Modern Middle East, for example.

Maybe they don't see the students that are in a basic history class. Maybe they don't see the students that have different aspirations or different academic interest and needs. As an end result, their focus is only those kids and that's all that they know.

*What areas of activity programming did you determine were in need of improvement?*

It's my job to have a broader scope and have a more holistic view of our institution and, most importantly, the students that we serve. My flat out focus is making this institution student-centered versus adult-centered.

For years, we've been adult-centered. I understand at times why that is. Again, the faculty that I have, I put them up against any high school in the nation. Our teachers are phenomenal. However, there are some things that we can learn from each other. I think that it's time for us to really think about the fact that, again as I said earlier, we have this tradition of excellence but when you pull it back, the question is who is our institution truly deserve over the years?

A famous author went to our school. We have a room that represents him and the artifacts in the classroom, the desks, the chalk board, all of those things are similar to what his experience was.
My problem with that for example is that room is isolated for many of our students. That room is given to our advanced placement classes and it's something that they strive for and it's like an honor to be in that room.

That's great and everything but I don't know if that really serves our entire school population. If we're going to pride ourselves in saying that a famous author is this phenomenal individual, he's on the wall in our school, what about the students that maybe don't have that particular skill set but could actually benefit and learn from being in there.

Maybe that's something that strikes something in those particular students to help them strive to be like that person. I also look forward to having another famous author that maybe doesn't look like him, that maybe hasn't had the experiences that he has and I believe that we have the faculty and staff that can make that happen. I just feel that there needs to be a little push and a little bit more redirecting, if you will, to make sure that, again, the goals and aspirations of our school and that tradition of excellence speaks to the entire student body and right now it doesn't.

What actions did you take in response to this need?

It's important to make sure that, again, it's about putting your money where your mouth is and, unfortunately, and I know that many schools are dealing with this, it takes a whole hell of a lot of resources to pull off some of these things.

Fortunately right now, my district is one of those that has those resources. I am just interested in allocating those in ways that are different to make sure that, again, we're meeting the needs of all of our students.

How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving activity programming?

Every year, we're required to provide our Board of Education what's called a Participation Report. It speaks to the racial demographics of the students. It speaks to the racial demographics of the sponsors. It speaks to the number of students that are involved in our building versus not. We provide surveys for our students that can constantly ask them are the programs and services and the activities meeting their needs? If not, why?

We do this in an annual basis. For example, a board goal two years ago was to aggressively increase our student enrollment within our clubs and activities by 5 to 7%. We accomplished that goal. That was the good news. The bad news is ... It's OK. I guess it's not bad news, it's a problem to have, but when you have 50 more students that go out for football that means you need to buy 50 more helmets and 50 more shoulder pads and things of that nature.
Unfortunately, those things weren't budgeted in our athletic department. However, again, based upon the resources that we do have, once I found out about that, I can make it happen. I just didn't know about it.

Principal 7

*Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the activity programming in your building.*

I think the number one thing here that separates us from any other school I've been at is our homecoming. Even the kids that aren't connected athletically or whatever, homecoming week is a big deal here. Kids will come out. We probably have the bleachers filled with kids on Tuesday and Thursday night. It's like small games. Kids will get pretty excited. I think we had 1700 kids out of our 2500 came to homecoming dance. That's an example of somebody did something that set up a good week of homecoming and it's not about anything else. It's about your grade level and you're competing against each other and there's some ribbing, but it's cool.

The freshman get used to what the school is all about, so we always pick if we can, earliest homecoming we can get because the freshman need to know what it's all about. They're coming from middle school where they're supposed to shut up at assemblies and you can't get people to be quiet. There's a lot of pride in the school. I think that's the first part is people have pride in this school. It was the only high school up until 14 years ago, so there's a lot of tradition, thirty-eight state titles. There's not a lot of high schools that I can say they've had that, are all state.

Our athletes in the hallways are only if you get all state. There's a lot of tradition that you can build on, successful tradition, and academically we're good. We're not at the 24 level of the ACT, but we're still pretty good in the state, so you try and build on that and get kids connected. Back in the day, each high school had a 100 stipends for sports and clubs. That's how it used to be at each school. We found out that the other school has 600 less kids. They have ten more clubs. District wide right now, we're trying to look at how many stipends can we have, how do we go about doing that?

*How did you evaluate the current activity programs to determine the need?*

I think it's when we looked at our list of emerging clubs and it was this thick, and then we have clubs that we're noticing are cancelling all the time. In that meeting, there's six kids, so first you have to be honest with teachers. Okay, there's never any expectation. We ethically need to tell them what the standards are and then this year, we're holding them to them, so next year, there will a decision. You
know people will be upset, but the Union understands that we can get rid of any contract at any time. Everything is a three year process in high school. It just takes a while. We're just trying to make sure we match our clubs and our limited resources with what the kids want.

What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve activity programming?

It's not what we want. We're starting a step dance club. It's a bunch of Hispanic students and African-American students. They want it. It's called Step, Step, Stepping, so we're starting that club. They've got a Dean, and the Dean is like I'll do it. So, they got a Dean to do it. He works with a lot of those kids. That's a new club that has more than our ping pong club. You look at when those start emerging and it gets to a point where we have to tell them to either quite or they could do it on their own, but we can't pay them. That's hard. Science Olympia we're on our second person who's been doing it for pro bono and the LGBT or the GSA, we're on our first person, but those are the ones that have done it the longest and held the most kids. It's like if you have the kids, if you have the interest, we'll try and find money for them.

What areas of activity programming did you determine were in need of improvement?

There's two things going on with activities. One, how do we get more activities? We have two right now, the Gay-Straight Lesbian Bi Transgender group has been running for eight years. We have a sponsor. No payment. We have another club, a photography club that last time I checked those kids take the pictures during the day. They don't really show up. Get rid of that club. It took us a couple of years though. How many kids are we going to tolerate being in a club? We should have at least 25. We have 2500 kids. If you don't have 25, you're not going to be getting that stipend anymore.

It's going to come from the kids and usually they'll find a teacher. Mrs. Hancock, will you sponsor this? No, I won't. Teacher, will you sponsor us? Yes I will. They've got to get a teacher. The teacher has got to make sure it's legit. We had some girls who wanted to start a Powder Puff Club. We're not doing that. It has to be fitting a need that meets the appropriateness of the building. We try to have as many clubs, activities, honor societies, as many choices for kids as we can to connect to as many as we can.

What actions did you take in response to this need?

The second piece is how many times you're meeting. If we're going to pay you, you need to meet X amount of times. There's a minimal to it. My new AP, this is her second year, and at the end of this year, she's going to get rid of two clubs and
add two clubs. We try and add the clubs that people are a part of. Science Olympiad was new four years ago. We've been doing really well. Now they pushed in the big leagues. We're not winning like we did the first couple of years. That's an academic. Kids love it, so we're going to get rid of one that isn't working anymore.

If you can't get 25 people, why should we be paying you? It comes down to the adult, so we're looking at getting rid of two. It took a year to look at criteria. What criteria are going to have? How many meetings? What do we expect? We're supposed to come to the activity advisor meetings and then how we add them is there a void? What's the void that we aren't offering? I thought we needed a Latino Unidos Club or Hispanic Culture Club, but the students asked last year that are Hispanic were like no, we don't want a club. We work after school. We don't have time for this stuff. It's not going to come from me.

*How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving activity programming?*

The board is big into that and I think we have 68% of our kids are connected in athletics or clubs. That's a pretty high percent.

There might be some repeat in that because it's not perfect either, but about 68% of our kids are connected in something. There are just some kids that if they're connected, it's at church. They're connected, but they're riding Equestrian horses and that's not at school. We try to connect with as many as we can. The board believes that's another way we could stop suicides is are kids involved in a club? Are they involved in an act? It doesn't matter what club it. We have the Gamers Club. There's 150 kids. On a Friday, they like to play games. It's not the games we think. It's all computerized now. It's does it meet the kid's needs? Is there a void?

**Summary of Responses to Subsection 3 – Activity Programming**

In regards to providing leadership towards improving Activity Programming in their buildings, each principal gave evidence of concern with the Ethic of Care. They spoke of the importance for each of them to have buildings where students can be involved, where relationships are caring, and where the greatest happiness can be achieved for the most students. The principals all spoke to the connections between students and staff that occur when there is a robust Activity Program in a school. The interpersonal interactions that occurred from students seeking a sponsor in order to begin
the process of a club becoming a reality was mentioned twice as evidence that Activity Programs were reflections of the student body. There also was a strong reliance within these schools on student-staff relationships as a driver for Activity Programming.

When asked to discuss how they evaluated the need for changes to Activity Programming, however, the influence switched to more the Ethic of Justice. Principals spoke to the need to evaluate the numbers of students in clubs as a criteria for their existence. Three of the four principals described a detailed process for evaluating clubs based on membership and club meeting frequency. Each of these three spoke to the need to be responsible with the funding that was available and therefore had specific criteria and processes for ensuring a fair distribution of funding to the groups that were most active. The reality of a fixed funding source was the basis for these detailed processes.

The most profound ethical influence that was evident in the responses to what compelled these building leaders to make changes to the Activity Programming was the Ethic of Care. All four principals acknowledged the importance of creating opportunities for students to have a role in deciding which activities were needed and to be able to pursue passions outside of the classroom. All of the principals emphasized the importance of the relationships that are engendered, both student-student and student-staff, in a robust Activity program. One principal noted how important he felt it was for his teachers to grow outside of their classrooms and become more focused on creating relationships that were not merely academically driven.

Though not as prevalent as the Ethic of Care, the Ethic of Critique emerged as an influence. Student voice was mentioned as important by all of the building leaders. Two of the principals included ALL student voices as an important factor in leading change in
Activity Programming. While this may not seem significantly different on the surface, it is significant when viewed through the lens of race, power, and privilege. (Delpit, 1995) These two principals were not only saying that Activity Programs encouraged student voice in the process, they also were conscious of which student voices were being heard.

One principal spoke of the Latino and African American populations requesting that a “Stepping” Club be started. The principal openly acknowledged that he did not know the first thing about “Stepping”, but he recognized that this was important to a population in his school that had less privilege. When the students convinced one of the Deans to volunteer to sponsor the club, the principal allowed it to begin meeting, and spoke to how it opened up an avenue for an underprivileged group to pursue a passion.

In terms of responding to the need for changes to the Activity Programs and the sustaining the changes, the Ethic of Justice was highly influential in their responses. Three of the four principals emphasized the need to be fair and equitable in distributing limited funding based on a strict criteria. One principal noted that there had been discussion with the teacher union and that there was a clear understanding that stipends for club sponsors could be reallocated at any time. While the Ethic of Care emerged in their responses, there were more responses to these prompts that indicated the primary focus for evaluating and maintaining Activity funding was an ethical, equitable-driven model for being fair.
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<td><strong>What areas did you determine…</strong></td>
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<td><strong>What actions did you take…</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How have you sustained…</strong></td>
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</table>
Describe a scenario…

The question is how you evaluate your programming and services on an annual basis to make sure that you're keeping up with the trends.

How did you evaluate…

If you have the kids and the interest, we’ll find the money for it.

