IDENTIFICATION AND ELUCIDATION OF CULTURALLY EMBEDDED

SCHOOL COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS IN A NEWLY CHARTERED URBAN

SCHOOL

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By

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the

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IDENTIFICATION AND ELUCIDATION OF CULTURALLY EMBEDDED SCHOOL

  COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS IN A NEWLY CHARTERED URBAN SCHOOL

presented by Mary Laughlin,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of education

and hereby certify, in their opinion, is worthy of

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the great loves of my life: my children. They have

watched me labor endlessly as a single mother for seven years, teacher for eight years and

in pursuit of higher education for 14 years. Kristina Laughlin-Anson, Luke Laughlin and

Michael Laughlin I thank you for encouraging and supporting me emotionally as I stayed

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available as I would like. Dear Husband—you certainly earned 'the dot!' Uncle Ray

Smither, a retired middle school principal, counselor and high school English teacher has

been instrumental in my progress as editor for chapters 1-3 and then my daughter,

Kristina, as she edited all chapters. Both loved ones are experts in grammar and masters

of writing! Additionally, I thank countless others who cared about my success,

encouraged me, and played a role in proofing, editing or checking my work in other

facets, as well as friends who all inspired me to complete my studies.

In MEMORY of my loving grandmother, Evelyn Smither, my kindred spirit, and my

Grandpa Laughlin, RJ, who believed that no amount of education was a waste. Both

grandparents would be incredibly proud of my accomplishments. I am fairly confident

my father is extremely proud of my growth over the past decade and admires the tenacity

to accomplish the latest of my goals. I am thankful he is here to celebrate with me!

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One thing has become clearer as I learn: many people do not work to hold others accountable or have difficult conversations, and being a functional, productive team is an obscure reality to many members of organizations. Rather, it is easier to turn away and complain, never seeking to solve a problem or tackle a difficult situation. This has been a challenging component for me to understand both the people and the role I play, and then how to (diplomatically) utilize the tools I have gained in the Leadership and Policy Analysis program.

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IDENTIFICATION AND ELUCIDATION OF CULTURALLY EMBEDDED SCHOOL

COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS IN A NEWLY CHARTERED URBAN SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This case study is designed to increase the understanding of an organization's cultural impact on students' improved learning. While much literature exists on best practice strategies for student learning, less is known about what influences are embedded in a school's culture that improve student learning (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000). Even less is known about what influences improve learning in charter schools due to the variety of design, systems, programs, and student body and teacher populations; therefore, more studies are warranted that isolate variables to learn more about what is successful and not (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006, CREDO, 2009; Nelson, Rosenberg & Van Meter, 2004). The lens used to conduct this mixed methods descriptive case study is organizational culture, called macroculture by Schein (2010). The education system as a whole then narrows to a school culture, or microculture, said Schein (2012). Then, theories incorporating expectancy-value/ motivation and accountability/ responsibility will be explored as concepts to support the school culture of this particular case study school (Bandura, 1993, 2001; Chen, et.al., 2009; Woolfolk, 2007; Meece, Pintrich & Schunk, 2008). For these reasons, this study is significant in that it will add to the literature about how school culture impacts student learning.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

"Culture is both a 'here and now' dynamic phenomenon and a coercive

background structure that influences us in multiple ways. According to Schein (2010),

"Culture is constantly reenacted and created by our interactions with others and shaped

by our own behavior" (p. 3). For these reasons "culture can be thought of as the

foundation of the social order that we live in and of the rules we abide by" (Schein, 2010,

p. 3). Furthermore, Schein (2010) posits that organizational culture, like the education

system, varies in strength and stability as a function of their emotional intensity as a

result of their history since founded. Therefore, school cultures, the microcultures of the

education macroculture system "are the most variable and the most dynamic and,

therefore, provide special opportunities to study culture formation and evolution"

(Schein, 2010, p.3).

Historically, certain student populations have been identified as struggling

learners in the education system (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; National Commission of

Excellence in Education, 1983; Payne, 2005). This in turn impacts both the macro and

micro cultures of education. The story unfolds about the education macroculture system

historically in chapter one as the background of the study is given, followed by a

summary of related literature before an explanation of the theoretical framework

underpinnings is given. Following the framework of the study will be: the problem

statement, assumptions, purpose statement, grand tour research question, abbreviated

methodology, limitations and delimitations of the study, significance of the study, and the

definition of the terms.

Background of the Study

Media and government have assailed the U.S. educational system for failing

certain student populations. These poorly performing students are predominately minority

students and low social economic status (SES) groups called achievement gap students

(Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Chavous, 2004; DSST B,

2010; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary

Education, n.d).The emotional assault on the macroculture of education has impacted

education. These attacks continue to impact both the macrosystem and microsystems of

culture within the education system.

The media and government's attacks are bold assertions to place upon educators'

shoulders alone, negating many factors that make up the individual's will and ability to

learn. A professor at the University of Michigan said it well: "The barriers to reducing the

[achievement] gaps are large. In fact it's doubtful that we can ever bring the social class

to zero; people with more money are always going to see to it that their children get more

and better education than the children of people with less money" (Nisbett, 2010, p.11-

12).

Teachers take part in the daily mission to teach all students. It is a noble

undertaking, because education was created as the means to sustain democracy, foster

citizenship, support the United State's positional and economic power, and give

individuals the opportunity to have a standard of living they desire (Chubb & Moe, 1990;

Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Gutmann, 1999; National Commission on Excellence in

Education, 1983). Due to evidence that continues to show achievement gap students

doing poorly on measurements and that minority groups and lower SES groups

themselves are growing, the federal government has set initiatives over time to foster these goals that target our nation's sustainability (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Gutmann, 1999; Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, n.d.; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Ultimately, more teacher and school accountability mandates have resulted from the federal government due to the poor measurement results of the achievement gap population.

Originally, Thomas Jefferson and the U.S. founding fathers thought it was imperative that citizens learned to read, write and do arithmetic, as well as learn good citizenship in order to understand and sustain democracy (Chavous, 2004; Chubb & Moe, 1990). Beginning two decades ago, President Reagan's Education Secretary commenced a heightened, national interest in student learning as *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983) was published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). Data began to reveal that the achievement gap population groups were not doing well academically (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The education system, teachers and schools were blamed. In this way, one can see the macrosystem culture blamed, which impacts their stability. This is turn affects both cultures of the macro and microsystems. For these reasons, Schein (2010) said people need to know what to pay attention to and know the plan of action for remedying various kinds of situations. Once again, education was seen as the essential piece for sustaining U.S. democracy as it had been originally envisioned by the founding fathers. Reform was needed and the government started coming up with federal policies to address the achievement gap; hence, teacher and school accountability measures resulted (Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Gutmann, 1999).

One initiative set into law on January 8, 2002 by President Bush was No Child

Left Behind (NCLB) (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of

Elementary & Secondary Education, n.d.); while reauthorizing the 1965 Elementary &

Secondary Education Act (ESEA), NCLB additionally offered alternative public charter

schools along with stronger accountability for schools and teachers based on student

achievement scores (Elementary & Secondary Education Act, 1965). NCLB mobilized

the charter school concept with the hope to find solutions that better meet the needs of

achievement gap students (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001). In contrast to public

traditional schools, charter schools were given less government and district office

bureaucracy. In this way, NCLB gave charter schools freedom to operate with different

educational philosophies, curriculums, teacher and administrator hiring and firing

procedures, and mission statements, for example, that might close the achievement gap

(Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; Chavous, 2004; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; H.R.

1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education,

n.d.).

Race to the Top (RTTT) (Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary

Education, n.d.; White House, 2009) is the federal initiative of President Obama that is

NCLB's sequel with a few modifications. Both federal initiatives promote the use of

public charter schools differently than how the government regulates private tuition-

based schools which *are* allowed to set criteria like grades, grade point average, or

require entrance exams in order to be accepted to the school. Public charter schools are

not allowed to have a tuition or entrance criteria due to rules set in the federal acts of

NCLB or RTTT (Hopmann, 2008; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department

of Elementary & Secondary Education, n.d.; White House, 2009). Given the vast charter school differences in how they are administered and regulated, there is little research about how a culture influences student learning (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; CREDO, 2009; Hassel, 2005).

Because public charter school models differ greatly, the 20-year span of the literature about public charter schools is all newer information and contains a large variance in what is known (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; Hassel, 2005). The breadth of literature indicated that controlling for different factors in charter schools; in order to establish correlations, relationships and transferability; while challenging, is worthy of study (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; CREDO, 2009; Hassel, 2005). It is important to discover and understand what variables work and those that do not. While the research findings are problematic in scope for fair comparison to traditional public schools due to non-similar variables, more studies may be needed where the isolation of factors can have practicality in application and thus comparisons and /or transferability can happen (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; CREDO, 2009; Clark, Dwoyer, Gleason &Tuttle, 2010; Hassel, 2005). It is important to study what high performing schools with large percentages of achievement gap populations, whether public charter schools or traditional public schools, are doing to sustain high growth achievement.

Exemplar Charter School

A Midwest urban public charter school, birthed from the federal initiatives and housed within a traditional Midwest urban public school district, was chosen for study. There are many charter schools across the nation, and this charter school was selected for the case study due to its state and national recognition and the researcher's connection to

the school through a colleague. Henceforth, the charter school will be called Stellar

Charter School to keep the identity of the school anonymous. While the high performing

public charter school has no qualms with being known, the Internal Review Board (IRB)

requires anonymity.

Stellar Charter School is dedicated to providing an outstanding college

preparatory liberal arts education with a science and technology focus to a diverse student

population; its goal is that 100 percent of its students meet state standards in math,

science and English (DSST I, n.d.; DSST J, 2012). The school, as noted on the school's

website (DSST J, 2012),

strives to create a community of learners and a school culture that fosters

academic and personal success for every student by emphasizing a set of six core

values that students, faculty, and staff are expected to live by every day: Respect,

Responsibility, Integrity, Doing Your Best, Courage, and Curiosity. These values

constitute the foundations of [Stellar Charter School's] mission, vision and

guiding principles. (no page)

Additionally, the charter school has achieved exemplar status regarding reform

from their state and the nation, and as a result they "host delegations from every part of

[their] state" (DSST J, 2012), seven other states and two countries. Two metrics have

been used to evaluate the Charter School District's performance: "1) Measurable student

learning growth and 2) [for the high school] Gaining four-year college acceptance for all

graduates and preparing them to succeed in those four-year institutions" (DSST J, 2012).

In 2010, Oprah's Angel Network (Grsoundbreaking Charter Schools, 2010; Oprah's

Angel Network Grants, 2010) gave Stellar Charter School's district a one million dollar

grant due to their high performance as a public urban charter school district. A final piece of supportive evidence for why this charter school was selected for study was the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) award that Stellar Charter School received in March, 2011 (Appendix M) (DSST M, 2012).

EPIC's full title is New Leaders for New Schools' Effective Practice Incentive Community; EPIC is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Incentive Fund, the school district and charter school partners, and by private philanthropists (DSST M, 2012; EPIC, 2012) found in Appendix M. According to the award letter, Stellar Charter School "is one of just 18 charter schools from across the country to be honored by EPIC...175 charter schools from 23 states and the District of Columbia compete in the EPIC National Charter School Consortium for $1.8 million in incentive funds" (DSST M, 2012). In sum, the school's recognition for dramatically improving student achievement and the enthusiasm shared from the colleague who works there were two components for selecting this school. Furthermore, the added teacher and school accountability mandates by the federal and state governments, along with little research illuminating how high performing charter schools' culture influences student learning, were all factors that impacted the researcher's selection of this school and the purpose for doing this study.

Conceptual Underpinnings

Schools wish to be effective in creating a culture that improves learning (Blankstein, 2010; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Sergiovanni, 2000). Stellar Charter School has improved student learning using a challenging liberal arts education model and school culture, as evidenced in historical documents (Appendix M) (DSST J, 2012; EPIC,

2012; Oprah's Angel Network, 2010). Schein (2010) said that culture is to a group like personality/character traits are to an individual. With that understanding, Schein (2010) also added where "our personality and character guide and constrain our behavior, so does culture guide and constrain the behavior of members of a group through the shared norms that are held in that group" (p. 14).

To discover how an organization influences culture, which influences learning, the heart of the organization is often explored (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Bush, 2003; Nisbett, 2010; Schein, 2010). The heart of the organization surpasses the first surface level artifacts gained by press releases, media, displays, observable rituals and ceremonies, and even the second level of "espoused beliefs and values" (Schien, 2010, p. 23). According to Schein (2010) "basic assumptions" (p. 23) are at the heart of an organization and these assumptions "are so taken for granted that someone who does not hold them is viewed as a 'foreigner' or as 'crazy' and is automatically dismissed" (p. 21). For example, if a "basic assumption comes to be strongly held in a group, members will find behavior based on any other premise inconceivable" (Schein, 2010, p. 28). Furthermore, Schein (2010) added that it is in this sense we can better understand how "cultures tell their members who they are, how to behave toward each other, and how to feel good about themselves" (p. 29). This gives people cognitive stability and humans need that type of stability as it helps them to know "what to pay attention to, what things mean, how to react emotionally, and what actions to take in various kinds of situations" (Schein, 2010, p. 29). With this understanding about culture, the researcher used the cultural lens for this study as defined by Schein (2010) for processing data.

Using the culture lens, the concept of accountability-for-responsibility was explored due to the six core values listed on the school's website, with one being "Responsibility" (DSST B & C, 2010; DSST J, 2012, no page). In the Western world we have moved from a system of student accountability-for-responsibility to teacher and school accountability/responsibility as directives of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), NCLB and its sequel RTTT (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education ESE. n.d.; White House, 2009). This high performing urban public charter school district, housed within a traditional urban public school district, appeared to marry the accountability/ responsibility concept to school, leader, teacher, parent and student groups (DSST B, C & E, 2010; DSST J, 2012). According to the school and district websites (DSST I, n.d.; DSST J, 2012), the district's student population was diverse. The diversity was 62% minority students and 40% low income students, with close to a 50-50% gender ratio. Given the achievement gap definition as stated earlier in this chapter and the district's demographics just listed, the Stellar Charter School and its district represent a large portion of the achievement gap population and yet are recognized for their students' high performance (DSST J, 2012, EPIC, 2012; Oprah's Angel Network, 2010).

The last concept explored in Stellar Charter School using the lens of culture was expectancy-value theory, a component of motivation theory. The researcher selected this concept due to the guiding philosophy that was posted on the school's website (DSST B & C, 2010; DSST J, 2012). One of Stellar Charter School district's guiding philosophies is "to create an academic culture which requires student's best effort daily, expects all

students to succeed, and supports their efforts to do so" (DSST B, 2010). Furthermore, the website said a guiding philosophy pertaining to integration was "to create a community truly centered on …six core values where values are lived and shared, not just talked about. And where academic learning and character development are seen as a common endeavor, not separate" (DSST B, 2010, no page).

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework, organizational culture, meaning the education system, with its microculture: this particular school's culture. Both conceptual underpinnings, known as concepts: accountability/ responsibility and expectancy-value/ motivation theory are assumed to be embedded in the school's culture to influence student learning. The purpose is to discover how one high performing charter school has moved from conceptualizing these concepts to sustaining them in their culture to influence student learning.
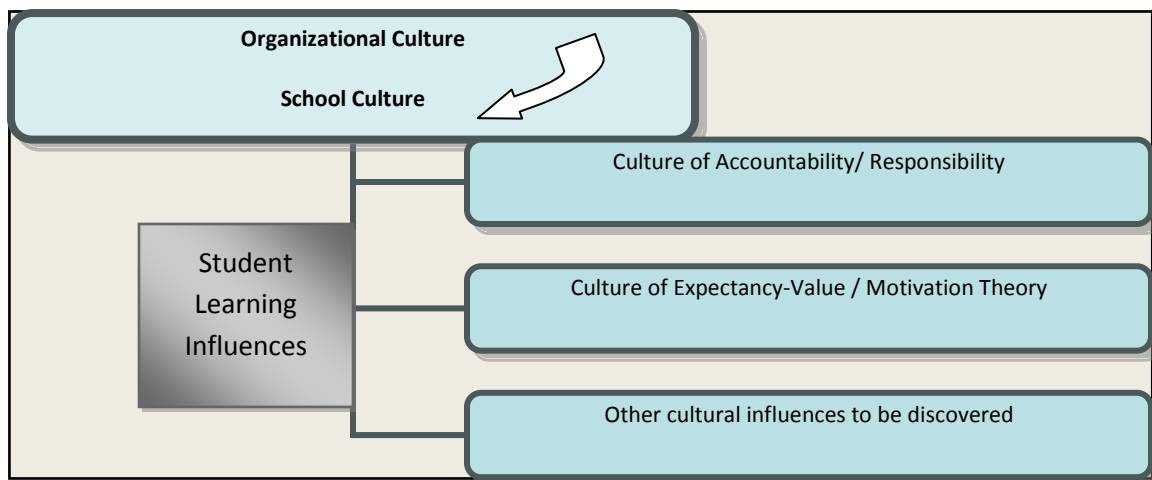
Figure 1. Schematic Diagram Displaying the Framework of Theoretical Underpinnings.

These are the underpinnings to be studied; however, through open and axial coding (Creswell, 2007, 2009) different underpinning themes, also called concepts, may emerge and if so then those concepts, will be explored in the second literature review of chapter 4.

Review of Related Literature

There are two concepts the researcher identified from the existing artifacts that she assumed would be found in this unique urban public high performing charter school's culture as highlighted above: accountability-for-responsibility and expectancy-value/ motivation theory. Both will be explored using the lens of culture. A more in-depth review of literature is found in chapter 2, but brevity of each construct will follow below.

Organizational Culture

Cultural models assume that beliefs, values and ideology are at the heart of organizations. Bolman and Deal (2008), Bush (2003), and Schein (2010) said that culture has an impact on the people involved in a specific school's environment. Schein (2010) gives further support of cultural impact when he said "culture is a product of social learning" (p. 17). This cultural impact on members also aligns with psychologists Bandura's and Vygotsky's work (Woolfolk, 2007) regarding social learning concepts. Social learning includes people's interactions with their environment, both intrinsically and extrinsically (Woolfolk, 2007). The study of this urban public charter school seeks to discover how this high performing charter school's culture influences student learning.

School Culture

Culture permeates every aspect of an organization's framework. Schools can be better at influencing student learning if educators understand the constructs of culture better. For example, knowledge of how culture impacts its members, how culture can be enhanced by design, and how to reach their stated goals and objectives are all components of culture (Blankstein, 2010; Sergiovanni, 1984, 2000, 2001). For the purpose of this study, Schein's (2010) definition of culture will be used:

Culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved

its problems of external adaptation and integrations that has worked well enough

to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct

way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 18)

In this sense, culture is both a product and a process that is taught to new members

entering the culture, lending purpose and shared values. The student population consists

largely of those groups which make up the identified achievement gap students and yet

receives awards for outstanding achievement growth (DSST J, 2012). Therefore, using

the lens of culture this study seeks to discover how a high performing urban public

charter school influences student learning.

Accountability/ Responsibility

First, as stated earlier regarding U.S. education, democracy advocates that citizens

be responsible to civic duties, and have reading, writing and mathematical abilities

(Gutmann, 1999). Presidents Reagan, Bush and Obama all have addressed the

responsibility that education plays in the matters of the good of the country and in

individuals themselves, as seen in *A Nation at Risk*, NCLB and RTTT (National

Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Missouri Department of Elementary &

Secondary Education, n.d.; White House, 2009). Furthermore, Gutmann (1999) puts the

purpose of education this way: "Given the democratic goal of sharing the rights and

responsibilities of citizenship, schools that teach children the cooperative virtues are

uncommonly successful and minimally problematical" (p. 62-63). Gutmann (1999) and

others (e.g. Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Hopmann, 2008; Segiovanni, 2000) are saying the

process of educating students would be enhanced by an emphasis on student

accountability and the teaching of positive values and citizenship. This study will explore

the construct of accountability/ responsibility through the lens of culture to learn and

explain how Stellar Charter School uses this construct to influence student learning.

Expectancy-Value / Motivation Theory

A long standing wonder and debate between behavioral and cognitive

psychologists, educators and parents, pertains to the factors of ability versus effort as it

relates to learning. Expectancy-value theory is motivation that emphasizes an individual's

expectations for success combined with an individual's valuing of that goal (Eccles &

Wigfield, 2002; Meece, Pintrich & Schunk, 2008; Reeve, 2005; Wigfield, 1994;

Woolfolk, 2001, 2007). In essence, expectancy-value theory involving education is about

the belief an individual has about their capabilities (self-efficacy) and, the reasons held

for learning. The researcher used the culture lens to discover if expectancy-value theory

was embedded in this school's culture and if so, explain how Stellar Charter School used

this construct to influence student learning.

<div align="center">Problem Statement</div>

Angel, Christensen and Hill (2006), CREDO (2009) and Hassel (2005) stated that

there is little research as to how high performing charter schools' culture influences

student learning. The formation of charter schools was created as a possible factor to

remedy the achievement gap students disparity (Angel, Christensen, & Hill, 2006;

Chavous, 2004; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001;

Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, n.d.); however, the

literature demonstrates a large variance because charter school models differ greatly

(Angel, Christensen, & Hill, 2006; CREDO, 2009; Hassel, 2005). Controlling for those

different factors to establish correlations and relationships is imperfect and challenging; nonetheless, these studies are needed in order to discover factors that influence improved student learning. Currently, these influences are not adequately understood, and thus, cannot be harnessed to impact various learning environments positively through replication. Once understood, such influences could be replicated if the variable alignment is conducive for that transformation. Regardless of the school type, good education systems seek to create and sustain a school that fosters a culture of high learning for all students and incorporates motivation structures enabling all students to realize that success (Sergiovanni, 2000).

<center>Assumptions</center>

The researcher considered her experiences and intuition to make the premise that teacher and student accountability/ responsibility integrated with expectancy-value/ motivation theory embedded in a school's culture would impact student learning. Perhaps the researcher's assumption may be correct, as evidenced by the school's website, "The academic program is founded on the following principles: high expectations, high-accountability school culture, remediation and support, balanced curriculum and use of technology" (DSST K, 2010, no page). With that noted, the researcher's bias consisted of the belief that students often need to be taught to value learning and be responsible and held accountable for their own learning. Ruby Payne's (2005) meta-analysis research supports that low SES and minority students' academic achievements are much lower than their affluent "African-American, Hispanic and Asian" counterparts (p.2). Additionally, as supported by Boykin and Noguer's (2011) meta-analysis research, there continues to be "persistent achievement gaps between Black and Latino students (both

boys and girls)" (p. 3). Therefore, combining both Payne's (2005) and Boykin and

Noguer's (2011) work with Schein's (2010) regarding organizational culture where

culture is a "product of social learning" (p. 17), the researcher assumed Stellar Charter

School designed a culture embedded with purposeful influences that improved student

learning.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to discover how one high performing charter

school's culture influenced student learning. The more educators learn how to design a

culture embedded with purposeful influences that result in improved student learning, the

more likely replications can occur. These replications would allow all students greater

learning opportunities, especially for achievement gap students as they have been

identified in previous studies as performing lower than their peers of middle to upper SES

(Boykin & Noguera, 2011; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of

Elementary & Secondary Education, n.d.; National Commission on Excellence in

Education, 1983; Payne, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; White House,

2009).

Grand Tour Research Question

Observing educational reform, policy and literature regarding evidence-and

scientifically-based instructional best practices, school culture, organizational design and

leadership, has proven especially interesting as these variables impact the culture of a

school and learning. Of particular importance are the influences which improve student

learning. Therefore, the guiding research question was: What influences are embedded in

one high performing urban public charter school's culture that have led to improved student learning?

Methodology

Knowing that the formation of charter schools has been one idea to address the student learning dilemma (Finn, Manno, Vanourek, 2000; Hassel, 2005; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, ESE, n.d.; Nisbett, 2010; White House, 2009), this study sought to add to the limited knowledge about public charter schools with the intent to report what one high performing urban public charter school's influences are that improve student learning. The researcher wondered what influences were embedded into the school's culture that worked to improve student learning. A mixed methods case study was used to combine quantitative research with qualitative inquiries, to create a richer study as the researcher studied "things in their natural settings, trying to make sense of them" (Creswell, 2007, p. 36). Furthermore, Creswell (2007, pp. 58-62) suggested a hermeneutical phenomenological study where a phenomenon, student learning in this case, is studied from data collected "from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (p. 61). Data analyses are not as structured in a phenomenological mixed methods descriptive study; hence, they are open to alternative procedures (Creswell, 2007). Open and axial coding of the interviewees and observations was utilized to identify common themes and support for them. In chapter 3, a detailed process is explained for all the methodology and various strategies used for this mixed method study.

Population and Sample Studied

A selected high performing urban public charter middle school was chosen for this study and is located in the Midwest, serving a diverse community (DSST A, B, C, D, E, 2010). To obscure the school's name, a pseudo name was selected and, as referenced earlier, the charter school will be called Stellar Charter School. The middle school serves about 420 students, grades 6-8, with over 43 percent of the student population qualifying for free-and-reduced lunches and 65 percent of the student body classified as minority status (DSST D, E, F, 2010; DSST G, n.d.; DSST I, n.d.). Therefore, sixty-five percent of the student body is made up of achievement gap students based on the earlier definition of low SES and minority students. The same websites list 32 staff members, one director and a three-member administrative team for this school. Additionally, the school has received state, national and international attention due to "the combination of the school's outstanding student performance on state assessments, an extraordinarily diverse student population, and a highly innovative school culture" (DSST J, 2012, no page).

Research Design

To create a richer study, this mixed methods research design as prescribed by Creswell (2007, 2009) and Mertens (2005) was a descriptive, "bounded system" (Creswell, 2007, p. 244). The case study's ontology was transformative as it stemmed from multiple realities that were molded "by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, [and] gender…values" (Mertens, 2005, p. 9). According to Creswell (2007) this is called a hermeneutical phenomenological study as the phenomenon is student learning, supported by experiences and perceptions of members involved. The research instruments were standardized open-ended interview and focus group questions and are

located in Appendix A. Briefly embedded in the instrument explanation will be a description of the data collection. Next, the validity of the triangulation process will be explained before a discussion of limitations and delimitations impacting the study, and then a summary will conclude as prescribed by Borg, Gall & Gall (2003), Casey & Krueger (2009), Creswell (2007, 2009), Mertens (2005) and Seidman (2006). A detailed explanation of the methodology is found in chapter 3 where only an overview is given here in chapter 1, as prescribed by researchers like Creswell (2007 2009) and Mertens (2005).

Research Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

First, as part of the quantitative component of the study, a Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ) by researcher Leithwood (1996), was sent, with permission, to teachers to discover leadership traits that would be further expanded in the qualitative study and perhaps provide evidence, while looking through the culture lens, for influences embedded within the school to improve student learning. Creswell (2009) explained this as a sequential mixed-method for the purpose of describing and explaining how those leadership traits are noticed, used and/or detected. Second, the researcher decided what questions to ask, the order, and what to observe and record (Mertens, 2005). The researcher used a one-step interview process that allowed her to first, build relationships with participants and then, immediately follow with the interview questions encouraging participants to tell their rich stories as prescribed by several researchers (e.g. Borg, Gall & Gall, 2003; Casey & Krueger, 2009; Mertens, 2005; Seidman, 2006).

Following the prescriptions of Borg, Gall and Gall (2003), Casey and Krueger (2009), Creswell (2007, 2009) and Seidman (2006), the qualitative side of this mixed method case study of hermeneutic phenomenology specifically incorporated the following components: (a) focus groups of 5-8 individuals, (b) individual interviews with teachers and administrators, (c) review of historical documents (newspaper articles, records, materials on the school's website, press/media of any type), (d) parent focus group and (e) awards.

In addition to faculty focus groups, focus groups with parents were also conducted, allowing all voices that wanted to be heard the opportunity to participate. Additionally, a parent (paper) questionnaire called Advanced Parent Questionnaire I (APQ I) was given via a convenience sampling and self-select process, with the consent form attached. The APQ I questionnaire was used in tandem or as Creswell (2009) said, a "concurrent triangulation strategy" (p. 213) was implemented through the APQ I to add validity and strength to the study. Descriptive statistics of both the PLQ and APQ I showing the distribution of data for the purpose of identifying where the most participants' responses were reported and percentages, were done with the standard deviations in parentheses (Field, 2009).

Convenience and selective random samplings (Casey & Krueger, 2009; Fink, 2009) with audio-taped interviews and focus groups that were later transcribed were part of the researcher's interview process. Jottings from the interviews completed the researcher's interview process as prescribed by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995).

Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews and focus groups allowed the researcher and participants: (a) to become familiar with one another, (b) to foster new relationships, (c) to discuss the purpose of the study and (d) to create an atmosphere of trust and friendship that encouraged rich storytelling (Casey & Krueger, 2009; Seidman, 2006). A convenience sampling from the school's faculty and parents was used, and an in-depth account of this process is explained in chapter 3's methodology section as supported by Creswell (2007, 2009). The interview and focus group questions were standardized and open-ended to garner responses that were also open-ended (Borg, Gall & Gall, 2003; Casey & Krueger, 2009; Seidman, 2006). Figure 2 shows the data collection process map used for the study.

Observations, Teacher & Parent Surveys

Survey to teachers & parents (March)

Observations of daily schedule & happenings (March)

Field notes

Reflection

Researcher Perceptions

Relationship Building

Analyze quantitative & qualitative surveys

Formulate and refine interview questions

Focus Groups

Interview of all willing staff members & 1-2 parent focus groups (March-April)

Verbatim Transcriptions Member checking

Trustworthiness

Open & axial coding; Initial interpretations; Reflection

Triangulate Data

Second Literature Review

Theme Development

Expand readings to include research on emerging themes

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews

(March-April)

Verbatim Transcriptions Member checking

Archival Data

Ongoing (March-September)

Collect documents Note taking & Reflection Open & Axial Coding

Trustworthiness

Open & axial coding

Reflection; Create categories & themes

Triangulate Data

Final Data Analysis

Open & axial coding; Final categories & themes with support

Triangulate Data & Final interpretations and Reflection

Figure 2. Data Collection Process Map for Researcher's Case Study.

Analyzing Qualitative Data

The researcher listened to the audio recordings from the interviews and focus groups to assist with the qualitative analysis, and then a transcription of the audio into a Microsoft Word document was completed. Following the transcription, came the axial coding. Axial coding, as explained by Creswell (2007) identifies one of the five or six themes as the phenomenon, which the researcher assumed was learning, and the other themes would most likely support that phenomenon. The final steps according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), as cited in Creswell (2007):

> the researcher returns to the database to identify (a) what caused this phenomenon to occur, (b) what strategies or actions actors employed in response to it, (c) what context (specific context) and intervening conditions (broad context) influenced the strategies, and (d) what consequences resulted from these strategies. The overall process is one of relating categories of information to the central phenomenon category. (p. 237)

In this way, the researcher discovered the concepts, or conceptual underpinnings, of the study that influenced a culture of learning. A coding process was used to identify facts from the data, which supported the themes that connected to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). While the open coding system is explained in more detail by Creswell (2009, pp.185-188) and more completely in chapter 3, it was essentially an organization system to help identify support for the themes that connect to the phenomenon.

Trustworthiness and Triangulation

Trustworthiness and credibility checks were accomplished by sharing the typed transcription from both individual and focus group interviews with participants to see if the researcher correctly captured what they said (Casey & Krueger, 2009). To enhance the accuracy of the researcher's categorized themes and concepts aligning with the research question, Creswell (2007, 2009) suggested securing both a "peer debriefing" person and "intercoder agreement, or cross checking person" (190-192) to review the coding and study overall. A doctorial colleague filled these roles.

In addition to trustworthiness, a quality mixed methods study has triangulation of data (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2005). To do this, the researcher compared data within and between all individual interviews, focus groups, observations and surveys to check for consistency of information given, including similarities and dissimilarities. See Appendix E for the graphic organizer explaining the triangulation. Additionally, these data points were cross-checked with historical documents of media forms and awards (Appendix E). The initial PLQ survey (Appendix B) impacted the qualitative side by guiding some interview questions. An APQ II survey given to a parent focus group of a random selective sampling found in Appendix D added demographic trustworthiness to the parent participants of the APQ I (Appendix C). Both surveys also served as another triangulation point to the study as noted in Appendix E (Casey & Krueger, 2009; Mertens, 2005).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations would be unforeseen circumstances that affect the study and are out of the researcher's control (Creswell, 2007, 2009). For example, limitations would have included a participant or the researcher becoming sick, having had transportation issues, a family emergency, or an unscheduled meeting that caused her to miss an individual interview or focus group.

Delimitations of the Study

The delimitations of the study included are elements within the researcher's control (Creswell, 2007. 2009). For example, self-selection of participants from the convenience sampling is a delimitation. The delimitations (Creswell, 2007, 2009) of the study included are: (a) not building adequate relationships with participants because she opted to not engage in a Seidman's (2006) three-step interview process, (b) a potentially limited transferability of findings due to the unique nature of the school studied, (c) a limited open window of time to complete the survey, (d) a hired transcriptionist not present for the interviews and focus groups, and (e) the bias of the researcher as she transcribed some recordings and interpreted all the data. The complete list of both limitations and delimitation's is found in chapter 3 as prescribed by Creswell (2007, 2009).

Significance of the Study

Ultimately more charter schools may be on the horizon as a result of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and *Race to the Top* (RTTT). These Acts require all students to be proficient on their state's testing by the year 2013-14, and if not, consequences befall the respective schools (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary

and Secondary Education, n.d.; White House, 2009). Another mandate is for each school to show annual yearly progress (AYP) for each subgroup, and if not for two consecutive years, then consequences ensue. For either situation, closing schools permanently is an option (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.; White House, 2009). This study adds to the research as to how high performing charter schools' culture influences student learning. This is especially important to know as the achievement gap students are the subgroups that have been identified as not making the progress mandated by federal initiatives (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Payne, 2005; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.; White House, 2009).

Summary

An overview of the study in chapter 1 included the background and statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the grand tour research. The significance of the problem was provided in order to justify the need for the study, and a brief explanation regarding the design and methods detailed the manner in which the mixed-methods case study was pursued. Furthermore, both limitations and delimitations were assumed for this study and included.

This case study was designed to discover how one high performing charter school's culture influenced student learning. Using the culture lens, influences connected to learning were explored: (a) the relationship between school culture to student learning, (b) student accountability/ responsibility to student learning, and (c) expectancy-value/ motivation theory to student learning. While much literature exists on best practice strategies for student learning purposes, less is known about what influence a high

performing charter school's culture has on improved student learning. In sum and for these reasons, this case study was significant in that it added to the literature about school culture and specific concepts that influence student learning; therefore, consideration for replication to other schools should be considered. Politicians, educational leaders and teachers look for ways to increase student learning.

Definition of Key Terms

Achievement Gap. There are three achievement gaps: (a) between White students and Black and Latino students, (b) between U.S. students and students in other parts of the world and (c) between what it took to be prepared for the 20th century and what is will take to be prepared for the 21st century (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). This study will be primarily, but not always, referencing the first of the three achievement gaps.

CSAP or TCAP. Colorado State Assessment or Temporary Colorado Assessment

Charter School. A public school serving a K-12 study body of any race and/ or gender with less regulations and bureaucracy than a traditional public school.

Culture. Culture is the foundation of social order lived in and rules we abide by, socially constructed and valued as worthy to be taught to others (Schein, 2010).

Disadvantaged Learner. Minority races and lower social economic status students.

Efficacy. Same as efficacy expectations or self-efficacy. One's perceived capabilities for learning or performing actions at designated levels.

Expectancy Value Theory. Motivation factors that improve an individual's expectations for success due to the belief an individual has about his capabilities and reasons he holds/values for learning.

Improved Learning or *Significant Learning.* Defined by the school studied as two years of academic growth.

M.A.P.S. Testing instrument the school used to measure growth. Works like the GRE in that it gives questions based on responses given by the student. The school uses the online assessment to first determine the students' baseline level, then two more times to measure growth over the course of the year (mid-year and end-of-year).

Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ). Dr. Kenneth Leithwood's instrument to measure traits of transformative leadership.

Significant Learning. This term is defined by the public urban school studied as two years of academic growth in one school year.

Social Economic Status (SES). A term used to refer to the financial category of an individual.

Science, Technology and Educational Model (STEM). Science, math and technology infused curriculum (DSST J, 2011; DSST, K, 2010).

Systems. Systems are structures, process or procedures.

Transformative Leader. A leadership style characterized by a clear vision of what the organization can accomplish, appealing to similar values and focusing on creating and sustaining that vision with positive school change, through professionally developing each member of the organization. Shared values, trust, cooperation, empowerment and distributive leadership with collective learning are a few more characteristics of transformative leadership (Yukl, 2006).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature regarding a brief history of traditional and public charter schools, organizational culture and school culture. Also reviewed will be student accountability-for-responsibility as it relates to student learning. Additionally, explanations of state and federal policies as they connect to education and their meaning to educational systems are recounted. In conclusion, consideration is given to expectancy-value theory as it relates to motivation and responsibility regarding student learning, as this study seeks to discover what influences are embedded in one high performing school's culture that have led to improved student learning.

The Tale of United States Education

It was not until the early 1900s that there was a formal public education system in the U.S. Prior to that, schooling was a local matter, unique and managed by communities, parents, elected representatives and interested citizens of that community (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Gutman, 1987). Typical of this era, schools were diverse and autonomous of one another. Thomas Jefferson, one of our nation's founding fathers, wanted "at least one citizen in every four- to five-quarter-mile radius to provide the area's children with instruction in the sciences, arts and morals of society" (Chavous, 2004, p. 6). The belief of the times was that the new nation needed to instill certain values in children, and that in order for democracy to work, all children needed to be able to read, write, and do arithmetic. Additionally, Jefferson felt that children needed to understand their rights and

responsibilities as citizens (Chavous, 2004). Completion of high school was uncommon during this period. Rather, people were simply taught to read and write.

The Industrial Revolution Period and Education

This Jeffersonian approach lasted until the 1830s when Boston formed the first jurisdiction mandating that every child attend school, encompassing much the same curricula as the Jeffersonian period, but purposefully adding moral character (Chavous, 2004). The new nation was now facing another change in communities: significant growth in immigrant population stemming from the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution also resulted in a large movement of families from rural to urban dwellings (Chavous, 2004). Many people were leaving school to work in factories before finishing high school. Securing high school diplomas was not necessary for factory work and an eighth-grade education was considered normal (Chavous, 2004). As a result, a new dilemma faced the country and there emerged a new reform in education to help meet emerging needs.

As more factories opened and urban populations grew, the need for a more progressive education emerged. John Dewey was largely credited for a new reform movement, called progressive education. He emphasized respect for diversity of student abilities, interests, emotions and cultures. Additionally, Dewey's theory encouraged the development of critical thinking skills to foster community and collaboration in order to achieve a common good (Allen & Mintrom, 2010; Chavous, 2004; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Gutmann, 1999). This reform continued to be prominent until the conclusion of World War II. In 1945, the United States awoke to the recognition that it was one of the two

world's superpowers. Consequently, educational competition in science and technology heightened.

The Super Power Time Period and Education

In 1957 the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, an orbiting satellite. Due to Sputnik, the United States felt increased pressure to catch up with its superpower competitor, the Soviet Union. As a result, this required a new focus in the areas of science and technology. President Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act of 1957 (New York State Education Department, n.d.). The purpose of this Act was to close the perceived technology gap by educating a new wave of scientists and mathematicians who would lead the world in new discoveries and inventions. The federal government infused millions of federal dollars into public education hoping to overcome the threat posed by the Soviet Union's space mission's success. As a result, Dewey's theories of critical thinking, diversity of cultures and talents were pushed aside as a set curricula was sought for a "one-size-fits all" program in order to compete globally.

Since the 1950s, more federal legislation have been passed due to the concern that the U.S., compared to competing nations, had faltering literacy, math and science scores. President, Lyndon Johnson declared a "War on Poverty" with the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), April 9, 1965 (Elementary & Secondary Education Act, 1965). This Act provided federal funds to help low-income students by providing special tutoring programs like Title I to help with reading and/or math and English Language Learners.

About twenty years after President Johnson's 1965 "War on Poverty", a study

done by a commission for President Reagan found more people were completing high

school, but the nation was still behind the Soviet Union in science; therefore, people

needed to be able to do more than just read and write (National Commission on

Excellence in Education, 1983). The National Commission on Excellence in Education

(1983) committee that evaluated the nation's current education system in the early 1980s

had this to say about the importance of United States' education system:

> All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and
>
> to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the
>
> utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts,
>
> competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed
>
> to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not
>
> only their own interests but also the progress of society itself. (p. 1)

In this way, our nation's power defensively, economically and scientifically served the

country's interest best. Technology was considered essential to the progress of society.

Furthermore, a transmittal letter regarding the findings forecasted in the *A Nation at Risk:*

The Imperative for Educational Reform (National Commission on Excellence in

Education, 1983) highlighted the values, beliefs, purpose and fervor of education in the

U.S.:

> Our concern [United States government], however, goes well beyond matters such
>
> as industry and commerce. It also includes the intellectual, moral, and spiritual
>
> strengths of our people which knit together the very fabric of our society. The
>
> people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do

not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will

be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that

accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully

in our national life. A high level of shared education is essential to a free,

democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a

country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom. (p. 1)

In sum, education is for individuals' welfare as much as it is for the United States'

success as a free democratic society and for sustaining its superpower position. This

vision began at the federal level as a common core culture for active citizenship,

responsibility, values and good morals. Additionally, the vision for all citizens beginning

in the Jeffersonian period included learning to read, write, do mathematics and excel in

science (Chavous, 2004).

Federal Legislation

Subsequent efforts have been enacted by various U.S. Presidents since the early

1900s for the purpose of helping low-income students and offering equal education for all

children. Following *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National

Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), came *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB)

(H.R. 1--107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary

Educations. ESE. n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, 2010) in 2001, and then the latest

version of NCLB, *Race to the Top* (RTTT) (White House, 2009). Both of these latest

Acts gave attention to the importance of adequate compensation for recruiting and

retaining quality teachers and identifying highly effective factors that produce high

achievement for students. The NCLB Act (Hopmann, 2008; H.R. 1—107th Congress,

2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. ESE., n.d.) requires lots of accountability and transparency for educational systems and school personnel. The latest revision of NCLB, *Race to the Top* (RTTT), was signed in November, 2009, by President Barack Obama (White House, 2009) and sustains most of what is found in NCLB.

There are a lot of rules associated with the RTTT, like its predecessor, NCLB. For the record, according to constitutional law, the federal government is not to set curricula for schools; rather, schools are a matter for the states to govern. In brief, if the U.S. Constitution did not explicitly address an area, then the states "retained sovereignty, independence and freedom, while retaining every power, right and jurisdiction" from the federal government according to Article 10 of the Amendments, known as the Bill of Rights, passed in 1791 (LAWS.COM CONSTITUTION, Retrieved February, 5, 2012, no page number). However, state sovereignty is circumnavigated by funds for education given to states from the federal government, with strings attached. One string, or heavy burden, is for all students to meet a measurement of "proficient" on their state standardized test by the year 2014 (Hopmann, 2008; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. ESE. No Child Left Behind, n.d.). "Proficient" is a set level of mastery for each state's standardized tests. Additionally, a school must show student annual yearly progress (AYP), growth, each year, including subgroups, and if they do not for two consecutive years, they are put on probation. Of additional importance, each state is free to set the benchmark for students to be labeled proficient, making the process very unequal from state-to-state (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Probation has consequences like notifying all patrons about the insufficient AYP measurement and offering alternatives for them regarding schooling for their children. Ultimately, if AYP is not met within a dictated time period, schools are closed, displacing students, teachers and administration (Hopmann, 2008; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. ESE. No Child Left Behind, n.d.). As noted earlier and cited here again, since the federal government's inception of school for all citizens of the U.S., it has abilities to dictate much, especially as federal funding has grown. States are having less autonomy over their schools each decade; however, the NCLB Act of 2001 set parameters for alternative schools, called public charter schools to assist with failing schools, as defined by NCLB, offering innovation and freedom to these schools with less federal strings (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. ESE. No Child Left Behind, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

<div align="center">Charter School History</div>

Public charter schools inception stemmed from the NCLB Act of 2001 (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. ESE. No Child Left Behind, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The NCLB's designers were trying to help charter public schools to be more innovative in addressing the achievement gap by reducing the number and scope of government regulations. The public charter schools do have less mandates and regulations as will be explained more fully herein. Prior to this time charter schools were comprised primarily of private boarding and parochial schools. Debate has ensued over this charter school provision as

<div align="center">34</div>

to whether this avenue will enhance education or hurt traditional public schools; however, as with most new ideas, differences will be loudly contested and questions asked. Research studies are ongoing to discover what successful charter schools are doing in order to explain those findings and offer replication to other schools where applicable (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; Hassel, 2005; Nisbett, 2010).

Charter School History

First, a brief review about school history. As stated earlier, the purpose of education was to teach the basic skills and values that would allow the U.S. to compete globally (Chavous, 2006; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Test results had shown that certain populations and subgroups were not achieving the minimum standards. Subsequently, federal laws were enacted to raise the level of school and teacher accountability in public schools (Blankenstein, 2010; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Elementary & Secondary Education Act, 1965; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. ESE. No Child Left Behind, n.d.; White House, 2009). Although there is inconclusive evidence as to how to fix poor student achievement in the basic skills, charter schools were hoped to be a fertile ground for educational innovation.

The notion that schools have to be run by the government in order to be public schools or have public funding is dissipating. One reason for this is the allowance under NCLB Act (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. ESE. No Child Left Behind, n.d .; U.S. Department of Education, 2010) that a public traditional school may restructure under the umbrella of a charter school instead of closing their doors. This allowance is an outcome of not meeting annual

yearly progress (AYP) as stated by federal regulations. Consequently, innovations in structure and curriculum design are explored through charter schools to better meet the needs of learners and purposes of education.

A working definition of charter school is needed before going further and will be provided from Finn, Manno and Vanourek (2000): a charter school is an "independent public school of choice, freed from rules but accountable for results" (p. 14). These schools are eligible for federal and state funding and anyone can decide to join one of these schools without regard to race, religion or academic ability. Public charter schools are freer to be innovative in curriculum design, organizational structure, hiring of faculty, autonomous in their operations from state and local regulations, students are there by choice, educators and administrators are also there by choice and like traditional public schools can be closed for not producing satisfactory results (Chavous, 2004; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Weber, 2010).

There are a plethora of charter schools on the landscape, and comparing them conclusively and accurately is nearly impossible due to several factors: variance of state laws regarding charter schools, the innovation that each charter has, the population of students therein, school structure, culture of the school as well as the community in which the school is located, funding, size, school-day length, grade-level coverage, teacher contracts, and teacher unions, or lack therein to name a few (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; Chavous, 2004; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; Weber, 2010). Then again, these are factors for why charter schools are an option. When traditional schools are failing, new ideas for cultivating the learning culture need to be

aggressively sought to enhance and promote scholarship. Successful traditional and
public charter schools need to be studied as there are many making gains in academic
improvement for not only the middle and upper social economic classes, but also for the
lower social economic status (SES) group too.

Literature Supports Lower SES Students Struggle Academically

The literature shows that students of low social economic status (SES) and
specific minority groups largely underachieve compared to their middle and upper class
peers (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; Blankstein, 2010; Boykin & Noguera, 2011;
Chavous, 2004; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; Frankenberg,
Orfield & Siegel-Hawley, 2010; Nisbett, 2010; Payne, 2005; U. S. Department of
Education, 2010; Weber, 2010; White House, 2009). Furthermore, the literature on
charter schools clearly demonstrates that various strategies are being pursued structurally,
culturally and methodologically in an effort to close the achievement gap (Chavous,
2004; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; Frankenberg, et al., 2010;
Nisbett, 2010; Weber, 2010). Many charter schools are trying to close the disparity by
targeting low SES and minority populations, like Stellar Charter School is doing, by
writing up their charter school program to include minimally 40% low SES students and
adhering to those figures, if not exceeding them (DSST B, 2010; DSST N, 2012).

Meeting Proficient Status on State Tests

Nisbett (2010) questioned the feasibility of all students' reaching proficient status
on their 2014 state assessment as directed by NCLB (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001;
Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. ESE., n.d.; U.S.
Department of Education, 2010). Given the tendency for current public schools to be

overly bureaucratic thereby stifling innovation, Nisbett (2010) questions how traditional public schools can meet the NCLB's requirements that all students will reach proficient status by 2014. The top-down control is typically challenging in nature as it creates greater bureaucratic road blocks and dissention within the organization that inhibit problem-solving due to restrictions and division within the system (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Creativity and critical thinking for problem solving are commonly sacrificed to bureaucratic control with group think actions and solutions. As it is not possible for every child to achieve proficiency on their state test, including but not limited to the lower SES students, minorities, special education students and English Language Learners (ELL), ultimately all schools will fail and be in the failing category by 2014 (Hopmann, 2008).

Different Needs and Options Available

Bureaucrats often do not understand the challenges and complexities of low SES students, minorities, special education students and English Language Learners present in the academic setting. For example, families with money will be able to secure a quality education for their kids as well as supplement it, while those without money will be left to toil with schools in their neighborhoods. In essence, the upper and middle class can either move out of a poorer traditional public school setting to a better one, or take their kids to a private school (Chavous, 2004; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000). Politicians are romantic in their educational idealism and ultimately harm the education system's purpose that was originally set in place for all "race or class or economic status [which] are entitled to a fair chance and [given] the tools for developing their individual powers" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1). By the federal government imposing many rules and regulations on traditional public schools, Chavous

(2004) posited if people would argue that more harm than good is caused. The lower SES families have less alternatives regarding schooling than do their counterparts of the mid-to-upper social economic classes.

However, options for alternative schooling are growing due to the provisions in NCLB (Hopmann, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This might prove to be a good plan due to the growing population of minorities who tend to fall into the lower SES group and have greater struggles in school; therefore, the current "one-size-fits-all" traditional approach may not support these learners adequately. To further support this, statistically speaking, in 1954, when the U.S. Supreme Court dealt with the *Brown vs Board of Education of Topeka*, 90 percent of the U.S. population was white and now, 50-years later the whites are barely the majority (Frankenberg, et al., 2010). Perhaps innovative structures in organizational design, cultural awareness, student diversity and curriculum, would better serve American learners. These are variables charter schools are purposefully working with to determine a better education program for student learning (DSST N, 2012).

In sum, one in ten students are identified as English Language Learners and Latino students have tripled over the last thirty years (Capps, Murray, Ost, Passel & Herwantoro, 2005). White students of middle to upper SES outperform their peers from achievement gap groups; however, the middle to upper SES population is decreasing (Frankenberg, et al., 2010). This change in population dynamics and students' results on state testing, indicate public schooling in traditional-type systems are struggling to effectively teach the growing new school members. According to research, needs are different for the achievement gap groups (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Payne, 2005). There

are schools which show more success in helping the population of achievement gap learners with a different design than the traditional public school (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; DSST N, 2012; Nisbett, 2010). Often these schools have extended days, longer time in school throughout the year and more collegiality among staff in the decision-making for the school (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Nisbett, 2010). Other variables include organizational structure, culture and curriculum. Additionally, parent choice and involvement, along with high expectations for both students and educators are components of alternative public charter schools that engage in a careful selection of teachers and administration (Chavous, 2004; Chenoweth, 2007, 2009; Chubb & Moe, 1990; DSST D, 2010; DSST M & N, 2012; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; Frankenberg, et al., 2010; Hassel, 2005; Nisbett, 2010; Payne, 2005; Weber, 2010). With this said, Boykin and Noguera (2011) highlight the uncomfortable fact: "Most existing research on the achievement gap suggest that even though a small but statistically significant number of individual schools and districts have made real progress, the impact of large-scale reforms has been far less promising" (p. 17). This study seeks to discover what influences are embedded in one high performing urban public charter school's culture that have led to improved student learning, and report the findings in hopes that more schools will replicate what works.

<center>Organizational Culture</center>

Bush (2003) says, "Cultural models are manifested by symbols and rituals rather than through the formal structure of the organization" (p. 156). Cultural models assume that beliefs, values and ideology are at the heart of organizations, where individuals hold certain ideas and value-preferences which influence how they behave and view behavior

<center>40</center>

of other members. Over time, these norms become shared traditions that are communicated within the groups and are reinforced by symbols and rituals (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Bush, 2003; Schein, 2010).

Learning and Innovation in Educational Organizations

Educational systems have emphasized culture more as a means to better orchestrate the learning environment, extracting sense out of the mayhem created by bureaucratic systems (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Sergiovanni, 2000). While bureaucratic models host a hierarchical and formal chain of command, with divided labor, rules, procedures and goals set and monitored by superiors, it is much less personal and unenthusiastically carried out in school organizations (Bush, 2003). In great part, this is due to the education level of the teachers who have expertise (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Though this bureaucratic model may be more efficient, it drains an organization to nothing more than robotic algorithms, and ultimately stagnant innovation. In sharp contrast, NCLB (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001) purposefully allowed innovation and decreased structural hierarchy through the organization of public charter schools. An example is the Stellar Charter School in the Midwest (DSST C & D, 2010).

Nonaka (1991) compared organizations to "living organisms" (p. 97), which are always evolving, and said, "The essence of innovations is to re-create the world according to a particular vision or ideal" (p. 97). Thriving organizations understand that organizations need members as much as members need the organizations, and according to Bolman and Deal (2008) if a good fit is had, then members maximize their talents, feel energized and satisfied. Additionally, Lundie (2009) believes education institutions play a key role in shaping students' mindset, or ontology, toward education. Bandura (2002)

agrees with Lundie, where he suggests three human agencies, or factors, that shape people. Bandura's (2002) agentic perspective theory has three modes: (a) "personal agency", (b) "proxy agency" and (c) "collective agency", which will be discussed more deeply in the next section. In this sense, we see support for Nonaka's (1991, p. 269) belief where one can shift her paradigm to a new ideal through culture. Leaders have a central role in creating a culture of learning in schools where learning is a good commodity, buy-in and value of this assumption is real, and such learning is tangible for all students and teachers regardless of race or class.

If Nonaka's (1991) innovative concepts were adopted, then innovation would support the No Child Left Behind Act provisions for charter schools. According to Nonaka (1991), one way innovation is done through a lateral structure is with "knowledge-creat[ion]" (p. 98) at the center, "making personal knowledge available to others" (p.98). In other words, hierarchy is replaced with horizontal fluidity by converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through a process which fosters a culture of sharing and innovation.

<center>School Culture</center>

Regardless of how school culture is defined, it is evident that the stronger and more understood the culture of a school is, then the better that school organization is able to move toward its stated goals and objectives (Blankenstein, 2010; Sergiovanni, 1984). Again, a leader's ability to be effective in developing and maintaining positive, effective school culture is of considerable importance whether a public traditional or public charter school. As stated earlier, a review of the literature shows there is a disparity in learning for achievement gap groups in education, particularly the Hispanics and African

Americans, and schools are strategizing to address this issue (Alberg, McDonald, & Ross, 2007; Bali & Alvarez, 2003; Barber, Garcia & McIlory, 2008;Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Lundie, 2009). According to Bandura (2002), we know that cultures are not "static monoliths"; rather, "diverse and dynamic social systems" (p. 269). Furthermore, numerous studies as cited in Bandura's (2002) *Social Cognitive Theory in Cultural Context* show "efficacy beliefs contribute significantly to the quality of human functioning" (p. 271). With this said, the better we understand human functioning in cultural contexts and foster efficacy, one's value or belief-system, then the better we can culturally structure and orchestrate schools for enhanced learning (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

A Culture of Forcing Change

Traditionally a hierarchal structural model has consumed educational organizations; however, a school culture of teacher collaboration and collegial leadership has been prescribed to enhance and support academic rigor for all learners. Schein (2010) defines culture as:

> Culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integrations that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relations to those problems. (p. 18)

In this sense, culture is both a product and a process that is taught to new members entering the culture, lending purpose and shared values. Once these values and purpose are established, then compass points and markers can be set for guiding what is to be done and how to achieve those as well. Any belief or action not held by the group's

shared basic assumptions is viewed as ludicrous (Schien, 2010). An effective leader's role communicates the shared basic assumptions, builds a team and moves towards the stated purposes, because it is vital for the sustainability of the organization and its members. An element of culture is shared values and these are in all education systems and microsystems of public charter or traditional schools. Sergiovanni (2001) puts it this way, "Shared values provide the glue that connects people together in meaningful ways" (p. 25).

Core values or shared norms are established as evidenced by Bryk and Schneider's (2002) review of group theory, where they assert that after being in an organization or group for a while, long term effects of those interactions and connections begin to have their own place or value. For example: "These are my friends, my school, my community organization…and [they] undertake subsequent actions because this identification is meaningful to them" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 15). Many researchers agree with Bandura (2001, 2002) that culture plays a significant factor in peoples' lives (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Bush, 2003; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Schien, 2010; Segiovanni, 1984). It would make sense then, for culture to affect learning.

First, to be clear, Bandura (2002) says that blends of three human agency modes are required for successful human functioning and may vary across cultures. However, "people have changed little genetically…but have changed [remarkably] through rapid cultural and technological evolution in their beliefs, mores [traditions/customs], social roles, and styles of behavior" (Bandura, 2002, p. 272). In this way, we see Bandura (2002) positioning convincingly the three modes of agency that affect human development: "(a) personal agency (which is exercised individually), (b) proxy agency

(where people obtain desired outcomes through influencing others to act on their behalf, and (c) collective agency (where people act in concert to shape their future)" (p. 269). All three agencies fall under the social cognitive theory of Bandura (Woolfolk, 2001, 2007), and when considering the plasticity of humans, it stands to reason that through purposeful structures in culture an organization can influence people to excel academically.

In essence, the culture of a school directly relates to what was stated much earlier in the school history section regarding the purpose of schools: students "can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and…manage their own lives…serving both self interests but also the progress of society" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1). This thought also remains in alignment to President Johnson's 1965, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, *War on Poverty* (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESE, 1965) where the achievement gap students were noticed to be struggling more in academic matters, and further back in time, to the progression education movement of John Dewey, including the Jeffersonian era where the success of the new democracy was important as well as individual welfare and citizenship (Chavous, 2004; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Gutmann, 1999). Furthermore, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) highlighted values and belief structures as important in U.S. education.

Culture is often framed as the way things are done at an individual school. When people share the same world view, hold similar paradigms, or are sufficiently homogenous in their core assumptions, then a common culture emerges and "the group becomes tribal" (Bearce, Caldwell & Millikan, 1989, p. 18). In a similar way, the

Jeffersonian period promoted this same world view in the late 1800s when he proclaimed

the nation needed to instill certain values and way of life in children, as well as learning

to read, write, and do arithmetic (Chavous, 2004). Furthermore, Gutmann (1987) pointed

out that in a democratic state, education "recognizes the value of professional authority in

enabling children to appreciate and to evaluate ways of life other than those favored by

their families" (p. 42). In this sense, shared values and norms serve as motivation to

match one's actions and choices to the group's and if the educational organization has

fostered a culture of learning and excelling in academics, then the members of that body

will more likely seek that alignment even if their family values a different system. Part of

this shared value system may also incorporate the idea that motivation to learn or ability

to learn is not so much a product of innate aptitude as it is one of effort (Dweck &

Molden, 2006; Dweck & Mueller, 1998).

    In support of culture and teaching different perspectives, Lundie (2009) was direct

in saying education's purpose is to empower students, teachers and schools to try new

perspectives. Lundie (2009) also discussed different groups' varying educational capital,

where learners' perceptions play a significant role in determining this capital. These

perceptions might factor into the idea that different approaches may be necessary in order

to teach various groups. Caldwell and Spinks (1992) support that school culture is about

core assumptions, values and beliefs, and the evidence suggests that buy-in is greater in

lottery systems over the traditional public school systems where one attends because of

one's housing situation, not by to choice (Weber, 2010).

In the case of public charter schools, many are based on a lottery system (Weber, 2010); hence, families signed up to participate, and if fortunate enough to be drawn, they became part of that student body with an enhanced buy in over traditional public schools. Knowingly, these families have elected to participate in a homogenous structure, which embodies common assumptions and values. Many of these schools have a signature of commitment document for families to sign, implying agreement to the school's design, mission and values; consequently, promoting buy-in from the onset is easier when participants have elected to join. Furthermore, commitment, accountability, passions, enthusiasm, history, innovation and a commonality of actions, communication and behavior are reflected in a positive school culture, says Bearce et al. (1989), as the group becomes tribal.

As the entity of education struggles to map out a system to reach all students consistently, whether a public charter or traditional school, Lundie (2009) argues against the "one size fits all curriculum" approach for today's learners. This researcher says there are three types of motivational difficulties that impact learning; therefore, with learners' different educational capital, different cultures are needed within schools to enhance motivation for learning based on the needs of the student population served (Lundie, 2009).

<div align="center">Accountability/ Responsibility</div>

A longitudinal study done by Chen, Cheng, Liu and Wu (2009) found significance regarding internal versus external control factors, including factors of ability. Accountability/ responsibility will be addressed using motivational research, as it aligns well with the construct. Students who held the belief that they were responsible for their

learning and setting goals, regardless of ability, engaged themselves more in the learning,

worked harder, and made significant gains compared to students that attributed external

factors such as teacher instructions, parental discipline and friends (Chen, et al., 2009).

Research by Boykin and Noguera (2011) reiterate similar findings as Chen, et al. (2009).

In motivational themes, a psychological need of relatedness and/ or competency is

indicated as Bandura (2001) supports the accountability/ responsibility of Chen, et al. in

his three modes of agency: "A firm group loyalty creates strong personal obligations to

do one's part in group pursuits as efficaciously as one can" (p. 273). Parts-to-whole

analogies appear to be thematic where values, belief systems, and efficacy, among other

factors, affect responsibility and accountability of people.

Student Accountability versus Teacher Accountability

Unfortunately, as a society in the Western world we have moved from student

accountability, to teacher and school accountability as noted in NCLB. In contrast

though, in 1983, a committee that President Regan commissioned to evaluate the current

education system stated that "All [students] …are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools

for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise

means that all children *by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided* [italics added],

can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful

employment, and to manage their own lives" (p. 1). In this way, we see that learners have

responsibility "by virtue of their own efforts" combined with the responsibility of

competent teachers. However, nearly 20 years later the shift of accountability/

responsibility has been placed strictly on the teacher and education system as noticed in

the NCLB Act of 2001 (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of

Elementary and Secondary Educations. ESE., n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, 2010)

and the reauthorization of said Act by the Obama administration with *Race to the* Top

(RTTT*)* (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.; White

House, 2009). Omission of language regarding student's own efforts or virtue has been

displaced solely to the teachers and education systems and communicated loudly and

clearly in bureaucratic, political and media arenas. Perhaps Gutmann (1999) captures it

best when she says, "Given the democratic goal of sharing the rights and responsibilities

of citizenship, schools that teach children the cooperative virtues are uncommonly

successful and minimally problematical" (p. 62-63).

<div align="center">Expectancy-Value/ Motivation Theory</div>

A long standing wonder and debate held by behavioral and cognitive

psychologists, educators and parents pertains to the factors of ability and effort. How

much do ability and effort come into play regarding learning and doing well in school?

Expectancy-value theory outlines motivation factors that improve individuals'

expectations for success in combination with valuing the goal (Woolfolk, 2007; Meece,

Pintrich & Schunk, 2008). Expectancies are people's beliefs and judgments about their

capabilities to perform successfully or not, and "values refer to the beliefs students have

about the reasons they might engage in a task" (Meece, Pintrich & Schunk, 2008, p. 44).

In essence, expectancy-value theory regarding education is about the belief an individual

has about their capabilities and then, the reasons they hold for learning. The term 'self-

efficacy' is similar to the expectancy-value theory, as noted in works by Boykin and

Noguera (2011) and Meece, Pintrich and Schunk (2008).

Blend of External and Internal Factors for Learning

A longitudinal study by Chen, Cheng, Liu and Wu (2009) found significance regarding internal versus external control factors, including factors of ability. Students who held the belief that they were responsible for their learning and setting goals, regardless of ability, engaged themselves more in the learning, worked harder and made significant gains, compared to students that attributed external factors such as teacher instructions, parental discipline and friends (Chen, et al., 2009). Additionally, Chen et al. (2009) found that students with "higher levels of educational expectation…had higher learning-growth rates" (p. 918) regardless of their ability beliefs. Furthermore, an interesting finding was discovered in cultural differences between Asian students and Western world students. American students and families would blame external controls, like ability and other external factors, where Asian students and families did not. The Asian students valued and placed emphasis on internal factors like effort over ability (Chen et al., 2009; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). With this noted, it matters how success is perceived or defined in a culture, and how failure is viewed or even tolerated.

The findings of Chen et al. (2009) were consistent with other research cited in Chen et al., including Georgiou (1999) and Schunk (1982) regarding attributions of achievements related to effort being positively related to actual achievements. Bandura (1993, 2001) also relates attributions of achievements to self-efficacy. As more success occurs, then one's self-efficacy increases, and as a result, higher levels of cognitive tasks are attempted (Bandura, 1993). Coupling greater self-efficacy with higher expectations further supports the findings of Chen et al. (2009) pertaining to educational expectations, educational achievements and learning-growth rates. For example, earlier research by

Gill and Reynolds (1999), Marshall and Brown (2004), Mau (1995), Sanders, Field, and Diego (2001), Seginer and Vermulst (2002), and Smead and Chase (1981), as cited in Chen et al. (2009), found positive correlations regarding expectations. The Asian culture has high expectations for learning and low tolerance for failure. Stevenson and Stigler (1992) noted in Asian culture that allowing a struggling student to wrestle with the problem and eventually solve it is considered a positive teaching strategy.

Good's (1987) research of two decades, and Dweck (2007) found that student learning was often related to the perceptions and expectations the teachers communicated to students regarding students' capacity for learning. The Asian culture example supports this, as noted by Stevenson and Stigler (1992) in their longitudinal study above. This is encouraging as it relates to the well-known self-fulfilling prophecy, or principle of high expectations that Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson theorized in their work (Woolfolk, 2007). It is the basic principle of thinking "you can" versus thinking "you cannot," or, in other words, the power of positive thinking and sticking with it until learning happens. The encouragement and support of a teacher who also believes in students and expects them to learn pairs well with the power of positive thinking and a hard work ethic that fosters greater student learning. Schools can foster a culture that helps students form habits of thinking and create an inner voice that guides them to higher learning by working hard to achieve such.

Psychologists Rosenthal and Jacobson (Woolfolk, 2007) brought to the public eye the concept of expectation through their studies of random elementary classes where they told the teachers that specific students in those classes would do significantly well academically. There was no reason that these students should do well; however, they did.

Random selection of students and the causal factor was that the teachers expected them to do well; hence, they had higher expectations for these students and they indeed did well (Woolfolk, 2007). This principle of high expectations is further substantiated by a graduate professor who tells her story as an English Language Learner (ELL) in the U.S. While doing her student teaching she kept notes and found themes. One emerging theme was that expectations were lower for ELL and achievement gap students (Cavazos, 2009) and consequently, the students fulfilled that prophecy. A major advocate of a high self belief-system, Cavazos (2009) continued to hold high expectations for herself and for her students. When the students asked her if they could really be successful with a class, attend college, and/or achieve other difficult activities, she told them (Cavazos, 2009):

> [The students] must have a desire to learn, and they must be dedicated and motivated to comprehend new information. They have to try their very best and when they do not understand a concept or an idea, they must ask questions without being embarrassed. (p. 77)

In this way, Cavazos (2009) legitimized to the students that it is okay to not know something: this is a form of failure and mistake tolerance. She messaged to the students that they were to be aware of their lack of understanding and then ask questions and work hard to remedy the knowledge gap. Considering the previous section regarding accountability/ responsibility, Cavazos was in direct alignment with President Regan's commissioned education committee's statement. The committee stated that the responsibility and accountability for learning belonged to the students, and commanded competent teachers to facilitate that learning (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

In retrospect, we see that Cavazos (2009) appeared to be right about perception as it related to students, parents and teachers. Beal and Crockett (2010) shared that "adolescents' thoughts about their future selves [were] important because they presumably influenc[ed] choices, decisions, and activities" (p. 258) as Nurmi (as cited in Beal & Crockett, 2010) found in his studies. To accompany these findings Beal and Crockett (2010) cited the works of Messersmith and Schulenberg (2008) and Ou and Reynolds (2008) noting that "adolescents' educational expectations predict their educational attainment" (p. 258). It is important, if not critical, that achievement gap students see their possible selves in order to achieve academic success. As a result of the evidence in these studies, students of all types need to believe in themselves, see their possible future selves, work hard, set goals and let those elements motivate them to do well in school to become their perceived selves.

Learning

Ability or effort seems to be an ongoing debate regarding our ability to learn (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992); however, many studies, as previously noted, have uncovered evidence to effort bearing far more weight than ability. With this said, a school's structural model and culture can promote the expectancy for students to do well academically (and behaviorally) by combining both effort and efficacy in students (Bandura, 2001; Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Another factor that emerged from the literature review was accountability/ responsibility for learning. Combining both educational system members (meaning teachers, building administrators, and central office personnel) along with students to be held accountable for their own responsibilities

regarding learning appeared to be more helpful than one of the two variables in isolation (Bandura, 2001; Blankstein, 2010; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Chen, et al., 2009).

According to many researchers' studies, there are numerous strategies, systems, leadership qualities and organizational structures that result in student learning. Student engagement, student goal-setting and relationships between teachers, leaders and students are a few elements. Additionally, awareness of different cultures that students come from and incorporating this into the learning environment is also noted to be helpful for student learning. The culture and mission of the school, along with collaboration of teachers as well as student-learning collaboration models and much more are evidenced by researchers like Blankstein (2010), Boykin and Noguera (2011), Jantzi and Leithwood (2000), Lundie, 2009, Payne (2005) and Sergiovanni, (1984, 2000). Perhaps the most significant point gleaned from all the evidence found in the literature review is that most all students can learn and improve over time. The blend of methods, leadership style, structure of the organization, and culture of the school appears to be the mystery.

Summary

The initial literature review provided information regarding history of the U.S. education system, organizations and school culture constructs, accountability/ responsibility, as well as expectancy-value/ motivation theory as it pertains to learning. These constructs were assumed to be influences embedded in one high performing urban public charter school's culture that led to improved student learning; however, additional constructs emerged. The review of literature showed some possible theories used to support the influences in the culture of schools, while explaining why a variety of charter schools have emerged on the landscape.

Due to federal initiatives that impact funding and closing of schools, educational systems are scrambling to discover what influences work for impacting student learning best. Once that knowledge gap is understood, we can then transfer that knowledge to other educational systems where appropriate factors align and an increase of student learning can transpire. A more focused second literature review will be in chapter 4 to expand on the new constructs which emerged.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

States and local school districts are scrambling to achieve the standards, mandates and benchmarks set by the federal initiatives. An abundance of mandates were set in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and *Race to the Top* (RTTT) as is evidenced by one particularly concerning benchmark that all students will score proficient on the state assessment by the year 2013-2014 school year (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, ESE, n.d.; White House, 2009). Given that benchmark, ingenuity to try a different school structural model was encouraged in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and remains in *Race to the Top* (RTTT) regarding the design of alternative schools (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.; White House, 2009). These alternative schools, also known as charter schools, can be public or private and have various structures and curriculum models, missions and focuses (Chavous, 2004; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Achievement Gap Learners and Education

Achievement gap learners are the low SES and minority students, as these groups have repeatedly demonstrated a disparity in learning when compared to their middle and upper SES peers on state assessments (Blankstein, 2010; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Payne, 2005; White House, 2009). Therefore, there is urgency in today's education systems and research studies to find a silver bullet that will make existing problems like low academic student achievement vanish, and in their place

create continual learning systems that always meet *Annual Yearly Progress* (AYP) (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, ESE, n.d.). According to federal laws, it is imperative that every child meet proficiency on standardized state tests or succumb to federal penalties (Hopmann, 2008; H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, ESE, n.d.; White House, 2009). Educators are not fooled that such a silver bullet exists; nevertheless, harsh penalties ensue for schools if growth within the identified benchmarks are not met. Hence, it is imperative to discover what influences are working within school culture and report those; however, "this sense of urgency" must be bridled to stay within the "evidence available" (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006, p. 144).

The purpose of this case study was to discover what influences were embedded in one high performing urban public charter school's culture that have led to improved student learning. The researcher sought to discover and report what teachers, administrators, staff and parents perceived as influences embedded in the school's culture that led to high achievement for students, and tell how these influences worked. This knowledge is important for all school systems to know in order that other systems can transfer this to their schools were appropriate alignment allows, and/ or create learning cultures to sustain what has proven to work.

Public Charter Schools

A provision of NCLB allows public charter schools greater flexibility to be creative in designing their school organizational structure, curriculum, hiring, pay and instructional focus/model (H.R. 1—107th Congress, 2001; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, ESE, n.d). Often, public charter schools

purposefully serve the identified achievement gap population since they are the group that is on record for struggling (DSST N, 2012). The research is as varied as the charter schools themselves due to the innovation and freedom afforded these schools. As charter schools are diverse in structure, it is unknown what influences are embedded in charter schools' cultures that are demonstrating high student achievement. More research to isolate variables needs to be done to better understand what works. An understanding of what works in these school systems will advance the field of education to best meet the needs of both students and federal initiatives (Angel, Christensen & Hill, 2006; CREDO, 2009; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; Hassel, 2005). Transformation of knowledge can then be put into action for other educational systems with similar variables. However, Angel, Christensen and Hill (2006) caution that "it is often wrong to generalize findings to all charter schools" (p. 143) because "charter schools serve [a] very different student population and operate under very different circumstances" (p. 143). Therefore, it is imperative to engage in more studies that control variables and compare what is similar between schools.

This chapter will outline the methods of research by first explaining the rationale for using a mixed methods approach. Next, the research purpose will be stated, followed with an overview of the population and sample to be studied. Sampling and data analysis procedures will be explained, along with strategies to address quality and "validity legitimation", (Creswell, 2009, p. 219) a newer bilingual term used to discuss validity of a mixed methods study. Chapter 3 will conclude with coverage of the limitations, incorporating researcher bias of the study and a summary.

Rational for Using Mixed Methods Research

In order to gather information that would better answer the research questions stated above and strengthen the study, the researcher settled on a mixed methods design of sequential format (Creswell, 2007, 2009) of "hermeneutic phenomenology" (Creswell, 2007, p.59). In essence, the quantitative method guides the qualitative methods. Following the quantitative survey, the researcher further studies the issue or interest like influences embedded in culture that impact student learning. Creswell (2007) says this is discovered by gathering lived or experienced examples of those involved, interpreting those texts and making meaning from them. Additionally, this data serves to triangulate the study with other data points collected (Creswell, 2007).

For example, a leadership survey (Leithwood, 1996) completed by a convenience self-select sampling (Fink, 2009) of the teachers impacted the qualitative interview and focus group questions. Based on the Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ) findings of Leithwood (1996) a few of the qualitative interview questions were adjusted to espouse and describe those leadership traits in action. Bolman and Deal (2008), Bush (2003) and Yukl (2006) stressed that leadership affects the culture of an organization; hence, this piece is valuable to the study. Additionally, as prescribed by Creswell (2007, 2009) the quantitative leadership survey serves as a triangulation point to determine if the information is trustworthy as it is compared to other data points on the qualitative side. There was another quantitative survey to parents (Advanced Parent Questionnaire I and II) adding trustworthiness to the study and explained in more detail later.