What ethical considerations were important…

I have been fortunate to be in different organizations and see different things and have been able to pull from those different organizations to create the best of both worlds.

What areas did you determine…

We are trying to ensure that our clubs and activities match the interests of our students.

What actions did you take…

Our building goal for next year will be finding a connection for all kids in the building.

How have you sustained…

You reach out, I saw this fabulous new teacher, and I don’t think she’s involved. Get her involved.

**Figure 19.** Exemplary Chart of Responses from Interview Question #3 Aligned to Ethical Frameworks

**Interview Question #4 – Classroom Instruction**

*Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the classroom instruction in your building. How did you evaluate the current classroom instruction to determine the need? What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve classroom instruction? What areas of classroom instruction did you determine were in need of improvement? What actions did you take in response to this need? How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving classroom instruction?*

Principal 3

*Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the classroom instruction in your building.*

Any time we have an audience, we are emphasizing student engagement, joyful learning, critical thinking and just loving our kids. We are constantly thanking people and acknowledging them publicly with specificity, telling them specifically why they are good at what they do.

We're feeding that need for human beings to be acknowledged from time to time about the great work that they do. Sometimes we'll have kids come in and they'll share it. They'll tell teachers in front of other teachers why they're so good.
How did you evaluate the current classroom instruction to determine the need?

This is what we do. One of the first things we did when I took over is we went right back to this. I said, "This is something that's been in place for a decade. Do we believe in this?"

We went through every syllable of this. We decided, yeah, that's where we want to be. This is who we are. Everything is guided right now by this and, at the same time, we adopted the thinking of Daniel Pink and Yong Zhao and Stephanie Pace Marshall and Ken Robinson and all these engagement gurus, John Bean, I mentioned before, Tony Wagner ... All those people and those voices made a lot of sense to us ... Margaret Wheatley ... That's where we thought we needed to go.

That was anecdotal. At the same time, everyone around us was moving toward EPASS and drilling into data and doing these data retreats to be able to find ways in standardized testing to ... It's criminal.

What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve classroom instruction?

Where does it come from? I guess that it's so painfully obvious that that's what learning should be. I see the very best teachers we have here and how they connect to kids and how those kids perform for them and the miracles that are developed.

Even when those same teachers get the very brightest kids, they find ways to stretch those kids to a whole new level that would never even be measured on anything that we look to measure.

It's stuff like that that just comes out of nowhere because we really value education here. When you ask me where does this come from, a lot of it has nothing to do with me. I'm just listening to the needs of what our parents want, what our kids desire and what our teachers are capable of doing.

What areas of classroom instruction did you determine were in need of improvement?

I think it's so simple. Get rid of the shackles. Let folks really get after it and do what they want to do. Don't force-feed them to do something, to teacher-proof them but instead ... When we interview somebody, I'll say to them is, "Patrick, we're hiring you. You. I want to know about your roots. I want to know why do you love words so much. Why are you so well read? Why are you so careful about the way you write? How do you hit a golf ball as hard as you do?"
Seriously, I'm hiring them. I'm not hiring someone to fill in some role here. I want you to break it open. I want you to come and party with us. Our staff, they have lives beyond this place. They love it and they learn. That's where our staff are very much alike in area schools and here.

*What actions did you take in response to this need?*

One of the things that dawned on me ... Should have dawned on me years ago before I was a principal. Whenever you have those very few moments where your whole staff is together at a faculty meeting or opening of school or Institute Day, those better be killer good. That's something that I'm so proud of.

*How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving classroom instruction?*

When you walk in to a faculty meeting, typically you're walking in and one of our very best talented kids is entertaining us with something. Last week we had Rhapsody and Blue with the number one Clarinetist in the country and in the state.

They're walking in, beautiful music, the meeting starts, and we immediately go to student engagement of some sort. We call Golden Lessons. We have teachers that are teaching remarkable things, sharing their lesson with takeaways for everyone to be able to ... and it usually connects to the PD that we did prior to the meeting whenever that was.

These meetings, instead of becoming these dreaded ... It's very open. I wish we could get all the voices involved but there's 150 of us typically there and the rest just make it up the next day but the design of those meeting's something that I think people recognize we're really making the effort to make these moments together really important.

Principal 4

*Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the classroom instruction in your building.*

Again, I’m going to step back. I’m going to look more programmatically if that’s okay because we’ve done some I think systemic work that has … That was needed. This is a very high-functioning high school. It has been for a long time, and I have never personally been in a school that has better kits. It’s just … It’s amazing, and teachers. It’s a great place to be. As we went through the RTI process, we really went through it and tried to do it authentically. We had to admit, as we looked at Tier 1, the first question is, “How have you certified that your curriculum and instruction is where it should be?”
How did you evaluate the current classroom instruction to determine the need?

We’re working really hard with our center schools because they’re identifying the Special Ed or putting them in the old program and not challenging them with the academic vocabulary they need. You can’t come in this high school with a fourth grade reading level and succeed the way you need to succeed and be ready for what’s coming at you in this world. These are kids who have been with us through the entire path. That’s not like they moved in. Their parents moved in. Their parents don’t speak English.

They have lived here their whole life. There’s no excuse why those kids aren’t at standard and above. In fact, should be exceeding standards because they’re bilingual. They got to have greater density and understanding of language than other kids. We have work to do, but we’ve made progress for sure.

What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve classroom instruction?

Because I think the main thing was critic and justice because we have kids who were not being served and still do. We have kids who … I think as a building, if I were to ask 10 years ago a kid struggling, the main question was, “What’s the kid going to do different?” Now, the main question is, “What am I going to do differently, so that I can help that kid?” That’s the question we got to be asking because kids come to us with all kinds of strengths and challenges, and we need to make sure we’re meeting … We’re doing the best we possibly can do for all kids. We have not solve that.

It’s not like I think we have come to a point. I’m certainly … Think we can … We keep saying that if we want to maintain excellence, you have to continuously improve. You have to continuously improve. The question is, what’s the most important area for us to continue to improve on? I know for some of our Hispanic kids who are graduating this high school without the skills that every other kid had, that’s not okay. For some of our low-income kids, that’s not okay. I can tell you, for some of our Hispanic kids, we can’t solve that problem alone either.

What areas of classroom instruction did you determine were in need of improvement?

We hadn’t and didn’t need to sort to say. We have a lot of high-functioning kids, and you don’t need to as long as you just look at your average score. One, I’m a proponent of the MCLB components that have illuminated the gaps that we have in how we support kids, and we do have gaps. What I say is, “If we can’t solve this problem, it can’t be solved, and I don’t believe it can’t be solved. I believe it can be solved.” Knowing that it’s a problem, and that’s been illuminated for us, that has called us to a different level of action that we’d have in the past.
What actions did you take in response to this need?

Then, I had all of my administrative team read several leadership books on more systemic things, and we talked to them. We took our time with this, but we really worked towards building our capacity to systematically start rowing in the same direction. Then, we created what we called organization goals. We have really let those evolved. Those are really more of truly a vision for curriculum and instruction. What they include is that we will backward design our courses utilizing UBD. We will infuse the college readiness standards. That is going to … We’re right now revising those.

That will, I’m sure, morph to more of a general skills and content because the skills we’re teaching in physical education are every bit as important as the skills we’re teaching in physics, and math, and everywhere else. We had to say what they are and measure how we’re doing with them, and we are doing them and starting to do that at a much better rate. UBD, and then with intentional focus on those, the standards. The skills and the content. Of course, it’s going to be common core for math and for language arts. It’s going to be the National Science Standards that have been revised for science. It’s going to be the fitness standards that we’re working on there.

How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving classroom instruction?

There has not been work that has been without some pain and without some true leadership learning. When you try and infuse something that systemic, I have learned a ton of lessons about what to do and what not to do. As we go back and we’re revising these going into our next round of looking at this very important work, we are going to do a whole lot more of every mind in this building doing a lot of the thinking that we’ve done. As a leadership team, we’ve did a lot of the thinking.

We included 47 teachers in a lot of this thinking, but we didn’t have a way to take that thinking and get it to teachers, get their wisdom, bring it back; so that when we put it in front of them, everybody goes, “Yeah, I understand it. I agree with it, and I commit to it.” As we go forward, every focus that we’re going to have in … For the curricular and instructional work that we’re going to be spending time on, we are literally going to take that. We have a professional learning committee that will take that out, and we will ask every teacher as we identify the main things that we think we need to work on, “Do you understand it? Do you agree with it, and are you committed to it?”

If we find that any of those three are not high, then we’re going to keep working because it’s not going to work. It’s not going to be what we need it to be. We
have taken a very systemic approach to improving in a high school that never did that.

Principal 5

*Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the classroom instruction in your building.*

Classroom instruction. Many folks know there's been some changes in the evaluation process in the last two to three years. We talk about park. We talk about different testing. Again, when I talked about being more student-centered versus faculty-centered, that's exactly what I mean.

I want to make sure that our curriculum is one that's culturally relevant. We need to have consistency. Because of the amount of students that we have, we certainly have multiple sections of classes. Let's take English for example. It'd be great to note that every freshman class has X amount of papers, consistent. That's an expectation. We're uneven in a lot of those efforts.

When it comes to homework in different classes, when it comes to different lab assignments that students have in Science for example. We're uneven. The thing that we have to address is that consistency. Why is that?

Let's talk about equity and excellence. It's not fair for a student to have an experience where, in their freshman year, let's say that their teacher signs two papers. Some of their other classmates get five. Who's going to be better prepared for sophomore when that teacher assigns ten papers? The one that had two or the one that had five?

Granted that's a stretch and that's a polar opposite of an example but my point is, again, consistency. Consistency and rigor opposed to dumbing down curriculum. Skills versus content. These are conversations that we continue to grapple with. Again, in an environment that's been relatively autonomous for years where teachers had been able to do their own.

*How did you evaluate the current classroom instruction to determine the need?*

Those are ways that I've impacted the academic environment. Again, the evaluation process are going to do some of that itself. When I stand before the faculty and tell them that 30% of my evaluation currently is directly related to student achievement and what I do is I look at our ... in the previous year of our PSAE scores, I've chosen areas specifically where we've been deficient.

Right now, those areas are Reading and Math. Probably similar to a lot of other schools but that's my area of focus. When I look at a Reading Program, one of my
personal goals is to make sure that our students that maybe aren't at grade level, by the end of their freshman year, are at grade level.

Those are things that, again, I pride myself in doing because that's what I think is best for kids and that's the right thing to do.

What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve classroom instruction?

I'm an agent for change. I think that that's leadership. One of the things that, when I talk, and I'll never forget it is when 9-11 happened. I was teaching English and I just felt helpless. I wanted to do more and that's when I realized that, for me, I wanted to impact a broader scale and a broader scope of the educational environment.

I think it's a gift. I think it's a God-given talent. Sometimes it's hard to explain but that's in my ethos and that's my core. Because of those principles and because of those ideas, it's lead me and got me to the place where I am now.

As a result of that, I feel that it's incumbent upon me to give back in that way and, again, make sure that people are ... If we're not thinking about those things, as long as I'm in a position of power and authority and have the ability to impact what's happening educationally in this building, those are the things that I want to do.

What areas of classroom instruction did you determine were in need of improvement?