Stability is gained when using both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Mertens, 2005). For that purpose, the PLQ was given to the teachers to first impact interview questions, and later triangulate and gain trustworthiness from the interviews and focus groups regarding if their leader influences the school's culture or not (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Mertens, 2005). Schein (2010) says that leadership is the "original source of the beliefs and values that gets a group moving in dealing with its internal and external problems" (p. 32), or, as in this case study, the leadership continues a culture already in place. A mixed methods study strengthens the research through the collection of participants' stories, historical documents, records and observations (Creswell, 2007, 2009). Furthermore, the descriptive research approach used was hermeneutic phenomenology (Creswell, 2007, p. 59) where the researcher purposefully studied peoples' lived experiences and interpreted the "texts" of life" (p. 59). To assist in the collecting of "lived experiences", the interview and focus groups were open and semi-structured in order to glean rich stories (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Mertens, 2005; Seidman, 2006). According to these researchers, this approach allows flexible follow-up questions as noted in the research questions below and the sampler protocol found in Appendix A.

The researcher purposefully designed a descriptive case study of hermeneutic phenomenology bounded by time and place, holding purposeful interviews and focus groups that deeply explored a school comprised of many individuals as prescribed by Creswell (2007, 2009). To triangulate the data, the researcher elected to use a variety of data collection procedures to add credibility/ trustworthiness to the findings by sharing transcriptions of interviews with interviewees and cross-checking (Casey & Krueger, 2009; Creswell, 2007, 2009; Mertens, 2005). Finally, as prescribed by Creswell (2009) a

"peer debriefer" was used "to enhance the accuracy of the account" (p. 192). The peer debriefer, someone not involved in the research but a doctorial colleague, was used as a sounding board for ideas and aided when critiquing the interview and focus group transcriptions.

Furthermore, Creswell (2007) said it is important to study and consider relevant documents like media materials and historical documents as they often capture information that interviews and focus groups would not. Finding themes, synthesizing information of rich, thick, and descriptive stories was the purpose for reporting what this high performing urban public charter school does as it relates to influences embedded in a culture that improve student learning, and describe how the members do this (Casey & Krueger, 2009; Seidman, 2006). In sum, a good design according to Creswell (2007, 2009) uses the combination of deductive and inductive research systems by employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to explain and report relationships found among variables; thus the researcher incorporated mixed methods to seek that end.

<div align="center">Research Purpose and Questions</div>

This study was designed to answer the overarching research question proposed: What influences are embedded in one high performing urban public charter school's culture that have led to improved student learning?

Focus group and individual interview questions were open-ended and flexible (Borg, Gall & Gall, 2003; Casey & Krueger, 2009; Creswell, 2007, 2009); however a few of these questions were expanded from an earlier quantitative survey first given to teachers, called the Principal's Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ) (Appendix B) and the Advanced Parent Questionnaire I (APQ I) found in Appendix C. Using Leithwood's

(1996) principal questionnaire instrument to gain insight about the type of leader this

school has segues into the qualitative study of expanding on those traits and situating

them in constructs the organization uses in its culture to improve student learning. For

example, the researcher had the assumption that expectations and accountability/

responsibility of students were embedded in the culture and upheld by the school's

leader. Therefore, a leader who collaborated with his members, distributed leadership to

meet common goals, and had high expectations (Bush, 2003; Yukl, 2006) might support a

finding or two from the qualitative study. If this is not found to be the case, such a finding

would be discussed in chapter 4 of the study. However, should the qualitative research

findings support the quantitative, then that would serve to verify that, one, the correct

research interview questions were asked and, two, trustworthiness was added to the

study. Furthermore, the APQ I from the parents might show something the researcher

would want to further expand on during the individual interviews and/ or focus groups.

Thus, a brief analysis of those findings before the qualitative study began added richness

to the study. This was done by reading over several completed questionnaires. Using

Creswell's (2009) "sequential mixed method…[approach] to elaborate on or expand on

the findings of one method with another method" (p. 14) was a purposeful part of the

researcher's design of study. The mixed method approach can validate, or as

Onwuegbuzie and Johnson said in Creswell (2009), create "validity *legitimatization"* (p.

219). Therefore, this method can "improve the accuracy of the findings" said Creswell

(2009, p. 219).

To create a richer study, this mixed methods research design, as prescribed by Creswell (2007, 2009) and Mertens (2005), was a descriptive "bounded system" (Creswell, 2007, p. 244) of "hermeneutic phenomenology" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). The case study's ontology was transformative as it stemmed from multiple realities that were molded "by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, [and] gender…values" (Mertens, 2005, p. 9). The study sought to discover what influences were embedded in one high performing urban public charter school's culture that have led to improved student learning. A sampling of the standardized open-ended interview and focus group questions can be found in Appendix A. Next, a description of the data collection procedures, analysis and conclusion will ensue, followed by a discussion of ethics, while concluding with limitations and delimitations impacting the study as prescribed by Borg, Gall & Gall, 2003, Casey & Krueger, 2009, Creswell, 2007, 2009, Mertens, 2005, and Seidman, 2006.

Grand Tour Research Question

This study has been designed to answer the overarching research question proposed: What influences are embedded in one high performing urban public charter school's culture that have led to improved student learning?

Interview and Focus Group Rationale and Process

According to Casey and Krueger (2009) and Seidman (2006), getting to first know one's participants is how to begin each interview and focus group. In order to foster relationship building and create an environment for storytelling, the researcher first thanked participants for agreeing to meet and participate in the research. Next, the researcher told them a brief history of her background and journey in education—both in

schooling and work, what she enjoys most when not working, and then explained the

purpose of her study (Appendix K). The researcher reassured participants that all names

would be changed to pseudo, fake names, to keep their privacy. A protocol, as found in

Appendix A was the script used to provide consistency as Borg, Gall & Gall (2003) and

others suggested was important to a quality study.

The second step in the interview process was to ask participants to fill out the

demographics questionnaire (Appendix J) to triangulate demographics of individual

interviews and focus groups to the PLQ and APQ I demographics respectively. While

doing that, the researcher asked the participants to state their names, and share their

backgrounds and journeys to create the relaxed atmosphere of friends visiting. In

continuing that friendly conversation, the researcher then asked each to share why they

came to the field of education, and what they enjoyed most when not working (Appendix

K).

For the parent focus group, the researcher shared her journey, told them how she

spent time with her family and what they liked doing together. Next, the researcher

explained her study, and assured privacy by changing their names in the study. To create

the friendly conversational atmosphere, the researcher asked the parents to state their

names and to share what they liked to do with their families. The parent participants also

completed a short Advance Parent Questionnaire II (APQ II) found in Appendix D,

which asked the demographic basics that was in the first APQ I; however, this

questionnaire does not go further than demographics. For example, age, race, marital

status, number of children, level of education, and income are sample questions on this

APQ II (Appendix D). This was used to triangulate, or validate that the same sampling of

population is involved in the focus group that participated in the APQ I, which enriches

the study according to Creswell (2009). From this point, the group moved to the

interview protocol sheet (Appendix A) and the researcher explained that while she would

use this to help guide their interview, they would simply visit and have a conversation

about the things in which she inquired. Stories and examples were welcomed as we

visited for the hour.

In a qualitative study the "key instrument" (Creswell, 2007, p. 38) is often the

researcher herself, and the instrument often used to collect data is called a protocol. See

Appendices A and K for protocol and interview warm-up documents in full. Typically,

the researcher "[does] not rely on questionnaires developed by other researchers"

(Creswell, 2007, p. 38) as she is the main instrument and it is an evolving process.

<center>Population and Sample Studied</center>

A selected high performing urban public charter school, given the pseudo name

Stellar Charter School, was chosen for this study and is located in the Midwest, serving a

diverse community (DSST A, B, C, D, E, 2010). The middle school served about 420

students, grades 6-8, with 43.42 percent of the student population qualifying for free and

reduced lunches and 65 percent minority status (DSST D, E, F, 2010; DSST G, n.d.;

DSST J, 2012). With that said, this school's population consisted of 50.3% males,

43.42% females, 35% Hispanics, 32% Caucasians, 23% African Americans, 6.2% mixed

and 2.6% Asian (DSST I, n.d.) According to the school's staff website, 32 members, one

director and three other administrators serve this diverse population (DSST H, 2010).

The objective for this school's academic structure is to "[have] a college

preparatory focus", meaning all learning is taught with a college-following-high-school-

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graduation mindset, and has "an emphasis on developing core liberal arts skills in reading, writing, mathematics and science" (DSST F, 2010; G, n.d.; DSST J, 2012). With this said, the school's education model, as posted on their website, is science and technology (STEM) (DSST J, 2012; DSST K, 2010). Furthermore, this high performing public urban charter middle school feeds into a similarly designed high performing public charter high school of intense rigor and similar structure; hence, the middle school prepares students for this by spiraling "a highly structured classroom environment with clear academic and behavioral expectations" of "rigor" (DSST C, 2010, no page). This information affected the researcher's assumption that student learning was the goal and perhaps accountability/ responsibility, as well as expectancy-value theory, was embedded in the school culture to help them achieve their goal.

A lottery system is used for entrance into this school with first preference given to the 40 percent free and reduced lunch status, the next preference is "sibling, staff and founding family [members]" (DSST G, n.d., page, 1), followed by students living within the zip code area of the school. Also on the school's website was the statement that the school does not use "discriminatory enrollment practices…like grade point averages, [and/ or] placements tests" keeping with laws about charter schools in the state of Colorado (DSST G, n.d., page, 1). In closing, this is an urban public school district that in its charter school totality served, at the time of this study, over 1,000 students and had plans to open three more middle school campuses by 2013, bringing the grand total of students served to 4,200 (DSST A, B, 2010; DSST J, 2012).

Sampling Procedures

Sampling selection varies depending on the tools used, purpose for the tools, population size, and "credibility of the findings" (Fink, 2009, p. 51). Natural, objective, random-type selection that results in a reflection of the body being researched was the researcher's goal (Fink, 2009). As prescribed by Fink (2009), avoiding bias is important to the study. Therefore, careful consideration in the selection of participants was as important as improving response rate of participants (Fink, 2009). To improve the response rate, "respondents [were told they could] easily complete and submit the survey" (Fink, 2009, p. 51). Fink (2009) said it was necessary to ensure respondents that their responses would be kept confidential. Additionally, the researcher provided incentives and/ or rewards where possible and ethical to encourage participation as Fink (2009) suggested this was a strategy to garner participation. A "Sign-Up" note-form found in Appendix I, was sent to each teacher/staff and administrators/leader as well as parents. This "Sign-Up" note-form (Appendix I) gave participants the opportunity to sign-up for a "systematic sampling" (Fink, 2009, p. 55) opportunity for either an interview or focus group. A focus group opportunity was the only option for the parents, as all parents were offered the opportunity to participate in the study through a survey questionnaire found in Appendix C. Both Sign-Up forms (Appendix I) told potential participants about the incentives for participating, including the chance to win a Starbuck's or Jimmy John's gift card paid for by the researcher. The selection procedures and justification will be explained next.

Teacher Selection Survey

For the quantitative portions of the mixed methods study, a convenience self-select sampling of all teachers was utilized for administrating the Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ) (Leithwood, 1996) (Appendix B). Fink (2009) suggested this as a good strategy when pooling from "available and willing" people (p. 52). A random sample was said to be a more objective selection method, similar to the lottery system, as each person has an equal chance to be selected, says Fink (2009). However, the teacher population size is smaller with approximately 32 in totality; therefore, the researcher was concerned the random selection system would result in insufficient participation. Ideally, the researcher sought as many of those teachers' inputs as possible to enrich the study. Additionally, the researcher wanted to avoid a biased or slanted view, which might have occurred if she asked the director of the school to give a list of 12 teachers to survey. Fink (2009) suggested this would not be random or objective because the director may have favorites and/ or select teachers that he knows are most enthusiastic about the mission and values of this school; therefore, slanting the results of the study. For these reasons, the teachers PLQ surveys were of convenience self-select sampling.

Interview and Focus Group Selection for Teachers and Administrators/Leaders

A systematic sampling as explained by Fink (2009, p.55) was used to form both teacher individual interviews and focus group lists for administrators/leaders and teachers/staff. Like the teacher PLQ survey, a convenience self-select method was used to get the total number of willing and available participants for both individual interviews and focus groups. Fink (2009) said "a convenience sample is one you get because people who are willing to complete the survey are also available when you need them" (p. 56).

From that point, a "systematic sampling" (Fink, 2009, p. 55) occurred as the researcher wrote two category lists of: 1) teacher/staff and 2) administrators/leaders. Next, the volunteer participants' names for both groups were alphabetized and numbered one through the end of names on the list. The final step was to sort the original category lists into two more lists using odd and even numbers. Odd numbered were the teacher/ staff and administrators/ leaders who were individually interviewed, while the even numbered were participants for the focus groups.

According to Fink (2009), this sampling method eliminated any hand selection, and was more objective and increased the probability of the groups having member-equality between them, meaning that one group was not more satisfied or dissatisfied than the other. Focus groups were kept to 5-8 participants following Casey and Krueger's (2009) suggestion for manageability and soliciting rich stories. The systematic purpose eliminated any handpicking from the researcher's or director's end, therefore improving the odds of natural grouping (Fink, 2009).

Parent Focus Group Selection

The parent focus group selection was organized by similar selection procedures as described above and prescribed by Fink (2009). Again, a convenience self-select sampling of willing and available participants was selected for the timeframe needed by the researcher, and a systematic sampling from that list. The parents' last names were written down beginning with the first to the last alphabetically and then every fourth name selected from that alphabetical list. This was a "systematic sampling," said Fink (2009, p. 55). While this method was convenient and expedient, it was also bias-free and was intended to replicate the student body demographic population. According to Fink

(2009), avoidance of handpicking participants and using purposeful sampling procedures

should result in random sampling of participants. In turn, random sampling of

participants begets natural groups (Fink, 2009). Additionally, a group size of 5-8

participants should be manageable and provide a good platform for rich, detailed stories

to be told (Casey & Kruger, 2009).

Parent Survey and Participant Selection

As prescribed by Creswell (2007, 2009) and Fink (2009) a convenience self-select

sampling, was employed with the parents for the Advanced Parent Questionnaire I (APQ

I) in Appendix C and Advanced Parent Questionnaire II (APQ II) in Appendix D to

replicate a random sampling. A random sampling is bias-free and more likely to replicate

natural groups (Fink, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), convenience self-select type

of sampling is "cross-sectional" (p. 146) and "single stage" (p. 148) since the sampling

collects participants at one point in time from accessible names.

The first APQ I survey was open to all willing participants as not to exclude

anyone, and allowed participants the self-select option.   APQ I's purpose was to get

feedback from participants and identify where most participants' responses reported with

a distribution of data, using descriptive statistics (Field, 2009), and served as a

triangulation point too (Creswell, 2007 and 2009). Researcher Fink (2009) also stated this

would solicit rich, thick information adding depth to the study as repetition is discovered

in the mixed methods approach. The APQ I had a comment box that was used in

identifying themes from transcriptions of the data. APQ II was only a demographic

questionnaire for triangulation to the demographics of the first APQ I survey. The

researcher wanted to know what bodies of social economics status parents were

participating and if that aligned similarly with the diverse student body population. No matter the outcome, it was an important element to the study and was described and reported in the findings.

To solicit high participation from these parents, Creswell (2009) suggested a four step process; however, the researcher modified this to reduce costs and to partner with the director. The director of the school wanted to send out a little information about the study and researcher in his e-mail communication to families and convey from himself personally that their participation was strictly volunteer and not an expectation of him or the school. The researcher drafted these informational pieces for the director to send. The director wanted the APQ I (Appendix C) to be sent out with parents the same week as their spring parent-teacher trimester conference time. Therefore, another brief explanation piece, called the "Sign-Up" form (Appendix I) was attached to the participant consent form (Appendix G) along with the APQ I (Appendix C). Parents that elected to participate completed the consent form and APQ I, and if they wished to be in the sampling lottery for a parent focus group, then they filled out and sent in the "Sign-Up" (Appendix I) form too. There was a "MU RESEARCH" box on the office counter for all paperwork and surveys to be placed, using the cut out slot. Creswell (2009) suggested that reminder informational pieces are necessary for getting participants to join and complete the study, and the staff reminded students to return their parents' forms.

<center>Data Collection Tools and Procedures</center>

The Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ) (Leithwood, 1996) (Appendix B) was done utilizing the online Internet tool SurveyMonkey (SurveyMonkey, 2011). This was a convenience self-select sampling for the PLQ survey as teachers self-selected to

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participate in the study or not (Creswell, 2009). A letter was sent to participants about one week prior to the actual survey. The objective of this letter was to introduce the researcher to participants and give contact information, the purpose of the study, and share the intent to publish and gain more publicity for their work at this school. Additionally, about a week ahead of the survey and research beginning, the director's communication tool of choice, e-mail, was used to inform both faculty and parents of the study, clearly communicating that this was not an expectancy to participate; rather, participation was a voluntary option. Copies of these communication documents are in Appendices H and I. The school has clearly outlined expectancies for both groups concerning school matters, and the director did not want to confuse anyone regarding that subject. Therefore, he stated this would be a criterion in order to allow the researcher to conduct the study, and it served the researcher well as it opened up the study to all members of the school.

The convenient self-select sampling clearly conveyed the guarantee of keeping participants' identity anonymous and served to solicit their participation prior to taking the survey as prescribed by Mertens (2005). Fink (2009), along with Crewswell (2007, 2009), also suggested that the previous strategy and the consent form be signed by all participants prior to their participation. The consent form was sent out the same week as the online PLQ survey (Appendix B) for teachers. Using the PLQ survey information, the research questions were tightened and adjusted for the purpose of the study to solicit rich stories from the interviews and focus groups. These groups addressed leadership trait components that might support the improved student learning, along with other embedded cultural influences this school had (Appendices A, C & D).

Data Analysis Procedures

The Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ) (Leithwood, 1996) (Appendix B) was analyzed for percentages divided into themes related to leadership traits and used to shape a few of the interview questions of the qualitative study. A distribution of data showing where most participants' responses were reported was conducted using a descriptive statistics analysis (Field, 2009). According to Creswell (2009) this is a "sequential transformative strategy…where a two phase project" (p. 212) is used for the study. Additionally, the Advanced Parent Questionnaire I (APQ I) (Appendix C) was analyzed for percentages (same data analysis as the PLQ) and also divided into themes. Creswell (2007, 2009) and Mertens (2005) suggested comparing, or triangulating data of both the PLQ and interviews and focus group themes that have been derived from interview transcriptions, for a deeper, richer study. Hence, this was a mixed methods approach (Mertens, 2005). Furthermore, the APQ I was examined briefly, though not exhaustively at first, to include the qualitative side as well, should anything to expand upon be discovered at the overview of responses. No data analysis was run at this juncture. Interview questions were expanded on items discovered that related to the school's culture and improved student learning. The APQ I (Appendix C) was also analyzed in tandem with the individual interviews and focus groups. In this way, not only was the study sequential (Creswell, 2009) but also served as "concurrent triangulation" (Creswell, 2009, p. 213). "The researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and then compared the two databases to determine if there [was] convergence, differences, or some combination" (Creswell, 2009, p. 213).

In order to expand on the quantitative findings and learn more about leader(s) helping achievement gap students learn, which is a stated organizational goal (DSST J, 2012) the qualitative side of the study asked participants to describe how leaders did this. The APQ I survey of convenience self-select sampling, like the PLQ survey to teachers, added trustworthiness to the parent focus group and served as another triangulation point to both the PLQ quantitative and other mixed method components of the study (Casey & Krueger, 2009; Mertens, 2005). See Appendix E for the complete triangulation of data graphic organizer. A portion of this information sought to describe and report the population studied. The APQ I (Appendix C) was used in tandem with the parent focus group (Appendix A & D) and served to triangulate information between the two parent studies and to themes found in the teacher and administrative interviews and focus groups (Appendix A) (Fink, 2009).

Analyzing Qualitative Data

A case study "analysis consists of making a detailed description of the case and its setting" (Creswell, 2007, p. 163). Additionally, a hermeneutical phenomenological approach captures "lived experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p. 59) from participants and interprets those "texts". The researcher listened to the audio recordings of the "lived experiences", transcribed a few and had the remainder of the audio transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. Once through describing the facts of the case study, Creswell (2007) said to "aggregate the data into about 20 categories…and collapse into five themes" (p. 164). The researcher did this and then began the axial coding process. Axial coding, as explained by Creswell (2007), identifies one of the five or six themes just

referenced as the phenomenon. The final steps according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), as cited in Creswell (2007) were:

the researcher is then to return the database to identify "(a) what caused this phenomenon to occur, (b) what strategies or actions actors employed in response to it, (c) what context (specific context) and intervening conditions (broad context) influenced the strategies, and (d) what consequences resulted from these strategies. The overall process is one of relating categories of information to the central phenomenon category. (p. 237)

In this way, the researcher discovered the conceptual underpinnings of the study, which influenced a culture of improved learning.

A coding process was used to identify facts from the data, which supported the themes that all connect to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). The researcher first read the transcripts that were typed into Microsoft Word from the original individual interviews and focus group audio recorded interviews. Then the researcher color coded groups (teacher/ administrators, for example) and then identified each participant by another system: 1, 2, 3, A, B, C, etc.) and made a key of this as to know which participant was whom and put theme-supporting data under the themes (Casey & Krueger, 2009; Creswell, 2009). This open coding system was explained in more detail by Creswell (2009, pp.185-188), but essentially it is an organization system to help identify support for the themes that connect to the phenomenon. As mentioned earlier in chapter 1, seeking another person who can cross-check the researcher's codes on passages, called an "intercoder agreement" (Creswell, 2009, p. 191), ensures greater reliability of the facts and themes. An intercoder person read the transcriptions until she heard saturation and

then checked the themes, support, and codes used. As prescribed by Creswell (2007, 2009) the findings are in chapter 4.

<div align="center">Strategies to Address Quality</div>

A quality mixed methods study has triangulation of data and cross-checking, both adding to the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the study according to Creswell (2007, 2009) and Mertens (2005). See Appendix E for the graphic organizer illustrating the study's triangulation. As mentioned earlier, the Advance Parent Questionnaire I (APQ I) (Appendix C), another quantitative method, was used to cross-check with themes found in the qualitative parent focus group (Appendices A & D), further adding credibility to the study. Additionally, all data points were compared and cross-checked with archival data, such as historical documents, media forms and aggregate public standardized test data (Appendix E). Creswell (2009) calls this cross-checking, either "confirmation" or "disconfirmation", depending on the "cross-validation" that ensues (p. 213), which further adds strength to the mixed-methods approach over using either of the approaches in isolation.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness and credibility checks were further accomplished by first sharing the researcher's transcriptions from individual interviews with participants to see if she correctly captured what was said (Casey & Krueger, 2009). This was also done with the teacher focus group. Then, as suggested by Creswell (2007, 2009) the researcher secured a peer debriefing person (a fellow doctoral student) who served as the "intercoder agreement (or cross-checking)" person to check if they would code the passages the same as the researcher or suggest something else (p. 191). According to Creswell (2009) this

process adds reliability to the consistency of the coding, and if the intercoder "agrees with at least 80 percent of the researcher's coding", then the researcher has "good qualitative reliability" (p. 191). The researcher had a few biases due to reading the online archival data and other information the school had on their website regarding test scores, school model, national, state and local media coverage, and personal teaching experience. Hence, a peer-debriefer and intercoder enhanced the study as this person did not have the same bias. In closing, to ensure no loss of verbatim transcriptions and interviewee checks, the researcher backed up computer files of audio and Microsoft Word documents of both the digital recordings and transcriptions.

Limitations

Limitations would be unforeseen circumstances that affect the study and are out of the researcher's control (Creswell, 2007, 2009). Examples of this would be if a participant or the researcher had become sick, had transportation issues, had a family emergency, or an unscheduled meeting that caused them to miss an individual interview or focus group. Self-selected participants from convenience samplings were a limitation in this study. A formal external limitation might have been the *Hawthorne* effect (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Fink, 2009) where participants may have assumed they were in a special experiment and became alert to expected or favored behaviors/ responses, inhibiting honest, free-flowing rich stories (Casey & Krueger, 2009; Mertens, 2005). Additionally, if language barriers existed with participants, this might have limited the study by the participants' inability to determine the researcher's questions correctly during the parent focus group and/ or parent survey. Finally, opening the parent survey to all parents on the same week as the spring parent-teacher conference event might have skewed the data due

to conversations regarding their child's academics on the conference day/ night. Perhaps only more interested or involved parents responded, or only glowing comments were shared because they had just heard positive news about their child's academic progress. If parents received news that their child may be held back due to limited academic progress and/ or not meeting the school's standards in some area, then their responses may have reflected those disappointments.

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study included are elements within the researcher's control (Creswell, 2007, 2009): (a) not building adequate relationships with participants because she opted to not engage in Seidman's (2006) three-step interview process, (b) a potentially limited transferability of findings due to the unique nature of the school studied, (c) a limited open window of time to complete the survey, (d) a hired transcriptionist not present for the interviews and focus groups, and (e) the bias of the researcher as she interpreted all the data. Any of these limitations or delimitations could have caused weaknesses to the study

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This research and design methods overview outlined the researcher's mixed methods case study of hermeneutic phenomenology for one selected urban public charter school in the U.S. The purpose of this descriptive case study was to discover and report what influences are embedded in one high performing urban public charter school's culture that have led to improved student learning. Following the purpose was the research questions with the evolving interview and focus group questions (Appendices A, B, C, D & J). Next, the rationale for using mixed methods as the study approach for a

descriptive case study was explained. The population and sample was described next,

along with sampling strategies, tools and procedures to gather that data. Data analysis

was then explained, explicitly addressing the issues of trustworthiness, reliability,

credibility and validity along with ensuring how confidentiality would be managed. And

finally, the limitations of the study were highlighted.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

States and local school districts are scrambling to achieve the standards, mandates and benchmarks set by the federal initiatives. An abundance of mandates were set in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and *Race to the Top* (RTTT) as is evidenced by one particularly concerning benchmark—all students will score proficient on the state assessment by the year 2013-2014 school year (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, ESE, n.d.; White House, 2009). Given that benchmark, creativity to try a different school structural model was encouraged in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and carried over into *Race to the Top* (RTTT) as to the design of alternative schools (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.; White House, 2009). These alternative schools, also known as charter schools, can be public or private and have various structures and curriculum models, missions and focuses (Chavous, 2004; Finn, Manno & Vanourek, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). However, there is little research as to how a high performing charter school's culture, including structures, influences and improves student learning.

Due to higher percentages of the identified achievement gap students demonstrating a lack of proficiency on state tests (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Payne, 2005), this chapter is dedicated to analyzing the perceptions of participants within one high performing Midwestern urban public charter school to see what they believe they do to improve learning. Hence forward, this school will be called Stellar Charter School. This charter school system is housed within a large traditional public school district in the

Midwest and has its own governing board of directors. In order to better understand the impact of the charter school educational model on student achievement, the purpose of this study is to explore, describe and report on what Stellar Charter School has done to influence improved student learning. This school was selected due to state and national recognition they received according to their website (DSST I, n.d.; DSST J, 2012; DSST M, 2012), along with the recommendations of a former colleague now working at the charter school, who spoke highly of the school and agreed to act as a research liaison. Stellar Charter School had made gains with all population groups, including the achievement gap group. Thus, the findings of this study are relevant in order to discover the influencers of this school's success so that we might better understand what educational structures can be utilized within school systems to effectively minimize the achievement gap.

<div align="center">Research Question</div>

The focus of this study is to discover how an organization influences learning, and what influences are embedded in one high performing urban public charter school's culture that have led to improved student learning. This grand tour question was a product of the literature review that predominately wonders what influences improve student learning. Policy makers, federal and state education departments wonder this too and set initiatives to help improve student learning. However, while the "silver bullet" is still at-large, this chapter elucidates influences embedded in culture that improve student learning given a specific organizational structure, curriculum model, cultural framework, and leadership style which sustains the organization.

The Principal Leadership Survey (PLQ) by Leithwood (1996) was purposefully chosen to illuminate leadership traits which might support influences embedded in the school's culture that could be further explored in the interviews. Hence, the PLQ (Appendix B) was given first to the teachers so that upon a quick glance at the results, interview questions could be adjusted if needed. According to Creswell (2009) this design is sequential transformative because it is a two phase study. Interview questions were carefully drafted to be open-ended and semi-structured, yet flexible to capture rich stories and examples of lived experiences as prescribed by researchers Borg, Gall and Gall (2003), Creswell (2007, 2009), Mertens (2005) and Seidman (2006).

Data Collection

The school liaison worked closely with the researcher to distribute and collect the Cover Letter to Staff/Faculty (Appendix H) about the study, Consent Form (Appendix G), Email Communication (Appendix L) to faculty and parents, Sign-Up Form (Appendix I) and the Advanced Parent Questionnaire I (APQ I) (Appendix C). The MU Research box sat on the front desk of the main office for ten days and collected all parent materials securely with a cut-out slot to drop materials in with no access to pull out. Teachers gave their consent forms to the school liaison, and only those teachers were sent the SurveyMonkey link for the PLQ survey from the researcher. Confidentiality was kept by keeping the paper documents locked up and by use of a password on the electronic system. Only the researcher had access to the information.

Surveys

A quick glance at the data for cross-checking the interview and focus group questions was done seven days following the start date. The qualitative interview and focus group questions remained to be appropriate as they related to the PLQ data to seek what this school does to influence improved student learning. Protocol documents were finalized and printed for the study at this time. The PLQ was closed on March 26, 2012 and data imported into an Excel document and then imported to a SPSS data program to run the statistical analysis. One respondent's data was removed as it was determined to be done in error. Possibly the respondent misread the directions and reversed the Likert Scale as this respondent selected the exact opposite of all other respondents and given all the other data points collected for the study and analyzed this outlier was judged to be respondent error.

The APQ I was administered the week of March 5th and collected through March 16th using the MU Research box for collection which was setting on the front office counter. The MU Research box served to keep all surveys confidential as the box had an open slit for sliding surveys into, yet no access to getting back into the box. The researcher picked up the surveys, cut the box open and began entering the data into an Excel document to later import into SPSS for statistical analysis. The researcher analyzed the data quickly to get a feel of the results, again conferring with her qualitative interview and focus group questions to ensure the right open-ended and semi-structured questions were still being asked. With that secured, she began organizing the Consent Forms and Sign-Up Forms for selection of both individual interviews and focus group sessions using

the process previously detailed that Creswell (2007, 2009) and Fink (2009) recommended.

APQ II was strictly demographics of the Parent focus group which met the week of March 19th. The researcher keyed that data into an Excel document and later imported into SPSS for data analysis. Again, confidentiality was kept by keeping the paper documents locked up and by use of a password on the electronic system. Only the researcher had access to the information.

Interviews

Individual interviews began March 18th and ended March 23rd. To help the researcher capture stories and lived experiences, along with note-taking and observations throughout the day, a digital recorder was used during the interviews. The digital recording of the interviews was transcribed later, listened to four times and read twice for the purpose of identifying categories that were condensed to themes. Evidence to support the themes was validated by data points studied and gathered: field study observations and notes, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and historical documents as prescribed by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Focus Groups

The two focus groups, consisting one each of Staff and parents, were held at the school the week of March 19th on two different days after school. A digital recorder was used during the focus groups to help the researcher capture stories and lived experiences, along with note-taking. The digital recording was transcribed later, listened to four times and read twice to identify categories that were condensed to themes. Evidence to support the themes was validated by data points studied and gathered: field study observations

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and notes, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and historical documents as prescribed by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Document Collection

The school's website provided a wealth of historical documents regarding the history of the four-year-old school, media publication of both video and printed formats. These historical documents were mined for common themes within the surveys, participant interviews and focus groups. Furthermore, the 2011-2012 Student and Family Handbook that was shared with the researcher substantiated themes that were found in the qualitative side of the study: interviews and focus groups, as well as field study observations.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Surveys were analyzed for descriptive frequencies (Field, 2009) to triangulate to the other data points of the study, and the PLQ was additionally used to assist the revision of the interview and focus group questions. Within the PLQ, teachers identified their leader's leadership traits/ behaviors which impacted their ability to influence improved student learning. This was further explored by seeking stories, examples and lived experiences from participants through the qualitative side of the mixed methods descriptive case study (Borg, Gall & Gall, 2003; Creswell, 2007, 2009; Fink, 2009; Mertens, 2005; Seidman, 2006). Member-checking was accomplished by sending the transcriptions through email to participants for their input to ensure the researcher captured what they had said correctly. Upon confirmation of trustworthiness via member-checking, themes were identified using open and axial coding (Creswell, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A doctorial colleague served as both "peer-debriefer" for consulting

purposes throughout the study and an "intercoder" (Creswell, 2009, p. 191-192) to check

coding, categories and themes found by the researcher. Again, in order to keep identities

of participants anonymous, names were changed to pseudo names and genders may have

been changed as well. Generally names were omitted altogether and phrases like 'Staff 1'

and 'Parent 1' were used. Due to the smaller number of participants, individual

biographies were also omitted to ensure participant confidentiality as mandated by IRB.

Surveys

A sequential transformative method (Creswell, 2009) was done at first as the PLQ

survey was administered to the teachers to identify leadership traits that were expanded

upon in the interviews and focus groups. According to Field (2009), a descriptive

analysis of frequencies and percentages would establish leadership traits themes the

respondents selected. From that point a few of those leadership traits were studied more

deeply in the qualitative side of this descriptive case study. Themes found in the PLQ

were followed with evidence in examples and lived experiences that participants shared

from rich stories told to the researcher during interviews and focus groups (Borg, Gall &

Gall, 2003; Casey & Krueger, 2009; Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006).

Another survey to parents, APQ I and APQ II, was used to collect demographics

of parent participants to triangulate the student body population that the school has

identified on their website. Again, like the PLQ both APQs were analyzed using the

SPSS statistical data analysis software program for descriptive frequencies (Field, 2009).

The APQ II also worked in tandem with the parent focus group to be discussed more

under in the interview section.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Part of ensuring a credible and trustworthy study includes verifying participants'

interviews with them to see if the researcher captured correctly what they said. This is

called member-checking as noted by Casey and Krueger (2009). This was done with all

individual interviews and focus groups, except the parent focus group, to establish

trustworthiness of information captured by the researcher. The parent focus group was

not done because the researcher had no means to do this member-checking with those

participants as emails or addresses were not exchanged. No Staff participants changed

what the transcripts said; therefore, accuracy and trustworthiness of information were

verified.

Using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) hermeneutical phenomenology method of

analyzing participants' transcripts from both individual interviews and focus groups, the

researcher found themes that also supported the first survey (PLQ), which all linked to

the phenomenon: student learning. Reading the transcripts and listening to the digital

recordings again, and then categorizing the material into 18 categories were done before

collapsing those 18 categories into groups of five themes which support the phenomenon

of student learning. After the themes were extracted from the data, the literature review

from chapter 2 was consulted to substantiate the findings. Then, the new themes were

studied and shared in this chapter before a discussion of the findings and summary.

The APQ II worked in tandem with the parent focus group. The researcher gave

the short demographic survey to the parents to fill out while she set the atmosphere for

relaxed conversations by visiting about herself, her study and polite conversations about

the participants as well. Once the participants had filled out the APQ II forms, the

researcher began the focus group interview. Later the focus group session was transcribed, read, listened to again and analyzed as stated above using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) method and cited again in Creswell (2007).

Open coding, as explained in Creswell (2009), is organizing the material into smaller segments prior to determining meaning from the text (p. 186). The researcher first colored coded the interviews and focus groups to make sense of them and to remember which group or participants shared what. As the researcher reread the transcripts she highlighted and marked the category for which the participants' stories supported. Once done, the next step was putting the categorical data from the interviews, focus groups, observations and surveys into tables with numerical data to illustrate the evidence clearly. Strauss & Corbin (1990) recommend all of these steps as part of open and axial coding. This final step, taken to ensure the central phenomenon of improved student learning by way of influences embedded in Stellar Charter School's culture was supported by evidence from interviews, focus groups, observations and historical documents.

Quality was addressed for this mixed methods study by triangulation of data and cross-checking, both adding to the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Mertens, 2005). Appendix E illustrates the triangulation minus the Administrator Focus group, which was not done due to lack of participants and number of participants serving those roles. The researcher's field observations replaced the triangulation piece of the Administrator Focus group. Interviews and focus groups were cross-checked, along with the surveys (PLQ, APQ I and APQ II) and all cross-checked to field observations and historical documents. To further add to the quality of the study a

"peer-debriefer" and "intercoder or cross-checking" person (Creswell, 2009, p. 191 & 192) was added to the study. According to Creswell (2009) this process adds reliability to the consistency of the coding if the person agrees with at least 80 percent of the researcher's coding and themes. A fellow doctoral student who understood the research question and confidentiality served this role and agreed to more than 95 percent of the researcher's codes, themes and findings.

Upon synthesizing all the data, two of the predicted themes emerged from the interviews and focus groups: accountability/ responsibility and expectancy-value/ motivation theory. Three other themes also emerged: relationships, support systems and transformational leadership. The quantitative survey of Kenneth Leithwood (1996) was used in the qualitative approach of the study to explore how the leader's leadership traits and behaviors helped teachers influence improved student learning, and the results were significantly indicative of a transformational leader. Evidence from the interviews and focus groups to support those findings will be included in this chapter as well. Figure 3 shows the mixed methods approach to the study and the triangulation manner as the phenomena of improved student learning was studied.
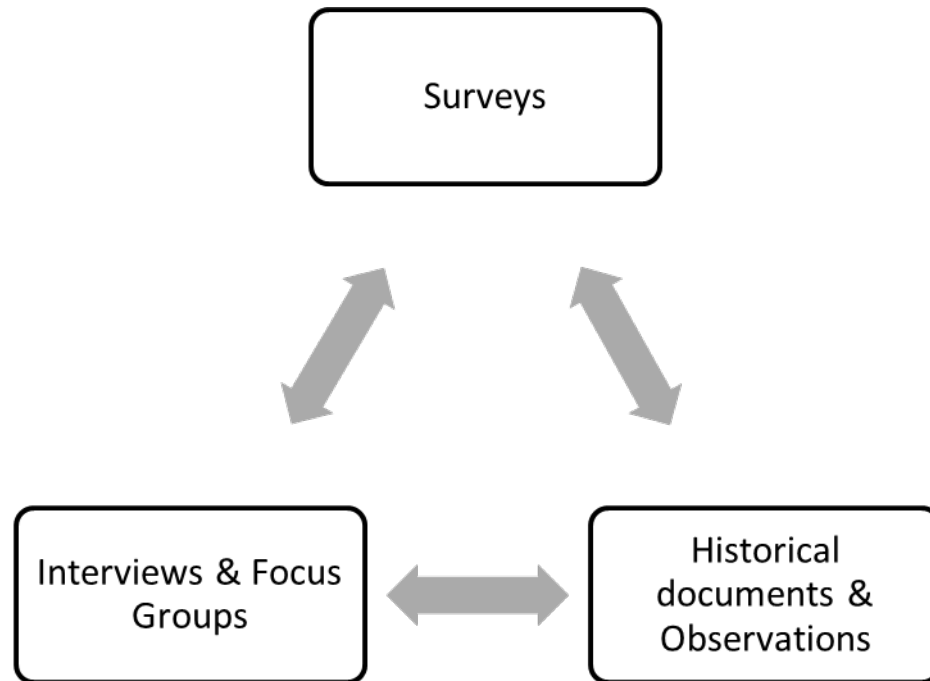
Figure 3. Mixed Methods Approach to the Study Diagram.

Findings

The totality of the study revealed five themes indicating that Stellar Charter School's success is built on (a) an *accountability-for-responsibility* culture (b) that is *motivated* toward the goal of college admittance and supported by (c) the creation of I between all system participants, (d) the implementation of technological *support systems*, and by (e) the *transformational leadership* style of its director. These themes resulted from a mixed method study incorporating quantitative surveys, both individual and focus group interviews, along with observations and studying historical documents.

Orchestra Metaphor

Throughout this study, the idea that Stellar Charter School operated much like an orchestra kept surfacing. Really, culture is the final finessed sound that an orchestra makes when performing music. The comparisons are many, and the image of how the many working parts come together to create one musical masterpiece, while

simultaneously showcasing individual talent, was insightful and helpful; thus, throughout the discussion of the findings of this study, this metaphor will be further developed and explored.

Theme I: Accountability/ Responsibility

A theme that resulted from participant interviews, focus groups, observations and historical document analysis was how all players were held accountable-for-responsibilities, including teachers/ administration as well as the students and parents. All parent and Staff participants spoke to the accountability/ responsibility piece found within this school in two specific realms: *academic* accountability-for-responsibility and *behavioral* accountability-for-responsibility. As shown in Figure 4, the relationship of accountability-for responsibility regarding both academics and behavior are depicted.
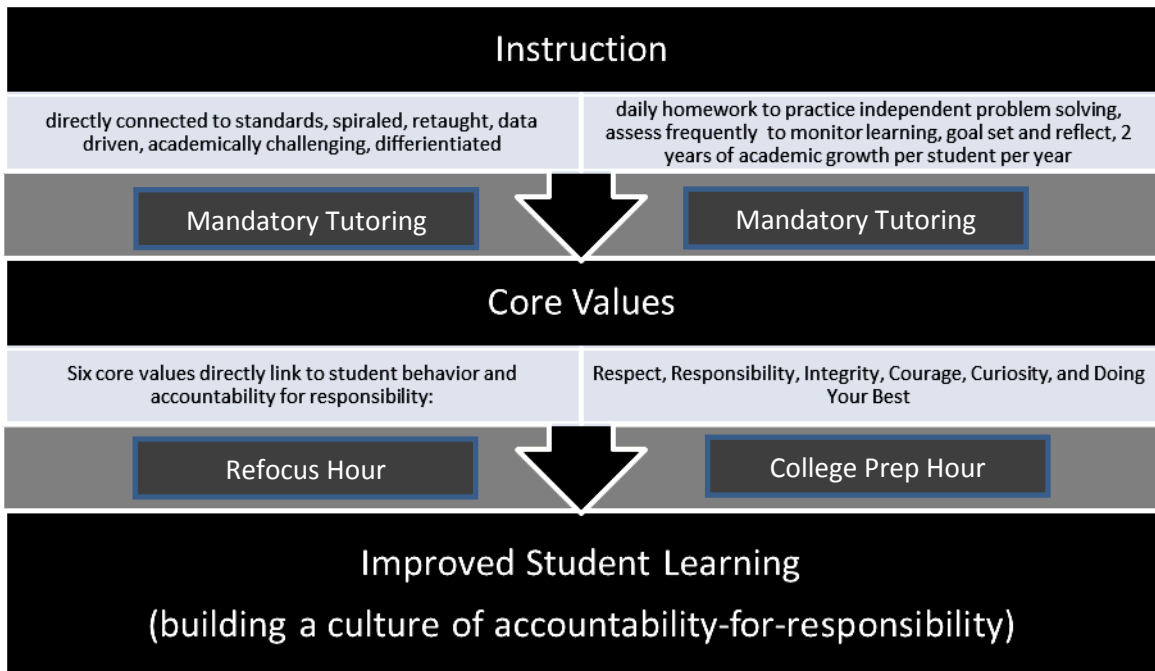
Figure 4. Accountability-for-Responsibility Diagram.

Academic Accountability/ Responsibility—Participants' Input

There are numerous ways in which all participants are held accountable for their role in impacting academic achievement. Both staff and parents discussed accountability/ responsibility with regards to the academic expectations at Stellar Charter School.

Staff focus groups. All teacher and other Staff participants, including the administration, identified multiple ways they are held accountable: instruction is to be (a) directly connected to the standards, (b) spiraled, and (c) retaught if students are showing a lack of understanding on the assessments; (d) students are to gain two years of growth each year; however, some students score two years higher than their grade level on their first tests and in these cases, (e) the goal is to challenge them. While being held accountable in these ways, flexibility is built in the accountability infrastructure in order to incorporate the needs of struggling students or those with documented learning abilities (allowing the differentiation needed for Individualized Education Plans).

All Staff members addressed their responsibility for helping students achieve two-year growth through differentiated teaching methods and through data-analysis driven instruction. Every participant talked about many assessments linked to different standards, enabling students, as well as teachers, to have a clear cut picture of their own strengths and weaknesses. Students are assessed daily and weekly, often electronically, in order to provide instant feedback to students and teachers who in turn incorporate the results to form their daily instruction. All Staff members said that instruction is influenced by data and that such practice is the foundation of the school. "That is the foundation of who we are…the administration level, student level,…[and] teacher level. We ask that all of our actions [be] made off of facts," said Staff 1 participant.

Staff 3 participant shared a tutoring system they have in place to support students. She said, "There are two types of tutoring….There's voluntary….and there is a system where I can sign them up and it is mandatory that they show up for tutoring." Students may sign themselves up for tutoring, which is encouraged by the Staff as students set academic goals based upon assessments and daily monitoring. Teachers may also sign students up for tutoring. An email is sent to students for the mandatory tutoring schedules and their families so that families can make arrangements to pick up their child at the appropriate time. There are no buses for this school. Many tutoring sessions are held before school, during lunch and immediately following school. Teachers freely set their own times and all are responsible to do this. Surprisingly, the researcher discovered that all teachers were happy to assist the students in this way.

Another system to help with accountability-for-responsibility is 'College Prep' (CP). Students are responsible for being prepared for school, including completing homework, having pencils ready and all other materials needed with them for every class. The idea is that failure to be responsible in these areas indicates a lack of preparedness for college; hence, you attend a CP hour to work on these things. "Any infraction falling under the umbrella of the core value *responsibility*," Staff 3 participant said, "it's a CP". She went on to say: "[In] CP [students] do the homework that they missed. And if it happens to be a pencil that you forgot then you can work on that night's homework and think to yourself about how to get a pencil." Thus, CP is a system which both supports and holds students accountable for these responsibilities: it is an hour after school for completing missing homework, finishing a late project, or thinking about the forgotten pencil, while forming an action plan for remedying and preventing the particular

situation. As Staff 1 participant said, "The school is built off of a high level of accountability as well as a high level of support." Parents are also brought into this academic support system, and they are apprised of their child's weekly academic progress through another technology system. An academic progress report is sent home weekly, signed by a parent/ guardian and returned to school. The channels of communication are open and transparent as this school purposefully seeks to keep everyone informed weekly.

In addition to tutoring and CP, the school uses another academic support system termed "Refocus." This comes into play when a student has failed to adhere to or implement one of the school's core values, as stated in the 2011-2012 Student and Family Handbook and discussed further in the next section. According to Staff 3 participant,

[If] a student violates the other five [respect, integrity, courage, curiosity, doing your best], I'd say the respect and integrity are the big ones….If you violate one of those it's usually a 'Refocus.' Essentially, this is a behavioral based detention….It's an hour of their time after school [where] they write an apology.

Refocus is an opportunity for students to think about what they did wrong, and often-times they write an apology letter consisting of a statement of what they did wrong, an apology, an action plan as to how to not repeat the offense, and ending with a request asking the community to accept them back. This is commonly read by the student to their advisory team of 15-18 student members and advisor; however, it can be read to all of their grade level peers too, or even the entire student body. The audience is often individually tailored, factoring in any recipient(s) of the wrongdoing, as well as time

available and scheduling. Thus, tutoring is the academic support while Refocus and CP are combinations of academic and behavioral support.

Parent focus group. Parent 2's comment is representative, saying, "They have a really good system of holding kids accountable and actually getting stuff done." Parent 2 further added, "They have this thing called mandatory tutoring that you can go to if you didn't do well on an assessment…or if you were gone the day…something was taught." Parent 2 said, "My daughter was sick for a while….so then she went on the mandatory tutoring and…it was really helpful." Parent 1 said,

> Even if you didn't miss, you were in school but you're just not quite getting it, you can still go to mandatory tutoring. The teacher can request that you go to mandatory tutoring…teachers are willing to let you [parents] know [if your child is struggling].

Cultural Accountability/ Responsibility—Participants' Input

At Stellar Charter School, not only are students responsible for reaching academic goals and held accountable for these responsibilities, students are also responsible for their behavior. This is done through the creation of a school culture comprised of a set of core value expectations. The core values are laid out clearly in the school's Student and Family Handbook and are messaged consistently all over the school building. Posters of the core values are in the commons area and in every classroom. All participants; teachers, administrators, students, and parents; are responsible for adhering to the expectations of the core values and are held accountable to them. All three groups of the school community; students, Staff and parents; sign a contract pledging their understanding and support to the core values to the school. These contracts are filed in

the students' files. Additionally, there are three framed posters that all group members sign which hang in the commons area of the school. The six core values are on larger posters in the commons area and in each classroom with the explanation of each value's meaning printed on it. The core values of Stellar Charter School are as follows:

Respect- Appreciating the value of a person or an object through your words, actions and attitude—treating people appropriately with common courtesy

Responsibility- Able to be trusted and /or depended upon to complete tasks, follow directions and own up to your actions

Integrity- Being truthful, fair and trustworthy in your words and actions—doing as you say and saying as you do

Courage- Possessing confidence and resolve to take risks and make right decisions in the face of pressure, and adverse or unfamiliar circumstances

Curiosity- Eager to learn, explore and question things to gain a deeper understanding

Doing Your Best- Putting your best effort into everything you do (no page).

Both the Staff and parent focus groups addressed the cultural measures the school had put in place to ensure all participants were accountable for their roles in building the culture of the school that drives its success.

Staff focus group. According to Staff 5 participant, the culture of Stellar Charter school "was intentionally built….[so that all participants—staff, students, and parents—] have the same unity of belief and a buy-in as we've agreed to these principals." Additionally he said, "That just makes it a lot easier to be productive when you're working together because it's like…we all know that we have this shared understanding."

This, along with statements by Staff 1 participant led the researcher to coin Stellar

Charter School's culture as 'purposefully developed': Staff 1 participant shared, "Our

values are our best attempt to build a perfect human [regarding] to how they act and what

they do." The Staff participant elaborated that teachers and students are "living respect,

courage, curiosity, responsibility, integrity, and doing your best." Additionally, Staff 1

participant elaborated, "Are they [students and Staff] really epitomizing that and

demonstrating that intrinsically at a high level? That is culture. It's built around values."

Perhaps the most profound statement by this Staff 1 participant was, "Culture first,

instruction will follow." Furthermore, Staff 1 participant said, one needs to "really [and]

truly embody the values of that organization, whatever you're working with, and get the

belief and buy-in of your Staff, if that's right, and have that translate to students." One of

the biggest challenges Staff 1 participant said, is "to create a cultural and instructional

vision that can last when [you're] gone."

> Staff 2 participant framed the core values in this manner:
>
> We ask students to display our core values in the way they interact with each
>
> other and with teachers and we hold them accountable so there [are] a number of
>
> systems that are in place to hold students accountable and we're consistent with
>
> them.

It was clear that Stellar Charter School used its core values as a catalyst for long-term

change in its community. Staff 6 participant explained the implementation of core values

as

the first things we emphasize with [students]. [If] you live the core values, you will go to college and you will be successful in college and you will have a big impact on the world after you go to college.

In the teacher focus group, teachers essentially explained the core values as part of everyday life. Staff 8 participant said, "All difficult conversations and meaningful conversations where we push each other are centered around the core values….You have a common language….and can come to a common understanding…a lot faster." Staff 8 participant said,

[Core values are] the one thing that allows both teachers, Staff members as well as the students to get around the very self-centered type of view….[We are] able to couch the conversation…on a much larger scale. [We phrase the conversation as] What are our values? What are the things that we hold sacred and how do your actions reflect or not reflect that? It is no longer me versus you. It's the standard and where you are [compared to that standard].

To show the entirety of the core values Staff 7 participant said, "I could have a kid call me out on a core value" and Staff 9 participant followed saying, "We teach kids how to advocate for themselves using those core values…[which are] lifelong skills that we are obviously trying to teach [students]…and learn [and live the values ourselves]."

A commonality between both Parent and Staff groups was that both viewed the "paycheck" accountability system utilized to reinforce the responsibilities and expectations of the core values as key. Under this system, students earn or lose credit points of fake monetary value and can earn things like a dress down day, meaning they do not have to wear the school uniform, or they can earn ice cream for example. They

have big rewards too, like a field trip to a sports game. The paycheck system is directly

linked to the six core values, measured on a weekly basis and reported out to the parents

weekly "to let them know culturally how [their child] is fitting in and excelling with our

core values" said Staff 1 participant. Additionally, Staff 1 participant said, "[W]e're

looking for a good cultural citizen as well as a well-educated student who will succeed in

college and beyond". Staff 2 said,

> Culturally speaking, I gauge learning by how well [students]…interact with their
>
> peers, adults, and you know, whether or not they're learning how to be
>
> responsible and respectful and [have] the skills that they'll need to do really well
>
> and succeed in college and beyond.

> *Parent focus group.* Four parents participated in a focus group and all said they

liked the core values. In addition to holding students academically accountable through

use of the core value system and tutoring, parents also discussed Refocus Sessions: "They

have 'Refocus' which is maybe you break one of the school rules you have to go to

'Refocus' and you have to like figure out what you did wrong and apologize for it," said

Parent 3. Additionally, Parent 2 said,

> I'm glad that the school has a policy to make sure those behaviors are taken care
>
> of.…Some of it's normal middle school behavior.…I've been to other middle
>
> schools where that behavior isn't kept under control and I'm glad that it is [here].

Parent 1 said,

> [It is the] stuff they got [*sic*] to learn anyway in life. You just can't do certain
>
> things and get by….I'm just glad that this school takes notice of that and starts

teaching them now and then [continues] when they get to high school… [all] before they go to college.

In addition to describing Stellar Charter School as different from other schools because of the systems in place which hold students academically and behaviorally accountable, the parents elaborated more about how Stellar Charter School is distinct from other schools. Parent 2 voiced her perception about the equality given to all students at Stellar Charter School. She shared,

The premise this school is built around is that all children regardless of where you came from or what happened before you came [to] this school….is going to be given the opportunity to go to a four year college and we're gonna do everything to get you there. And if you need extra help, it's here for you. We're not just gonna write you off…. It's every kid, and their test scores show that. [On top of that,] I really wanted to be part of a community that really fostered the idea that it's not just about, you know, white kids do good and black kids don't. [This school] looks different.

This same parent said it was not so much the grades her kids got that concerned her, but the values which mattered greatly. "You got points because you're doing your best and you have, you know, courage and responsibilities, like, those things are really important and they're about your character," she said, as she appreciated the school teaching and reinforcing the values that they taught from home as well. Parent 4 chimed in, describing how the school's focus on behavior and character puts more responsibility on students:

My child had a lot of issues the first year….He's always been a good student, but that was like an adjustment. And yeah, they would call us all the time you know

[and] kept calling us in and I liked that….They're making him accountable. Making him realize you know that you're not getting by with it. You have to be a better person and you have to do your homework and you can't make these excuses because in the ultimate end, it's gonna hurt you and nobody else.

While overall all the parents appreciated the incorporation and uses of Stellar Charter School's system of core values in fostering accountability and responsibility in students, there were some mild concerns discussed. Several participants noted that there is a lot of pressure felt by both students and Staff, which causes stress; however, both Parents and Staff also acknowledged that this is part of what makes students and teachers great, too. Parents conveyed that their children sometimes felt that the Refocuses were unduly given or in excess and sometimes the parents wondered the same; despite this, these parents said they would not share their own concerns with their child but rather, thoughtfully decided which Refocuses warranted further consequences from home. Parent 2 said,

> [For] some things…there would be some serious consequences. And there are other things where I'm like you're acting like a middle school student. And I'm glad that the school has a policy to make sure those behaviors are taken care of.

Parent 2 said, "It's not gonna hurt them." Parent 3 agreed with, "Life is hard." While Parent 1 summed it up with, "Right. And sometimes you get unfairly blamed for things and that's the nature of life,"

Parent 3 struggled a little more with the public apologies, sympathizing with the challenge that was to do in front of your peers. Further, Parent 3 said she also struggled

with her child having to accept responsibility for something her child said he didn't do. Parent 3 thought of core values and the consequences in this way:

I think they should…hopefully…learn these values outside of the school. [I'm not sure about] the thing where you stand up in front of the school and apologize and have to be like accepted—I'm thinking look, this is like the scarlet letter.

Parents 1 and 2 shared stories, expressing that while we wish all children were taught these values at home, that is not always the case; further, there is also the natural behavior of children and the mistakes that they will make, as this is part of human nature and growing up. Parent 1 shared her perspective:

Some of these kids will never get those core values at home. They have alcoholic parents, they have missing parents… so this is where they get them. And when you talk with some of the kids, they're glad that they get them. I volunteer at the school and they're [students] coming up talking and they are glad to get them....I'd rather for these children to stand here before their peers and never have to stand before the court and go to jail. And they're [Staff] teaching them that this is for life.

Cultural accountability/ responsibility staff and parent focus group commonalities. With these comments shared and further responses given, both Staff members and parents overwhelmingly said the results speak for themselves, though at times some parents felt tension regarding the public apologies. Overall, Stellar School participants emphasized and stated explicitly that students are accountable for being responsible for their learning, and this message is clearly given to students all year long. Staff 1 participant summed it up well saying, "[While Stellar Charter School] is not easy

to go to because of the accountability measures, we offer the support that's needed to ensure that all students can and will succeed if they choose to." Furthermore, the Staff participant continued, and others echoed,

> When [students] choose to succeed is when they truly buy into the system, [and its] values[,]…with our support and their family support.…When [students] make that choice, that's when they're gonna truly, truly succeed at a high level in our network.

Accountability/ Responsibility Observation Input

Gigantic posters with the core value were hanging in the commons area and explicitly spoken about in the all school meetings, advisory and grade-level meetings. Students were asked politely to have the right *slant*, which means upright posture, no slouching, *track* or *tracking* the speaker, which means eyes are on the speaker with body turned toward the speaker, even if a student is speaking. Obviously there is no talking out of turn in that only the speaker has the right to speak and everyone else is silent. These rules are posted in each classroom along with the core value posters. Tracker sheets are held by the teachers as they mark points for the core values. Students can earn those or lose them and all breaking of core values has consequences as in the CP or Refocus after school hour. The researcher watched those in action as teachers triaged after class with different students who had shown disrespect by not tracking the speaker or incorrect slant (slouching) during class for example. The conversation always went to the core value broken and how that was not helpful to them as learners or the class as a community of learners. Tutoring was on-going in the grade-level offices between classes, during lunch,

and after school. One teacher watched her wrist watch during the interview, because she

had tutoring at 4 P.M. and said she had only a few more minutes.

Accountability/ Responsibility Historical Documents Input

The data shows that students are high performing and making significant

academic growth in grades 6-12, with 100% of high school seniors graduating and being

accepted into college (DSST J, 2012; DSST K, 2010). High accountability culture has

been accredited, in part, for these results (DSST K, 2010).

The 2011-2012 Student and Family Handbook explicitly echoed details of Stellar

Charter School's mission and goals along with rules and procedures which were also

found and explained on their website pages. This document required the signature of both

guardian and student and was placed in the student's school file. Paraphrasing

information gleaned from several documents, Stellar Charter School purposefully sought

to build a common understanding that each student would embrace as they became part

of the school's community. Students were to share in the responsibilities and sacrifices

such a commitment brings. Additionally, students who were absent were to take

responsibility for getting make-up assignments and submitting them in accordance to the

make-up homework policy.

Further support of the student and parent accountability-for-responsibility piece is

demonstrated in a portion of the academic honor code, which reads as follows: "I accept

the responsibilities for maintaining honorable behavior in all academic work, to assist one

another in maintaining and promoting personal academic integrity, and to only submit

individual work that is completely my own or properly cited" (p. 13). The handbook goes

on to say that homework is assigned nightly, completion of it is mandatory, and parents

must sign the daily planner to signify that they were aware of the assignments and completion thereof. Additionally, the handbook states: "Homework has academic benefits as well as developmental benefits. It helps develop students' responsibility, time management skills and independent problem solving skills" (p. 12).

Under the school's website page "Announcements" (DSST N, 2012), Stellar Charter School's district was recognized in the May 2012 National Alliance for Public Charter School as one of six high performing and integrated schools. This was calculated by pairing high performing school models in their large city, Washington, D.C. and San Diego. Even though each school model differs, the report explains that,

> Through rigorous curricula, a commitment to strong school culture, and an absolute focus on academic achievement, both school models have yielded incredible academic growth for their students. In fact, when [Stellar Charter School's traditional school district] published the list of schools that showed the greatest amount of student growth in 2010-2011, seven of the top eight schools were…[all Stellar Charter Schools]. (p. 3)

The school's commitment to 'strong culture' steered much of what Stellar Charter School has accomplished and influenced capacity building for each student and Staff member to achieve high academic levels. The "Educational Programs" page on the school's website (DSST K, 2010) sums their culture up in this way: "[Stellar Charter School] has created a high-accountability culture where doing your best in your classes is expected and doing well in school is cool" (¶ 2).

Figure 4 illustrated the accountability-for-responsibility construct found in Stellar Charter School and embedded in their culture. Thus, given the many explicitly stated accountability measures of teachers, students, and families, and the transparency of the behaviors required from each participant in order to reach the common goal, it is clear that a tenant of Stellar Charter School's culture is accountability for responsibilities. Without this theme, the school would not have the ability to reference, emphasize, and enforce, via a common shared language, the important roles each player has to perform in order to reach the group goal of college admittance for students.
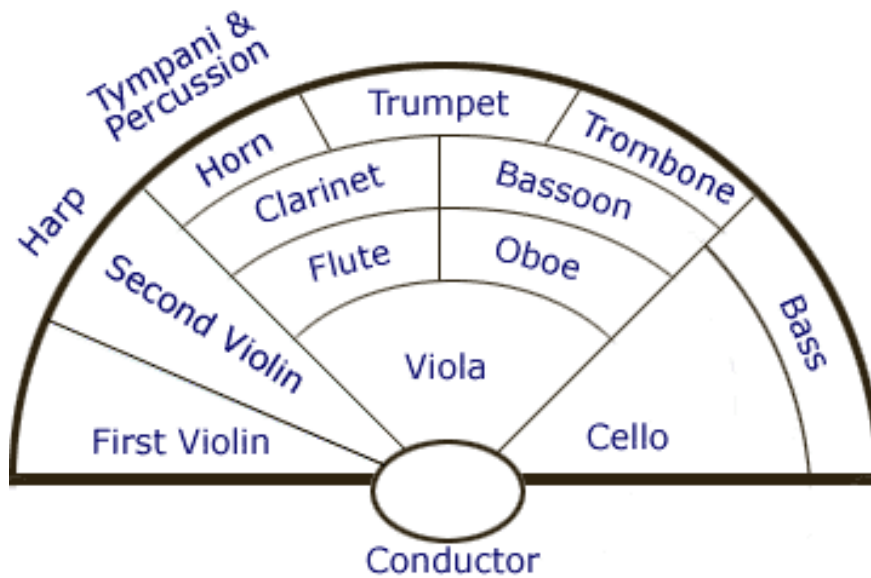
Stellar Charter School	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade	Parents	School Director
Orchestra Sections	Strings	Woodwinds	Brass	Percussion	Conductor
Teachers & Staff; PTA	Strings' Section Leader: First Violin Principal	Woodwinds' Section Leader: Oboe Principal	Brass' Section Leader: Trumpet Principal	Percussion's Section Leader: Tympani Principal	
Advisors	First Chair of each individual instrument section	First Chair of each individual instrument section	First Chair of each individual instrument section		
Students/ Advisory Groups	First Violins Second Violins Violas Cellos Basses	Flutes Oboes Clarinets Bassoons	Horns Trumpets Trombones and Tuba		

Figure 5. Orchestra Metaphor Incorporating the Accountability-for-Responsibility Theme

Discovered in the Study.

Accountability/ Responsibility—Orchestra Theme

The accountability-for-responsibility theme really evidenced well the orchestral nature of Stellar Charter School. Like an orchestra, Stellar Charter School's success is based on the performance of many individual parts, playing their role (responsibilities) in unison with each other in order to produce the beautiful music written on the musical score. Without each player successfully performing her role, the orchestra would fail in its goal of performing quality music.

In Stellar Charter School, the parents, students, school director, and staff all make up the orchestra's players. Each is responsible for a different role and in helping ensure that every other player is in sync with the whole. To begin, the school director works as the conductor, establishing the arrangement, making stylistic technical decisions, guiding the orchestra during ensemble practices/ performances, and selecting the leaders of each instrumental section. Teachers are these leaders of each section, called the principals or first-chairs. Their role is to aid in bringing about the conductor's vision for the music, leading sectional rehearsals and ensuring that each player within his section is successful in performing his part in unison with the whole. The percussion players of the orchestra perform a role much like the parents in Stellar Charter School do: while not as involved in the day-to-day operations as the other players, they are present in every musical score and their role is a very noticeable one. They provide support for the overall sound (and success) of the performance. All the other players of the orchestra, the brass, string, and woodwind sections, consist of the students at Stellar Charter School. Each student's part of the score is his responsibility, which he is expected to learn how to perform well, and with the entire orchestra. Thus, private lessons, or tutoring, may be required, to aid the

student in performing up to par with his instrumental section, so that his section can perform the part it needs to play at the level it needs to when playing with the entire orchestral ensemble.

As in an orchestra, the players in Stellar Charter School are there because they want to be. Thus, just as orchestra members must commit to put in the time, practice, and effort to achieve the goals and rewards of being in the orchestra, so too must each player in Stellar Charter's School's "orchestra" put forth the time, practice and effort needed to succeed and grow. This commitment is evidenced by the contract that Staff, students, and parents sign every school year.

Theme II: Expectancy-Value/ Motivation Theory

A second theme, expectancy-value theory, or motivation, was found for teachers and students. Both groups were expected to embrace and actively display the core values of the academically rigorous program, with the primary goal of going to college. Much, if not all, of the expectancies parallel the accountability/ responsibility constructs spoken about previously. In essence, where the accountability and responsibilities were, as shown in Figure 4, there too was an *expectancy* that participants would be responsible and be held accountable for their responsibilities. From the extensive focus group discussions and participant surveys, it was found that a culture of purposeful, embedded, consistent, stable, and well-communicated core values, as shown in Figure 6, influenced improved student learning and sustained Stellar Charter School's academic rigor.
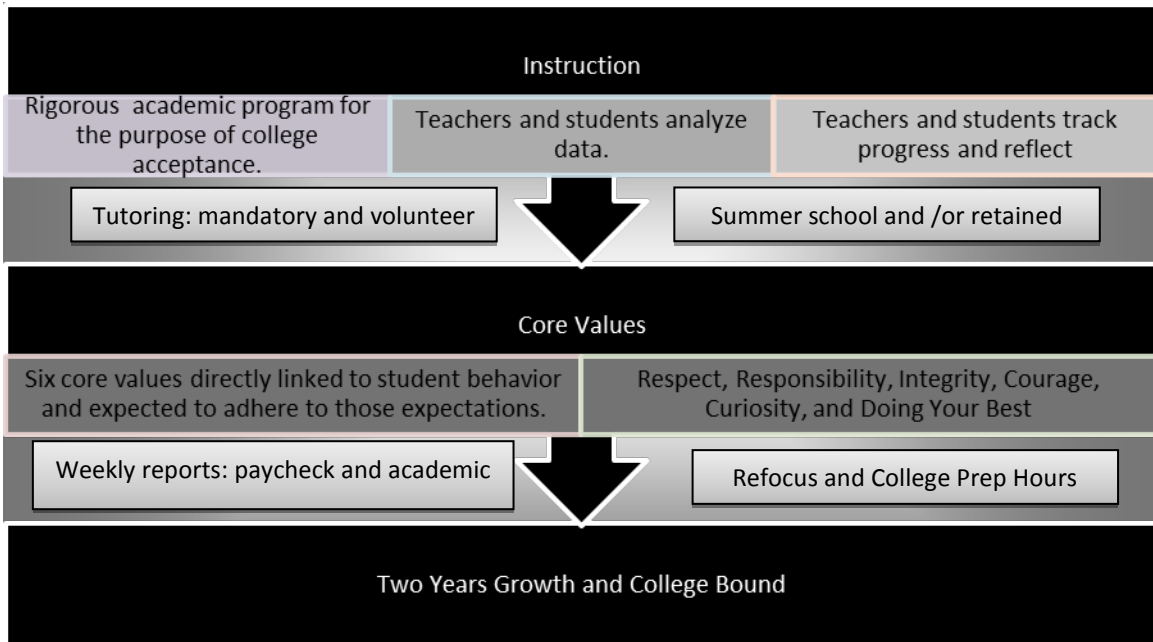
Figure 6. Expectancy-Value/ Motivation Theory Processes Diagram.

Expectancy-Value/ Motivation Theory—Participants' Input

Key to this idea of expectancy-value/ motivation theory is how participants determine whether they are meeting their stated expected goals, and how they use this information to motivate further progress toward those goals. Both Staff and parents had a great understanding and appreciation for the tools and systems utilized at Stellar Charter School to track, maintain, and motivate progress toward the completion of stated expectations as shown in Figure 6.

Staff involvement. First, Staff extensively explained the tools they utilize to see if their students are meeting stated expected goals, and how they use this information in order to progress. Upon asking the Staff the question, "How do you measure student learning?," Staff 2 participant echoed the general response with, "Benchmark assessments are key and [we] really use assessments and the data from [those] assessments to determine how much students are really growing in their academic

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knowledge and skills." Another participant expanded on how they use assessments: Staff

1 participant said,

> We are built off of data….It is the foundation of who we are. And that's at
>
> [administration] level, that's at the student level, [and] it's at the teacher level….If
>
> a student is not understanding a concept, we need to know what concept they're
>
> not understanding, analyze if it's the question, if it was presented to them, if it
>
> was the concept, if it was the teacher, or if it was the student. So all of instruction
>
> is based off of if a student, if a class, [and/or] if a cohort is performing. And if not,
>
> we're always asking our self why. [We are] trying to feed into that *why* and then
>
> create an action plan on how to fix it.

While benchmark assessments and the data gathered from them are used to

measure student learning, the goal these measurements are motivating both students and

teachers toward is the expectation of two years of growth and at least level two

proficiency for each student. Staff 1 and 6 participants, as well as two others said the

expectancy was two years growth while the other five Staff participants spoke about

levels two and three or proficient and advanced. Staff 6 participant explained how they

use data:

> The [fall] M.A.P. data, we're looking at…. is our baseline.…The winter's test
>
> should show [the students] at one year's growth, or halfway to the goal, and the
>
> final, or spring M.A.P. test, should show two year's growth. And that's every kid.
>
> Now granted, like, some of [the students] on this test are actually…maxing out [at
>
> the two year's growth level]…so they can't [progress on this test more; however,
>
> we don't want them] to digress….We message…the expectation…to all our kids

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that they will all grow and they will all grow significantly and our goal for them is two years.

Staff 1 echoed the same as Staff 3 and 6 participants regarding growth expectancies and the exceptions. This participant shared,

We expect all students to grow two years at almost all levels. I mean, when you get into the higher end, you know, when students are already three levels ahead, it's really difficult to get that kind of growth….If a student comes into the sixth grade and they're actually—you know they just finished the end of their fifth grade level—so technically they're at a fifth grade level, if another student comes in and they're two years behind that—so they'd be at a third grade level—we would expect that he'd be on [5th] grade level just with normal structures in our school by the end of the year.

Several participants talked about the level of proficiency they expected each student to gain in a given year. Staff 6 participant said,

[Teachers] are expected to know the kids' levels and to be pushing [to the next level]. We level our kids out so I've got a list on the board over here…level one, level two, level three…based on all the data….Level two is the goal….level two is proficient and level three is advance[d]….For] a high level kid,…[we] want them to keep being pushed…At the same time we may have kids in here who may have come from an academic environment that was not rigorous or was not structured…. So the school talks a lot about levels of our kids and using the levels as a way—and messaging it to the kids as a way—of pushing them forward as opposed to clumping them in that section per se. And so the kids see it that way.

They understand that levels come as a result of their data and since they look at

their data so often…they understand that's where [the levels] come from.

Student involvement. Second, not only do teachers share in this expectation and

tracking of growth: the students play an active role in these activities as well. As

discussed by Staff, students are involved in tracking, maintaining, and monitoring their

own progress toward completion of the standards and stated expectations: the students

actually chart their own progress and set academic goals based on standards. Staff 6

participant said, "[The students] are expected to hold on to [data charts and goals]."

Further, during the teacher focus group interview, all three Staff participants talked about

the reflecting process that the kids engage in following an assessment, using the data

record keeping just as the teachers do. Staff 8 said, "If you look at the charts on the

wall…you can …look at where the red rows are and be like, oh, well, that's a standard I

need to go back over." "Yes," says Staff 9 participant, "[And as we progress with more

assessments] hopefully they're getting more green." Staff 8 explains, "Red goes down,

green goes up." Staff 9 says, "I also show [students] the circle graph to show exactly

what percent of the kids are proficient…advanced and unsatisfactory." "The kids like that

too," said Staff 8 participant. Staff 7 participant followed with, "I think we all do some

type of reflection with the students after the test." While this may look differently by

teacher, it essentially has the same purpose and accomplishes the same end: Staff 8 said,

"The kids look at their score, compare it to the one before, and then highlight standards

with which they are struggling and standards that they did really well on." "[Students

note on their charts] how much they grew [and]…did they meet their goal," said Staff 7.

Class time is spent analyzing the data because it is an expectation and everyone is

accountable/ responsible to know where they are academically, what their academic goals

are, and charting their progress. Staff 8 participant added, "We want to emphasize

it.…This is important and so we take the class time to go through it pretty

meticulously….We [also] go over specific questions on a test that were missed a lot."

In addition to both Staff and student involvement in tracking and using data to

motivate progress, Staff mentioned a number of supportive structures aiding students in

their involvement in tracking their own successes. One such structure includes

intervention methods, which are utilized to support and ensure that students are on track.

Thus, in addition to Staff and student awareness, the students are supported with systems

that help them maintain or get back on track toward meeting stated academic

expectations. Tutoring, both voluntary and mandatory, is one such intervention.

Following this type of intervention, another intervention method then used to motivate

and maintain academic expectations, Staff 3 participant said, is summer school:

> If a student fails one class, they've got to [go to] summer school. If they fail two
>
> they are retained. That is supposed to be a hard line but things like IEPs
>
> [Individual Education Plans] and special circumstances come in….It's a…normal
>
> student with no other external factors except they are not performing at the right
>
> level [that] will be retained….We do not [have] Ds, so if you get a 60 [percent],
>
> you fail….Anything below a 70% is failing.

However, these academic expectations and the interventions and data which help

motivate and track progress toward their completion, are only one view of the picture.

The other side of this coin, which this school does not separate, consists of the cultural

expectations which influence academic progress. As Staff 2 participant said, "I kind of

think about [student learning] in two different capacities now: both the academic and interpersonal [cultural]." In order to really help the students, this Staff participant said, "it involves [the] culture at the school." As a means of informing and gaining community support in shaping this culture, Staff 1 said,

> We expect parents, …Staff and students to sign a commitment to our core values….[which is on] three posters hang[ing] in our commons….We also ask that [parents] support our accountability, our celebrations, support our scheduling… and what comes with our core [values systems,] our college prep, our refocuses…All of the systems …are set up that we believe help their students….This is all laid out in a contract we actually ask [parents and students] to sign as well.

Furthermore, Staff participant 2 added, "[You] set the expectations and, really, set the bar for that and the student understanding what those expectations are." He said to build the "*I want*" in students. For example, he elaborates how we want to create a student mantra of,

> *I want* to be at school, I know why *I want* to be at school. *I want* to be at school because I know what *I want* for myself in the future. I know what kind of high stakes this is and I know what it's gonna take in order for me coming from, you know a family that hasn't had any college graduates. I know how hard that's gonna be for me.