A goal of mine is to get teachers to start talking to each other. What's it look like in a division where you've got five teachers that are teaching the same thing and you give them 90 minutes to talk once every other week about their craft and about their curriculum, more importantly, about their lesson planning.

Can we have some common informative assessment? Those things are things that people really, really were gun-shy about. We really were afraid to show each other example of student work because we felt that there was this competition that was happening.

For me, it's not about a competition, it's about how we can learn and learn from each other and make sure that our students are having the best experiences. If you and I teach the same class and we're teaching Great Gatsby and I'm struggling with getting a particular point across, it'd be great to know that a colleague is teaching that same thing and has a different methodology or different way of reaching to kids because, again, if that's something that lends itself to the
students actually grasping that knowledge and that content, why the hell wouldn't I use it?

What actions did you take in response to this need?

In order to do that, teachers need to talk. I've been trying to provide a professional development model where teachers are afforded the opportunities to do that. Right now, we have a late arrival model, much to the chagrin of some of our community members but the goal of that is 90 minutes every other week really amounts to, teachers get to talk about their craft.

How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving classroom instruction?

There's a couple of ways that are formal. I mean, the essential survey that happens every year now for principals is one way that I can figure out the beat and pulse of what's happening. Again, I say that with a tongue-in-cheek ... Yeah, the five essential survey. I say that tongue-in-cheek because, again like I've said, I've been here seven years. It's going to take a while for me to influence a culture in a way that I really feel impact all of our students.

I know that as long as some of the people in the building are appreciative of the leadership and appreciative of the way I'm going, I can deal with some of the resistance. One of the things I always say is there's a fine line between leading a parade and being run out of town and you need to know the difference.

Right now, I'm leading a parade and that feels really good but through a critical evaluation of our programs and services, the things that I'm finding is that it's incumbent upon us to continue to strive to keep race on the table, to keep equity on the table and allocate resources strategically to make sure that our students that have been under served over the years are those students that are finally getting served.

That doesn't mean that we're taking away from those students that are already striving and being successful, we're just refocusing because we know that by improving those students that are at your lower levels, you're entire student body's going to grow from that.

Principal 7

Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the classroom instruction in your building.

Yeah, something I've heard a lot at high school and I'm pretty sure I heard at middle school. I feel like I'm more experienced now. I can do that in my honors
and AP class, but I can't do it in my standard class. Last year and this year, we really tried to focus on rigor in the classroom. We wanted to say the standard classroom, but it's for every classroom. Truly 80% of our kids are going to college, so when you say standard kids can't do it, we have a lot of standard kids that are going to college.

*How did you evaluate the current classroom instruction to determine the need?*

That's I think what led us to that was just I heard it, the data showed this is where we're at with our standard kids. This is where the other school is at with their standards kids. There's a dip. We have data to back it up… We know our data doesn't match our grades.

*What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve classroom instruction?*

Rigor, just ethics. If your kid was in a standard class and teacher told you, your son can't do this because it's standard, I'd think you'd want to rip their head off. When people say that, and it was said enough to where this was just the culture here. In AP and honors they can do this, but in standard, they can't. We have to fight that culture. It takes three to five years. I haven't switched it yet, but people won't say that to me anymore. They won't say that to me anymore because I'll say really? They know 80% of the kids are going to go to college. I think ethically I have an obligation to these parents of these standard kids that are going to college or going to a career that their last English class or their last math class should be rigorous.

They should learn. It can't just be work sheets and just rote memorization. You have to actually get to the core of understanding. 20% of our kids go to military or the career track, and we still want them to be great members of society, so we owe it to all those kids, every group, whether it be standard, ELL, Special Ed. Ethically, we should educate all kids.

*What areas of classroom instruction did you determine were in need of improvement?*

We're trying to help them understand what rigor is, how do you create rigor? Is it making more work sheets? No. It is making it harder on the kid where they feel like they can't be successful? No.

*What actions did you take in response to this need?*

…we've been talking about rigor in the classroom. That's one of the focuses we've done. I don't know if you ever started the Danielson, but we're on Danielson 5.0. This is our sixth year. Every teacher we're meeting with, we're trying to help them
move from proficient to distinguished. That's classroom instruction and how do you help teachers? Our biggest problem right now is most of our teachers all got distinguished before I got here and I just try and use the rubric.

*How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving classroom instruction?*

They're nervous because we're having a dip in enrollment in the next five years. They think if I'm proficient, then you're going to fire me because I'm old and you're going to keep the young one, and that's not how it's going to work. We're trying to fight through like how do we make teachers better, not just because they want to keep the job, but we want learning to improve. As a building, we're working on rigor. As a leadership team, we're really focusing on how do we focus our planning conferences, our reflection conferences, our feedback, and our work to make learning a priority in the classroom. We don't have an answer. There's no silver bullet, but we're trying to get better at that.

**Summary of Responses to Subsection 4 – Classroom Instruction**

This area provided the most diversity in responses. Principals were clearly influenced by the entire spectrum of ethical frameworks when evaluating Classroom Instruction in their buildings. The areas of improvement of Academic Programming discussed were: Student engagement, certified instruction under Tier I criteria, culturally relevant instruction, ensuring rigor and viability for every class regardless of track. From this broad spectrum of initiatives came an even broader array of influences for making changes to the above programming.

Principal 3 focused on student engagement in and outside of the classroom. He emphasized the need for caring and responsive professional development opportunities that highlighted teacher and student achievement. He referenced “joyful learning” multiple times and spoke of his responsibility to ensure that the staff encouraged students to appreciate the present over looking ahead to college and beyond. He eschewed the
focus on standardized testing as an indicator for change and instead relied on the Ethic of Care to keep his focus on the general health of his school.

Principal 4 reported that the focus of his school has been driven by the mandates of Response to Instruction (RTI) and an adherence to ensuring that they are providing all students a viable and guaranteed curriculum. He referenced No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates as having forced his school to identify and close curricular gaps. He acknowledged seeking justice within this process, working to ensure that all students received a rigorous curriculum and the supports that the law entitled them to. And while he briefly spoke of “all students”, his framework for viewing this work was clearly the Ethic of Justice.

Principal 5’s responses indicated influences from the Ethics of Care, Profession, and Critique. He referenced standardized testing as informing his actions, as well as evaluating his curriculum for rigor throughout the tracks. These are indicators of the Ethic of the Profession having an influence on him. But then he discussed the equity components that he uses when evaluating his curriculum and classroom instruction. He questioned whether students in lower level classes were receiving the same rigorous expectations as those students in Honors level classes. This clearly reflected an influence from the Ethic of Critique. Lastly, he maintained a desire for classroom instruction to be more “student-centered”, which reflects the influence of the Ethic of Care.

Principal 7 also discussed ensuring high rigor throughout all levels of the curriculum. The Ethic of the Profession largely influenced his actions based on his responses. He spoke to the work the leadership team was doing on professional development, the teacher evaluation model, and the curriculum review model. He also
referenced the ethical “obligation” he feels to the parents of all students, not just the ones that are college bound. This reflects the Ethic of the Profession influencing his views.

When asked how they evaluated the current Classroom Instruction, answers were varied, but largely aligned with the Ethic of the Profession. Principals looked for the existence of course standards, reviewed their evaluation models, reviewed data from the Five Essentials Survey, and reviewed the work of professional authors and educators for inspiration. These answers are more technical in nature than in the other subcategories.

When asked to reflect on the ethical influences that compelled them to take action around Classroom Instruction, the Ethics of Care, Critique, and the Profession were evident. The use of standardized assessment data, college readiness scores, and teacher ratings as a means of professional excellence were all mentioned as factors influencing their decisions. More than half of the responses reflected a concern for the best interests of the students, however. From the standpoint of the Ethic of Critique, one principal spent significant time discussing the importance of understanding the Hispanic population at his school and providing the highest quality classroom instruction for them.
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<tr>
<th><strong>Examples of the Ethic of Care in Responses to Question #4 – Classroom Instruction</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe a scenario…</strong></td>
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<td><strong>How did you evaluate…</strong></td>
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<td><strong>What ethical considerations were important …</strong></td>
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<td><strong>How did you evaluate…</strong></td>
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Examples of the Ethic of the Profession in Responses to Question #4 – Classroom Instruction

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Describe a scenario… We moving towards more of a skills and content approach aligned to standards.</td>
<td>We used the college readiness standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>How did you evaluate… We used the college readiness standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What ethical considerations were important … I have an obligation to these parents of these standard kids that are going to college or going to a career that their last English class or their last Math class should be rigorous.</td>
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<td>What areas did you determine … The skills and the content. Of course, it’s going to be Common Core for math and language arts. It’s going to be National Science Standards and fitness standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What actions did you take … I had all my administrative team read several leadership books on more systemic things, and we talked to them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>How have you sustained… I start with my lead teachers, and I think they understand, but then they had better start talking to their departments.</td>
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*Figure 20.* Exemplary Chart of Responses from Interview Question #4 Aligned to Ethical Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Ethic of Justice</th>
<th>Ethic of Critique</th>
<th>Ethic of Care</th>
<th>Ethic of the Profession</th>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>Principal 5</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<td>Principal 7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>113</td>
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</table>

*Figure 21.* Number of comments coded by Ethical Lens for Each Principal

Interview data for each principal were disaggregated by ethical framework and subject area. This figure reflects both the total comments coded per subject area aligned to each ethical framework as well as the HSSSE sub-score for each school in that subject area compared to total subsection score. Figures 22-25 reflect these data.
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<tr>
<th>Principal 3</th>
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<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of Critique</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of Justice</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of the Profession</th>
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<td>0 (38.14/65)</td>
<td>0 (38.14/65)</td>
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*Figure 22. Summary Chart of Questions and Responses Aligned to Ethical Framework for Principal 3*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal 4</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of Care</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of Critique</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of Justice</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of the Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Programming (C/I Engagement)</td>
<td>1 (38.14/65)</td>
<td>9 (38.14/65)</td>
<td>0 (38.14/65)</td>
<td>28 (38.14/65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities Programming (S/P Engagement)</td>
<td>7 (8.63/17)</td>
<td>1 (8.63/17)</td>
<td>4 (8.63/17)</td>
<td>0 (8.63/17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Instruction C/I Engagement</td>
<td>5 (38.14/65)</td>
<td>5 (38.14/65)</td>
<td>3 (38.14/65)</td>
<td>11 (38.14/65)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 23. Summary Chart of Questions and Responses Aligned to Ethical Framework for Principal 4*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal 5</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of Care</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of Critique</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of Justice</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of the Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Programming (C/I Engagement)</td>
<td>3 (38.51/65)</td>
<td>7 (38.51/65)</td>
<td>1 (38.51/65)</td>
<td>10 (38.51/65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities Programming (S/P Engagement)</td>
<td>6 (8.63/17)</td>
<td>6 (8.63/17)</td>
<td>2 (8.63/17)</td>
<td>7 (8.63/17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Instruction (C/I Engagement)</td>
<td>8 (38.51/65)</td>
<td>6 (38.51/65)</td>
<td>0 (38.51/65)</td>
<td>8 (38.51/65)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 24. Summary Chart of Questions and Responses Aligned to Ethical Framework for Principal 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal 7</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of Care</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of Critique</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of Justice</th>
<th>Number of Responses Aligned to Ethic of the Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Programming (C/I Engagement)</td>
<td>5 (38.72/65)</td>
<td>5 (38.72/65)</td>
<td>0 (38.72/65)</td>
<td>23 (38.72/65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social – Emotional Programming (E Engagement)</td>
<td>14 (25.18/39)</td>
<td>8 (25.18/39)</td>
<td>0 (25.18/39)</td>
<td>14 (25.18/39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities Programming (S/P Engagement)</td>
<td>10 (8.21/17)</td>
<td>0 (8.21/17)</td>
<td>4 (8.21/17)</td>
<td>11 (8.21/17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Instruction (C/I Engagement)</td>
<td>1 (38.72/65)</td>
<td>4 (38.72/65)</td>
<td>0 (38.72/65)</td>
<td>14 (38.72/65)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 25. Summary Chart of Questions and Responses Aligned to Ethical Framework for Principal 7
Summary

This study seeks to augment the research base in the field of educational leadership by seeking data for the following research questions:

1. According to data gathered in Illinois high schools that administer the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), what are the factors that contribute to student belonging in high schools?

2. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, how do school leaders assess their learning environments to determine whether factors that contribute to student belonging are evident?

3. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, what do high school building principals do to continuously review and stress the importance of the factors that contribute to the culture?

4. According to high school principals, what ethical lenses influence them as they create and sustain cultures of belonging in their high schools?

5. What implications do the findings of this research have for leaders of high schools?

The research study utilized a sequential explanatory mixed methods design. Data from the HSSSE was analyzed for indicators of student belonging in schools that administered the survey. Participants were selected based on an established cut score from the HSSSE data. Participants were administered semi-structured interviews. Quantitative and qualitative phases, target populations, and sampling strategies are all
described in this chapter. Data from the interviews were coded in alignment with both the constructs of belonging identified in the HSSSE as well as the ethical frameworks of Care, Critique, Justice, and the Profession.

In Chapter V, the researcher will highlight important findings from an analysis of the data. The research questions will be answered using data analysis findings. Connections between the data from this research and past research will be explored. Findings that are not supported by the data and may be considered new discoveries will be discussed in detail. Lastly, limitations of findings, the researcher’s potential bias, and implications for future areas of research will be discussed.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF DATA

Overview

This chapter provides: (1) a summary of the rationale and methodology used in this research, (2) the answers to the research questions based on the data collection and analysis, (3) connections made between the research findings and related literature, and, (4) a summary of research findings. Additionally, this chapter addresses the limitations of the research, areas for possible future research, and the implications of this research for educational leaders.

Summary of Rationale and Methodology

What is belonging? What does it mean for a school to have a culture of belonging? How do school leaders place value on leading schools that have a culture of belonging? What impact do schools with cultures of belonging have on student achievement? And what do school leaders of schools with high levels of belonging due to influence these cultures? The research is extensive on all of these questions (Anderman, 2004; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Born, Meeuwisse, & Severeins, 2010; Bucknam, James, & Milenkiewicz, 2008; Bustamante, 2009; Fullan, 2001; Goodenow, 1992; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Muller, 2001; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Strike, 2007; Willms, 2001). As the nation’s public schools have been overwhelmed by accountability measures that demand increased attention to standardized tests scores and
Students who feel they belong to the greater school community are more likely to adopt healthy and adaptive motivational orientations toward academic achievement (Osterman, 2000; Tinto, 1997). Students who feel part of the school community are more likely to place a higher value on and have higher levels of expectations for success in the classroom (Delpit, 1995). School leaders grounded in a holistic and socially just approach must place an emphasis on creating and sustaining cultures of belonging as they balance the demands of high stakes testing in the age of accountability (Herrera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The purpose of this study was to determine how high school leaders evaluate their schools as having cultures of belonging, and to examine the ethical frameworks that influence leaders as they sustain and enhance a culture of belonging within their schools. Student belonging can be defined as individuals’ perceptions of fitting in and belonging with others at the same institution (Anderman, 2004; Osterman, 2000). Other facets of student belonging have been described as a sense of commitment to the school, the individuals’ commitment to work in this setting, and a sense of one’s abilities being recognized by others (Smerdon, 2002). Adolescents who do not have a sense of connection to a larger group or community likely will experience increased stress and emotional distress (Baumeister, 1995). Better perceived school relationships with teachers and peers are likely to lead to a stronger sense of belonging in school, which, in turn, is likely to lead to more positive beliefs and emotions about one’s learning, which
then relates to higher academic grades and lower levels of behavioral problems (Roeser et al., 1996).

Causal connections are varied when looking at the relationships between student belonging and academic motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 1999), student belonging and grade-point average (Roeser & Midgely, 1996), lower rates of school drop-out, and belonging and social-emotional functioning (Anderman, 2004). Some studies have shown a causal relationship between student belonging and absenteeism (Nichols, 2008; Osterman, 2000; Roeser et al., 1996).

While the first purpose of this study was to determine how high school leaders evaluate their schools as having cultures of belonging, a secondary purpose of this research was to determine, through interviews and document analysis, the ethical frameworks that influence leaders as they sustain and enhance a culture of belonging within their schools. Studies suggest that the relationships students have with their teachers can make a difference not only on student academic performance but also on their feelings toward their school. (Baumeister, 1995; Endo & Harpel, 1982; Hallinan, 2008; Herrera, 2010; Klem, 2004; Muller, 2001) School leaders, on the other hand, are not a very frequently studied group in educational research in terms of their effects on students’ sense of belonging. Born, Meeuwisse, and Severeins (2010) suggest that the way school leaders socialized with their students was indeed valued by the students. Not only did school leaders’ leadership qualities matter in managing their schools, but so did their social interactions with the students influence the students’ feelings towards the school.
There is a growing body of research that strongly links administrator leadership to student achievement (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Findings reported in various reviews of research and large-scale multivariate analyses confirmed that leaders strongly influence student learning by creating and sustaining a culture that sets high expectations and enables teachers and students to learn and work productively (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Robinson et al. (2008) undertook a meta-analysis of leadership dimensions across 27 studies and found a moderate impact (80 indicators across nine studies) from leadership practices of planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum on student achievement. Waters et al. (2003) identified the correlations in their meta-analyses, finding modest association with measures on knowledge of, participation in, and practice of monitoring and evaluation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

This study was a Sequential Explanatory study that examined quantitative data from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) and qualitative data via structured interviews with existing school leaders. HSSSE data was solicited from every high school district in the state of Illinois that administered the survey between 2007 and 2012. Mean scores were computed and compared. The researcher then solicited the principals of the high schools that had the five highest Mean scores on the HSSSE. A 30-minute semi-structured interview was conducted with the four principals that responded to the Request for Participation email that was sent out. Interview data were coded for evidence of the Ethics of Care, Critique, Justice, and the Profession.

The research questions for this study were:
1. According to data gathered in Illinois high schools that administer the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), what are the factors that contribute to student belonging in high schools?

2. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, how do school leaders assess their learning environments to determine whether factors that contribute to student belonging are evident?

3. In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, what do high school building principals do to continuously review and stress the importance of the factors that contribute to the culture?

4. According to high school principals, what ethical lenses influence them as they create and sustain cultures of belonging in their high schools?

5. What implications do the findings of this research have for leaders of high schools?

Conclusions

Discussion of Research Question #1

According to data gathered in Illinois high schools that administer the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), what are the factors that contribute to student belonging in high schools?

Studies support the belief that student engagement is related to overall emotional feelings of control and belonging in school (Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981; Meeuwisse, Severins, & Born, 2010; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Wentzel (1994) found
that students with a greater perception of school belonging, which he defined as support from teachers, were more likely to be pro-social, which predicted better classroom behavior. In addition, Wentzel (1998) found that students’ perceptions of their teachers’ caring was significantly related to their internal control beliefs, interest in school, and academic output, most notably regardless of race or socioeconomic status (Wentzel, 1998). Based on the results of the HSSSE, the schools that had the highest levels of belonging were schools 3, 4, 5, and 7. These scores reflect student reports that indicate that they feel that they belong to their schools. The student responses reflect a high sense of cognitive/intellectual, emotional, and social/participatory engagement, all strong indicators of a culture of belonging.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>C/I</th>
<th>S/P</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>Avg. Mean</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>39.83</td>
<td>9.28</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>25.84</td>
<td>30.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>38.14</td>
<td>8.96</td>
<td>28.56</td>
<td>25.22</td>
<td>29.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>1,962</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>38.51</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>26.27</td>
<td>24.47</td>
<td>29.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 7</td>
<td>1,920</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>38.72</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>25.18</td>
<td>24.04</td>
<td>30.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>1,316</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>37.57</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>23.99</td>
<td>29.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>36.42</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>26.16</td>
<td>23.49</td>
<td>28.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 8</td>
<td>1,916</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>35.92</td>
<td>7.76</td>
<td>23.89</td>
<td>22.52</td>
<td>28.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>34.08</td>
<td>7.66</td>
<td>25.45</td>
<td>22.40</td>
<td>26.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 8</td>
<td>1,846</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>34.02</td>
<td>8.93</td>
<td>24.06</td>
<td>22.34</td>
<td>25.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 9</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>35.67</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>23.44</td>
<td>22.16</td>
<td>28.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 9</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>33.94</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>21.63</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 26. HSSSE Scores by Average Mean and Range, Ranked Highest to Lowest*
### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>C/I</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S/P</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HSSSE</td>
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<td>17 (14%)</td>
<td>39 (32%)</td>
<td>121 (100%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>39.83 (51%)</td>
<td>9.28 (12%)</td>
<td>28.4 (37%)</td>
<td>77.51 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>38.14 (50%)</td>
<td>8.96 (12%)</td>
<td>28.56 (38%)</td>
<td>75.66 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>38.51 (52%)</td>
<td>8.63 (12%)</td>
<td>26.27 (36%)</td>
<td>73.41 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 7</td>
<td>38.72 (54%)</td>
<td>8.21 (11%)</td>
<td>25.18 (35%)</td>
<td>72.11 (100%)</td>
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<td>School 5</td>
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<td>25.9 (36%)</td>
<td>71.97 (100%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>36.42 (52%)</td>
<td>7.9 (11%)</td>
<td>26.16 (37%)</td>
<td>70.48 (100%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>School 5</td>
<td>36.42 (52%)</td>
<td>7.9 (11%)</td>
<td>26.16 (37%)</td>
<td>70.48 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>35.92 (53%)</td>
<td>7.76 (11%)</td>
<td>23.89 (35%)</td>
<td>67.57 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 7</td>
<td>35.92 (53%)</td>
<td>7.76 (11%)</td>
<td>23.89 (35%)</td>
<td>67.57 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 8</td>
<td>34.08 (51%)</td>
<td>7.66 (11%)</td>
<td>25.45 (38%)</td>
<td>67.19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 8</td>
<td>34.08 (51%)</td>
<td>7.66 (11%)</td>
<td>25.45 (38%)</td>
<td>67.19 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 6</td>
<td>34.02 (51%)</td>
<td>8.93 (13%)</td>
<td>24.06 (36%)</td>
<td>67.01 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 9</td>
<td>33.94 (52%)</td>
<td>7.64 (12%)</td>
<td>23.3 (36%)</td>
<td>64.88 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>31.88 (50%)</td>
<td>7.31 (12%)</td>
<td>24.24 (38%)</td>
<td>63.43 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Figure 27.** Engagement Scores as a Percentage of Total Score

**Cognitive/Intellectual Engagement.** The Cognitive/Intellectual Engagement (C/I) subsection accounted for 54% of the overall test score. Of all of the HSSSE data collected, the schools with the four highest scores on the C/I subsection were the schools that had the highest Mean scores. Only school 7, however, scored high enough in the area of Cognitive/Intellectual Engagement to be proportional to the overall weight of the subsection. The other three schools, all of which had higher Mean scores on the test, scored below 54% on this subsection. The range of scores on this subsection amongst all of the reported data was 4 percentage points (50-54%). This suggests that Cognitive/Intellectual Engagement is less of a variable factor in schools that have strong cultures of belonging.