In order to capitalize fully on the school's expectations, Staff 6 participant said, "You have to teach the expectations and set them in stone at the very beginning of the year." According to all participants, the Staff embraces the core values or culture forming

structures of the school along with the rigorous academic structures, which all link to the goal of college for every student. In this way, one can see how the *I want* is fostered in students. Staff 1 participant shared how they measure student learning in the areas of both academics and culture:

We measure student learning…on standards performance as well as cultural performance….We are continually assessing our students behaviorally, and culturally as well, as if they're understanding conceptually the standards and topics that we're teaching in the classroom….We do that with our paycheck system…[which] is basically a system that tracks student behavior, positive and negative….It's directly linked to our core values and our six core values are measured on a weekly basis, and then a report is sent out to the parents of each student to let them know culturally how they're fitting in and excelling with our core values….On the instructional side, we also have weekly assessments and we have a database system that we use to collect data and then also send out progress reports for instruction….We are looking for a good cultural citizen as well as a well-educated student who will succeed in college and beyond.

In support of previous participants' statements regarding expectations, Staff 6 said this about the academic expectation and college goal, integrated with their core values:

[There are] high academic expectations….and it's messaged to them every day that they're gonna go to college and they're gonna graduate from college….As a school I think the two things we message to them is you are here to be part of the community and to treat the community well and live these values, and then second is you're gonna go to college.

The teacher focus group also echoed these sentiments when Staff 7 participant coined the phrase "the presence of a school wide culture." All participants nodded in agreement. Then, this participant followed with "That school-wide culture, both academically and around the core values is revolutionary….everybody's consistent….The kids know what to expect and what is expected." Staff 8 participant added, "And that shared vision allows us to do the things that are required to make that come true." This participant felt like their work and time was not valued in previous school systems; however, that was not the situation in this school and the other participants agreed. The researcher heard this comment from every Staff and teacher participant involved in the study. Staff 7 wrapped up the group's sentiments with:

All of the conversations [Staff and parents have] are around how will *we* get this student to be successful….The bar is set that you will attend a four year university of your choice….And in…my public school experience…not everybody's meant to go to college…[but rather,] we should be working with them on, you know, some good solid skills so they can get a decent job. It's like, 'NO' [not at this school]. We don't write *anybody* off. Period. It doesn't matter where they're at,…we know where they're going. And it's just a matter of how are we gonna get them there,…which is a whole completely different mindset.

Parent involvement. Thirdly, in addition to Staff and student utilization and awareness of expectancies and motivational tools tracking progress, the Parent focus groups, similar to the Staff's, also referenced the expectations and motivation tools; these include tests, student recording keeping, intervention ideas and mandatory tutoring. Parent 3 said, "There is a lot to testing…fairly often, like weekly….[and the students] get

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their results right away. The kids do them on their laptops, so they know which questions

they missed and the teachers know who missed which question." Parent 2, in reference to

Parent 3's testing data, voiced:

> And they have [test data] posted outside [classrooms]. 'Cause [teachers] align all
>
> of their tests with…their standards, so the kids know what standard they miss.
>
> Like, when they get their feedback, it has a lot of information on there. It wasn't
>
> just like you got a 75%. It was, you missed questions around this particular
>
> standard and this particular standard and here's the intervention we have.

One example of such an intervention, the parents explained, is tutoring, both voluntary

and mandatory. Parent 1 added that "[Mandatory tutoring] is nice so students can stay up

with the rest of the class. [Teachers] give [the students] mandatory tutoring so [students]

have to go."

In addition to the academic measurements, expectations, and goal-tracking, the

parent participants liked the expectations for student engagement in the classroom. Parent

1 participant shared,

> The core values are on every wall…[and in] every classroom…so [students] can
>
> see it, and the *SLANT* is another thing I like: You sit up, listen, ask, nod and track
>
> the teacher. So [students] know when someone is talking [by] you looking at that
>
> person and tracking, not talking to this person right [beside you] there, [but]
>
> you're tracking [the one talking]. And [students] get points deducted if they don't
>
> track.

Overall, it is clear that all participants, staff, students, and parents, are aware of the expectancies of academic progress. Further, each group is involved in this process, and there is a very clear understanding of how these expectancy systems are tools toward motivating student achievement progressively closer toward the common shared goal of college admittance.

Expectancy-Value/ Motivation Theory—Observation Input

The researcher observed a guest administrator from within the district speak to the 7th graders during their morning meeting time. The administrator's question was, "What makes you guys so successful?" M. L. Times (personal communication, March 22, 2011). She held up a local paper that touted the middle school's success and that of the feeder high school, too; the schools had planned a celebration that coming Friday for the seniors, whom were all graduating high school and had all been accepted to a four-year college. The middle and high school join for this celebration and the schools make a big deal about it: core values, high expectations and hard work pay off. The guest seemed to be the precursor for the end of week celebration. The guest administrator had the students close their eyes and envision themselves graduating high school and going to college. While students' eyes were still closed, she had them show via thumbs up, thumbs sideways, or thumbs down if they could see themselves graduating. The guest used student volunteers to role play what it takes to realize the college goal. After this activity with the audience, the guest administrator role played the graduation ceremony with a student volunteer adorning the cap and gown, complete with graduation music. In conclusion of this interactive meeting, the guest administrator spoke about graduation behavior. She explained how you enter, sit, celebrate and then exit for Friday's

celebration and that there is no hooting or hollering. Hooting and hollering is not appropriate or accepted. As a member of the audience, she explained, these are the expectations and each student is accountable for this behavior during Friday's celebration. For the researcher, this school assembly was an indication of how the culture of Stellar Charter School uses feedback to assess progress and motivate all participants to continue their efforts in order to be successful in reaching their academic goals. Further, expected student behaviors are clearly outlined and students are held accountable for adhering to the stated expectations.

Stellar Charter School attended Friday's 100% senior graduate ceremony and acceptance to a four-year college. All 88 high school seniors were graduating and the principal lauded their accomplishments because in their city the statistics are that only half of the seniors even graduate high school. Next, the high school principal explicitly set the transition expectations. The whole audience, grades 6-12 practiced them too. If they were slow, and they were once, he corrected them and they practiced again. Teachers and all Staff members were monitoring students and individually correcting them throughout the ceremony as needed. Everyone was engaged in the ceremony both in paying attention and in monitoring behaviors. Toward the end of the ceremony two seniors spoke to the audience: one male African American and one white female. Among serious and fun tributes, they additionally thanked the teachers for "the strong and positive community." The principal closed the ceremony with two thought-provoking comments: "Where will you be in 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, years? Imagine." And then he added, "You have the capacity to help someone else in your class. A teacher, dean or someone you know may ask you to help a classmate—who needs your help?" With those

comments the researcher noticed the embedded (and encouraged) expectation to participate in the community and to imagine success. Positive energy was felt by the researcher during this ceremony. Again, this entire event demonstrated the expectancy that students succeed and encourage each other, reinvigorating students to be excited about working toward and achieving the goal of college admittance.

As shared by participants, the researcher found the College Prep (CP) and Refocus names posted by each grade level pod in a designated location for students to check. Additionally, automated phone calls to parents were done to apprise them of their child's schedule change for pick up arrangements after school. Additionally, emails to both students and parents are sent to notify them. Tutoring sessions were a constant siting throughout the day. The researcher saw these sessions in the common area, off to the side of the common area, in grade-level offices and classrooms. After school hours, the tutoring was done primarily in grade-level offices or classrooms. All of these routine structures operated to remind participants of the expected responsibilities of each, and to support individuals in succeeding in these responsibilities.

Behaviors were corrected during whole school meetings, grade level meetings, advisory meetings and classes consistently. The Staff member leading a morning meeting told the students to sit straight, check their slant and have eyes tracking the speaker. In the next sentence, the Staff member asked the teachers to check if anyone was not showing these to assign a refocus. All students did as they were expected and voices were off. On the "Announcements" PowerPoint that was used to guide their morning meeting, there was a slide called "Expectations Reminders." The slide read: "Little things matter, follow expectations, be on-time and in class, and ask permission to leave a class."

Student apologies for being late to school were toward the end of the morning meeting. Late students, about three to four, had to stand up, apologize for being late as they know it is a disruption to the class and inhibits their learning as well. The apologies were brief; however, they owned that it is their responsibility to be on-time, they were late and the expectation is to be on-time. Upon dismissal from the morning meeting the students walked to class silently, which is another expectation in Stellar Charter School. There are no bells to dismiss from meetings. Most times, there was nothing to identify class was over, just silent students walking through the hallways and teachers greeting students at the doors. After meetings, the researcher noticed that music was played, and again played after the last class of the day. When the music ended, all students were to be in class or out the school doors if it was the end of the day and the student did not have a Refocus, CP or tutoring session to attend. This observation demonstrated how expectations serve to create a community culture that supports and motivates students toward continual success.

During class the researcher witnessed students being redirected to track the speaker, have the correct slant (which is posture) and to participate. In one class, as the teacher was giving the directions for the first activity, he asked the student to correct her slant and waited until the student corrected her slouching posture to upright. Another student had his hands on the computer when the directions were explicit to not touch the computers, yet. The teacher reminded the student and waited for the student to remove hands from the computer. This episode took little time and no dialog between teacher and student occurred, as the student corrected his behavior quickly. Another student came to the teacher for help while the teacher was working with a small group. The teacher put

the responsibility and expectation back on the student by saying, "You know what you need to do. Where do you get help?" And the student slowly went to the board and signed up for tutoring. This highlighted for the researcher how clearly each participant is held to awareness of and responsibility for the stated behaviors they are expected to emulate.

The researcher observed the dress code expectations and silent hallways maintained by Staff. One student was asked to remove her big-loop earrings and she did. Another was asked to remove a school-hoodie from his head while another was asked to place his ball cap in his locker. A talking student during class transition was assigned Refocus and twice the researcher observed students being reminded to "tuck your shirt in." These corrections took place automatically during class time too. During the middle of a math or social studies lesson, the researcher watched a teacher say "slant focus" and all students aligned their posture. Another time a teacher commented, "tracking and slant" as another student was speaking and all eyes and bodies turned and followed the fellow student who was speaking. In sum, it is clear that the stated expectations and systems put in place create a common language used in a community culture to support, track, maintain, and facilitate further success and progress toward the group goal.

Expectancy-Value/ Motivation Theory—Historical Documents Input

The 2011-2012 Student and Family Handbook infuses expectant-value theory/ motivation throughout the school's culture using the core values it embraces and lives every day. Furthermore, students and parents sign the document pledging awareness and acceptance of what is expected. The Handbook reads:

Academic integrity lies at the center of our commitment of our six core values at

[Stellar Charter School]: Respect, Responsibility, Integrity, Courage, Curiosity,

and Doing Your Best. Learning is predicated on a mutual trust and respect

between teacher and student. We expect each student to take the *responsibility* for

their learning by demonstrating their *integrity* in their work. We expect students

to have the courage to ask for assistance, the *curiosity* to research their ideas, and

above all, to do *their* best in all their work. (p. 12)

By this, it is clear that in addition to holding students accountable for their own

responsibilities in contributing to their learning success, which is the theme discussed

earlier, students are also motivated to accomplish these responsibilities by the community

commitment to the established core values of Stellar Charter School.

Stellar Charter School and their charter school district have partnered with the

initiative called "100K in 10 initiative", which means they "dedicated themselves to a

mission of preparing all students for success in college and the 21st century" (DSST B &

K, 2010). To further substantiate this college focus and show the curriculum spiral from

grades 6-12, the school's website said this about high expectations in their education

system:

All students are required to complete a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum

that includes 7 years of secondary math through pre-calculus—regardless of their

math level when they enter [the school system] in the 6th grade—and 8 years of

integrated laboratory science. There is not a remedial track at [this school]. Every

student completes the core curriculum or a challenge course in each subject. Our

requirements well exceed [the state's] higher education entrance requirements. (¶

2)

Through this unequivocal frame, students are messaged, and thereby motivated, to achieve the expected goal no matter how challenging it may be.

In conclusion, it was very clear to the researcher, via the parent and Staff focus groups, as well as her own background research of the school and observations made while within the school environment, that very clear expectations are set and communicated to all participants, staff, students and parents. Figure 4 summarized the findings illustrating the influences are parallel to accountability-for-responsibility as consistency and common language assist Stellar Charter School to meet its goals. Further, these expectations are measured by transparent means of data collection, and most importantly, used by all participants in order to motivate and facilitate further growth. This approach is very clear from the school's website and communications with the outside worlds, as well as from participants' communications within the school itself.

Expectancy-Value/ Motivation Theory—Orchestra Metaphor

Stellar Charter School motivates its members to continue to excel both individually and as a group, much as an orchestra does. In an orchestra, it is clear what is expected from players, as the musical notes and conductor notations are written on each player's score. Much like Stellar Charter School students, orchestra players have benchmark assessments; such as sight reading tests, soloist auditions, and performances in local venues; which provide feedback on where each player is musically. This feedback informs individual players of whether more practice is needed, and also informs section leaders and the conductor of where more work and time needs to be spent for the entire orchestra ensemble and sections as a whole. For Stellar Charter School, this is like

the spiraling and differentiation of instruction based off of data, as well as voluntary and mandatory tutoring.

Additionally, just as Stellar Charter School motivates its students and staff through consistent awareness and reminders of the larger end goals of graduation and college admittance, an orchestra is continually striving to achieve more prominent renown through state and national competitions and tours. Thus, the pride of Stellar Charter School in its test scores, graduation and college admittance rates (seen in school assemblies, through former graduates speaking to current students, and on posters throughout the school) is displayed and touted proudly as an orchestra would display its scores, awards, honors, and critic reviews. In this manner, the current members are reminded of the expectations and encouraged to continue to strive toward the stated goals.

Theme III: Relationships

Great teachers and schools both academically challenge and nurture students. In order to get buy-in from the students to empower them to achieve academically, relationships between teachers and students are essential (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Goodwin, 2011; Sergiovanni, 2000). The two teams used in Stellar Charter School to influence student learning by building relationships is shown in Figure 7. A vast array of research has been done on the concept of relationships and what constitutes authentic, real relationships that influence student achievement. This section is devoted to a discussion of this relationship theme along with evidence from the studied school; a brief literature review will follow this discussion, as this was a new theme discovered from the analysis of the data.
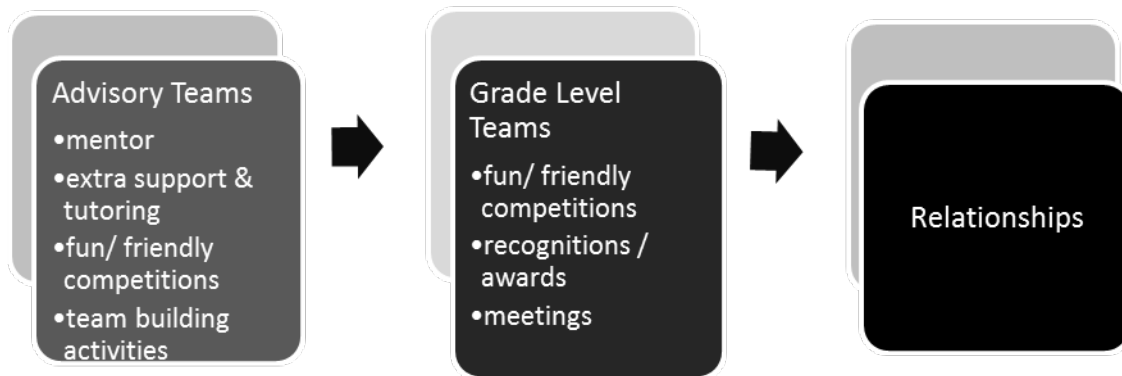
Figure 7. Relationship Theme Diagram: Two Teams to Foster Relationships.

Relationships—Participants' Input

Both the staff and parent focus groups emphasized the important role
relationships played at Stellar Charter School.

Staff focus group. Staff 2 participant had this to say about the importance of
relationships in influencing and building a successful culture:

It takes a lot of time and just building [students] up to believe in themselves and

then also to show them that you do believe in them and that you're not gonna give

up, so it really takes relationships. I'm more convinced now than ever [that]

students have a hard time with intrinsic motivation and want to get attention in

ways that they're not getting it because they're not successful in class. You know,

they have low academic self-esteem. That relationship with [students] is what will

drive their success. Because they might not do it for themselves, but they will do

it for you.

When asked how those relationships were built, Staff 1 said, "[By] checking in
with students,….asking questions….finding out what they care about, what they
value…Just being involved in their lives outside of school." Then the researcher asked,

"How do you do that [find out about students' lives outside of school]?" Staff 2

responded,

> You know I don't do it as much as I wish I did, but going to their basketball
>
> games, going to their activities outside of school. Talking to their parents [and]
>
> asking what's happening at home, and what they value at home and just showing
>
> up, I think, is huge and that consistency is huge too.

The researcher further learned that Stellar Charter School has a system for

fostering relationships that incorporates both academic and behavioral components called

Advisory. Staff 1 participant explained it like this:

> Our Advisory system is one of the most effective systems we have….Each
>
> student has an advisor, [who has] usually between 15-17 students, and the advisor
>
> really becomes a point person for that student, an advocate for that student at
>
> school. The advisor checks in on their grades, sits down and conferences with
>
> them...Really, this is all about the student relationship and building that person up,
>
> [and being] a confidant that the student can go to at school too. The advisor also
>
> sits down at the end of the trimesters and goes over [student's] grades with the
>
> parent….Our…first…point of contact for parents is always the advisor…. so the
>
> advisor is really a key person….[He] kind of keeps up with all student work.

To further explain the trimester conferences, three parties are involved in that

conference at the end of each trimester: student, advisor and parent. Parents receive

weekly academic and core value progress reports throughout the school year that have to

be signed and returned; however, the grade cards are not sent home. Grade cards are

viewed the first time during the trimester conference, and taken home with them after the

conference. In this way, it is clear that an advisor has multiple roles at Stellar Charter School. Staff 3 participant said, "The advisor-student relationship is all about the relationship and building that person…[a] confidant that the student can go to at school." Student advisory teams are intentionally grouped by gender; while they also try to match the advisory teams and the advisor Staff-members by gender, this is not always a possibility. "We don't have as many male Staff so there are some female advisors for all boy advisories," said Staff 2 participant. He added, "We do this intentionally so we can have pretty honest and transparent…conversations."

Staff 3 participant talked about expectations that lend themselves to relationships. For example he shared,

It is an expectation at the start of the school year, to greet your students at the door….I am relationship oriented. I have pretty strong bonds with most of my students and they feel comfortable taking to me and because of that we have this…level of mutual respect so when they take a test they're gonna do their best because they want to show me what they can do.

He further went on to explain that he shares his phone number with students and occasionally students will contact him with personal problems. When this happens, he counsels them through, stating that he is not a professional counselor, but this is how he might handle the situation. He is very real with them and honest. Staff 3 participant shared another example that illustrates the importance of teacher-student relationships. He had a student who selected the wrong answers on purpose on a test until the relationship was built:

I've had a student in the past, actually tell me that on the first standardized

assessment he took, he would find the right answers and then choose a different

one—the 'gonna give it to the man' [attitude]. Kids do that. [Students] need to

know the purpose [for learning and doing well]. I feel like that is my role.

Students need to know why they're learning what they're learning and why you're

doing it. [Tell students what] you are doing for them.

Along the lines of letting students know the purpose of their learning and the role

of a teacher in helping them, Staff 3 participant further shared his perspective about

learning and student behaviors related to core values. He said, "It's absolutely impossible

for me to separate the student learning from the students themselves….Every week we

have a house meeting; well really, it is a grade level meeting." The purpose of the built-in

meetings is for the grade level teachers to come together to discuss students' needs. The

school structures this in their Wednesdays when they release the students two hours early

each week for Staff to work on this and hold other Staff meetings. There is a document

generated throughout the week and teachers insert issues/ concerns by grade level. Staff 3

said, "We talk about individual students…[during] an hour every week set aside for

individual student concerns….It's all action-oriented. It's not venting time." He went on

to explain that, "It's just a way for us to really focus on individual students and how to

help them with academic and behavioral concerns in a very structured setting….It's very

collaborative. Everything is very collaborative." Staff 5 echoed the same message when

she said, "If a student's having a lot of trouble doing anything…I can contact their

advisor and their advisor is most likely gonna be able to reach out and support [the

student]." Furthermore she said, "It is really awesome to have a go-to person and everybody here is really dedicated to supporting those [students]."

Staff 3 said he would email parent compliments about their child and often include the student's email address too. Sometimes he doesn't because it occasionally embarrasses the student when they receive glowing compliments, but, "I like them to know I am proud of them," he said, "even if it embarrasses them a bit." Staff 6 participant said,

I make a point to get to my level-one students to make sure they feel supported and that they understand and can get moving on work that we're doing. If I know that there's a specific task that we're doing that might be complicated and that I need to give them extra [teaching], you know mini-tutoring, then I'll do that [with those students].

This Staff participant further substantiated the relationship influence of the school as he said:

I think the expectations are high….but there's a lot of fair and honest conversations with the kids. There's a lot of fun too. It's all built on the idea of relationship building. I mean it's based on those core values and the kids know them and it is our goal to try to internalize that with them and we do that through our relationships with them. We don't see [students] as products. They are people to us….It feels good to be in a culture that is good to each other every day, and I feel that way every day in this community….[We teach students to consider] what is my relationship with the community…and what is my relationship with others.

Staff 4 agreed, as did all 13 participants in the study, that diversity was truly advantageous for Stellar Charter School. He explained,

I think the mission of diversity is really interesting to watch in action. To see kids learning from one another and their cultural and religious differences just totally organically is meaningful…..We do some diversity stuff here, but for the most part it's learned through friendships and just being in a contained environment together and learning together.

Agreeing completely with Staff 4 participant, Staff 1 shared,

We are verging right around 50% free and reduced lunch and we have students on all ends of the socio economic spectrum….It's one of the things I truly cherish about our school…[It's] highly, highly diverse and I think that's something that's really special….[This is] special to me specifically because I truly believe that everyone from …all ends of the spectrum can learn from each other….We have the opportunity for students to learn from each other….It's not one student or one group of students that learns more from others, [but] every student from every end of the spectrum has something to offer to the person next to them.

Parent focus group. Like the Staff, the Parent focus group discussed the positivity they felt and liked hearing and seeing from school Staff. Parent 1 participant said, "[Teachers] let you know the good things too", while Parent 3 said, "Everybody here seems enthused." "Yeah. They do," said Parent 2. Parent 2 continued, "[Teachers] like their class. My kids like their teachers. And [students] like school. And they're [students] okay with getting in trouble." Parent 3 said her child might not always agree with her next statement, but to this parent,

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The faculty was the parent away from home….They [are] gonna tell when she

does something wrong….like a big brother or sister….And it's done in a very

professional way, a very caring way because they want the student here to have

the best education possible.

Parent 2 agreed completely and explained that it did not matter how much background

knowledge you came to school with or social economic status; rather,

The premise that this school is built around is that all children, regardless of

where you came from or what happened before you came in this school,

everybody …is given the opportunity to go to a four year college and [the school]

is gonna do everything to get you there. …if you need extra help, it's here for

you. If you need to learn how to act appropriately, that what we're gonna

do…..that was really appealing to me.

Relationships—Observations Input

To further support the collaborative part of Stellar Charter School pertaining to

working to support students via relationships, the researcher listened to example after

example of teacher-to-teacher support. For example, if there is a student behavior or other

concern that an advisor feels like another teacher might relate better, especially during the

first weeks of school, then the advisor-teacher would ask another advisor-teacher to assist

and they do so willingly. "Everyone is happy to help out," said eight of the participants.

One example of everyone helping one another freely is a time the researcher

observed a student coming into a grade-level office and complaining how they were

going to drop out of some sport because they were going to fail out of a particular class.

The teachers explained to the researcher later that the grades were not bad; rather, the

student was struggling with home situations and it was spilling over to her academics some, but not dramatically. Rather, the student was feeling frustrated and discouraged with the outside distractors. Two teachers talked her through some of this and kept reassuring her it would work out and that she was not failing. They were here to support her and that it would be okay. Another story was shared about a student who was struggling with the way he looked and carried his weight. The main advisor did not look like he had struggled a day in his life with weight and the student indicated that, so without making it an ordeal, the advisor sought out another advisor that he thought would better be able to assist the student with this particular area of concern.

Another interesting and fun way that Stellar Charter School influenced relationships was through team building. The researcher watched a sixth grade teacher have his head shaved in the shape of a smile. The only hair left on his head was the outline of a smile. This was done for a friendly challenge around one of the core values. Students had to display the core value *Doing Your Best* with a target for total points as a grade level in order for this event to transpire. Teachers recorded and tallied the points for this core value for a set period of time and reported the totals to the students along the way to let them know how they were doing. In the end, they achieved the targeted points and watched enthusiastically as their teacher had his head shaved into a smile.

As another example of team and relationship building, the entire sixth grade team earned a "dress down day" meaning the school uniforms did not have to be worn; however, the researcher continued to notice that no shorts, baggy or sagging pants were worn, no hats, 'bling' or big earrings. This was evidence to the researcher that respect for

the dress code was embodied even if it was a "dress down day;" certain types of clothing were simply not acceptable for Stellar Charter School.

Eighth grade had a team building activity with embedded relationship influences too. The teachers played seconds of recorded popular songs and the advisory teams had to come up with the song title. Students had to first work together in their advisory teams and write the song title on a white board to be checked by the lead teacher of this activity. Advisory teams earned points and the winner announced. Following this, the eighth grade-level meeting began. The room was quiet with all students engaged in the *SLANT*. "'S' for 'sit up', 'L' 'for listen', 'A' for 'ask and answer questions', 'N' for 'nod your head', and 'T' for 'track the speaker' (Lemov, 2010, p. 159). Overall, it is very apparent that Charter Stellar School makes a conscious effort to establish and maintain positive relationships between all school participants in order to foster understanding, encouragement, and progress toward the common goal.

Relationships—Historical Document Input

A Staff member held up the local paper during an all school meeting with the students saying that people know who you are and what you are doing. The school engaged enthusiastically with the news and waited in anticipation too. Due to advisory teams' recent challenges to one another, the teachers did silly things as rewards. The one in the paper had shaved half his beard because his advisory team had won a friendly competition related to the six core values. He looked a little odd with only half of his beard intact; however, it was powerful to students for creating synergy and building relationships within their advisory team.

In the sixth grade wing, the researcher noticed a poster displaying the core value challenge for February 6- March 16. As shown in Figure 8 all six core values are covered in six weeks.

Feb. 6-10	Feb. 13-17	Feb. 20-25	Feb. 27-Mar 2	Mar. 5-9	Mar. 12-16
Respect	Responsibility	Integrity	Courage	Curiosity	Doing Your Best

Figure 8. Core Value Calendar for the Months of February – March.

The poster explained the meaning of a core value challenge, listed the weekly core value focus and listed the end prize. The core value challenge was for each advisory team to work as a team and score the highest core value points of the week. Then, the poster explained how the challenge worked. At the end of the week the points would be tallied and the advisory with the highest average for the week won. The last explanation on the poster explained what the prize was, and for this particular six-week stretch the prize was an ice cream sandwich at lunch. From this, the researcher realized the effort Stellar Charter School went to build a supportive community based on relationships that motivate and keep participants on track to success.

Relationships--Literature Review Input

A plethora of literature exists on relationships. Goodwin (2011) used a three-legged stool analogy to illustrate that strong relationships with students, coupled with intentional use of instructional strategies and maintaining high expectations are essential to influence student learning. Developing personal relationships has been established in dozens of research and meta-analyses on student achievements linked to effective

student-teacher relationships (Goodwin, 2011). No doubt, a great challenge for educators is to both "challenge and nurture," says Dweck (2006, as cited in Goodwin, 2011, p. 22).

Boykin and Noguera (2011) said, "Interpersonal relationships involve social exchanges that occur between teachers and students and among students and their peers" (p. 70). These two researchers use the term "teacher-student relationship quality" (TSRQ) (p. 70). Boykin and Noguera (2011) claim that out of all "asset-focused factors," TSRQ has shown the greatest influence on closing the student achievement gap (p. 70). Student relationship-building traits include things like teacher "empathy, support, encouragement, and optimism [such that] they are perceived to be fair, genuine, and nonpatronizing in their praise and feedback" (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 70). Additionally, Boykin and Noguera (2011) stated that "proactive communication with students" (p. 70) aides in building relationships. Goodwin (2011) gave ideas on what constituted relationship-building activities; for example, this can include

> talking casually with students about their interests before or after class, greet[ing] students by name as they enter the classroom, comment[ing] on important events in students' lives…, consciously seek[ing] to make eye contact with every student in the room, freely mov[ing] about your room, deliberately seeking to move toward and be close to all students… and us[ing] get-to-know-you activities at the beginning of the school year. (p. 23)

Sergiovanni (2000) aligned with Goodwin's meta-analyses and took it a step further when he said, "Good schools are unique…because they reflect the values of the communities they serve….[and] the beliefs of the teachers who work in them." In support for this uniqueness, Sergiovanni aligned similarly with Scheins' (2010) traits for culture.

Sergiovani (2000) said, "Being part of a unique school helps us feel special and improves our level of commitment. Shared commitments pull people together and create tighter connections among them and between them and the school. And these factors count in helping students learn at higher levels" (p. 23).

With this said, when shared commitments are realized by the members of the school, then relationships are built and the "we" transformation occurs. Along with this transformation "schools become authentic communities with unique characteristics" (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 24). Furthermore, Sergiovanni (2000) said, "Schools develop social capital by becoming caring communities" (p. 25). As concluding support for building a unique community oriented school culture, Sergiovanni (2000), utilizing the works of Coleman, (1988, 1990) and Gamoran, 1996 (as cited in Sergiovanni, 2000), said, "Social capital consists of norms, obligations, and trust that are generated by relationships among people in a community, neighborhood, or society" (p. 25).

Sergiovanni (2000) added to the social school community culture utilizing relationships and buy-in from community members, with a concentration on academic achievement by rigorous academic work within this same community. Again, support and personal concern for students is part of the culture and the "expectation [is]… students will work hard, come to class prepared, and complete assignments" (p. 27). In order for personal concern to be realized by students, students must feel this genuine concern from teachers (Bryk & Sebring, 1996, as cited in Sergiovanni, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2000). Sergiovanni (2000) said, "Extra help is provided when needed, and students are praised when they do well" (p. 28).

The power of teacher-student relationships is not new information. Judith

Kleinfeld (1969) did research work as a Harvard doctoral student and found that students

were more successful in a classroom with a teacher that "combined 'high personal

warmth with high active demandingness'" (as cited in Goodwin, 2011, p. 23).

Essentially, students are willing to work hard for their teachers when they have developed

a positive mutually respectful relationship with teachers that give real feedback not

patronizing. Figure 7 illustrated two community-groups Stellar Charter School

implements, Advisory and grade level teams, to build relationships that influence

improved student learning through their culture of purposefully designed core values

integrated with rigorous academics.

Relationships—Orchestra Metaphor

Orchestras spend a great deal of time together, from rehearsals, to touring, to

performing. For example, oboe players practice with each other, with their woodwind

section, and also with the entire orchestra ensemble. This is akin to students at Stellar

Charter School, who are members of an advisory team, a grade level, and an entire

school. At each level, the student body (the orchestra) is broken into smaller groups with

the purpose of individualizing attention to better help, encourage, and support students

through relationships. In addition to time spent practicing, orchestra members travel

together when on national tours; it is hard to imagine an orchestra that spends so much

time together working to make beautiful and moving music doing so without building

relationships between its members. These relationships are fostered by member

involvement in professional musical organizations and events. This element of an

orchestra is similar to the grade level and school-wide meetings and assemblies at Stellar

Charter School, where students are brought together to get to know and take pride in the school-wide culture they are a part of; it is events and traditions like these that foster relationships and a shared sense of purpose and belonging. These relationships, in turn, encourage and motivate members to excel and work toward the common goal.

Theme IV: Support Systems

Support systems to Stellar Charter School are like lights, instruments, music stands, and sheet music to an orchestra. They are necessary materials to do the job well. In this school, support systems were in place to maximize Staff members' ability and efficiency in accomplishing the goal that every student will graduate high school having the opportunity to attend a four-year college of their choice and then go on to graduate from college. Support systems at Stellar Charter School are both behavioral and academic as illustrated in Figure 9. Academic support systems encompass assessments, data systems, time to analyze data, mandatory tutoring system, College Prep (CP), weekly academic and core value progress reports and advisory systems. Behavioral support is found in the advisory system, Refocus system, two Staff positions called *Dean of Students*, behavioral progress reports, weekly core value paycheck system, and time scheduled for Staff to strategize ideas to help students behaviorally.
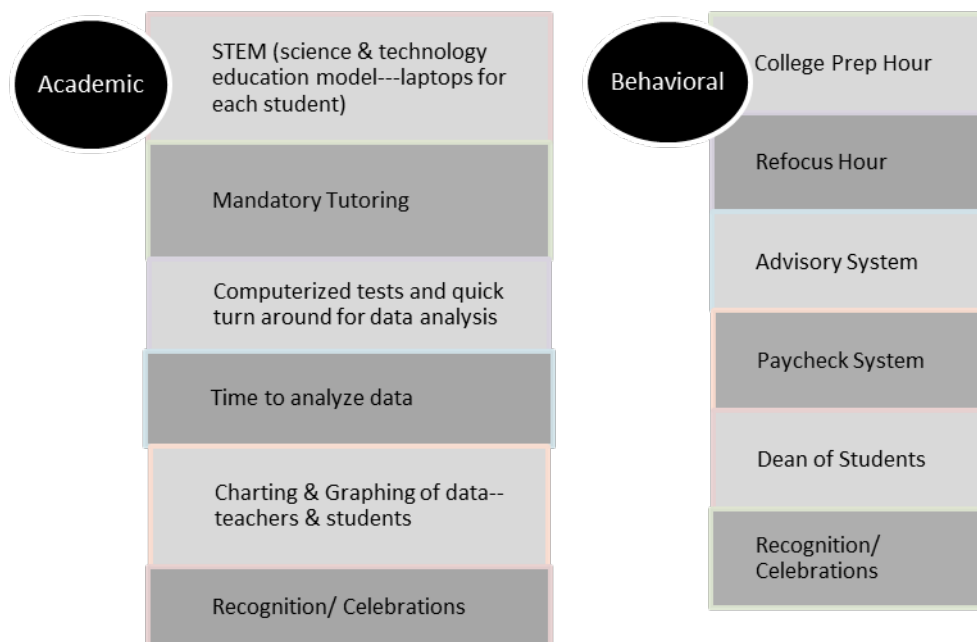
Figure 9. Support Systems Chart Identifying the Different Systems Used to Influence Student Learning.

Support Systems—Participants' Input

Both Staff and parent participants were very cognizant and positive about the systems put in place to support and foster students academically and behaviorally. Not only did both groups discuss the academic and behavioral support systems at Stellar Charter School, but they described the tools used to both administer and reinforce these support structures.

Staff focus group. The Staff focus group spoke about all the systems that every Staff participant used as they answered the researcher's broad question to tell about their school.

'Advisory support system.' With regards to academic supports, as said earlier, in order to influence relationships, the Advisory system also supports students in their learning. To reiterate its function as a support system, Staff 6 participant said,

One of…the most effective systems we have is the advisory system…..The

advisor really becomes a point person for that student, an advocate for that student

at school….The advisor checks in on [students'] grades, sit[s] down in

conferences with them…[and says,] 'Let's check on your missing work,' you

know, [and asks,] 'Why you are having a hard time in math?,'…or whatever it

may be.

If it is discovered by the advisor that the student needs more instruction, the

teacher will recommend to the student that she sign herself up for tutoring and take care

of that matter right away. If the advisory teacher can provide instructional scaffolding on

the spot during the 15 minutes of advisory time and still meet with the other advisees,

then the teacher might do that. Most often though, the Advisory system is for relationship

building, with the purpose of aiding students to take ownership of their learning and

responsibility for seeking help in the content needed. All six core values are continually

and consistently threaded throughout all systems used at Stellar Charter School.

'Data support system.' After understanding how the Advisory system worked, the

researcher noticed all 13 participants referenced a data system. All nine Staff participants

talked about how the data system was used to give, collect and analyze assessments as

well as impact instruction. First, "Teachers use…data to really drive their instruction,"

said Staff 1 participant. "We measure student learning by using "a lot of data tracking and

mastery," said Staff 4 participant. Staff 5 and 6 both spoke of a database system called

Active Progress; this was the tool each Staff member was referencing when discussing

data tracking and analysis. Staff 6 said, "Active Progress is a real [technology]

resource...it's very standards based, so I know what standard I'm testing for all the time

and then connecting that standard to the data I get…[From there, instruction is] very data driven." Furthermore, he said, "Performance Assessments, which are given twice a year…[are] basically [a] writing….that goes into Active Progress too."

Staff 3 participant shared information about an assessment they give five times throughout the year. The assessments are called Interim Assessments, often coined "IAs" and all include the standards they teach. "A percent of a student's grade in our middle school is based on the test and changed to a graduated increase, starting at 10% for sixth graders, 15% for seventh, and 20% as an eighth-grader," said Staff 3. Staff 3 participant shared the story of how IAs are used for grade promotion, along with course grades. Staff 1 participant explained:

Interim assessments—….we have five of them—….[and] the last two are considered promotion assessments….The last one is the major promotion assessment….If [students] fail one or both of those [last two interim assessments], they have an option of two things: one [option] is summer school, based on kind of where they fell in the spectrum of not passing or not mastering this assessment; or [their second option is that] they're a candidate for retention and/ or both [options one and two]…They might go to summer school, not quite hit the mark on those assessments again, and be asked to repeat that grade…..The other part is the grade itself in the core classes [science, math, English and social studies and includes Spanish in the eighth grade].

IAs are used to measure students' learning progression throughout the school year; the students also reflect, set goals, and obtain tutoring based on these computer assessments. Another test, the M.A.P., is the data tool specifically used to measure the

two year growth the school seeks for each student. All Staff participants spoke of this M.A.P. data tool; however, it was Staff participants 3 and 6 who spoke extensively about the M.A.P. test. Staff 6 explained it best:

Three M.A.P. [assessments] are taken…[in] the fall, winter and spring….These just started this year and they're supposed to give us a…scope of how we are comparing nationally to other schools….We were told that a lot of the higher performing charter schools are taking these tests so it gives a better gauge of where we stand nationally….[The] M.A.P. works like the G.R.E….Every student starts with the same problem; if they continue to do well the questions get harder and harder….If they aren't doing well the questions get easier….We use the first test as the baseline and expect two years growth by the third test.

The school is "built off data," said Staff 1, and the other 12 participants mentioned the same. Staff continued to talk about the systems used at Stellar Charter School, and Staff 6 participant praised, "The systems built-in [make] it so easy to learn about what good data looks like and how we should use data to inform the way we teach… you don't have to recreate the wheel."

Staff participants talked about how they used the assessment data to inform and differentiate their instruction, and they shared that they were given time during their work day to analyze this data. Staff 3 said,

At the end of each IA we get a day to analyze and work from that…to grade and analyze…and after the second, third and fifth [IAs] we get two days. One is for trimester closing: core value, scores, grades, everything has to be done.

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Staff 3 said "Teachers would typically do differentiation in class." All Staff participants talked about differentiation. Staff 4 said,

> It depends on the standard, but I'll do student pairings of students that have mastered it with students that haven't….Other times I'll pull a small group to give them [concentrated help], while I'm giving challenge work to the other students so that get a little bit further along in their learning.

The teacher focus group mentioned having leveled lessons and activities. Staff 9 said,

> Sometimes it's like differentiated lesson based on how they master that standard. If they mastered it, maybe it's an extension activity, if they didn't master it maybe it's a reteach activity and then for some maybe just more practice of that skill.

Staff 7 participant said, "Once the student has mastered one level, they might move to another level, so they're leveled [meaning leveled activities attached to standards]." A few Staff participants talked about another type of differentiation using data, which involved the leveled students too: level one being the lowest with three as the highest level. The researcher learned that level two was typically the proficient level. Staff 2 described it this way and used science as the content:

> [Teachers] would have three different activities going on at the same time and [teachers] would actually rearrange the room so that in the back it's mostly individual student seats. Those are level three students and they're basically given a self-driven project of some sort. They are given the guidelines, but then they're given an amount of freedom [to complete the project]. The middle group has a lot more structure and it's more partner work: you're working with somebody trying to figure it out. The level one group is basically put in a U [formation] in front of

the Smart Board and the teacher would do direct instruction for that level one

group and go back over [something] step-by-step.

He compared this differentiation to a factory with all the different moving pieces within

sections of the factory.

'Academic support systems.' While the school has implemented extensive

academic support systems to monitor and facilitate academic growth, it also has

incorporated a number of intervention tools to reinforce its academic support systems.

One such system is tutoring. Staff 3 explained that tutoring as two formats. One format is

where the students sign themselves up for tutoring and Staff 3 called this "voluntary,"

and the other is where the teacher signed students up for tutoring. Every Staff participant

talked about tutoring. All Staff told the researcher that they offerd and gave tutoring to

students and the researcher witnessed this as well. In addition, Staff 2 said, "We ask

teachers to hold tutoring at some point during the week: either at lunch, during a lunch

period or after school." Hence, it is a teacher expectation; however, every Staff confirmed

it is what they do here to help students and they like it.

In addition to tutoring, Stellar Charter School has implemented other academic

support systems for students. As with most groups of learners, there are students where

in-class differentiation, tutoring and spiraling standards back into classroom work and

homework are not enough to advance them two grade levels, or to get them to their

current grade level. Stellar Charter School has an Enrichment system for this and has

continued to work to improve it. Staff participants 1, 2, 3 and 6, along with the teacher

focus group all spoke of finding ways to improve their Enrichment system. Staff 1

described the Enrichment class:

We [have] intervention or enrichment class that happens three days a week with

English and we try in most grades three days a week with math as well. And these

are extra classes that we offer support for those students that are just you know,

pretty far behind the curve as far as grade level comprehension goes.

Later in the conversation, this Staff member said, "For their intervention classes they

usually look for more than two years behind in that subject." Staff 2 called this an

Enrichment block or seminar class and said the students that have been identified as

needing this class do not attend Art. In place of Art, these struggling students get extra

support from the Enrichment class. He said specifically:

We have to prioritize either reading [and writing], enrichment or math, and there

are a lot of kids who need both. So we look at their data and [determine in] which

one they need the most extra support….[Then] we rely on our differentiation to

help with the other weak areas. When they are in reading and writing

[enrichment], for two hours we make sure that they're getting instruction on their

level.

In this form of intervention, Stellar Charter School purposefully implemented the

Enrichment block to influence student learning for the really low academic students. The

researcher thought Staff 6 said it well:

Even though you have a class of 150 [students]…we're working our hardest to

make [sure] every kid is individually supported—….That they're not part of a

group or part of a class, but they're an individual within that class….We create

plans for them to help that child be successful.

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In addition to these academic support structures, behavior systems are embedded into Stellar Charter School's culture purposefully to aid both teachers and students. Staff 6 participant continued, "[With regards to] behavior systems,….everybody's consistent. We do the same things. The kids know what to expect and what is expected." Staff 9 participant added,

> We have a lot of systems that are here to help teachers. And it helps teachers to be very consistent across classrooms. [For example,] we have College Prep and Refocus. Those systems are built in to help teachers. So you don't have to come up with your classroom management strategies…..[They] are in place already for you.

Echoing similar thoughts, Staff 3 said, "[There are] consistent structures throughout." This helps kids and teachers, agreed Staff 3 with the teacher focus group. His perspective was,

> The structures are very consistent from sixth all the way to eighth grade. So students know what to expect, teachers know what to expect and there's kind of a level of, this is how our school works that everybody knows….Structure like things on the walls in your classroom are also really consistent [in that]…there's a "First Three" poster in every classroom. It tells the students what should be the first three things you do when you walk in the door. The agenda, the homework, the essential questions and the objectives are all on every single board, in every room you go in you will see all of that every day.

All participants talked about how College Prep (CP) and Refocus are dual-purpose systems which help support students in reaching both behavioral and academic

capacity, for the school has a goal to foster great citizenship that helps sustain students through college and beyond. Staff 1 phrased it this way: "We are looking for a good cultural citizen as well as a well-educated student who will succeed in college and beyond." "If you didn't have your homework done or you're not prepared for class in some way you are assigned a CP", said Staff 3. "If you violate the Responsibility [core value] piece [then] it's a CP." Furthermore, Staff 3 explained, "CP, like the Refocus system, is an hour after school of the student's time where they do the homework that they missed," for example. "If it happens to be a pencil that you forgot, then you can work on that night's homework and think to yourself about how to get a pencil," shared Staff 3. Staff 3 participant said Refocus was essentially "a behavior based detention" and that it is based around the "core values." He added, "[Refocus is] an hour of [student's] time after school [where] they write an apology." Thus, a student could be assigned a Refocus for failing to pay attention to the teacher or for not participating in a learning activity, in addition to talking out of turn or being disrespectful to others. Thus, Refocus, like CP, serves to support academic success and rigor, as well as reinforce the behavior of model citizens and future successful future college applicants.

'Technology support system.' A vital component of all of these systems is the technology used to administer them and make them more efficient. For example, CP and Refocus are implemented through electronic communication: the teachers enter names into a specific system and notifications are sent to parents and students. In addition to the emails to both parents and students, an automated phone call goes to parents and the office assistant running the Refocus and CP Reports. The office assistant posts the student names on the grade level wing's designated location for students to check at the

end of the day. As Staff 3 aptly said, "The parents get a phone call home [that] tells them their child is on the list. We post CP, Refocus and mandatory tutoring lists everyday….If [students] don't check it, if they miss it [CP or mandatory tutoring], then they get a Refocus. If [a student] skips Refocus, then they are in *in-school intervention* the next day." The researcher later learned that *in-school intervention* was like a traditional school's concept of in-school suspension. However, in Stellar Charter School, this typically meant you had a day removed from your regular classes, had school work to do, including why you skipped Refocus and many conversations would be had about the core values broken and actions you as a student must take to remedy that. Again, the core values of 'Respect,' 'Responsibility,' 'Integrity,' 'Courage,' 'Curiosity' and 'Doing Your Best' are reiterated, and it was clear that Stellar Charter School had embedded these values in their culture purposefully.

Further, these dual behavioral and academic systems utilize technology to make them more efficient through collaboration. Staff used technology to create a document where every Staff member could access and add student concerns for use during the weekly one-hour meeting. This grade-level meeting was devoted to problem-solving collectively about the students on this document. Staff 6 participant shared more information about the electronic *Student Support Document* and how the Staff used it to collaborate during grade level meetings to influence student learning. He said:

A Student Support Document [is one] that we fill out every single week for students who we have concerns with either behaviorally or academically and the teacher will go into that document and put the date and put their new concern….As a group [of same-grade level teachers], we discuss that kid and

..after we get the problem, then we immediately begin coming up with ideas for

solutions and then we work those interventions for a couple weeks…with the

kid….If they don't work then we begin to create, like, a plan whether it's an

academic plan or a behavior plan for that student, which they're also on for two

weeks, and that's at an advisory level….[At the] advisor level, they keep track of

that data from the contract…and if it continues to be an issue from there

behaviorally, that goes to the Dean and it becomes a dean level problem….With

academics…we work as many interventions as we can and if we continue to see a

problem then that might be a red flag for IEP testing, if it's necessary.

Staff 5 echoed similar sentiments when she and all Staff spoke about the grade levels

collaborating concerning the *Student Support Document*. Specifically she said,

We do department meetings all the time…We have a ton of …systems in place

where all of us are collaborating about a student…that we are concerned

about….Then we have a solution based conversation….They really are solution-

based 99% of the time.

'Behavioral support systems.' In addition to the electronic systems through which

these behavioral (and the dual behavioral and academic) systems are administered, these

systems are supported and reinforced by a "paycheck" system. "We assess our students

behaviorally and culturally using a paycheck system that tracks students' behavior, [both]

positive and negative," said Staff 1 participant. Additionally, he said, "[This system] is

directly linked to our six core values [which] are measured on a weekly basis, and then a

report is sent out to the parents of each student to let them know how they are doing

culturally."

Parent focus group. In the Parent focus group, much of the discussion also involved the many systems used by the school to support students, and the way these systems are administered and reinforced.

'Academic support systems.' With regards to academic structures, parents addressed assessment and data driven instruction by saying that students were tested a lot and given feedback. "[Scores are] posted outside the [classroom]," said Parent 2, and in addition to class scores and averages, students personally "get feedback [which] has a lot of information." For example, "You missed questions around this particular standard…and here's the intervention we have," said Parent 2.

Parents also explained the interventions, with one being tutoring and another, an enrichment class. First, the tutoring system was addressed during the Parent focus group as Parent 2 said, "[Teachers assign students] mandatory tutoring…to go to if you didn't do well on an assessment….or if you were gone a day when they taught something." Parent 1 interjected, "It's nice so students can stay up with the rest of the class…Anything you missed, you have to go catch up."

'Behavioral support systems.' In terms of behavioral support systems for students, Parent 1 participant agreed, as did all three other parents, that consistent behavior structures were present, expected and enforced by all Staff members. She said,

> [Students] sign the core values each year they come in….And that goes on every
> wall. Every classroom [also] has, so [students] can see it the *SLANT* [poster]. I
> like it. Students must sit up, listen, ask, nod and track the teacher [whoever the
> speaker is]….And [students] get points deducted if they don't track.

The parent focus group also praised the paycheck system used to enforce the behavioral supports and expectations. Parent 3 said, "[Students] get extra points toward a paycheck because they were recognized for good behavior…and that's really nice….The kids come home saying, 'I got points for showing the core values' and you can praise them as well." Parent 1 liked this too and agreed with Parent 3, but added, "And…the paycheck is whole [advisory] too…it's the [advisory] class. If the whole advisory has the highest paycheck then their whole [advisory group] will go on…[a special field trip], or have a pizza party." Parent 2 shared that sometimes a whole grade level is awarded things, for example, "The sixth grade had a dress down week…because they had the best attendance during [state testing] week."

The discussion also included the CP and Refocus support systems and the dual, both academic and behavioral, purposes these systems have: the parent focus group explained the two systems alike. Parent 2 said,

They are holding kids accountable for actually getting stuff done…[with] two different systems. They have College Prep which is like if you forgot to do your homework or you forgot to like do an assignment in class or your parent forgot to sign your planner.

Parent 3 chimed in, "Or [teachers] don't like the way you've done [homework]. [If teachers] don't think it's good enough or it's not your best effort [then teachers will assign the student CP]." The parents said "Doing Your Best" is a core value and the school holds students accountable to that value. Parent 2 elaborated, if the CP was assigned due to homework or assignment quality issues, "You [the student] just lost the privilege of doing your homework at home." Parent 2 said, "[Students] have a Refocus

[if] they break on of the school rules.…[Students] have to figure out what they did wrong and apologize for it."

Overall, the support structures established by Stellar Charter School serve to create a streamlined process that fosters efficiency, accountability, and awareness. These systems are utilized by all participants, creating common reference points between each participant's role and responsibilities, and how her own efforts impact the progression to success.

Support Systems—Observations' Input

Due to student confidentiality, the researcher did not participate in the Refocus or CP after school systems, nor did she observe the team collaborations pertaining to the *Student Support Document*. The researcher noticed that time was set aside for this on Wednesday from 2-3 p.m. Staff members told the researcher that the all-Staff meetings followed the team meetings and lasted until 4 p.m.

As described by participants, the same posters were on the classroom walls establishing consistent systems. These were the posters found: all six core value posters, a "Turn and Talk" poster, "Stop and Jot," "First Three," "Last Three," and "*SLANT*." The "First Three" poster had three commands: "(1) Sit down quietly and take out your supplies, (2) Copy your homework into you planner silently, and (3) Begin the 'Do Now' silently and promptly." The "Last Three" poster also had three commands which listed in the following order: "(3) All students make sure their homework is written correctly, (2) All students pack up and organize their materials, (1) All students stand behind their desk and wait to be dismissed." As Staff participants said in their interviews, the researcher

noticed how behavior and classroom management systems were already embedded in the structure of the school.

Additionally, during classroom observations students were held accountable to these systems and expected to follow them; the core values were posted on each classroom wall and the commons area, and referenced and incorporated in reprimands and reminders to students. For example, during one class, not many students were participating in a charades game and one warning was given while the teacher had the paycheck clipboard in hand, giving points to or taking points away from students regarding the core values during class time. Immediately, all students began participating as the teacher pointed out they needed to be 'Responsible' for their learning, and encouraged students to exhibit 'Courage' and the other core value of 'Doing Your Best.' Another teacher gave the positive reinforcement to his class regarding adhering to the "First Three" poster as he said, "[That it was the] best they'd done on 'First Three' in a while." While students were working on their computers, he asked a question and few hands went up to answer. The teacher then said, "I will give negative points to students who don't respond when I ask the next question." All hands went up after he re-asked his earlier question. Clearly, the systems in place are easily accessible and understood by participants, supporting expectations and motivating progress.

Observations at the school additionally revealed the school culture through the support the systems utilized in whole-school and class meetings, as well as in advisory sessions. Some observations included a Staff t-shirt that said "Culture is King," kids walking silently through the halls, and a dress code that was adhered to and enforced. When the dress code was not adhered to, the researcher saw Staff ask students to remove

anything that was against the dress code: hat, big loop earrings, tuck a shirt in and stand in line correctly ("Please."). Absolutely no scenes or big deals were made in any of these instances. Students simply did as they were asked. Again, this was evidence of the common language created by the support structures utilized, which created the goal-focused culture found at Stellar Charter School.

During advisory time or sessions, the researcher observed an all-male advisory team. On the board and in oral statements to the students, were two options: the first was to work on homework, and the second was 30 minutes of reading. The Advisor conducted individual conferences with students and on occasion had accountability/responsibility conversations about missing assignments. The Advisor asked, "Will you ask the teacher _____, do the work and then turn it in?" And the student replied, "I will try." Another student asked if they could take a late assignment to a teacher and the Advisor asked, "Is it finished?" and he said, "Almost." The Advisor responded, "Finish it, unless you have something else more important?" And the student replied, "No, I can do this quickly in Spanish." The Advisor closed, "Please do. That's worth 20 points and it's killing your grade." Later, this same student brought the Advisor the unfinished homework just to show the teacher what they had done, *like you would a parent*, the researcher thought. Another student had struggled with finding some piece of homework, finally found it in his backpack, brought it over to the Advisor who said, "Finish it right now." The teacher was using a piece of paper to follow up and check in with students as this document informed him of late work and other concerns by student. It appeared to the researcher that the advisor role aligned well to what an active parent role would be. Monitoring students' progress both academically and behaviorally, encouragement was framed

around the six core values (respect, responsibility, integrity, courage, curiosity, and doing your best). Thus, the Advisory support system incorporated and further ingrained the six core values which grounded the goal-focused culture at Stellar Charter School.

Another occasion during class time and in the halls, the researcher observed an administrator member having a conversation with two female students. It was apparent the girls had a concern. First, the Staff member listened and then offered suggestions on how to handle the situation and work through it positively. A phrase that the researcher heard and said by the Staff member was, "Own your problem—or part—first, then move to the next step. Give it a try." The girls were hesitant and the Staff member concluded, "It will work out if it is pure, honest and respectful." While the conversation lasted maybe 5-6 minutes, it was framed around the core values, short in duration, resolved, and then all parties moved on.

Another piece of evidence for the support systems in place is seen through the technology and data tracking implemented by the school. This system gives teachers the ability to assess students' levels of understanding and allows them to respond with differentiated instruction. One example of differentiation in a classroom followed a math quiz that had five standards on it. Once the students finished the quiz on their laptops, it was electronically scored. Students had to analyze their scores, and list their percent mastery and the number of multiple choice questions missed. If a student had less than 85%, they did a certain activity; if they missed only one, then they did not have to re-do the problem. The teacher had station activities set up for them based on ability levels. The students knew which station to go to, as a result of their quiz score and which standards they missed. It was observed that a couple of students were in need of attending many

stations because they missed proficient status of several, if not all five standards. It was later explained that one of those students was in danger of repeating their grade level and this had been communicated at the third trimester conference. First though, they would start with retaking a class or two during summer school and if they passed the IA and did well on class work, then the student would be promoted to the next grade. The Staff retains students on an individual basis considering components such as home life, personal life and academic ability and/or diagnosis of the student; however, the school does have specific guidelines to help make these decisions. The support systems in place provide guidance, facilitate understanding across participants, and underscore the importance of community and mutual effort; however, the support systems retain flexibility so that Stellar Charter School may still address the individual differences and needs of students.

Support Systems—Historical Document Input

In the May issue of *National Alliance for Public Charter Schools* (DSST N, 2012) Stellar Charter School was identified as one of the highest performing public charter schools in the state. The article noted that strong school culture was one reason for the outstanding academic achievement of the students for this urban public charter school.

On the school's website were descriptions about Stellar Charter School's assessments. The following comes off Stellar Charter School's website (DSST L, 2012):

Students take [Interim Assessments]-specific tests that act as benchmarks across the school year. The students take these tests, aligned to [their] standards, five times throughout the school year. Students take these tests in: reading, writing,

math, social studies, and science. Teachers use this data to make instructional

decisions that best meet the needs of their current students. (¶ 3)

The 2011-2012 Student and Family Handbook echoed similar statements as two other

school website locations, explaining the educational program and guiding principles of

the school (DSST B & K, 2010). The following is from the "Educational Program" under

the "About Us" tab (DSST K, 2010):

a high-accountability culture where doing your best in your classes is expected and

doing well in school is cool.

- An advisor for every student, who monitors student performance and

  maintains regular communication with parent' guardians

- College Prep, a required after-school study hall for students who have not

  completed their homework

- Mandatory teacher tutoring for students who fail a quiz or test or need support

- A learning culture that communicates to students that learning the concepts

  and skills is more important than grades

- Weekly recognition of students for academic effort and success and

  demonstrating core values

Remediation and Support: in order to help students meet our high expectations we

require:

- Required summer school for all incoming 6th graders and incoming 9th graders

  who have not demonstrated grade-level proficiency in math and /or English

- Math and English seminars for students who are still working to master basic

  fluency skills

- Math and English support classes, courses that students take in addition to their regular courses, if they are performing below grade level and are at risk of failing courses for the year

Use of Technology: …employs technology to transform teaching and learning in the following ways:

- A wireless one-to-one teaching learning environment for all students and Staff

- Pedagogy that utilizes technology to enhance and transform outstanding teaching practices

    - The use of technology throughout school-wide assessment practices to efficiently analyze and act on data. (¶ 2)

To summarize, Stellar Charter School implements a variety of support structures, which are clearly explained and widely referenced and utilized. Figure 8 listed the systems briefly. These structures served to reinforce expectations, motivate and excite participant growth, and created a culture of shared values and goals.

Support Systems—Literature Review Input

There are multileveled approaches used today to research and explain academic achievement. Behaviorally speaking, school culture does influence student learning as noted by many researchers (e.g., Blankstein, 2010; Boykin and Noguera, 2011; Goodwin, 2011; Payne, 2005; Schein, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2000).

Culture is a huge concept in education systems; however, harnessing what culture is and how to create a good one, or to change one, is the real story. Freiberg and Stein (1999, as quoted in Stewart, 2008) claim that, "'School climate is the heart and soul of a school'" (p. 184). Shields (1991, cited in Stewart, 2008) added that the culture of a school

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influences positively or negatively "classroom instruction and student learning" (p. 184). Researchers Rumberger and Parlardy (2005, cited in Stewart, 2008, p. 184) found that a disruptive school and/ or classroom negatively impacted student learning. Culture is learned through socialization and influences behavior; furthermore, Schein (2008) and others have said culture is composed of shared beliefs, values and ideology. These elements (beliefs, values and ideology) are the heart of an organization where individuals hold certain ideas and value-preferences which influence how they behave and view behavior of other members. Over time, these elements become norms of shared traditions that are communicated within the groups and are reinforced by symbols and rituals (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Bush, 2003; Schein, 2010).

Furthermore, shared values are key factors in an organization's success and "the most important structural element" in any organization, said Sergiovanni (1994, as cited in Blankstein, 2010, p.102). "Values are the attitudes and behaviors an organization embraces. They represent commitments we make regarding how we will behave on a daily basis in order to become the school we want to be" (Blankstein, 2010, p. 102). Blankstein (2010) went on to state that "values endure" and are "never compromised for a short-term gain or quick solution" (p. 103). Blankstein (2010) concluded:

> In high-performing schools, eventually the school Staff will…help bring individuals' behaviors into line with the stated values. Acting in accordance with these stated values becomes part of the culture. Lateral accountability for shared commitments and agreed upon behaviors becomes the province of the entire school community. (p. 103)

In this way, researchers noticed how confidence of a group grew. Jantiz, Patten & Leithwood (2010), citing Bandura (1997), explained it this way:

[*Collective teacher efficacy (CTE)*] is conceptualized as the level of confidence a group of teachers feels about its ability to organize and implements whatever educational initiatives are required for students to reach high standards of achievement. The effect of efficacy (or collective confidence) on teacher performance is indirect through the persistence it engenders in the face of initial failure and the opportunities it creates for a confident group to learn it way forward rather than giving up. (p. 676)

Values well defined, understood, and lived in an organization influence CTE and in turn, both these concepts influence student learning.

In addition to values, data has been shown to also play an integral part in the creation of school culture. As an example of using data to influence practice, Goodwin (2011) referenced a case study of a school that set out to improve its system of student supports and used "a sophisticated data system that tracked student achievement data, provided valued-added calculations for schools and teachers, and stored relevant background information on students" (p. 150). After using the data support systems, the school they identified problem areas, formulated plans to address the problem, and implemented support systems and/ or class instruction that influenced improved student achievement. Covey (1989) suggested it this way:

To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you're going so that you better understand

where you are now so that the steps you take are always in the right direction. (p. 98)

With that said, McTighe and Wiggins (2005) discussed making lesson plans that encompass the variety of learners in a classroom. As a teacher, it is important to design lessons that impact "the less experienced; the highly able, but unmotivated; the less able; those with varied interests and styles" as well as those who already understood and can articulate the knowledge to others or on assessments (p.4).

Establishing baseline data to determine where students are as they come into a grade level is a place to commence monitoring of student growth. Then, giving a short quiz or collecting a K-W-L chart are two examples of assessing student understanding prior to the lesson or unit of study, which then impacts and guides instruction (Blankstein, 2010; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Goodwin, 2011; Tomlinson, 1999).

While the use of data is integral to providing for meaningful instruction in "real-time," streamlining and maximizing educational efficiency, it cannot be used without first establishing the appropriate atmosphere of trust and understanding. Michael Fullan's (2001) book *Leading in a Culture of Change,* explained the guiding premise of data use:

> What has been discovered is that first, people will not voluntarily share information—especially if it is unflattering—unless they feel some moral commitment to do so and trust that the data will not be used against them…Data without relationships merely causes more information glut. Put another way, turning information into knowledge is a social process and for that you need good relationships. (p. 6)

In this way, a culture of trust and commitment to use information to influence practice must be established in order to be effective with data. Again, Fullan (2008) talked about "data transparency" of a school in his book *The Six Secrets of Change,* noting that data should be about gathering information and doing something constructive with that information.

From the pre-assessment that is risk free to students and which informs instruction, follows student goal setting. Goal setting influences self-regulated learning said Pintrich (2000, as cited in Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Pintrich (2000) continues, stating that goal setting is "'an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment'" (as quoted in Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 55). As mastery of goals is realized, Gutman (2006, as cited in Boykin & Noguera, 2011) said student self-efficacy is enhanced. McTighe (2009, as cited in Blankstein, 2010) said, "'Formative assessments help students to see their learning progress and to see the importance of taking an active role as learners by monitoring their own growth. Effective learners use habits of mind that include goal setting and self-assessment'" (p. 184-185). In addition, feedback that is timely for students, specific, and easy for students to understand, provides enhanced self-adjustment for learners (e.g., McTighe & O'Connor, 2005; Wiggins, 1998; Blankstein, 2010).

Using formative assessment to influence instruction is also part of the equation, along with student goal setting and students taking an active role in regulating students' own learning. Tomlinson (1999) stated clearly in her book, *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners* the next step for teachers:

> In differentiated classroom, teachers provide specific ways for each individual to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly as possible, without assuming one student's road map for learning is identical to anyone else's. These teachers believe that students should be held to high standards. They work diligently to ensure that struggling, advanced, and in-between students think and work harder than they meant to; achieve more than they thought they could; and come to believe that learning involves effort, risk, and personal triumph. These teachers also work to ensure that each student consistently experiences the reality that success is likely to follow hard work. (p. 2)

In this way the essentialness of differentiation is noted, but there is another step. Data driven instruction aides' intervention if used as Sergionvanni (2000) recommended. Assessments should be used to gather information about the skills mastered, not yet mastered and students' potential for the purpose of providing useful feedback to the students and to inform the teachers. As supported by Blankstein (2010), schools that use these type of informational assessments are committed to success for all students by systematically identifying struggling students and doing so early on. Schools then implement intervention systems to assist learners. These programs support learners. Some schools have summer school programs, tutoring and/ or intervention/remedial classes to support learners and scaffold for them so they too can meet mastery on the standards

(Blankstein, 2010; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Goodwin, 2011; McTighe & Wiggins, 2005; Sergionvanni, 2000; Tomlinson, 1999). Student support systems like these, coupled with alternative behavioral modification systems, promote character development and positive values that have been proven in previous studies to close the achievement gap with their culture.

Support Systems—Orchestra Metaphor

An orchestra is able to perform beautiful music because of the instruments, sheet music, performance hall, and practice time given to both individuals and the orchestra ensemble as a whole. Without these support structures, it would be much more difficult for an orchestra to perform such complex music. While players could perform together without musical scores and notes, or without knowing how to read music notation or proper playing technique, the process is made easier and the goal of numerous individuals making beautiful music together (in unison) is made more attainable by the knowledge and use of such resources.

This same idea holds true for the support structures utilized by Stellar Charter School: these systems make it easier for the school to ensure the success of all participants. Just as sight reading tests and solo auditions for an orchestra inform section leaders, the conductor, and the orchestra as a whole of where strengths and weaknesses are, so too do the assessments at Stellar Charter School drive instruction and differentiation of curricula. The technology used to make this data easier to track and use is much like the first, second, and third tier chair system an orchestra uses to assess ability levels and experience; these positions are fluid, just as students' proficiency levels are, and are adjusted with each evaluation or assessment. Even how students are divided

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by proficiency level so that students can work together to get on the same page of understanding is like how players of similar instruments and sections work together, under the guidance of the section leader, to make sure their bows go up at the same angle, for example. Similarly, private lessons of orchestra members are like tutoring for students, supporting individual weaknesses and building up the overall strength of the whole. Support structures are instrumental to the day to day operations of Stellar Charter School, and, just as with an orchestra, support structures make it easier to bring everyone together in harmony, in the right key with the right tempo, to accomplish the group's goals.

Theme V: Transformational Leadership

A transformational leader like Martin Luther King, Jr. is symbolic as well as visionary, and indeed, is more rare than common (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Researchers Burns (1978) and Yukl (2006) added that a transformational leader appeals to followers' morals, values and emotions "to raise their consciousness about ethical issues and to mobilize their energy and resources to reform institutions" (Yukl, 2006, p. 249). The researcher discovered that the leader of Stellar Charter School aligned, as King did, to his members; he functioned as a visionary, appealing to their morals, values and emotions. Importantly, these transformational leaders emphasized the work of the unit as a whole, empowering individuals to lead and contribute toward achievement of the community goals.

Transformational Leadership—Participants' Input

Transformational leaders foster synergy within the group and create a 'we' culture as was noted by participants. Additionally, the researcher discovered a commonality from Staff regarding their leadership. First, teachers felt valued by their leader. Second, teachers felt that the leader included them in decision-making. Last but equally important, teachers felt that they were given the opportunity to grow.

Staff focus group. The leader connected with the Staff by first aligning to their common (school's) mission and values. Further, the leader connected by explicitly telling Staff how amazing and great they were, which worked to build teacher self-efficacy and willingness to work harder. Staff 2 participant framed it this way:

> [I want to] really help teachers hold students to our expectations—to use the accountability systems for what they are, but then also have the flexibility to respond to students as individuals and not just 'this is how it is,' 'this is how we do things.'

Staff 1participant added, "Our school is filled with amazing students [and] amazing Staff members that are all dedicated toward one common goal and that succeeding at a high level starting with middle school to high school to college." Staff 8 participant shared, "My main motivation for moving someplace else was first, I did not feel like my work was valued and second, it was wasted after [students] left my room. And I don't feel that way here." All the Staff shared similar thoughts about the value of their work here as compared elsewhere.

Staff 1 participant offered the following:

Be optimistic, seek advice always, continue to be a learner, not an [administrator]….Listen and absorb from other people:…staff, teachers, students….Conceptualize that and move on it….It is important to be inclusive versus exclusive when creating a school….Create a strong culture….Culture first, instruction will follow….Truly embody the values of that organization…Get the belief and buy-in of your Staff if that's right, and…translate to students.

Secondly, the leader embodied distributive leadership by sharing leadership roles among the Staff. This inclusion assisted the Staff in feeling that they were genuinely a part of the successes at Stellar Charter School which increased the synergy. Staff 3 participant explained the inclusion in this way: "To write the curriculum…was a huge opportunity [for me]." While he said that it was different and hard to write the curriculum, he enjoyed it because it gave him ownership and he felt like he was part of the reason they were doing well. He added, "It's a lot of work… but they [administration] work really hard to make teachers feel like they're not being taken advantage of. And I don't feel like I am at all." Staff 6 participant elaborated,

It's an intense environment, but the people [who] work here want to work here….They want to work long hours, they want to work for the kids, but they also want to have someone who's gonna have their back, and when that person tells them they need to take a break or tell them they need to go home before 6:00….You know, things like that…I really like working here….I like the kids….the whole nature, the whole building.

In these ways a transformational leader borrows from the collegial model by honoring

teachers' expertise as well as aligning to similar values and morals by distributing

leadership tasks.

Last, a transformational leader borrows from the servant leadership model by

serving Staff; in this way, the transformational leader builds the trust necessary to create

an atmosphere where teachers feel safe in facing challenges and in growing from them.

The leader of Stellar Charter School purposefully assisted Staff to be the best they could

be as teachers, and this support fostered teachers' continual learning and growth. Staff 3

participant said,

> We know that our director and deans, all former classroom teachers, are fighting
>
> for us. You definitely get that sense. Usually we have early dismissal on
>
> Wednesdays so we can have two hours of meetings. They throw things once-in-a-
>
> while at our Staff meetings, like "living life" lotto, peer pop-ins for prizes and
>
> they are goofy incentives.

Every Staff participant echoed Staff 5 participant's thoughts regarding growing

and learning in order to be better teachers. Staff 5 participant phrased it this way: "There

is a lot more feedback, there's a lot more insight into what it takes to be a good teacher

and so I'm learning a ton about that." All Staff echoed Staff 3 participant's comments

regarding evaluations and informal pop-ins:

> Different people come in and out of the classrooms all the time and it's all
>
> helpful. Nobody's coming in to see what you are doing wrong. They're coming to
>
> give you either help with what you need to fix or to see what you're doing well.

Another Staff participant added that the administrator was available to talk about "classroom strategies" and the same was true with any administration team member or teacher. It was a very open and safe atmosphere. Totally "risk free…[and] positive," said the Staff focus group participants. Staff 6 said, "I like to talk to my director and the deans." Furthermore, he said he liked the videotaped observations where the administrator and teacher review it together, and he liked it the peer observations, too. It is all to "enhance ourselves as teachers…[Administrators] sit with us and want to know our ideas and ask how they can support us."

Staff 4 summed up the sentiments of all Staff participants well regarding feedback in their culture:

[Our administrator] set a culture of providing a good work environment for the teachers to feel like they're heard and that their work is meaningful on an every single daily basis. He is really able to be there for anything you might need but also trusts you to be the professional to do the daily dirty work of, you know, making sure kids are learning. If there's ever a time he feels by looking at the [assessment] data that students aren't learning, then he immediately pulls you and has a check-in. He will give you some ideas that he has had work and ask you what your ideas are to possibly boost student learning. So he's constantly having those meetings, building you up and making sure you know he trusts you as a professional, but at the same time intervening if you're not getting the job done.

She concluded, "Feedback is sometimes never easy to get, but when it's feedback with constructive ways to change, then it makes it a lot easier to receive."

Parent focus group. Parents noticed the job satisfaction teachers exhibited. Parent 3 said, "Teachers seem really enthusiastic here and want to be here, and they are not difficult to deal with, as my experience has been elsewhere." Two other parents phrased it from the kids' perspective, saying that the kids liked their teachers, school and that the teachers like the kids, too.

To influence culture, Stellar Charter School brought former graduates back and had them share with current students what they learned at this school and how it has helped them. The students also spoke to the leaders and Staff. Parent 1 said, "Graduates come back and talk about the pros and the cons and what they learned here and what they need to change. Some programs were changed to accommodate what the students brought back from college."

In this way, the researcher noticed the distribution of leadership with the staff member creating the school's schedule. Furthermore, the synergy witnessed as staff collaborated continually and frequently throughout the day and finally, the devotion of the leader to the school's goals by her active participation in the day-to-day interchanges. These are characteristics of a transformational leader.

Transformational Leadership—Observations Input

The researcher observed a teacher printing Stellar Charter School's complete schedule of classes, times, lunches, etc. that he had created for the current school year. Additionally, team collaborations were witnessed as well as Staff members assisting with other students behaviorally and academically. Furthermore, one administrator was difficult to speak with due to her busy schedule; the administrator was extremely devoted

to the Staff and students. She was seen conferring with students, triaging and following up with teachers regarding student concerns or other school matters.

Transformational Leadership—Historical Document Input

On the school's website (DSST A & C, 2010) terms like *we* were often found as well as *culture, high academic rigor* and *college bound.* The researcher found Yukl's (2006) definition of a transformational leader evidenced by the school director's description of the staff and her welcome to incoming members. According to Yukl, a transformational leader creates positive change by the empowerment others through a system of shared values, trust, cooperation, and distributive leadership. Here, the director of the middle school welcomed everyone to the new school year and she stated:

> We are a small, tightly-knit group of highly motivated scholars who are
>
> committed to ensuring a college ready, college bound culture….We are proud of
>
> our work and successes. We welcome you to our school and our community and
>
> look forward to working with you soon. (¶ 1).

In this way, we see the transformational leader is showed her respect and appreciation for the Staff, which is underscored by the emphasis of "we" and the united efforts of the school Staff as a whole unit. It is this united group that she spoke for when she welcomed incoming members to be a part of this community, and the pride and values associated with it.

This transformational style was evidenced further by the manner in which the director framed successes of Stellar Charter School. Awards abound for the school district as a whole, yet specifically for Stellar Charter School, too. They have been recognized locally and nationally for their ability to take urban students, serving roughly

45-50% low SES marginalized students, 76% Hispanic, African American and Mixed race/ other and graduate students and send them to college with "character and sense of civic responsibility of whom a significant percentage will assume leadership positions in an increasingly scientific and technology based society" (DSST N, 2012, ¶ 1). Upon having received the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) award in 2011 (DSST M, 2012), Stellar Charter School's former director said:

> We are thrilled by this recognition from New Leaders for New Schools. The hard work of our teachers to ensure student achievement and growth is key to [Stellar Charter School's] success and we are honored to be among the top 18 schools recognized nationally. (¶ 3)

Again, the focus was on the united efforts of the staff as a whole, and respect and appreciation for the teachers was clearly expressed.