**Emotional Engagement.** The Emotional Engagement subsection accounted for 14% of the overall test score. None of the schools that reported data scored high enough to account for 14% of the total score on this subsection. The top three schools with the
highest Mean scores all registered scores on the Emotional Engagement subsection that comprised 12% of their total scores. School 7, the fourth-ranked school, registered a score that comprised 11% of their total score. This subsection had the tightest range, two percentage points, of scores amongst all of the schools. These two factors would both indicate that Emotional Engagement in these schools is more of a constant factor.

**Social/Participatory Engagement.** The Social/Participatory Engagement subsection accounted for 32% of the overall score on the HSSSE. Unlike the other two subsections, in which the scores of very few schools were proportional to the section percentage, in this subsection every school exceeded the percentage. Amongst the top four schools in terms of Mean score, school 4’s subset score comprised 38% of their total score, compared to 37% for school 3. Schools 5 and 7 saw their percentages decrease to 36% and 35% respectively. This would suggest that Social/Participatory Engagement as measured by the HSSSE has a relatively significant impact on the cultures of belonging in these schools.

While there appears to be a slight correlation in the top 4 between the percentage weights of the Social/Participatory Engagement subsection and overall Mean scores, there is no evidence of this outside that subgroup. The range of percentages for all of the reporting schools was four percentage points (35-38%). However, as overall Mean scores dropped, the percentage of weight for the Social/Participatory subsection remained high, with even the school with the lowest Mean score having a 38% weight in this subsection. This suggests that Social/Participatory Engagement as measured by HSSSE is more of a constant presence in these schools. In schools that evidenced strong cultures of belonging, as determined by the High School Survey of Student Engagement scores,
students reported high levels of Cognitive/Intellectual Engagement, Emotional Engagement, and Social/Participatory Engagement.

**Discussion of Research Question #2**

In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, how do school leaders assess their learning environments to determine whether factors that contribute to student belonging are evident?

Literature supports the fact that student achievement is linked to school leadership. Marzano (2005) found that educational leaders who utilize 21 leadership behaviors within the school setting substantially impact student achievement. These leadership skills focus on the relational aspects of leadership as much as they do the curriculum, instruction, and assessment knowledge employed. The principals interviewed in this research study reflected this research in the ways in which they sought to evaluate not only the data that resulted from tests, surveys, and needs analyses, but also in the relational components not easily quantified.

**The use of multiple sources of data.** Interview responses revealed that data are an important component of the learning environment when evaluating current programming. All four principals reported reviewing PLAN, EXPLORE, PSAE (Reading and Math subscores), and/or ACT test scores as one aspect of their evaluation for both Academic Programming and Classroom Instruction. Other data from these areas were graduation rates, college success rates, comparison data from neighboring schools, Danielson Evaluation (Danielson, 2013) ratings of teachers, demographic, attendance and
behavior data, and enrollment projections. Each of these data provided the leader and his team perspectives to begin from in looking for gaps in student academic achievement.

When evaluating current Activity Programming as part of the learning environment, the data were heavily enrollment oriented (Ethic of Justice) and student-driven (Ethic of the Profession). All four principals relied heavily on the enrollment numbers and the meeting frequencies when assessing the quality and equity of their Activity Programming. Interview data indicated that Activity programming funding is a fixed entity that requires a building leader to review the expenditures regularly to ensure these resources are being distributed as efficiently as possible. Three of the four Principals stated, in one way or the other, that there had to be basic meeting frequency and enrollment requirements for a club to continue to be funded by the school.

**Reliance on student perspective to evaluate the relevance and engagement of current programming.** Another strong element that emerged from how leaders evaluate Activity Programming as part of the learning environment was the emphasis on listening to student voice. While minimally evident in the other three areas of programming (Academic, Social-Emotional, and Classroom Instruction), the need to access and listen to student voice was reported by all four Principals. Building leaders of schools with strong cultures of belonging as measured by the HSSSE detailed in their interviews that Activity Programming is about providing students with connections outside of the classroom and that in order to do this the voice of the student is of critical importance. In these buildings, students had a voice in what clubs were created and funded. Students had autonomy to propose an idea for a club, to fund a sponsor, and to approach the school for funding. In none of the other programming areas was such a student-emphasis evident.
Utilization of research-based methods to build capacity in their staff towards 
**improving programming.** As Strike (2007) points out, “professional knowledge in 
education consists of a body of ideas, theories, and collective experience about practice 
that may shape practice but does not dictate it in detail” (p. 100). This body of 
professional ideas was evident amongst the sample Principals when discussing means by 
which they evaluate current programming. One Principal spoke of a methodical 
application of the “Backwards Design” model he used to evaluate Academic Instruction 
in his school. The Understanding by Design framework (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011) 
offers a process for developing curriculum, assessment, and instruction. The two areas of 
focus are: (1) focus on teaching and assessing for understanding and learning, and (2) 
design curriculum “backward” from those ends.

Principal 4 discussed the process of using backwards design in evaluating needs 
for improving Academic Programming. He delineated a process of leading his team in 
building their own leadership capacity. The leadership team read books on educational 
leadership. Then, the leadership team performed a needs assessment of the Academic 
Programming across the building. He led the leadership team into the developing of plans 
for improvement and he led the implementation of that plan. Principal 3 discussed the 
works of John Bean, Tony Wagner, and Margaret Wheatley as well as a key partnership 
with Google as crucial components of the improvements made to Academic 
Programming. These leaders made no attempts to reinvent the wheel, so to speak, when it 
came to leading improvement processes in their schools. They provided their teams the 
needed access to expert research to build professional capacity, then led the efforts to 
identify needs and implement the plans for improvement.
When evaluating the Academic, Social-Emotional, and Activity programming in their schools, Principals of schools with strong cultures of belonging:

a. Used multiple sources of data to review current programming,

b. Relyed heavily on student-voice to inform them of the relevance and engagement factor of current programming and,

c. Utilized the work of educational leadership research to build capacity in their staff towards improving their programs.

Discussion of Research Question #3

In high schools where a culture of belonging exists, as measured by the HSSSE, according to high school principals, what do high school building principals do to continuously review and stress the importance of the factors that contribute to the culture?

Highly effective and sustainable organizational systems. The creation of systems that are highly effective and sustainable was clearly evident in the sample group. A staff that models collaboration and expert-sharing has been shown to improve organizational effectiveness (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Mintrop, 2004; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005; Moolenaar, 2010; O'Day, 2004). The influence of collaboration on school performance can be directly related to the importance of relationships within the school community and the inherent benefit of developing new knowledge between individuals (Mohrman, Tnkasi, & Mohrman, 2003). Collaborative and caring environments are key elements of a strong professional system that is sustainable. All of the sample principals spoke of creating systems within their schools that relied on collaboration and relationships to sustain them.
Principal 3 described the system in place at his school whereby they maintain a critical eye on classroom instruction. It begins with a Student Advisory Group that meets with him once a month. Their input on classroom instruction amongst other things is brought to Staff Development Committee, which plans activities for the Literacy Liaisons that reflect student voice. Additionally, teachers have the necessary time to spend with colleagues from different departments to share practices. This process leads to a healthy “buy-in” amongst students, staff, and parents due to the highly collaborative nature.

Principal 4 discussed their “PLC approach” to evaluating programming, which relies on collaborative and professionally driven efforts to ensure student-focused learning outcomes. Because all stakeholders are involved, the process can remain high quality and be sustained over time.

**Ongoing data evaluation.** Principal 4 described a process for ongoing evaluation of Response to Intervention (RTI) programming in his building. The system that was recently put into place thoughtfully incorporates the resources at hand in a manner that builds strong systems of support for students as they matriculate through the high school. Staff teams were created to organize resources and supports for all students. Principal 4 believed that the team-based approach is working, and is sustainable because of the thoughtful and efficient design.

It was evident that data remains a priority every year in the process of ongoing school improvement efforts. All four Principals reported looking at data each year to evaluate programming. Principal 7 noted that the school reviews the academic and survey data every year when looking at the quality of classroom instruction. He also stated that the Board of Education in his district keeps asking him, “When are you going to get a 24
on the ACT?” Principal 7 was particularly specific when reflecting on the data reviewed each year. His school looks at ACT scores, previously looked at PSAE subscores in Reading and Math, looked at college success scores, and compared all of these to their neighboring schools.

Principal 7 also discussed the use of the district’s teacher evaluation model, the Danielson model (Danielson, 2013), in not only reviewing staff performance but also in infusing areas of academic focus across the staff. He used the example of “academic vocabulary” as a focus of his school over the last three years. “As a leadership team, we’re really focusing on how do we focus on our planning conferences, our reflection conferences, our feedback, and our postconferences to make learning a priority in the classroom.” This strategy is a thoughtful, intentional approach to utilizing regular (and state mandated) professional development opportunities for ensuring ongoing programatic quality.

**Efficient and targeted allocation of resources.** All four Principals of these schools that had strong cultures of belonging as measured by the HSSSE acknowledged that funding was a key component in providing robust programs that engage students. All four schools were situated in communities considered affluent and therefore each Principal could identify areas where their students benefitted from more than adequate funding. That being said, three of the four building leaders specifically stated the importance of ensuring that the fiscal resources available were effectively allocated.

Principal 7 repeatedly pointed out that, when it comes to clubs and activities, it is important to spend dollars wisely. He started by recalling the disproportional funding that existed in the district between the two schools when he first took over as Principal, and
the work he did to correct that. He described the annual process of reviewing club membership (minimum 25 expected), meeting schedule (at least once a week expected), and whether the club is still relevant to the students. He alluded to the fact that sponsor stipends are by definition reviewable each year and there is no legal recourse for staff who have a stipend taken away. With this relatively hierarchical approach, staff is encouraged to keep their clubs engaging and relevant to their students. Additionally, given that numbers are reviewed yearly, sponsors, and to a lesser extent students, are kept mindful of the expectation of sustainability.