From these examples the researcher demonstrated the collaborative culture embraced by the community of leaders and teachers. Furthermore, the buy-in to the school's values and mission from the entire community is evident from stories shared and successes documented, printed and recounted in other media forms.

Survey findings. The summary results of staff response to the PLQ were computed using SPSS software, presented in Table 1, and divided into the survey's six factor descriptors. The PLQ's six factor descriptors as prescribed by Leithwood (1996) were used with a 5 Likert Scale. As shown in Table 1, because the responses were within accepted ranges established by the author, the school leader can best be described as a "strong transformational leader."

Table 1. *Reporting Results of Mean Scores for Transformational Leadership Traits.*

(Note: Means of four and above suggest a strong transformational leader.)

Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ) Results The principal has:	Mean	Std. Deviation
Leader identifies and articulates a vision:		
Commanded respect from everyone on the faculty.	4.33	.492
Made faculty members feel and act like leaders.	4.42	.515
Given the faculty a sense of overall purpose for its leadership role.	4.50	.522
Excited faculty with visions of what we may be able to accomplish if we work together as a team.	4.58	.515
Both the capacity and the judgment to overcome most obstacles.	4.67	.492
Leader provides and appropriate model:		
Symbolized success and accomplishment within the profession of education.	4.42	.699
Led by "doing" rather than simply by "telling."	4.67	.492
Provided good models for faculty members to follow.	4.67	.492
Leader fosters the acceptance of group goals:		
Used problem solving with the faculty to generate school goals.	4.42	.515
Worked toward whole faculty consensus in establishing priorities for school goals.	4.50	.522
Regularly encouraged faculty members to evaluate our progress toward achievement of school goals.	4.58	.515
Provided for our participation in the process of developing school goals.	4.58	.515
Encouraged faculty members to work toward the same goals.	4.67	.492
Leader provides individualized support:		
Provided for extended training to develop my knowledge and skills relevant to being a member of the school faculty.	3.83	.718
Provided the necessary resources to support my implementation of the school's program.	4.17	.389
Taken my opinion into consideration when initiating actions that affect my work.	4.67	.492
Treated me as an individual with unique needs and expertise.	4.75	.452
Behaved in a manner thoughtful of my personal needs.	4.75	.452
Leader provides intellectual stimulation:		
Provided information that helps me think of ways to implement the school's program.	4.17	.577
Challenged me to reexamine some basic assumptions I have about my work in school.	4.25	.622
Stimulated me to think about what I am doing for the school's students.	4.58	.515
Leader holds high performance expectations:		
Insisted on only the best performance from the school's faculty.	4.50	.522
Shown us that there are high expectations for the school's faculty as professionals.	4.58	.515
Not settled for second best in the performance of our work as the school's faculty.	4.67	.492

Note. Teachers = 12

Literature Review Input

A working definition of leader is needed. Yukl (2006), who cited many works of others regarding the definition and attributes of leadership in his book *Leadership in Organizations* said, "[Leadership] involves a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization" (p. 3). Along with those responsibilities, a leader facilitates collective and individual efforts to accomplish objectives which will require an organization and its members to be learners (Burns, 1978; Bush, 2003; Gill, 2010; Yukl, 2006). With that said, the researcher applied transformational leadership qualities in an organizational context next.

With the working definition of leaders asserting intentional influence over people, the researcher considered the higher-order attributes that transformational leadership has over the traditional autocratic leader. Both researchers Burns (1978) and Yukl (2006) said a transformational leader appeals to followers' morals, values and emotions "to raise their consciousness about ethical issues and to mobilize their energy and resources to reform institutions" (Yukl, p. 249). In this way we notice researchers eluding that the organization's outcomes are often greater than expected due to enhanced capacity building of the organization's members. This outcome is empowered by a leader who is more in tune with the members in the first place: similar values, which elevate followers to a greater performance capacity, results from that connection. The autocratic leader simply enforces rules and procedures, ensuring members are doing what they are supposed to be doing. These types of leaders often neglected leading people in a manner that made them feel special about what they did and/ or that they had worthy qualities; on

the contrary, omitting these values caused members to feel frustrated and devalued (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

On the other hand, transformational leaders appealed to the operating cores' values and morals, gaining their "trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect …to [ultimately] do more than they originally expected [them] to do" (Yukl, 2006, p. 262). In essence, transformative leadership motivated people because they can and already have bought into the values, mission and goals of the organization. Building on that foundation, those leaders fostered inclusion of their members by having them participate in processes of the organization, further demonstrating worth and respect of their qualities that enhanced synergy, belonging and increased dedication to the organization. Unlike transformational leadership, the traditional autocratic-style leadership and transactional leadership do not include members in the process, resulting in the loss of enthusiasm and commitment to the mission as well as the objectives of the organization (Yukl). Traditional and transactional leadership styles typically compromise synergy, enthusiasm and loyalty in exchange for hierarchical structure, obedience, and compliance which leads to mundane, meaningless work.

A culture that empowers members has a leader that designed or sustained an existing organization to include its members in organizational processes, promoting energetic brotherhood and equity for both members and community; this serves to increase the capacity of both the members and organization (Burns, 1978; Bush, 2003; Senge, 1990). In sharp contrast to a transformational leader is a traditional autocratic-dictator leader who micromanaged members. Another sharp contrast to the transformational leader is the transactional leader where it is more of an exchange

system. Both the traditional autocratic-dictator and transactional leadership styles extinguished the self-efficacy of its members, because they do not connect with members' values and belief systems or give tribute to their talents by including them in organizational processes.

Gill (2010) succinctly paraphrased Schein's culture definition in his book, *Developing a Learning Culture in Nonprofit Organizations* with: "Organizational culture [is] the values, basic assumptions, beliefs expected behaviors, and norms of an organization; the aspects of an organization that affect how people think, feel, and act" (2010, as cited in Gill, 2010, p. 5). How people feel, think and act impacts lives of people, just as it does an organization. Members of an organization have a shared sense of culture by definition of a transformational leader; as stated earlier, such leaders influence and facilitate collective and individual efforts by first aligning and appealing personally to the morals, ideals and values of the group. Next, a transformational leader builds on intrinsic motivation, where confidence in individuals' self-worth is demonstrated by sharing power in decision making and other responsibilities, further increasing members confidence they can accomplish difficult tasks and also the collective efficacy of the group is positively affected when tackling difficult responsibilities together (Yukl, 2006).

In this way, we see how transformational leadership's attributes influence positive relationships and create a culture of respect where the leader can and often does distribute leadership responsibilities among the group. This empowerment of others can bring change to an organization when leadership is grounded not in the position, but rather in the distribution of leadership over "social and situational contexts" (Spillane, Halverson,

& Diamond, 2001, p. 25). This is especially helpful in dynamic, changing environments like education, where coming together as a whole and delegating in order to conquer problems and find solutions in subset groups is expedient for reaching mutual organizational goals. These are characteristics borrowed from the collegial leadership model and found in organizational culture studies to influence a culture of honoring others' expertise, as well as appealing to their values and morals (Bates, 1987; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Bush, 2005; Greenfield, 1984; Schein, 2010; Tierney, 1988; Yukl, 2006).

Additionally, "cultural models are manifested by symbols and rituals rather than through the formal structure of the organization," as defined by Bush (2003); because schools are unique, determined by the population and community that occupy them, special leaders are needed where democratic ideals and shared values are based on the ideas, shared between the leader and followers (Sergiovanni, 1984, 2000). Cultural models assume that beliefs, values and ideology are at the heart of organizations, where individuals hold certain ideas and value-preferences, which influence how they behave and view behavior of other members. Over time, these norms become shared traditions that are communicated within the groups, taught to new members and reinforced by symbols and rituals (e.g., Bolman & Deal, 2005; Bush, 2003; Schein, 2010). As a consequence, education systems are emphasizing culture more and more as a means to better orchestrate the learning environment, extracting sense out of the mayhem created by growing bureaucratic systems. To conclude, the importance of a culture designed and lived by the transformational leader is, as Sergiovanni (2001) puts it, in the "shared values [which] provide[s] the glue that connects people together in meaningful ways" (p. 25).

Researcher, Senge (1990) summed it up well when he said people need a leader who (a) has a good "design", not just a vision, (b) is a good "teacher", not an authoritarian expert on the 'one, correct' view of reality, and (c) is a good "steward" whose attitude is to serve rather than be served (pp. 10-13). Thus, as humans are learners by nature, it would be natural for the leader to involve the members of the organization in organizational processes, systems and structures. Additionally, the leader would foster a culture of continual learning in an organization, by having teacher qualities, be teachable, participate and serve the members and the organization; hence, tending to the organization like a living organism (McCombs & Whistler, 1997). The transformational leader's design (which is more than a vision) and mission to ensure a healthy, effective culture within the organization are needed in education institutions to influence improved student learning.

Transformational Leadership—Orchestra Metaphor

The transformational leadership style seen at Stellar Charter School is exceptionally like the distributive leadership style utilized by orchestras. Orchestras are led and guided by the vision of a conductor; this conductor relies heavily on the leadership of section leaders to carry out this vision. Section leaders are entrusted with determining the needs of their sections and making sure that the group is working together toward accomplishing the vision of the conductor and the goals of the orchestra as a whole. It is section leaders that lead sectional rehearsals. This parallels the structure of leadership seen at Stellar Charter School, as the school director brought teachers on board to help develop curricula and participate in decision-making. The director worked to establish trust in her relationships with teachers so that all staff and administration

could work in unison together to accomplish a common goal. The director emphasized the "we" in discussing the school staff, and it was clear that the Staff felt valued and respected by administration. This distributive style of leadership is characteristic of a transformational leader, and is the common style of leadership found in orchestras.

Discussion

Student learning for Stellar Charter School, a Midwest high performing urban public school, purposefully embedded six core values that influenced student learning and utilized technology and behavioral support systems to maximize efficiency for informing instruction and supporting students both academically and in relationships. The participants illustrated many ways the influenced student learning. The six core values formed the foundation for Stellar Charter School and served as the common thread that connected the other systems used to influence student learning. All participants discussed the integrated culture with academics and one Staff participant framed it as, "It's impossible for me to separate the student learning from the culture."

Accountability/ Responsibility

The first theme, *accountability/ responsibility,* is about building a culture where leaders, teachers, Staff, students and parents are all active in some integral way with the learning and appropriate behavior. At Stellar Charter School parents were accountable/ responsible to sign the weekly academic and core value progress reports, student planners verifying they are aware of the assigned homework (and completion of it daily) and upcoming assessments, etc. Transporting students to and from school, since there is no school bus system, was another responsibility of parents. Additionally, parents were responsible for attending the trimester student-parent-teacher conferences. The school

Staff hoped parents provided a place for their student to do homework at home and would verify that it was done, helping when they could; however, school Staff also understood that many parents are unable to academically assist their student(s). For these situations, acceptance into Stellar Charter School was precisely equivalent "to actually winning the lottery," said four participants.

The Stellar Charter School Staff was accountable/ responsible for providing a rigorous curriculum, assessing and analyzing data to quickly give helpful feedback to students, who in turn reflected and set goals to learn. College Prep (CP) was another way to influence student learning, along with weekly progress reports to be signed by parent(s) and returned to school. Not having planners signed or weekly academic and core value progress reports, missing or incomplete homework, or not having school materials for class, earned students an hour after school to reflect and action plan how to remedy that responsibility deficit piece. If it was missing homework, then the consequence was a mandatory time set aside to do the homework; hence, as a few Staff participants and a parent from the focus group said, "student(s) just lost their ability to do their homework at home." This is just for one day. If this was a pattern of behavior, then a behavior plan is drafted.

Differentiated instruction and tutoring sessions were held to support learners and influence their learning following daily informal and formal assessments. Following a mastery-check done electronically or in-class grading of five math problems, for example, instruction followed that met the learners' current academic needs. There were often three different instruction levels happening at the same time in one class period.

The Staff held students accountable/ responsible for their behavior too with the Refocus and paycheck systems. Points were earned and tallied daily, but sent home weekly to let families know how their student was fitting in culturally. Incentives and recognition were given for individuals, advisory teams and grade levels concerning the core values, both culturally and academically. For example, a student could be recognized at a grade level meeting for the core value of 'Courage.' If the student had made significant changes in possessing confidence and resolved to take risks and ask questions to clear up their understanding and/ or voluntarily signed up for tutoring to improve their learning. With this, the student would be modeling the right decisions in the face of pressure, and adverse or unfamiliar circumstances, and therefore be recognized for the 'Courage' core value.

Expectancy-Value/ Motivation Theory

The second theme, *expectancy-value/ motivation theory* naturally followed the first theme. *Expectation* was a common word used by participants. Parents were *expected* to transport their students to and from school and make arrangements should their child have to stay for the hour after school for Refocus or CP due to student choices, or a teacher having signed them up for mandatory tutoring. Additionally, parents were expected to attend the trimester conferences, sign planners, student core value paychecks, weekly progress reports and assist their students as they can with homework, and support the school's structures and discipline decisions the school Staff makes. Parents, students and Staff all signed the Student and Family Handbook to serve as a reminder of what they had agreed to uphold, including school systems and the six core values. Teachers were *expected* to analyze data timely and use that information to inform classroom instruction,

frequently assess based on standards, and differentiate instruction based on student data,

tutor students, and daily conduct informal assessments to check students' understanding

of the lessons. Additionally, teachers served as student advisors and had quality student-

teacher relationships as part of that system. For students, the *expectation* was to do their

homework on time and well, work hard to learn the standards/ lessons taught, set

academic goals, reflect after each assessment and take ownership of their learning.

Students were *expected* to sign up for tutoring in the content they were struggling in

whether they had missed class or were struggling with a concept. Behaviorally, the

students were *expected* to uphold the core values of 'Respect,' 'Responsibility,'

'Integrity,' 'Courage,' 'Curiosity' and 'Doing Your Best' in everything at school,

including relationships and taking part in both the school community and as a global

citizen in general.

Relationships

The third theme is *relationships*. *Relationships* served Stellar Charter School well

from the perspective of letting the student know they were valued, valuable and had a

school mentor who was an advocate for them. Teachers believed in students as individual

people and learners who possessed the ability to attend and finish college. In the Senior

Celebration ceremony, a charter school Staff member said, "You have the capacity to

help someone else in your class. A teacher, dean or someone else you know may come

and ask you to help a classmate—who needs your help?" The school had built a

relationship culture.

Support Systems

The fourth theme is *support systems*. There were several *support systems* purposefully embedded in Stellar Charter School to influence student learning. The school had a database system that helped teachers/ Staff create and access behavioral and academic concerns for later problem solving during a grade level meeting. Additionally, computer software was used to make and score tests and simultaneously aligning the questions to standards. Teachers could also hand-enter scores from other assessments. Students and parents could assess grades from a database system, always able to be aware of their current academic standing. The system broke-down the questions into standards and both teachers and students analyzed the data.

Mandatory tutoring, CP and Refocus were automated from a database too. Teachers entered the students' names into the technology system and then email notifications were sent to students and parents, and a phone call was sent to the families. In addition to those infrastructures, a list of each category and names was generated by grade level and the administrative secretary posted them at the end of the day for students to check. Teachers could assign Mandatory tutoring to students who needed the help but did not sign up on their own, while the CP was for not being prepared for class academically (missing homework or pencil for example) and Refocus was a behavior system to build character and good citizenship.

There was an Intervention/ Enrichment *support system* to help identified struggling learners who were not responding to interventions tried from the grade level collaboration academic plans and were more than two grade levels behind. These learners were placed in an Enrichment class. This class worked on the weakest content area of

math or reading/ writing with these students, and some made two or more years growth. As Staff 1 said, "Overall, yes, the intervention support does see much more than two years' worth of growth."

The Advisory System was a *support system* embedded in the school's culture to influence student learning both academically and behaviorally. Staff and parents liked the advisory system to support students. Staff 6 said:

When I have issues with a student, it's really nice to be able to go to their advisor and talk to them about it, and then we communicate with the student. If we need to talk to the parent, then the advisor and I will work together to communicate with a parent. If I need to talk to a student's parent that is not an advisee of mine, I've never had issues doing this either. It's been a good system.

Staff 2 participant said the "advisory system was one of the most effective systems" they had. The paycheck system paired well with the advisory system, as the students earned points based on the core values displayed in their school community. Parents liked the individual and collective point system for teaching good character individually as well as a community member. Parent 1 said, "They are her parent away from home." When a lack of values was evident, Parent 2 said, "[This school is] gonna teach you."

Transformational Leadership

The fifth theme is *Transformational Leadership.* A leader who can conceptualize the school culture to influence student learning and foster camaraderie among the organizational members to act collectively is in part a transformational leader. "Positive structures that support teachers in executing shared beliefs and practices" was discussed

by Staff 8 participant. Being able to have more frequent "cultural and academic conversations with both the Dean and the school director," said Staff 7 was one such example of the distributive leadership style found at Stellar Charter School. Furthermore, Staff 4 discussed, "There is a lot of collaboration…and observations of one another to get ideas…and team teaching for cultural things. A lot of sharing of ideas and talking about BET practices in our department meetings and working together to help find solutions" when you are struggling with a group of students that are just not learning the material. A couple other Staff participants gave examples where the leader gave suggestions of strategies that were successful when she had taught. These were both academic and behavioral tips that were given, and it all focused around influencing student learning.

Summary

Discovery of how one high performing charter school's culture influenced student learning was extracted from a careful examination of the interviews, cross-checking interviews from teachers, parents and administrators and cross-checking those findings with historical documents and observations. Five themes emerged from the 18 categories: *Accountability/ Responsibility, Expectancy-Value/ Motivation Theory, Relationships, Support Systems and Transformational Leadership.* Transformational leadership traits were additionally validated by comparing to the Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ). Each of these themes was examined in detail and discussed in chapter 4. Chapter 5 will provide a summary of the study, share the limitations of the study, discuss the implications and make recommendation for future studies.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF NEW LEARNING

Introduction to the Study

The purpose of the study was to discover how one high performing charter school's culture had influenced student learning. A hermeneutic phenomenology mixed methods case study was the research approach used to capture lived experiences. This chapter presents: (a) a summary of the findings based around the five themes; (b) a discussion of the findings as the related to the literature through the culture lens; and (c) conclusions and implications for research, policy and practice.

Public charter schools are similar to public traditional schools in that they teach students similar curricula and have to meet state and federal standards. Both school types may have the full range of academic ability students and behavioral issues as well. Traditional and public charter schools cannot limit enrollment with academic entrance tests; however, the school studied, Stellar Charter School, had a lottery system that pulled a minimum average of 50%: (a) low SES students (qualifying for free and reduced lunches); (b) racial groups (largely Hispanic and African American); and (c) female students as prescribed in the school's organization structure bylaws (DSST B & E, 2010). Many students entered Stellar Charter School at minimum, one year behind grade level, but they were expected to make two years of academic gains in one year. There were no teacher unions, and charter schools do not have to hire teachers with a degree in education or who hold a teaching certificate.

Stellar Charter School:

Theme IV
•Support Systems

Theme V
•Transformational Leadership

Theme I
•Accountability/ Responsibiity

Theme II
•Expectancy-value/ Motivation Theory

Theme III
•Relationships

A Culture of Improved Student Learning

Orchestra:

Theme IV
•Private Lessons
•Sectional Rehersal
•Whole Ensemble Practice
•Sight Reading Tests
•Solos
•Instruments/ Concert Halls

Theme V
•Distributive Leadership between Conductor and Principals
•Arrangement and Stylistic Execution
•Collaboration

Theme I
•Sheet Music Notes for each Instrumental Section
•Chair in Orchestra is Position-Earned

Theme II
•Performance on Individual Sight Reading Tests and in Local Concert Halls
•State/ National Connections and Tours

Theme III
•Touring with Orchestra Professional Association

Music

Figure 10. Fives Themes Discovered from the Mixed Methods Study Paralleled with the Orchestra Metaphor.

Summary of Findings

A summary of the findings from the interviews, textual analysis from historical documents, and observations made during visits to the school are presented in this section. Additionally, using a reliable leadership survey of researcher Leithwood and compiling descriptive mean scores from a statistical program, a quantitative analysis

captured leadership traits that further demonstrated how one high performing urban charter school influenced student learning.

The qualitative side of the mixed methods study was framed by four open-ended questions once the interviews progressed:

1. How do you measure student learning?

2. Tell me about your school.

3. Describe how you help students.

4. Describe how you help each other (teacher-to-teacher and administration-to-teacher).

From these questions using the mixed methods stated above such as interviews, focus groups, observations, historical documents and surveys, five themes emerged:

1. Accountability/ Responsibility

2. Expectancy-Value /Motivation Theory

3. Relationships

4. Support Systems

5. Transformational Leadership

Half of the teaching staff participated in the Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ) and once a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted, strong traits of a transformational leader emerged. Six strong factors illuminated and two triangulated for reliability purposes to the qualitative findings through Staff interviews and the Staff focus group.

1. Collaboration: Fostering the acceptance of group goals

2. Expectancy-Value / MotivationTheory: Holding high performance expectations

Discussion of the Findings

This study was chosen because the achievement gap students predominately continue to struggle in school, both behaviorally and academically. This struggle continues to be a national and state government issue, as well as an educational system concern. The researcher worked in a traditional public school system and wondered how high performing charter schools made academic gains with students—especially the identified achievement gap students. In the researcher's mind, that is the earnest goal of every teacher, administrator and education staff member involved in K-12 education.

To provide a visual, the researcher used an orchestra metaphor. An orchestra is composed of many members that simultaneously play different instruments and notes in harmony. Many of these performers have had private lessons taught by masters in their field. These private lessons assist these musicians in perfecting their individual playing and honing their own individual performance capacity. When the musicians come together as a whole group or orchestra, they can develop and sustain group capacity with the conductor's leadership and with the guidance of section leaders.

The findings were filtered through Schein's culture lens. The researcher used Schein's (2010) and Sergiovani's (2000) cultural perspective that shared basic assumptions once proven to work is taught to new members. This, in turn, fostered synergy and connections between group members, and then bolstered member

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commitment and was used as the lens to interpret data that influenced high student learning.

Themes

  Accountability/ responsibility. The first theme, accountability/ responsibility, was accomplished in Stellar Charter School by its purposefully designed system of core values. The literature review supported that values both clearly set and simple in nature to implement, provide a solid foundation for an organization. Blankstein (2010) said it well:

> In high-performing schools, eventually the school staff will…help bring individuals' behaviors into line with the stated values. Acting in accordance with these stated values becomes part of the culture. Lateral accountability for shared commitments and agreed upon behaviors becomes the province of the entire school community. (p. 103)

In building these values and their associated behaviors, Schein (2010) said, "Many culture researchers prefer the term *basic values* to describe the deepest level [of culture]. [Schein] prefers *basic assumptions* because these tend to be taken for granted by group members and are treated as nonnegotiable." According to Schein, basic assumptions are the "essence of culture" (p. 23). He refers to these as "tangible… to deeply embedded, unconscious, basic assumptions" (p. 23). And culture included things like: "espoused beliefs values, norms, and rules of behavior " (p. 23). Furthermore, Schein (2010) explained that eventually "basic assumptions are so taken for granted that someone who does not hold them is viewed as a 'foreigner' or as 'crazy' and is automatically dismissed" (p. 23).

The researcher aligns to Schein's culture description, because this was a common feeling she experienced while conducting the interviews with staff participants and a lot afterwards. The researcher felt like the 'foreigner' even though, in her opinion, she was a colleague. When the researcher emailed staff to expand on a comment, only the pre-assigned liaison responded. In defense of the staff, the researcher felt the staff was too busy to take any more of their time away from the students to interview and visit with the researcher. Clearly, Stellar Charter School was all about the goal of college-bound students and supporting students to obtain that goal. Certainly, the researcher cannot fault them for this as she worked diligently to discover what they embedded in their culture to influence student learning.

Accountability and responsibility has been mandated for teachers clearly in state and federal initiatives and broadcasted loudly in various media forms; however, the student accountability-for-responsibilities piece has been largely neglected. This is not the case in Stellar Charter School. They have merged the responsibility of both teachers and students. Additionally, the school encouraged the parents to do what they could in way of support for students, namely getting them to and from school, attending conferences, signing both the academic and behavior progress reports and supporting decisions the staff makes on behalf of their student. Responsibility was the second core value of Stellar Charter School and defined by them as "the ability to be trusted and/or depended upon to complete tasks, follow directions and own up to your actions" (p. 19 & 34). Staff 4 shared what all participants said in one fashion or another. She shared:

> We focus a lot that learning is their [students'] responsibility…as a sixth grader
> that's very hard to understand, but they have to grasp it pretty quickly because

they find out very quickly if they aren't responsible for their own learning they're

failing, they're getting in trouble…etcetera. Just as like there are consequences in

the real world for not doing your job, [the] same [is true] with school and I guess

we equate that pretty well for them.

In this way the researcher observed that group members took the value of

accountability/ responsibility to the level as 'nonnegotiable,' as Schein (2010) had said

was a factor in culture. The researcher wondered how these students could be held

accountable-for-responsibilities better than in traditional public schools, and the message

that resurfaced time and again was, "That's the way things are done here." Another

familiar comment heard from staff participants and paraphrased here is: We have "similar

philosophies" here and, "We work out butts off." Also heard was: "We have a great

record;" "Results speak for themselves," and "This makes the conversation much easier"

with students and parents. The parents communicated these sentiments as well,

concerning philosophies, results and everyone working hard.

Two more important perceptions were shared from all participants, including

parents regarding how the school is able to hold students accountable/ responsible for

their learning and *expect* this, as well. First, Staff 8 shared the thoughts of many

participants when he said, "[Parents] run the gambit" in their level of support. "Some

parents challenge us daily both from a perspective of, 'You can serve my child better,' to

completely unvested and uninterested." Staff 9 said, "Parents obviously signed their kids

up for the lottery, so somewhere there's some investment. But a lot of parents are not sure

how to follow through with supporting their student." Echoing similar thoughts of the

colleagues, Staff 7 further added:

I think parents who sign their kids up for the lottery and then we don't see [them] means they're really hoping that by getting them into the best school…these people [staff from Stellar Charter School] are going to make it happen for me. We have those people. And they're working, and those people are working two jobs and have one parent, or might be homeless multiple times throughout the year…Tons of stuff…where getting into the lottery literally was winning that ticket for them and they hope for absolutely the best for their child…from us. [That is] the bottom line.

Expectancy-value/ motivation theory. The second theme, expectancy-value/ motivation theory was explicitly laid out in many historical documents and verbalized consistently throughout the interviews. To the researcher this was the orchestra conductor's message at the onset of the first practice for the big performance to come, and communicated during many practices over time. As in an orchestra, there are many members with different instruments; however, in the end, every member is to play proficiently, if not advanced, for performance events. To illustrate that metaphor in Stellar Charter School, one performance event for the middle school was the attainment of two years growth, a characteristic of "college bound." College was the target goal of this school as it fed into the district high school, and all schools in Stellar Charter School's district upheld the main goal of 100 percent college acceptance into a 4-year college. All staff said, "We expect two years growth at almost all levels." Meaning that a sixth grader who entered at the 5th grade level will exit at the end of sixth grade at the seventh grade level. Ideally, a 6th grader who entered at the 4th grade level will, at a minimum, exit at the 6th, but likely to make another year's growth and exit at the 7th. Staff

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members said that the students who entered at greatly above their current grade level need to maintain their level. Staff 6 framed it this way: "[Students] maxing out at the 10th grade level…they need to not digress. All other kids need to show two year's growth."

Assisting with the middle school's two year growth Staff participants 1 and 3 both conveyed the teachers are expected to make decisions from data. "We are definitely influenced by data, and I mean we live by that. It is the foundation of who we are…We ask that all of our actions are made off of facts," said Staff 1. A different message is *not* sent to students with an individualized education plan (IEP) or students in the Enrichment/ intervention class, said several staff participants. Again, like with the accountability/ responsibility theme, the researcher noticed consistent messages, expectations and systems used to influence student learning embedded in Stellar Charter School's culture. "Culturally, we set the expectations," said Staff 2 and this was confirmed consistently by all participants, including parents.

To help influence student learning with the constructs accountability/ responsibility and expectancy-value/ motivation theory, the target goal of college was imprinted on the minds of every member by messaging it daily. College banners were in the commons of the school, teachers had their biographies posted outside their classroom doors and their advisories were named after their colleges. Additionally, the researcher learned that the school used several systems to support their goals of two year growth and college bound students.

Relationships. Relationships were the third theme uncovered. An advisory system was used to support learners both behaviorally and academically, and to build on relationships. Staff 2 said, "Relationships with [students] is what will drive their

success." Two staff participants said while the students may not do it for themselves at first, they will do it for you. "Yes" it takes a lot of time. Staff 8 framed building relationships and the work they do in a compelling way:

Look at the small actions that people take in this campus, whether it's taking another half hour after school on a Friday to have a tough conversation with a student, or working through lunch hour. You're doing it because you truly believe that *that* child is going to be walking across that stage in five years [and] going to a four year university. And we know that's the case because we're sending them to a school next door that's gonna serve them just as well. That's very rare. And that doesn't happen in a lot of places and so I think for me coming from a public school where that definitely wasn't the case that was my main motivation for moving someplace else…. I felt like my work was not one, being valued and two, being wasted after [students] left my room. And I don't feel that way here.

An advisor had 15-18 students assigned to their care and the main point-of-contact person for families. The advisor served as an advocate, confidant, counselor and go-to staff member for the students and housed in the culture of the school espousing the values Stellar Charter School embraced.

Support systems. Support systems included the Advisory system addressed previously, and also included Technology. Technology was another system used to gather data, which influenced instruction. As mentioned above in '*Expectancy-value/ motivation theory'*, data was used to inform instruction and hold students accountable/ responsible for their learning. Students set goals and monitored their learning by reflecting on their goals and forming action plans to achieve their goals. Furthermore, students would have

instruction tailored to meet them where they currently were in their understanding and scaffold them to the mastery level. All goals were measurable and made from the standards. Parents said, "[Students] get feedback right away," and "They know which questions they missed" "around a particular standard…and here's the intervention." Teachers said that they do "differentiated lesson based on how [students'] mastered that standard. If they mastered it maybe it's an extension activity, if they didn't master it maybe it's a reteach activity and then for some maybe just more practice of that skill." All staff said that data influenced their lesson plans. With these known facts about the data system utilized and embedded in the culture of the school, students: (a) engaged in lots of assessments to measure their learning and growth; (b) set learning goals and monitored and took ownership of their learning; (c) received quick feedback, sometimes instantly to know exactly where their understanding was; and (d) an Enrichment/ Intervention class was generated for students that were more than two years below in either math or reading/writing content areas.

The literature supported the technology data support system Stellar Charter School incorporated in their structure. Pintrich's (2000) work, as cited in Boykin and Noguera (2011), found that goal setting is "an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment (as quoted in Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 55). As mastery of goals is realized, Gutman (as quoted in Boykin & Noguera, 2011) said student self-efficacy is enhanced. McTighe (as quoted in Blankstein, 2010) said, "'Formative assessments help students to see their learning progress and to see the importance of

taking an active role as learners by monitoring their own growth. In this way, effective learners use habits of mind that include goal setting and self-assessment (p. 184-185).'" For these reasons, it was clear that the data system was another influence embedded in Stellar Charter School that attributed to improved student learning.

Other support systems were: (a) College Prep (CP); (b) Mandatory Tutoring; (c) Refocus; and (d) the Student Support Document. All four systems utilized technology for implementation and students benefited. First, CP was an academic system that supported the 'Responsibility' core value. This core value was cited by staff participants as being used most frequently. When a student had a CP hour after school because they neglected to do their homework or did not have a pencil for class, for example, students had to reflect on the core value(s) broken and do the day's homework. In this way the researcher understood how the values were integrated into the daily structure of the school and lived throughout the school day.

It was discovered that Mandatory Tutoring reinforced ownership of learning and especially the core values of 'Doing Your Best' and 'Responsibility'. However, two other core values ('Courage' and 'Curiosity') could be argued as a part of the Mandatory Tutoring system as well. Mandatory Tutoring assisted students where they needed the academic support most and when students needed that support: assessments were taken daily and students were flagged immediately for not mastering concepts. Both the teacher and the students were aware of the standard not mastered. From that information, instruction was tailored to students' needs during tutoring sessions. Students were encouraged to self-select, and three of the four parents were aware of this saying their student had participated by self-selecting. If students are not self-selecting, then teachers

would sign them up and conversations are had around the six core values. 'Courage', 'Curiosity', 'Doing Your Best' and 'Responsibility' were addressed as students were expected to take responsibility for their learning.

Teachers communicated to students that while the "curriculum is rigorous," there is support for them. It was messaged often from the staff: "We are here to help you." Furthermore, students and parents received an email notifying them of the CP, Mandatory Tutoring or Refocus. Automated calls also went home and a computer list was generated and hung outside the three classroom hallways. Obviously, the expectation was that students be responsible and attend the after school hour. Then parents were required to make arrangements to accommodate the change in schedule: it was part of the contract signed in the Student and Family Handbook.

Refocus was a behavior system which aligned to the core values, paycheck system and advisory system. It too was an hour "detention" after school to reflect and think about actions done which placed them in Refocus. Students wrote an apology and read to the school, class or their Advisory, depending on the infraction and/ or time constraints of the schedule the following day. In this way, Stellar Charter School gave members "cognitive stability" and fostered a sense of community by embedding this system in their culture as a way of communicating to their members "who they are, how to behave toward each other, and how to feel good about themselves" (Schein, 2010, p. 29).

The *Student Support Document* was used to brainstorm strategies and employ action plans to assist struggling students. Whether the student was struggling academically or behaviorally, the collaborative brainstorming commenced with this

document. During staff collaboration time on Wednesdays, grade level teams worked to come up with plans to help the students on that list. Once several plans had been exhausted with no significant progress, the next step was to consider testing, or to see the Dean of Students for more serious behavioral situations. As staff continued to say over and over again, it was hard to separate the culture from the academics; they were interwoven at every turn, just like all the orchestra instruments playing a concert piece. It was polished and ran smoothly.

   Transformational leadership. The final theme was transformational leadership. Repeatedly, the researcher heard things like: "Our school is filled with amazing students, amazing staff members that are all dedicated toward one common goal, and that's succeeding in life at a high level starting middle school to high school to college;" "It's not an easy school to go to, but we offer the support that's needed to succeed." The school offered support to help the students, but additionally the teachers. Staff said things like: "I wanted to be the best teacher that I could be." Others explained they wanted good constructive feedback regarding their teaching and found that here, and they liked that their work would be appreciated. "I wanted to grow as a teacher." Additionally said staff participants, "We don't give up on students—ever;" I am a part of "something great" and that "feels good;" We observe others; We "reflect on our teaching" and "we target our weaknesses." "We have that same unity of belief and buy in" regarding what we are doing here. "It's a lot easier to be productive when you're working together because…we have this shared understanding." "I definitely feel supported [here]." Investment in members of the organization has proven beneficial for Stellar Charter School, which was acclaimed for making "incredible academic achievements" (DSST N, 2012, ¶ 1).

Furthermore, "The hard work of our teachers [has] ensured student achievement and growth" (DSST M, 2012, ¶ 3).

The demand on teachers to do exceptional work in teaching and supporting students is no doubt high in Stellar Charter School; however, "the consistency, support systems and school-wide culture" were all "huge advantages," as noted above, but the disadvantage is that "It's exhausting," said Staff 7 participant. All agreed it was hard, but good. All participants also said that they really valued the diverse student body. They liked this because it represented the real world and helped people learn about differences and how to get along. Several members said they addressed the culture first and set the bar high. Staff 1 said, "Be optimistic, seek advice always, continue to be a learner," "Listen and absorb from other people." The researcher heard, "Don't mandate;" rather "be inclusive of others" and "truly embody the values of the organization, if it's right," and "have that translate to students." Perhaps the most telling piece heard was, "Culture first, instruction will follow." A t-shirt worn at school by a staff member aligned similarly to Staff 1's comment as it read, "Culture is King." Schein (2010) would agree with the staff members' comments of culture as important and the t-shirt "Culture is King". Culture is the trump card. Schein said it this way: "Cultures tell their members who they are, how to behave toward each other, and how to feel good about themselves" (p. 29).

Perhaps the difference between this high performing urban charter school and a traditional public school, or other public charter school, is the missing shared commitment to core values. The orchestra cannot perform the piece without a common understanding of the musical piece and its complexity, as well as the vision for how it is to be stylistically expressed through the combined efforts of all of the parts. The same is

true with an organization: members need to be aligned similarly. Additionally, it begs to wonder if some traditional public and charter schools are missing systems purposefully designed and embedded in their culture to support improved student learning for all students. Blankstein (2010) said it this way:

> Without a shared commitment to a core base of values, schools fall into the 'my belief versus your belief' pattern. These schools may have certain individuals or factions that operate as 'rogue agents,' taking actions that run counter to the school's mission and vision….Behaviors [must] support the school's mission. Therefore, [the school must have] a functional set of values—a school wide statement that dictates *all* behavior. (p. 103)

<center>Implications in Education and Policy</center>

The themes and literature reviewed earlier in this chapter have several implications for the K-12 organizational context of education; in large part, the implication is that there is currently an accountability-for-responsibility prong that is missing in many educational cultures found in public schools. Certainly, much focus has been placed on the roles educators and administrators play in this area, and many structures have been put in place to increase accountability for teaching-responsibilities; however, the role of the students and parents in impacting student learning has not really been given the emphasis it needs in order to truly create a transformative educational environment and experience for students. Once this element is brought into the picture and students and parents are held accountable for their own responsibilities in impacting achievement, then the culture of the entire school has been forged out of a common understanding and goal that all players are working toward and held accountable for

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helping achieve. This culture provides a common language, along with common support

structures, which all help to keep players in alignment and working toward the common

goal of student academic and behavioral success. Implications from this study, as related

to each of the themes uncovered; namely, (a) an accountability-for-responsibility culture

(b) motivated toward the goal of college admittance and supported by (c) the creation of

relationships between all system participants, (d) the implementation of technological

support systems, and by (e) the transformational leadership style of its director; are

further elaborated and broken down in this chapter.