As Principal 5 put it when asked how he sustains engaging programming for his students, “It’s important to make sure that it’s about putting your money where your mouth is and, unfortunately, I know that many schools are dealing with this, it takes a whole hell of a lot of resources to pull off some of these things. Fortunately right now, my district is one of those that has those resources. I am just interested in allocating those in ways that are different to make sure that we’re meeting the needs of all of our students.” For all of the Principals who spoke to the importance of fiscal resources, appropriate allocation was based on the belief that all students should have opportunities to connect in their buildings. Race was specifically mentioned by three Principals in describing the focus for equitable allocations of resources. When evaluating the Academic, Social-Emotional, and Activity programming in their schools, principals of schools with strong cultures of belonging:

a. Created highly effective and sustainable organizational structures,

b. Utilized a process for ongoing data evaluation and,

c. Worked to ensure efficient and equitable allocation of school resources
Discussion of Research Question #4

According to high school principals, what ethical lenses influence them as they create and sustain cultures of belonging in their high schools?

Ethic of the Profession. The principals that were interviewed were all leaders of schools where a strong culture of belonging was present, according to HSSSE results. They led distinctly unique schools that were academically high performing but had varying degrees of racial and socio-economic diversity. What was quite evident in their responses was that every principal was influenced by the Ethic of the Profession when evaluating current factors in their buildings that influenced a culture of belonging. Interview responses with evidence of the influence of the Ethic of the Profession appeared more than twice as often as any of the other ethical influence and more than the three other ethical influences combined.

The lead administrator is the educational expert bringing staff along in a manner that guides rather than lectures. In this manner, a degree of self-awareness and the ability to see “the forest” are critical attributes to fostering a culture that builds capacity in all staff towards establishing a healthy learning environment. The profession demands a fidelity to the tenets of codes both personal and professional. While personal and professional codes may at times clash, for the building leader influenced by the Ethic of the Profession they intersect most significantly in the area of the best interests of students as the central component to their actions. (Frick, 2013)

According to Shapiro and Stefkovich, as described in Frick (2013):

preparing students to live and work in the 21st century requires very special leaders who have grappled with their own personal and professional codes of
ethics and have reflected on diverse forms of ethics, taking into account the differing backgrounds of the students enrolled in U.S. schools and universities today. By grappling, we mean that those educational leaders have struggled over issues of justice, critique, and care related to the education of children and youth and, through this process, have gained a sense of who they are and what they believe personally and professionally. (p. 16)

School leaders influenced by the Ethic of the Profession apply moral principles to ethical decision-making. They are concerned with fairness and integrity, and rely on knowledge from different professional associations to guide the process. The fundamental questions that guide decision-making are: (1) What does my profession ask me to do, (2) What do various communities expect me to accomplish, and (3) What do I need to take into account as it relates to the best interest of the student? (Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

Examples of the responses that gave evidence of influence by the Ethic of the Profession when asked how they evaluated the need for changes to certain programming in their buildings:

1. We used the college readiness standards.
2. For us, it’s really about having the students understand what the path is in the STEM fields.
3. We did a needs analysis that we needed to expand what we were doing in this area.
4. We do look briefly at ACT, and planned ACT growth.
5. Always in the best interest of the kids, that in any decision I make, I think about the students first.

This prevalence of the influence of the Ethic of the Profession was strongest when principals evaluated Academic Programming. They expressed examining what was in the best interest of their students, evaluating current programming in a systematic way, and using their professional associations and educational background as guidance moving forward.

**Ethic of Care.** Another influence that emerged in how leaders evaluate their buildings for having a culture of belonging was the Ethic of Care. This ethical influence considers relationships as the key to a healthy environment. Building leaders influenced by the Ethic of Care seek to establish the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people through an open, collaborative, and nurturing environment (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). Most notably in the area of Activity Programming, the principals reported wanting to be responsive to the needs of the students primarily in evaluating the programming. In all areas, however, responses indicated that student-teacher relationships were of primary importance, and that caring for and developing healthy and happy students was the mission. According to Principal 3, “We feel that it is essential that we provide them opportunities for meaningful relationships outside the classroom because we know that for a lot of these kids these are going to be life-long friendships.”

What was evident in the interview data was that principals of schools with strong cultures of belonging were strongly influenced by the Ethic of the Profession and the Ethic of Care when evaluating, creating, and sustaining programming that contributed to the culture of belonging.
Ethic of Critique. While not highly represented, it is of interest where the Ethic of Critique was influential. The leader influenced by the Ethic of Critique is concerned with privilege, power and culture. He or she is aware of the inequities that exist between social classes and seeks a discourse that leads to an establishment of a socially just environment. (Shapiro & Gross, 2013) Not surprisingly, when evidence of the Ethic of Critique appeared, it was reported from the principals of the more racially diverse schools in the sample.

Evidence of the Ethic of Critique appeared twice in Principal 4’s response to how he evaluates the current Social-Emotional programming within his school. His school’s student of color population is almost 33% of the total population (second highest of the sample). As he put it, “For many kids who don’t have a kitchen table at home, their parents are both working, or they just have a lot going on in their lives, and they need somebody who can be in contact and following up, making sure they are moving forward in doing their homework.”

Principal 5’s responses to the same question showed evidence of the Ethic of Critique six times. School 5 has a student of color population comprising 47% of the total population, by far the most diverse school in the sample. These data suggest that principals of buildings with higher rates of minority students are more aware of the inequities that exist in their buildings and show a greater tendency towards being influenced by the Ethic of Critique.

Ethic of Justice. The influence of the Ethic of Justice was evident the least in the responses of these principals. Where it was clearly evident, however, was in how these principals evaluated the Activity Programming as a component of the learning
environment. Two-thirds of the responses that showed influences of the Ethic of Justice were in this area. Principal 4 detailed a process whereby club membership numbers were evaluated annually. Additionally, he had advocated for more funding for Activities as his student population grew. Principal 7 said it most clearly as it related to the Ethic of Justice: “How many kids are we going to expect to be in a club? We should have at least 25. We have 2500 kids, if you don’t have 25, you’re not going to be getting that stipend anymore. The second piece is how many times you’re meeting. If we’re going to pay you, you need to meet X amount of times.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Ethic of Justice</th>
<th>Ethic of Critique</th>
<th>Ethic of Care</th>
<th>Ethic of the Profession</th>
<th>Total Comments Coded</th>
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<td>82</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>Principal 7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>113</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 28. Number of Comments Coded by Ethical Framework

Responses to questions regarding how principals “evaluated” the current programming within their schools were disaggregated by program area. This figure indicates which ethical influence was more prevalent in their responses.
Figure 29. Number of Responses Aligned to Ethical Framework for How Principals Evaluated Their Programs

Discussion of Research Question #5

What implications do the findings of this research have for leaders of high schools?

The Ethic of the Profession. These dynamic building leaders were very proud of their high schools. They were leaders of high achieving public schools with strong cultures of belonging in their buildings. They spoke openly and enthusiastically about how good their kids were, how world-class their staffs were, and how supportive their communities were. These school leaders had all faced challenges within their buildings, from student and staff deaths to rapid and ongoing demographic changes in community populations that demanded new approaches to educating their students. As they spoke, their energy seemed to increase, and each principal displayed moments of intense pride, thoughtful candor, and profound resolve to continue the very work they were reflecting upon. What was clear during time with all of them was that they were committed to the
field of educational leadership because they had passions for doing right by kids (Stefkovich, 2014).

The schools that were led by these talented administrators had strong cultures of belonging. The schools were seen as being a safe and caring environment by the students. Academic programming was seen as challenging and relevant to the students. Classroom instruction was engaging and stimulated students to make real-world connections to the material. Activity Programming was accessible for many students, reflected the interests of the student body, and provided connections outside of the classroom. Students felt a part of the school, both in their views of their peers as well as the relationships they had with the adults.

The building leaders in this study were strongly influenced by the Ethic of the Profession. The primary lens through which they viewed their schools was “What is best for kids?” This influence drove the work they did evaluating Academic, Social-Emotional, and Activity Programming in their buildings. If any of these programs were not meeting the needs of a sub-population (students of color, lower-performing students, students with IEP’s), the principals utilized their leadership skills to build staff capacity and implement new approaches. They stressed ongoing evaluation of programming under the “best interest of the student” model, and were not willing to rely on the status quo, despite all being leaders of high performing schools. According to Principal 4, “We will utilize research-based instructional strategies and we’ve developed instructional norms that we expect to see in every classroom, every day, by everyone.”

Throughout the process of continually challenging their staffs to improve, these administrators utilized professional resources for developing staff capacity. They brought
the works of leading experts (Mike Schmoker, Margaret Wheatley, Google) in educational leadership to their staffs as building blocks for implementing and sustaining professional growth. They used fiscal resources to bring outside programs into the school if they promised improved experiences for students. Staff development was continuous, intentional, and inclusive of student and staff voices.

**The Ethic of Care.** Understanding what the research indicates about a high-stakes testing emphasis in educational leadership is important yet not enough. Starratt (2004) challenges educational leaders to operate under both intellectual and ethical frameworks. While the intellectual approach to educational leadership is groomed through the licensing and certification procedures as determined by the state, the ethical or moral component to leadership is a relatively small element of leadership preparation programs. As a result, “many educators in leadership positions have had little or no formal exposure to ethical analysis or reflection; many lack a vocabulary to name moral issues; many lack an articulated moral landscape from which to generate a response” (p. 5). Sergiovanni (1992) makes an artful distinction between intellectual and ethical approaches in educational leadership. Essentially, either one without the other renders the leader ineffective (Israel, 2004).

While maintaining allegiance to their professional responsibilities as principals, these leaders exhibited strong moral and ethical influences when describing their work. As previously mentioned, all four schools were high achieving schools, with exceptional student bodies and parent communities that held high expectations. Principal 3 lamented the impact that the era of school accountability in tandem with seemingly unattainable parental pressures are having on the adolescents in his school. He spoke of the need, as
the adults who are responsible for educating these students, to be very intentional in focusing on creating a caring, nurturing environment that insulates students from the “what’s next” mindset. Principal 3 described the efforts his staff makes daily to allow their college-driven students the opportunity to, “enjoy drinking a glass of water while drinking a glass of water.”

The influence of the Ethic of Care pervades the efforts of these talented building leaders. Each principal spoke of how important caring relationships are for their students. They outlined systemic efforts to ensure staff are creating and sustaining nurturing relationships with their students. Activity Programming provided staff opportunities to establish relationships with students outside of the context of their classrooms. Social-Emotional Programming provided every student access to emotional supports whenever and however needed. Academic Programming was robust in their words, not solely because of the material being taught but actually more importantly because the efforts staff made to establish positive and supportive relationships with their student first. “We have teachers that are teaching remarkable things,” Principal 3 related regarding a professional development session, “sharing their lessons with takeaways for everyone to be able to use, and it usually connects to the PD that we did prior to the meeting.”

The influence of collaboration on school performance can be directly related to importance of relationships within the school community and the inherent benefit of developing new knowledge between individuals (Mohrman, Tnkasi, & Mohrman, 2003). Collaboration was a cornerstone for professional development as well as program evaluation. Teachers were given time to interact professionally with each other for extended periods of time. As Principal 3 put it, “When you have extended periods with
the whole staff together, it better be gold.” Principal 5 expressed the need to “get teachers out of their classrooms and talking to each other.” Both Principals provided a model of professional development that allowed for these interactions.

The school environments, as overseen by these administrators, were richly woven with the inclusion of student voice. Principal 3 described the Student Advisory group that he met with monthly, and how he used feedback from those meetings to drive the development of Academic Programming (“It all just bubbles up…”). Principals 4 and 7 expressed similar satisfaction in how the implementation and evaluation of their Activity Programs are driven by what students want. Principal 5 detailed ongoing conversations with his teachers to “see students as individuals and for who they are as persons first,” when describing his work to ensure that the Academic Programming in his school is culturally relevant.

**Ethic of Critique.** School leaders must be committed to giving teachers the time and access to expertise and resources to culturally responsive teaching in order to fully support the examination of their classroom cultures and adapting to meet the needs of their individual students (Delpit, 1995; Herrera, 2010; Noremore, 2010). The Ethic of Critique emerged as a somewhat significant factor in the work of these administrators. As previously mentioned, the Ethic of Critique had a greater influence on the leaders of the schools with higher populations of students of color. These building leaders were acutely aware of the potential for these populations to feel displaced or ignored in their buildings and worked to ensure that all facets of their schools were highly reflective of their cultural compositions.
Principal 5 spoke of how he constantly kept “race on the table,” in discussions about Academic and Activity Programming. He referenced the famous white author that had graduated from his school, and eloquently explained that “hopefully, we will see another great author graduate from here, but he will look different.” Principal 7 spoke of how the changing demographics in the community served by his school was driving him to translate parents communications into Spanish. Principal 4 maintained that a major focus of the school’s impressive drive to grow its STEM Programming was increasing the number of female students that took those classes. Clearly, in schools that had diverse populations, the principals interviewed recognized the power imbalances between cultures and worked to provide a more culturally responsive environment.

**Ethic of Justice.** The principals interviewed displayed lesser influences from the Ethic of Justice. Principal 4 spoke of the importance of evaluating their Social-Emotional support programming with fidelity to the legal tenets of RTI. He gave a slight nod to the federal accountabilities that came out the No Child Left Behind legislation because they “illuminated the gaps that we have in how we support kids.” Additionally, Principal 4 referenced the legal responsibilities that his school had in ensuring that students with IEP’s were having their legal entitlements met. Aside from those comments, no other comments from the Principals interviewed reflected an influence from the Ethic of Justice. This suggests that while a clear understanding of educational laws and policies are obviously critical for administrators, this body of knowledge does not drive the passions of leaders to create strong cultures of belonging in their buildings.

As the stewards of fiscal resources, these building leaders adhered to their fiduciary responsibilities of allocating resources effectively and equitably when
evaluating Activity Programming as a component of the learning environment. The Principals of these schools challenged themselves and their staffs to follow a set criteria when evaluating the efficacy of their Activity Programming. When Activity Programming became irrelevant, unengaging, or too narrow in the population it served, resources were reallocated towards better programming that would serve a broader student population. These strict guidelines used to evaluate programming annually served to sustain an equitable allocation of resources.

**Limitations of the Study**

It is important to acknowledge that this research was presented with limitations due to its design and methodology. In regards to the sample (N) of participants, the study only accessed data from districts that had administered the HSSSE in the state of Illinois over the last seven years. As a result of this limitation, five participants were selected from the quantitative data with one Principal not responding. All four Principals interviewed for the qualitative component of this study were males. This obviously results in data that does not have the richness and expertise of the female leader’s perspective.

Another limitation to this research was the fact that the four Principals interviewed were leaders of high achieving, relatively resource-rich schools. This denies the reader the opportunity to understand the perspective of the building leader who leads student populations that have high poverty levels and low academic achievement. Additionally, the perspectives of school leaders facing rapidly dwindling fiscal resources are absent from this research.
With regard to the data pulled from the HSSSE, student sample sizes amongst the schools chosen varied. Two of the schools with the highest mean scores on the HSSSE administered the survey to the freshman class only, while the other two schools administered it to multiple classes. The HSSSE is a self-reported measurement tool, which means that the data rely on student perceptions. Lastly, HSSSE data that was analyzed varied in the year the survey was administered.

The researcher has worked in public education for 18 years as a teacher, administrator and coach. Throughout that time, this researcher has utilized social-emotional supports to address student disengagement, behavioral issues and academic issues. The researcher admits that he believes in the importance of providing students opportunities for social, psychological and academic integration into their schools. Additionally, while the researcher was intentional at times to stress the importance of belonging for students of color, the same could be said for students with learning disabilities, students from lower socio-economic statuses, and a myriad of other factors.

In order to minimize the impact of bias, this researcher maintained a reflection log throughout the process of gathering and analyzing the data. The research log served as an outlet for expressing disappointment, confusion, frustration or other reactions to the data. In addition, throughout the process of analyzing data, a sense of cognitive dissonance can develop as new understandings arise that may conflict with old paradigms. The reflection log served as the outlet for the necessary processing of these.

The aforementioned biases and limitations aside, this research study not only resulted in data aligned to the findings of previous research, but also resulted in new findings regarding the ethical influences on high school leaders. As schools are
increasingly evaluated by a narrowing band of data, largely assessment-based, school leaders can understandably be feeling the pressure of improving student test scores at all costs. But this research furthers the evidence that leadership influenced by the Ethics of Profession, Care, Critique, and Justice significantly contribute to student belonging.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this research revealed how high school principals of schools with strong cultures of belonging, as measured by HSSSE, evaluate the elements that contribute to belonging, what they do to sustain these elements, and the ethical influences on this work. The Principals interviewed reported providing caring and professional leadership and a fiscally just approach in the evaluation of programming while creating caring and collaborative environments that work to sustain the elements that improve student belonging. Future studies should consider the teacher and student perspectives on either the existence (or lack thereof) of the elements that contribute to student belonging within their schools as well as their perceptions of the principal’s impact on these factors.

The HSSSE is no longer being used by many districts in the state of Illinois due to costs associated with purchasing, administering, and analyzing the data from the survey. The newer *5 Essentials* survey is now required of districts as of the 2012, resulting in districts switching to this survey for the 2012-2013 school year. Future research should consider a similar methodology that utilizes the *5 Essentials* survey, which will increase sample size and likely include the perspectives of female leaders. Additionally, as the 5 Essentials survey will also be administered for grades 1-8, elementary schools can now be studied in this same regard.
While this study reviewed the research on the factors that contribute to belonging and explored high schools that have strong cultures of belonging, future research should explore schools that have relatively low cultures of belonging. These studies could utilize survey data as mentioned above, and use student, teacher, parent and administrative perception data to support of reviewed previous research findings.

Findings

The findings of this research presented some understanding of how high school Principals of schools with strong cultures of belonging evaluate the elements that contribute to belonging, what they do to sustain these elements, and the ethical influences on this work.

The research utilized a Sequential-Explanatory methodology that explored the work high school Principals do to evaluate, create, and sustain effective programming that contributes to strong cultures of belonging. Additionally, this research examined the ethical influences that impacted their work. This study utilized quantitative data from the High School Survey of Student Engagement to determine which schools in the state of Illinois had strong cultures of belonging. The Principals from the four schools with the highest scores on the High School Survey of Student Engagement were interviewed and data were coded within the framework of the Ethics of Care, Critique, Justice, and Profession.

Based on data gathered and analyzed by this researcher, the study offers the following findings:

1. In schools that evidenced strong cultures of belonging, as determined by their High School Survey of Student Engagement scores, students reported high
levels of Cognitive/Intellectual Engagement, Emotional Engagement, and Social/Participatory Engagement.

2. When evaluating the Academic, Social-Emotional, and Activity programming in their schools, Principals of schools with strong cultures of belonging:
   a. Used multiple sources of data to review current programming,
   b. Relied heavily on student-voice to inform them of the relevance and engagement factor of current programming and,
   c. Utilized the work of educational leadership research to build capacity in their staff towards improving their programs.

3. When working to sustain the Academic, Social-Emotional, and Activity programming in their schools, Principals of schools with strong cultures of belonging:
   a. Created highly effective and sustainable organizational structures,
   b. Utilized a process for ongoing data evaluation and,
   c. Worked to ensure efficient and equitable allocation of school resources.

4. Principals of schools with strong cultures of belonging were strongly influenced by the Ethic of the Profession and the Ethic of Care when evaluating, creating, and sustaining programming that contributed to the culture of belonging.

5. Principals in schools that had more racially diverse populations were more influenced by the Ethic of Critique when evaluating, creating, and sustaining programming that contributed to a culture of belonging than Principals of schools with fewer students of color.
Given the findings of this study, in tandem with the wealth of research on the importance of belonging, the researcher sincerely hopes that more school leaders will utilize the strategies used by the dynamic professional leaders in this study in order to build and sustain strong cultures of belonging for all students in their schools. The most important aspect of these frameworks is a belief that they are not “programs” but rather a “mindset” that guides action towards creating and sustaining cultures of belonging within their buildings. As schools continue to evolve to meet the changing society they serve, new approaches to educating adolescents such as on-line programming, will still require that educators focus on the relational components first, and the academic components second.

The Ethic of the Profession demands that a school leader consider first and foremost what is in the best interest of the student when leading. The Ethic of Care demands that an open, collaborative, and supportive environment be the cornerstone for all activities within a school. The Ethic of Critique demands that a school leader be aware of all of the power systems that exist within their buildings and work with strong intention towards ensuring a culturally responsive environment for their students. In this age of high-stakes accountability, a school leader grounded in the Ethics of the Profession, Care, and Critique can make differences that last a lifetime for all of their students.
To whom it may concern,

This is a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

I request that a copy of the following documents (or documents containing the following information) be provided to me:

1. District and school results from the 2012-2013 High School Survey of Student Engagement for the participating districts located in the state of Illinois.

In order to help determine my status to assess fees, please note that I am (select one):

☐ Affiliated with an educational or noncommercial scientific institution, and this request is made for a scholarly purpose through Loyola University of Chicago.

Please notify me if the fees will exceed $25.00.

Additional comments:

This information request may also be emailed to psassen@luc.edu.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Patrick James Sassen
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FOR ACCESS TO HIGH SCHOOL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT DATA
To whom it may concern,

I am a Doctoral candidate at Loyola University of Chicago. I am doing my dissertation, entitled “Creating a culture of belonging; the significance of student belonging and the ethical frameworks school leaders utilize in order to sustain and enhance cultures that promote it.” This is a request to access your district’s records pertaining to results of the High School Survey of Student Engagement that was conducted during the years 2010 - 2012.

I request that a copy of the following documents (or documents containing the following information) be provided to me:

1. District and school results from the 2010-2012 High School Survey of Student Engagement for your district.

Confidentiality:
Any information that is obtained during the course of this research related to you will be disclosed only with your permission. All results will be kept confidential. Any written reports or publications will contain only group data.

Research results will be maintained as confidential with the strictest fidelity. Only the researcher and my advisor will have access to the records while working on this project. Upon completion of the dissertation the researcher will destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked to participants.

This information request may also be emailed to psassen@luc.edu.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,
Patrick James Sassen
847-373-1502
APPENDIX C

LETTER FOR COOPERATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Project Title: Creating a culture of belonging; the significance of student belonging and the ethical frameworks school leaders utilize in order to sustain and enhance cultures that promote it.

Researcher: Patrick James Sassen

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Marla Israel

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Patrick James Sassen, a Doctoral student at Loyola University of Chicago under the supervision of Dr. Marla Israel, a faculty member in the School of Education.