Change in K-12 macroculture. There are numerous possible implications for the

K-12 school system. First, Stellar Charter's school's implementation of an accountability-

for-responsibility culture was the catalyst for a fundamental change in approach toward

K-12 education. This is the founding tenant which, when supported by the other themes,

impacts student academic and behavioral achievement in a tangible way that is

meaningful not only to students and parents, but supportive of and rewarding to teachers

as well. There are numerous implications of this theme toward K-12 educational systems

as a whole:

- Core values posted and embraced by all stakeholders, which guide the

  entire education system.

- Partner with students, families and the educators and hold each

  accountable for learning, not just the teacher.

- Students held accountable for their academic work and behavior in school

  as they would and will be held accountable post-school. For example, after

school programs are in place when infractions occur in either academics or behavior. Families support these natural consequences.

- Students responsible for their academics and held accountable to do what is necessary to be successful academically, which may mean seeking tutoring and teachers fill that need.

Change in K-12 school focus. Second, the expectancy-value motivational theory toward the goal of college admittance was starkly different from a traditional K-12 public school and served as the target for every student in Stellar Charter School. College focus was explicitly stated in the school's goals and communicated clearly in everything the school does. The school culture used symbols and ceremonies to encourage its members and motivate them toward realizing college admittance and it was expected from day one. The K-12 implications would entail:

- Mission, value and goal statements reflect that learning has the purpose to obtain college admittance, or the school's stated focus, for each student.

- Time built into the day for the purpose of checking in and working with students through advisory/ advisee relationships expecting responsibility of quality and on-time work from students.

- College posters or other similar goal-focused graphic should be dispersed throughout the building, with similar goal reminders embedded into the everyday routine of the school. Here, advisor team names were derived from teachers' colleges, to keep the goal of college expectancy in sight.

- Class and whole-school meetings have a focus component on the (college) goal, while conversations and consequences incorporate the same target as everything connects back to that college goal for all students.

- Celebrations and ceremonies are conducted to celebrate successes that link to behavior and academic choices that help realize the (college) goal and are explicit as stakeholders engage in them.

- Rewards are extended for positive actions both individually and collectively as an advisory or class for meeting or exceeding expectations, which directly link to the college goal. High attendance and showing highest numbers as a team displaying one of the core values are two examples for promoting the expectancy to reach the (college) goal and motivating students to work toward this goal.

- Behavioral and academic conversations are conducted with the (college) goal as educators' converse with students about behavior choices and academics.

Change in K-12 microculture. Third, Stellar Charter School had created a focus of relationships between all system participants and permeated this theme throughout their culture. Relationships, along with the other components of Stellar Charter School, worked in tandem effectively and could have the following implications in traditional public school systems:

- Advisors and advisories to encourage and support students behaviorally and academically through relationships.

- Friendly competitions among advisory teams and/ or grade levels foster synergy, cohesion and relationships among team members as they work together to meet goals or surpass them.

- Twenty minutes of the day is designed for the purpose of checking in with students behaviorally and/ or academically. Lessons are built for the core values.

- Staff members are available to students and will triage with them behaviorally or academically incorporating the core values and relationships.

Change in K-12 support systems. Fourth, technology systems support all members of Stellar Charter School. The infrastructure Stellar Charter School had incorporated in their school to communicate, report, track, monitor and test students was utilized daily. The implications to K-12 traditional public or private school settings would include:

- Laptop computers in every staff and students' hand.

- Computers assist in preparing learners for the 21st century jobs. Smart Boards are used in each content classroom in addition to the one-to-one laptops.

- Teachers create tests both for quick mastery formative assessment checks as well as summative assessments. The feedback can be instant in the quick mastery checks for example or unit tests. Teachers can modify their instruction in the moment or for the next day, depending on the student data.

- The mastery checks can be done at the beginning of a lesson to see the level of understanding that carried over from the previous day's in-class instruction and homework. This knowledge impacts the current day's instruction as teachers tailor instruction based on student understanding or place students in mandatory tutoring if the numbers are few.

- Testing on computers gives both students and teachers feedback quickly for analysis and impacts lessons daily. Differentiated learning is one outcome as well as tutoring.

- Individual homework may result from an area of weakness noted from the test results. Teachers reteach or may spiral the content to reinforce the learning, and this depends on the need discovered through testing.

- Students set learning goals and track their growth to goals using technology. Students analyze their results looking over their data, reflecting, charting and setting new goals constantly.

- Students are leveled by understanding of concepts and work to master the concepts. Student awareness of what standards or learning content must be mastered is clearly known to them using technology.

- Current and relevant communication happens as weekly behavioral and academic progress reports are sent home Fridays and must be signed and returned by parents the following Monday.

- Calls and emails are sent out to families and the students using the technology automated system, for students having mandatory tutoring,

Refocus, or College Prep after school. This feature allows teachers to

maximize their time in helping the students instead of making phone calls.

Change in K-12 leadership model. Fifth, transformational leadership qualities

encourage a group to move forward passionately and zealously toward their mission,

value and goal statements. Added synergy and cohesion is felt and displayed by the staff

as a leader exemplifies transformational leadership traits. A leader which promotes

collegiality, distributes leadership and promotes the common goal framed in being a

nobler and higher calling that will benefit the world is powerful in building a

relationship-centered, zealous and cohesive culture. Additionally, a transformational

leader uses symbols, stories, rituals and ceremonies to foster a rich synergetic

environment worthy of emulating. Stellar Charter School had been intentional about

learning for the purpose of capacity-building, both in the individual and in the

organization. The school accomplished this with the systems they purposefully embedded

in their school culture, which included core values. The K-12 implications are:

- Core values adopted and integrated into every fiber to the organization.

- Staff members have other roles other than teaching in the organization that is leadership type roles where decisions are made that impact the organization.

- Staff members' voices are heard and valued. Their ideas, concerns and expertise are sought out by the leader.

- Collaboration time is built into the work day and afforded to the staff members rather than carved from their personal time outside of the school day.

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- Data analysis time is built into the calendar for teachers to analyze the data and lesson plan with this information.

- Time is built into the schedule to prepare for conferences and the data is easy to access vs. time consuming without efficient technology systems that work cohesively together.

- Leaders model genuine relationships among staff and when working with students.

- Efficient cohesion that fosters additional synergy in the organization: Leaders support teachers as they triage with students academically and behaviorally because they all speak the same language and have the same goals that are stated clearly in the core values and mission statement, which are embraced by everyone in the organization.

- Ceremonies, stories and rituals are shared by former students who come back and share with current students that staying the steady course and working hard is worth it.

- Time given weekly to recognize students during class meetings, for example, for the purpose of rewarding these students publically for their effort. This encourages others to do likewise.

The culture of a learning organization, schools in this example, can grow and change as "human behavior is socially situated, richly contextualized and conditionally expressed" (Bandura, 2002, p. 276). This is yet another implication where the researcher believes that a transformational leader is more effective than the transactional or

traditional autocratic top-down leader as a transformational leader appeals to people's

morals and values, builds trust and relationships that implore followers to do great works.

<center>Further Research Opportunities</center>

While the findings of this study ring true for this high performing urban charter

school, how is student learning equity in all schools accomplished? More research needs

to be done to discover if the factors that improved learning for these urban students are

found in other public schools, or can be duplicated in other schools. Those factors were:

Accountability/ Responsibility, Expectancy-Value/ Motivation Theory, Relationships,

Support Systems and Transformational Leadership, as summarized in Figure 10. "The

challenge may be getting all staff members to believe in schools' ability to intervene

positively in a student's life and to act on this information in a sustained, concerted, [and]

systematic manner" (Blankstein, 2010, p. 113). The researcher believes that the bigger

part of this equation may be the concerted and systematic system. It has already been

established through mountains of research that low SES and minority students (the

achievement gap students) enter school behind their middle to upper SES classmates and

struggle far more in their learning. However, the "missing link" may be the *systems* in a

school structure to support both teachers and students situated around a *common core set*

of values and mission that stakeholders embrace before equity is mastered in other

schools. It does not matter if schools are public charter or traditional public schools, or

even private…they need a culture that sustains the mission.

Another factor to be explored is the students' perception of what influenced their

learning. If the school collected data on student's perceptions using the questions asked in

the study through an online survey using a Likert scale, or multiple choice questions and

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a response section in addition to holding focus groups, then a researcher could triangulate that data to the findings in this study. A future study that would garner more minority and lower social economic parent participants would also enrich the findings of the study.

Additionally, a longitudinal study should be conducted to follow the students from Stellar Charter School to the Charter High School it feeds into, thus encompassing grades six through twelve. This would reveal how many of the students who began in the system matriculated through the system; such a study would expose whether or not the system implemented actually supports students throughout the entirety of the program. As to the students who drop out of the program, this would need to be factored in when understanding the true measure of the school's success, as would the circumstances surrounding their departure.

<div align="center">Finale: Concluding Remarks</div>

Policies are made for the purpose of improvement in schools. Research is conducted to discover what works and/ or does not work; hence, the hope is to glean from what works and replicate it. With that said, the researcher believes her research should be conducted in other high performing public charter schools and traditional public schools and data compared to determine if the influences of Accountability-for-Responsibility, Expectancy-Value/ Motivation Theory, Relationships, Support Systems and Transformational Leadership, found in this study are found in other high performing schools. If so, then replicating these attributes in low performing schools should be done in order to demonstrate for all, especially those in educational policy, what has been found to be most successful in gaining equity for all learners.

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Appendix A

Protocol

Interviewee: _____ Position: _____

Date: _____ Location: _____

1. Question and Response: How do you measure student learning?

    a. If needed—What systems are in place to intervene when a student does not learn?

    b. How often do you measure student learning? Describe that process to me?

_____

Goal—Description of measuring student learning, systems used, intervention plan and is tracking down by individual student---how? Does this impact lessons---and describe how, if so? Seeking description/ explanation of how formative, summative and monitoring of student learning is used to improve student learning.

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

                 □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

_____

: Tell me about your school?

   c. If needed--Tell me about the students you are serving.

   d. If needed--You said _____ student. Tell me more about that student…describe that student…examples.

Prompt—Describe the types of students you serve and tell the systems you use to serve them.

(Looking for low SES and minority student defined by participant and how they are served in this school.)

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

               □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

_____

3. Question: Describe your leader-role at this school.

       a. If needed—Describe how you assist teachers to best serve students.

       b. If needed- How have you helped or not helped the students in your school learn? (Give some examples)

Prompt – Describe the systems you use to help teachers improve so they help students' improve their learning.

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture +/-

                □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

_____

4. Question: Describe how you measure improved student learning?

    a. If needed—How does a student get academic help in this school, if needed?

    b. If needed— Describe the academic expectancy in this school?

    c. Describe any differences, if any, your school has regarding improved student learning from other public or charter schools. Tell how do you know?

Prompt - Describe improved student learning or significant learning for low SES/disadvantaged students?

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

               □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

5. Question: Describe what brought you to this school?

    a. If needed—If you could change anything here in this school what would it be

    b. If needed—If you could offer advice to another school leader, what would it be and explain why.

Prompt - Describe the advantages and disadvantages as a leader working at this school?

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

                □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

_____

6. Question: Describe how you interact with parents/families.

    a. If needed—Explain the expectations you have for a parent to assist their child's learning. Examples

    b. If needed—You said _____. Describe this to me more so I understand how _____ works.

Prompt - Describe the role parents have in this school.

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

    □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

_____

7. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Debriefing

Overall

Interviewee: _____Position: _____

Date: _____ Location: _____

1. Question and Response: How do you measure student learning?

a. If needed—What systems are in place to intervene when a student does not learn?

b. How often do you measure student learning? Describe that process to me?

Goal—Description of measuring student learning, systems used, intervention plan and is tracking down by individual student---how? Does this impact lessons---and describe how, if so? Seeking description/ explanation of how formative, summative and monitoring of student learning is used to improve student learning.

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

               □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

_____

2. Question and Response: Tell me about your school?

    a. If needed--Tell me about the students you are serving.

    b. If needed--You said _____ student. Tell me more about that student…describe that student…examples.

Prompt-- Describe the types of students you serve and tell the systems you use to serve them. (Looking for low SES/disadvantaged student defined by participant)

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture +/-

              □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

_____

3. Question: How has your role as teacher helped or maybe not helped the students at your school?

      a. If needed—Describe how you help one another assist student learning?

      b. If needed— Tell how the leader helps you impact student learning? Examples?

Prompt – Describe what you and your school does to help one another as teacher's impact student learning. (Looking for student support structures and systems)

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture +/-

                □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

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4. Question: Describe how you measure improved student learning?

      a.   If needed—How does a student get academic help in this school, if needed?

      b.   If needed— Describe the academic expectancy in this school?

      c. Describe any differences, if any, your school has regarding improved student learning   from other public or charter schools. Tell how do you know?

Prompt - Describe improved student learning or significant learning for low SES/disadvantaged students?

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

                      □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

5. Question: Describe what brought you to this school?

      a. If needed—If you could change anything here in this school what would it be?

      b. If needed—If you could offer advice to another school teacher, what would it be and explain why.

Prompt - Describe the advantages and disadvantages of this school for you.

Describe the advantages and disadvantages of this school for students.

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

                □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

6. Question: Describe how you interact with parents/families.

a. If needed—Explain the expectations you have for a parent to assist their child's learning.

b. If needed—You said _____. Describe this to me more so I understand how _____ works.

_____

Prompt - Describe the role parents have in this school.

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

                      □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:
_____

7. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Debriefing

Overall

Interviewee: _____ Position: _____

Date: _____Location: _____

1. Question and Response: How do you measure student learning?

a. If needed—What systems are in place to intervene when a student is not learning?

b. How often does your school measure student learning? Describe that process to me, if known?

Goal—Description of measuring student learning, systems used, intervention plan and is tracking down by individual student---how? Does this impact lessons---and describe how, if so? Seeking description/ explanation of how formative, summative and monitoring of student learning is used to improve student learning.

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

                  □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:
_____

2. Question and Response: Tell me about your school?

       a. If needed--Tell me about the students who attend here.

       b. If needed--You said _____ student. Tell me more about that student…describe that student…examples.

_____

Prompt-- Describe the types of students and tell the systems used to serve them.

(Looking for low SES/disadvantaged student defined by participant, if they will define themselves)

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture +/-

             □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:
_____

3. Question: How has your parent-role helped or maybe not helped your child at this school?

    a. If needed—Describe how you help your student learn? Examples?

    b. If needed— Describe student success at this school.

Prompt – Describe what you and your family do to help your student learn.

(Looking for family student support structures and systems)

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture +/-

                □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

4. Question: Describe how you measure improved student learning?

    a. If needed—How does a student get academic help in this school, if needed?

    b. If needed— Describe the academic expectancy in this school?

Prompt - Describe improved student learning or significant learning for low SES/disadvantaged students?

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

              □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

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5. Question: Describe what brought you to this school?

    a. If needed—If you could change anything here in this school what would it be?

    b. If needed—If you could offer advice to another family, what would it be and explain why.

Prompt - Describe the advantages and disadvantages of this school for parents.

Describe the advantages and disadvantages of this school for your student.

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

                □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

6. Question: Describe how you interact with leaders and teachers of your child's school

    a. If needed—Explain and describe the expectations you have for a teacher and/ or leader to assist your child's learning, if you have any.

    b. If needed—Describe what is unique about your school.

Prompt - Describe the role parents have in this school.

Non-verbal: □ Facial expression (+/-)   □ posture (+/-)

                □ tone (+/-)   □ animated

Communicate Style: □ casual   □ formal

Key Concepts:

7. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Debriefing

Overall

Appendix B

Principal Leadership Questionnaire

Please respond by considering how well each statement applies to our principal.

Please use the following scale:

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

1.	My principal has both the capacity and the judgment to overcome most obstacles.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	My principal commands respect from everyone on the faculty.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	My principal excites faculty with visions of what we may be able to accomplish if we work together as a team.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	My principal makes faculty members feel and act like leaders.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	My principal gives the faculty a sense of overall purpose for its leadership role.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	My principal leads by "doing" rather than simply by "telling."	1	2	3	4	5
7.	My principal symbolizes success and accomplishment within the profession of education.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	My principal provides good models for faculty members to follow.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	My principal provides for our participation in the process of developing school goals.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	My principal encourages faculty members to work toward the same goals.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	My principal uses problem solving with the faculty to generate school goals.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	My principal works toward whole faculty consensus in establishing priorities for school goals.	1	2	3	4	5

13.	My principal regularly encourages faculty members to evaluate our progress toward achievement of school goals.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	My principal provides for extended training to develop my knowledge and skills relevant to being a member of the school faculty.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	My principal provides the necessary resources to support my implementation of the school's program.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	My principal treats me as an individual with unique needs and expertise.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	My principal takes my opinion into consideration when initiating actions that affect my work.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	My principal behaves in a manner thoughtful of my personal needs.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	My principal challenges me to reexamine some basic assumptions I have about my work in the school.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	My principal stimulates me to think about what I am doing for the school's students.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	My principal provides information that helps me think of ways to implement the school's program.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	My principal insists on only the best performance from the school's faculty.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	My principal shows us that there are high expectations for the school's faculty as professionals.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	My principal does not settle for second best in the performance of our work as the school's faculty.	1	2	3	4	5

Adapted from Jantzi & Leithwood, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, October, 1996, pp. 533-534. Used by author's permission.

Advance Parent Questionnaire I (APQ I)
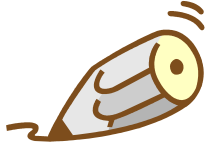
Advance Questionnaire I:

Parent Questionnaire

1. What grade is your child in?
- ☐ 6th
- ☐ 7th
- ☐ 8th

6. How many hours of television does your child usually watch each day?
- ☐ 1 hour or less
- ☐ 2 hours
- ☐ 3 hours
- ☐ 4 hours
- ☐ 5 hours
- ☐ 6 or more hours

2. My child is a :
- ☐ Boy
- ☐ Girl

7. Which best describes your household?
- ☐ Single parent
- ☐ Two parent household (mother/father)
- ☐ Two parent household (step-family)
- ☐ Other

3. What is your relationship to the child?
- ☐ Mother
- ☐ Father
- ☐ Stepmother
- ☐ Stepfather
- ☐ Grandmother
- ☐ Grandfather
- ☐ Other relative
- ☐ Unrelated

8. Which best describes you?
- ☐ White (not Hispanic)
- ☐ African American (not Hispanic)
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Other/Mixed Race

4. How many years has your child been in this school?

☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3

5. How many adults in your household work for pay?

☐ None
☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3 or more

11. Which best describes your level of education?

☐ Elementary School
☐ Some High School
☐ High School Graduate
☐ Some College
☐ College Graduate
☐ Graduate School

12. Which category best describes the total annual income of your household?

☐ Under $10,000
☐ $10,000-$19,999
☐ $20,000-$29,999
☐ $30,000-$39,999
☐ $40,000-$49,999
☐ $50,000-$59,999
☐ $60,000-$69,999
☐ Over $70,000

9. How many children in your household are under 18 years old?

☐ None
☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5
☐ 6
☐ 7 or more

10. Which category best describes your age?

☐ Under 30
☐ 30-39
☐ 40-49
☐ 50-59
☐ 60 or over

15. How much time does your child spend on homework each day?

☐ Doesn't have any
☐ Doesn't do it
☐ One-half hour or less
☐ 1 hour
☐ 2 hours
☐ More than 2 hours

16. How many hours a day does your child spend playing on the computer or with video games?

☐ 1 hour or less
☐ 2 hours
☐ 3 hours
☐ 4 hours
☐ 5 hours
☐ 6 hours or more

13. Which of the following best describes your child's grades so far in school?

- ☐ Mostly A
- ☐ Half A & B
- ☐ Mostly B
- ☐ Half B & C
- ☐ Mostly C
- ☐ Half C & D
- ☐ Mostly D
- ☐ Below D

14. Would you say that this public charter school is better than your district's traditional public school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Same

17. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D and F to denote the quality of their work. If this school were graded the same way, what grade would you give them (A, B, C, D or F)?

- ☐ A
- ☐ B
- ☐ C
- ☐ D
- ☐ F
- ☐ Don't Know

18. How much time does your child spend reading at home each day?

- ☐ No time at all
- ☐ 10-15 minutes
- ☐ 20-30 minutes
- ☐ About 1 hour
- ☐ 2 hours or more

19. Please answer YES or NO to the following:	YES	NO
I enforce family rules about how many hours my child can watch TV, or play video/computer games.		
I enforce family rules about doing homework.		
My child has access to the Internet at home.		

20. Please mark the box that best describes how often during the school year you have done each of the following:	Never	1-2 times	3 or more
Talked to your child's teachers			
Attended an open house at school			
Attended parent/teacher meetings			
Visited the school on your own			
Helped with school activities			

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21. Please mark the box that best describes how often you do the following:	Not at all	Rarely	Occasionally
Talk to your child about his/her experiences in school			
Talk to your child about his/her plans for high school classes			
Talk to your child about his/her plans for after high school			

Indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement by marking one of the boxes:	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree
22. The school recognizes the accomplishments of my child				
23. My child's opinions are valued by teachers, director and Deans.				
24. My child's school promotes an environment of mutual respect among students.				
25. My involvement in my child's education has improved his/her achievement.				
26. Parents are asked for input about school decisions.				
27. Our school has a program that teaches and reinforces student self-discipline and responsibility				
28. The school values and respects differences among students and their families.				
29. Effective assistance is provided for children having difficulty in school.				
30. The way they teach at this school works well for my child.				

|					
31.	My child is given a fair chance to succeed at school.				
32.	My child likes attending this school.				
33.	I would make the same decision and send my child to this school again.				
34.	I can talk with my child's teachers and director whenever I need.				
35.	I know how well my child is doing in their class.				
36.	I feel my child is safe at school.				
37.	Discipline in my child's school is handled fairly.				
38.	The school encourages parents to be involved.				
39.	My child has been taught in school about respect for other cultures.				
40.	The school offers suggestions about how I can help my child learn at home.				
41.	I am a partner with the school in my child's education.				
42.	I know what my child's teachers expect in school.				
43.	The community is proud of this school.				
44.	My child's teachers are good teachers.				
45.	I expect my child to do well in school.				
46.	My child's teachers expect very good work from my child.				

47.	The school has helped my child establish educational career plans.				
48.	There are students from my child's school that belong to street gangs.				
49.	Drug use is common among kids in this community.				

50. If there is anything additional that you would like to comment about pertaining to your child's school and their education here please do so in the box below.

Thank you for your time in completing this survey. Have a super day!
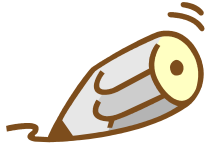
Advance Questionnaire II:

Focus Group Parent Questionnaire

Demographics

3. What grade is your child in?
- ☐ 6th
- ☐ 7th
- ☐ 8th

4. My child is a :
- ☐ Boy
- ☐ Girl

6. What is your relationship to the child?
- ☐ Mother
- ☐ Father
- ☐ Stepmother
- ☐ Stepfather
- ☐ Grandmother
- ☐ Grandfather
- ☐ Other relative
- ☐ Unrelated

7. How many hours of television does your child usually watch each day?
- ☐ 1 hour or less
- ☐ 2 hours
- ☐ 3 hours
- ☐ 4 hours
- ☐ 5 hours
- ☐ 6 or more hours

7. Which best describes your household?
- ☐ Single parent
- ☐ Two parent household (mother/father)
- ☐ Two parent household (step-family)
- ☐ Other

8. Which best describes you?
- ☐ White (not Hispanic)
- ☐ African American (not Hispanic)
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Other/ Mixed Race

7. How many years has your child been in this school?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3

8. How many adults in your household work for pay?

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3 or more

11. Which best describes your level of education?

- ☐ Elementary School
- ☐ Some High School
- ☐ High School Graduate
- ☐ Some College
- ☐ College Graduate
- ☐ Graduate School

12. Which category best describes the total annual income of your household?

- ☐ Under $10,000
- ☐ $10,000-$19,999
- ☐ $20,000-$29,999
- ☐ $30,000-$39,999
- ☐ $40,000-$49,999
- ☐ $50,000-$59,999
- ☐ $60,000-$69,999
- ☐ Over $70,000

9. How many children in your household are under 18 years old?

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7 or more

10. Which category best describes your age?

- ☐ Under 30
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60 or over

15. How much time does your child spend on homework each day?

- ☐ Doesn't have any
- ☐ Doesn't do it
- ☐ One-half hour or less
- ☐ 1 hour
- ☐ 2 hours
- ☐ More than 2 hours

16. How many hours a day does your child spend playing on the computer or with video games?

- ☐ 1 hour or less
- ☐ 2 hours
- ☐ 3 hours
- ☐ 4 hours
- ☐ 5 hours
- ☐ 6 hours or more

13. Which of the following best describes your child's grades so far in school?

- ☐ Mostly A
- ☐ Half A & B
- ☐ Mostly B
- ☐ Half B & C
- ☐ Mostly C
- ☐ Half C & D
- ☐ Mostly D
- ☐ Below D

14. Would you say that this public charter school is better than your district's traditional public school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Same

17. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D and F to denote the quality of their work. If this school were graded the same way, what grade would you give them (A, B, C, D or F)?

- ☐ A
- ☐ B
- ☐ C
- ☐ D
- ☐ F
- ☐ Don't Know

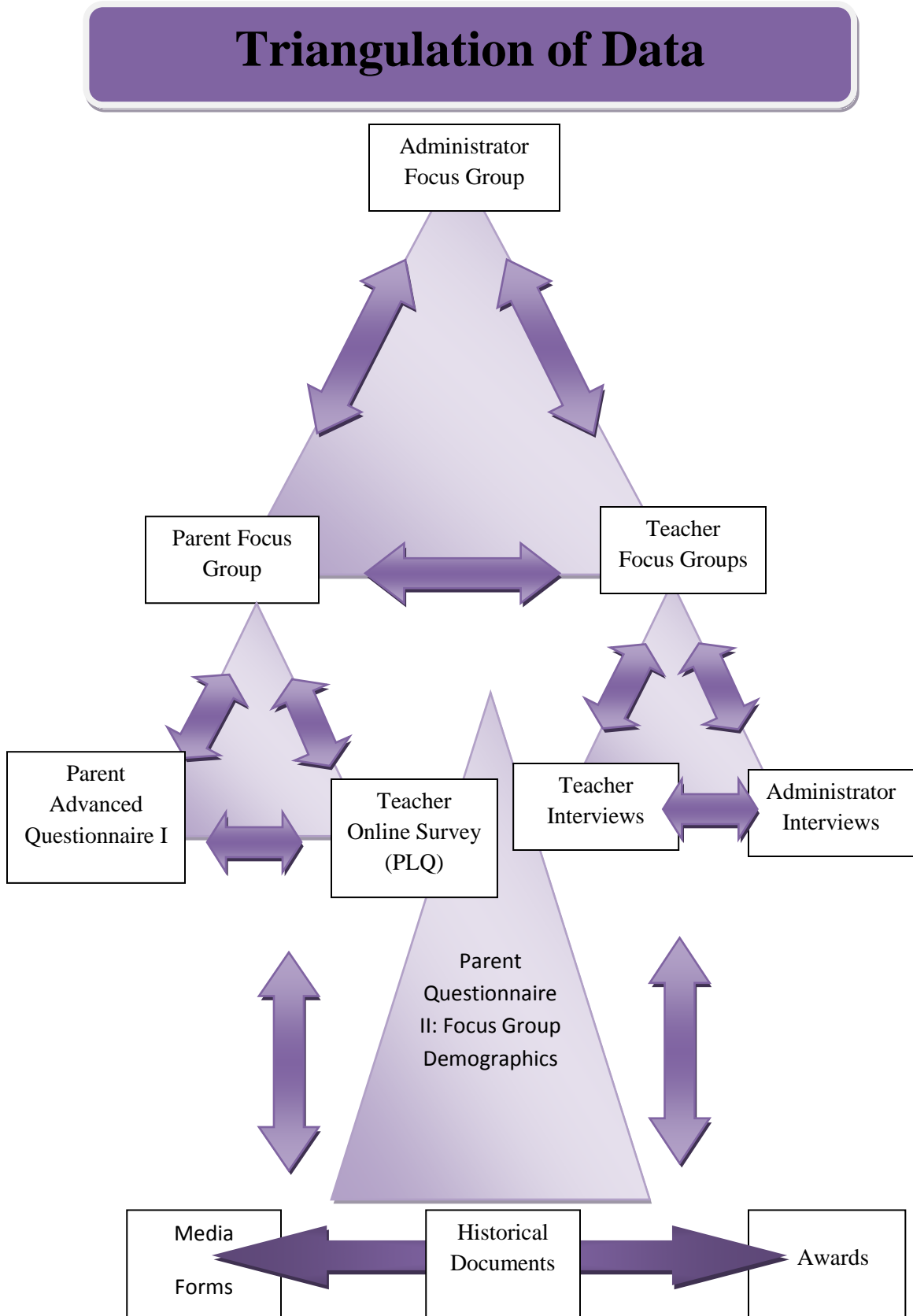**18. How much time does your child spend reading at home each day?**

- ☐ No time at all
- ☐ 10-15 minutes
- ☐ 20-30 minutes
- ☐ About 1 hour
- ☐ 2 hours or more

Adapted from Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Advance Questionnaire: Parent Questionnaire*. Last revised May 16, 2011. Retrieved, June, 2011 from http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/sia/msip/advquest/parent.pdf.

Triangulation of Data Concept Map

Triangulation of Data

Administrator
Focus Group

Parent Focus
Group

Teacher
Focus Groups

Parent
Advanced
Questionnaire I

Teacher
Online Survey
(PLQ)

Teacher
Interviews

Administrator
Interviews

Parent
Questionnaire
II: Focus Group
Demographics

Media
Forms

Historical
Documents

Awards

Appendix F
Cover Letter to School District

March, 2012

Stephanie George, Director
Stellar Charter School- Middle School
4000 Valentine Street
Flint Hills, Kansas 71234

Dear Ms. George:

I am working to conduct a mixed methods research on Stellar Charter School. As part of the University of Missouri-Columbia's Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis doctoral program, a research study is required. I have selected Stellar Charter School for a couple of reasons. First, I am intrigued about the school's success. My former colleague, moved to Flint Hills to work in this school its opening year and he constantly praises it. Secondly, and most importantly for my work, I wish to learn what systems are embedded in the culture of Stellar Charter School that administration, teachers/staff and parents perceive are used to assist student learning. I am especially interested in how this culture and systems benefit lower social economic and minority groups/disadvantaged students.

Your permission is essential in order for me to conduct this study. Each participant's input is voluntary and valuable as it will help me gain an understanding of what systems are embedded in the school's culture that positively affect student learning how they might be applicable to other schools. All responses are anonymous, and participants can drop out at any time without ramifications. I know this school already receives publicity and I hope my study will earn you greater publicity in more educational venues. For example, findings may also be used in articles, presentations and other publications to inform a national and international audience. My study includes a survey to the teachers and a different survey to a group of parents, interviews with administration, teachers and parents, along with focus groups of administration, teachers and parents.

My study seeks to administer an online survey to all willing teaching staff. Next, I seek to interview about 4-6 teachers, and all willing administrators, or people who have administrator type roles, in the building. I would like to interview district office personnel who are affiliated with the design/model of this school and any overseers, if possible. If these members total 4-8 then I intend to do a focus group in place of individual interviews and/or combine them with the administrator interviews/focus group. Most importantly, I am happy to do what works best for participants' schedules. Additionally, I would like to hold as many faculty focus groups in order to capture all willing staff members' voices, enriching the study. One paper parent survey of convenience sampling to families attending the spring parent-teacher conferences is also part of my study and one parent focus group of about eight people would wrap up my study.

More information about the study is attached to this letter (e-mail) in the Informed consent form; however, please feel free to contact me with additional questions, ideas or concerns by phone at (816) 803-9426 or by email at laughlinmaryruth@gmail.com. I am happy to complete forms you may have that grant me permission to conduct this study.

Sincerely,

Mary Laughlin

Mary Laughlin

Appendix G
Consent Form

IDENTIFICATION AND ELUCIDATION OF CULTURALLY EMBEDDED SCHOOL COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS IN A NEWLY CHARTERED URBAN SCHOOL
Informed Consent

This form requests your consent to participate in a research study that explores faculty and parents perceptions of what processes are embedded in their school culture and used to create an environment where students demonstrate academic improvement, and especially the low SES and/or minority (disadvantaged) students. The project is initiated by Mary Laughlin, a doctoral student of the University of Missouri, as part of the requirements for a degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. I am working under the direction of my advisors, Dr. Messner (660) 541-1818 and Dr. Edmonds (660) 853-9087. Data collection and analyses will be completed by Mary, and the interviews/focus groups will take approximately one hour. The online or paper surveys will take approximately 20 minutes.

Project Description: This research project involves interviews with faculty members and students' parents who have participated in the Stellar Charter School District to discover and describe what processes may be embedded in a culture that strives to improve achievement for students, especially the low SES and minority students and report how.

Potential Benefits and Concerns: Findings of this project will be written up in my dissertation to be read by professors and kept in archival data for the University of Missouri-Columbia for anyone's reading. Findings may also be used in articles, presentations, and other publications to inform a national and international audience. This could benefit your school financially as it receives more attention. Additionally, the transference of this school's successes regarding culture and leadership traits that benefit student learning, and in turn benefit society if emulated and applied to other schools is another possible benefit of the study. However, increased recognition might be a distracter to your school, serving as a reasonable risk or discomfort to members of this school. The time to participate in the study may also be a reasonable discomfort to the participant s as well.

Confidentiality: All information associated with project participants will be kept in a locked file box accessible only to the researcher. In accordance with the Federal regulations and the University of Missouri, the research materials will be kept for a period of 7 years after the completion of the research project. All names will be changed to pseudo names for the purpose of keeping participants anonymous. No comments will be attributed to you by name in any reports or publications related to this study. You may be identified by category (e.g., teacher, parent, administrator), but a pseudonym will be used in place of your name in all reports.

Audio Recording and Surveys: All interviews will be audio recorded, unless you prefer to have the interview conducted without recording. If you agree to have the interview recorded, you have the right to request the recorder be stopped at any time— either to stop the interview completely or to continue the interview unrecorded. You can stop the survey at any time.

Participation is Voluntary: Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can decline to answer any questions you do not wish to or withdraw your participation in this study at any time without penalty. You can freely withdraw from the project at any time without negative consequences, and all data pertaining to you will be destroyed.

Participation Details: In March a Parent Advanced Questionnaire will be sent home with parents at Parent-Teacher Conferences. In March one online survey will be sent to teachers. The week of March 19th three separate focus groups of 5-8 administrators, teachers/staff, and parents will be held. The week of March 19th individual interviews with the researcher will be held; however, no one from the previous focus groups of administrators or teachers will be included in the individual interviews, and no individual parent interviews will be done. Only teachers and administrators will have the one-on-one/individual interviews with the researcher, no parent individual interviews will be held: Parent focus group only.

Questions: Please contact Mary Laughlin (816-803-9426 or laughlinmaryruth@gmail.com) with any questions or concerns. If you have questions about your rights as a research project participant, you may contact the MU Institutional Review Board at 573-882-9585.

: Please check the appropriate line to indicate that you have read and understand this letter:

_____I agree to participate, and I give consent to the online survey (teachers/ administrators/leaders) or paper survey (parents). At any time I may stop the survey and drop out.

Next:

_____I agree to participate, and I give consent that the interview or focus group can be audio recorded. At any time I may ask that the recorder be stopped.

OR:

_____I agree to participate, but do not give consent to audio tape the interview.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

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Appendix H
Cover Letter to Staff/ Faculty Letter

February, 2012

Dear Ms. Stephanie George and all Stellar Charter School Members,

First and foremost I congratulate all of you for your dedication and hard work to foster a rich environment with high expectations, stellar instruction and accountability for students, as well as one another. I am extremely impressed and have been since my colleague joined your team. My name is Mary Laughlin. I live in Kansas City, Missouri, and I would like to study what you *do* here at Stellar Charter School.

My hope is that you will join me in sharing your story. My study would need staff:

- Volunteers for individual interviews & focus groups (estimated time of 45-60 minutes, with pizza or a sandwich provided by me)
- Volunteers for a 20 minute online survey
- I would be there to do interviews & focus groups the week of March 19th

My respect for each of you and your limited time is great. I realize you work long, arduous hours, and I wish to minimize your time as much as I feasibly can. Your role would be voluntary and you could back out at any time. I will send a consent form explaining more details soon. I want to learn more about what you *do* to help the students in your school community.

Educators' roles are vital to students' quality of life post school and the sustainability of our country's democracy, citizenship, economic welfare and our country's global power position as well. I have read much about the history of United States education recently while pursuing my education doctorate degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia, and have never felt less proud to be working toward helping others help themselves.

Researching public charter schools and studying your relatively new history has intrigued me greatly and I wish to understand more about what you do, which may be embedded in your culture and beyond that, to help students of minority and economic disadvantages make great strides of improvement academically. By what I hear from the students on the videos, students are motivated to learn and wish to excel. What do you *do* to foster that? I want your story told in academic journals and conferences. Your recognition on Oprah and with the White House was impressive! Bill Gates funding of recent is also exciting! No Child Left Behind opened the doors for innovation via public charter schools and you all are making remarkable headway!

Education is changing and your stories are the evidence that the world of education and policy need to hear and understand.

Respectfully,

Mary Laughlin

Appendix I

Sign-Up Form

March, 2012

Stellar Charter