You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are currently hold the position of Principal of a school in a district within the state of Illinois that participated in the 2012-2013 High School Survey of Student Engagement and was in the top quartile of scores.

Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to this study.

Background Information:
This is a two-phase study. The purpose of the study is to identify the ethical frameworks that influence school leaders when they seek to sustain and enhance the cultures of belonging within their buildings.

Procedures:
If you decide to participate, you will be asked to provide the researcher 90 minutes to conduct a semi-structured interview in person. Please fill out the enclosed consent form and mail back to the researcher in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. Upon receipt of the consent form you will be contacted directly by the researcher to arrange a mutually convenient time and location to meet for the semi-structured interview.

Risks and Benefits of being in the study:
There are minimal risks involved with participating in this research. Your identity, as a participant, will not be used at any time during the development of this study.

Your involvement in this study adds to the body of research in education and leadership. It is hoped that the information cited in this study will benefit current and future leaders and researchers with the ultimate impact being by future students.

Compensation:
You will not receive direct compensation for your participation.
Confidentiality:
Any information that is obtained during the course of this research related to you will be disclosed only with your permission. All results will be kept confidential. Any written reports or publications will contain only group data.

Research results will be maintained as confidential with the strictest fidelity. Only the researcher and my advisor will have access to the records while working on this project. Upon completion of the dissertation the researcher will destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked to participants.

Voluntary nature of the study:
All participation in this study is voluntary and you can decide to stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate or not will not impact your present or future relationship with Loyola University of Chicago.

Contacts and questions:
Please feel free to contact me with questions at psassen@comcast.net or my faculty advisor, Dr. Marla Israel, at misrael@luc.edu. You may also contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola’s Office of Research Services if you have additional questions. They can be reached at (773) 508-2689.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:
You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please, know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date
APPENDIX D

FIRST REMINDER LETTER
Date

Dear Principal

Recently you were mailed an invitation to participate in a research study being conducted by Patrick J. Sassen, a Doctoral student at Loyola University of Chicago under the supervision of Dr. Marla Israel, a faculty member in the School of Education. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you currently hold the position of Principal in a school in a district within the state of Illinois that participated in the 2012-2013 High School Survey of Student Engagement and was in the top quartile of scores.

As a courtesy to you, I have enclosed a copy of the original invitation that outlines the study and how you can participate in this research. While I understand the demands of your position, I encourage you to find time to participate in this study. Please know that I have designed the study with your multitude of responsibilities in mind and therefore expect to minimize the impact of your participation on your valuable time. Your participation will provide invaluable information and contribute to the research literature on leadership, education and student belonging.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Patrick J. Sassen, at sassenp@comcast.net or my faculty advisor, Dr. Marla Israel, at misrael@luc.edu. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to speak with someone other than the researchers, you may also contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola’s Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Thanks you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Sassen

Enclosures:

- COOPERATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
- SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE
APPENDIX E
SECOND REMINDER LETTER
Date

Dear Principal

I recently mailed an invitation to you to participate in a research study being conducted by Patrick J. Sassen, a Doctoral student at Loyola University of Chicago under the supervision of Dr. Marla Israel, a faculty member in the School of Education. If you have already reviewed the materials and mailed the consent letter back to me, let me thank you.

If you have understandably not had the time to review the request yet, please take some time to consider participating in this valuable research study. Your participation is important as it provides the study with valuable data to inform results and enhance the research literature regarding education leadership and student belonging. If for some reason you have not received the aforementioned request, please contact me and I will send one out immediately.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Patrick J. Sassen, at sassenp@comcast.net or my faculty advisor, Dr. Marla Israel, at misrael@luc.edu. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to speak with someone other than the researchers, you may also contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola’s Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Sassen
APPENDIX F

THIRD REMINDER LETTER
Dear Principal

This is your last chance to participate in a research study regarding educational leadership and student belonging. An invitation to join this study was mailed to you last month outlining the study and detailing how you can participate. I hope that you will decide to participate. Please know that once you have consented to participate I will contact you to arrange for a time to interview you. This one-time interview will not exceed 90 minutes and can be conducted in the location of your choice provided it is suitable for audio recording purposes.

As a courtesy to you, I have enclosed a copy of the original invitation that outlines the study and how you can participate in this research. While I understand the demands of your position, I encourage you to find time to participate in this study. Please know that I have designed the study with your multitude of responsibilities in mind and therefore expect to minimize the impact of your participation on your valuable time. Your participation will provide invaluable information and contribute to the research literature on leadership, education and student belonging.

This is a research study being conducted by Patrick J. Sassen, a Doctoral student at Loyola University of Chicago under the supervision of Dr. Marla Israel, a faculty member in the School of Education. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you currently hold the position of Principal in a school in a district within the state of Illinois that participated in the 2012-2013 High School Survey of Student Engagement and was in the top quartile of scores. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Patrick J. Sassen, at sassenp@comcast.net or my faculty advisor, Dr. Marla Israel, at misrael@luc.edu. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to speak with someone other than the researchers, you may also contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola’s Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Sassen

Enclosures:

- COOPERATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
- SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE
APPENDIX G

LETTER FOR CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW
Project Title: Creating a culture of belonging; the significance of student belonging and the ethical frameworks school leaders utilize in order to sustain and enhance cultures that promote it.

Researcher: Patrick James Sassen

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Marla Israel

Introduction:
You have previously agreed to participate in a research study being conducted by Patrick James Sassen, a Doctoral student at Loyola University of Chicago under the supervision of Dr. Marla Israel, a faculty member in the School of Education.

You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are currently hold the position of Principal of a school in a district within the state of Illinois that participated in the 2012-2013 High School Survey of Student Engagement and was in the top quartile of scores.

Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to the interview portion of the study.

Background Information:
This is a two-phase study. The purpose of the study is to identify the ethical frameworks that influence school leaders when they seek to sustain and enhance the cultures of belonging within their buildings.

Procedures:
Since you have decided to participate, you will be asked to provide the researcher 90 minutes to conduct a semi-structured interview in person. Please fill out the enclosed consent form and mail back to the researcher in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. Upon receipt of the consent form you will be contacted directly by the researcher to arrange a mutually convenient time and location to meet for the semi-structured interview.

Prior to the interview you will be provided the interview questions. Prior to commencing the interview, you will be read a “Consent to Participate in Research” letter and asked to sign. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. The audio recording will be sent to a professional transcribing service for transcription. The transcription service provider will sign a confidentiality agreement. A copy of the interview transcription will be sent to you and you will be given the opportunity to suggest revisions, if necessary. Once you have reviewed the transcription, all identifiers will be removed before using the transcription in the research study.
**Risks and Benefits of being in the study:**
There are minimal risks involved with participating in this research. Your identity, as a participant, will not be used at any time during the development of this study. To the extent that you will be asked to share your knowledge and experiences in educational leadership as they apply to student belonging, the researcher will attempt to mitigate some of the risk by giving you the opportunity to review the interview transcript before it is used as data.

Your involvement in this study adds to the body of research in education and leadership. It is hoped that the information cited in this study will benefit current and future leaders and researchers with the ultimate impact being by future students.

**Compensation:**
You will not receive direct compensation for your participation.

**Confidentiality:**
Any information that is obtained during the course of this research related to you will be disclosed only with your permission. All results will be kept confidential. Any written reports or publications will contain only group data.

Research results will be maintained as confidential with the strictest fidelity. Only the researcher and my advisor will have access to the records while working on this project. Upon completion of the dissertation the researcher will destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked to participants.

**Voluntary nature of the study:**
All participation in this study is voluntary and you can decide to stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate or not will not impact your present or future relationship with Loyola University of Chicago.

**Contacts and questions:**
Please feel free to contact me with questions at psassen@comcast.net or my faculty advisor, Dr. Marla Israel, at misrael@luc.edu. You may also contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola’s Office of Research Services if you have additional questions. They can be reached at (773) 508-2689.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**
I, the Principal, agree to cooperate in the research interview being conducted by Patrick J. Sassen in conjunction with Loyola University of Chicago’s School of Education. His doctoral project entitled “Creating a culture of belonging; the significance of student belonging and the ethical frameworks school leaders utilize in order to sustain and enhance cultures that promote it,” along with the outlined research protocols are understood.
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<th>Signature of Participant</th>
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<table>
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1. Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the academic programming in your building.

2. How did you evaluate the current academic programs to determine the need?

3. What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve academic programming?

4. What areas of academic programming did you determine were in need of improvement?

5. What actions did you take in response to this need?

6. How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving academic programming?

7. Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the social-emotional support programming in your building.

8. How did you evaluate the current social-emotional programs to determine the need?

9. What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve social-emotional programming in your building?

10. What areas of social-emotional programming did you determine were in need of improvement?

11. What actions did you take in response to this need?

12. How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving social-emotional programming?

13. Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the activities programming in your building.

14. How did you evaluate the current activities programs to determine the need?

15. What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve activities programming in your building?

16. What areas of activities programming did you determine were in need of improvement?

17. What actions did you take in response to this need?
18. How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving activities programming?

19. Please describe a scenario when you had to provide leadership towards improving the classroom instruction in your building.

20. How did you evaluate the current classroom instruction that existed in your building to determine the need?

21. What ethical considerations were important for you to consider when attempting to improve classroom instruction?

22. What areas of classroom instruction did you determine were in need of improvement?

23. What actions did you take in response to this need?

24. How have you sustained the progress made since you began the process of improving classroom instruction?
APPENDIX I

TRANSCRIPTIONIST CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT
I, __________________________, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Patrick J. Sassen related to his doctoral study entitled “Creating a culture of belonging; the significance of student belonging and the ethical frameworks school leaders utilize in order to sustain and enhance cultures that promote it.”

Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of recorded interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not make copies of any audio files or computerized files of transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Patrick J. Sassen;
3. To store all study-related files and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
4. To return all audio files and study-related documents to Patrick J. Sassen in a complete and timely manner;
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber’s name (printed): __________________________________________

Transcriber’s signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Researcher’s signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________
REFERENCE LIST


VITA

Patrick James Sassen is the son of James and Helen Sassen. He was born in St. Cloud, Minnesota, on July 9, 1970. He currently resides in Lake Bluff, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, with his wife and two children.

Patrick attended parochial school in Cincinnati, Ohio, from Kindergarten through eighth grade before moving to Chicago, Illinois, where he attended high school and graduated from St. Ignatius College Preparatory in 1988. Patrick graduated from Loyola University of Chicago, Illinois, in May 1992 with a bachelor of business degree in finance. In 1994, he earned his teaching certification from Loyola University of Chicago. In 2005 he earned a Master of Arts degree in educational leadership from National-Louis University in Wheeling, Illinois. He received a Type 75 school administrative certificate after the completion of his program at National-Louis University in 2005.

Patrick has worked in the public education system for the past 20 years. He began his educational career as a high school Special Education teacher before becoming a Dean of Students in 2005. He currently is in his first year as an Assistant Principal at a public high school in the Chicagoland area.
DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

The dissertation submitted by Patrick James Sassen has been read and approved by the following committee:

Marla Israel, Ed.D., Director
Associate Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Janis Fine, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Susan Sostak, Ed.D.
Clinical Assistant Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago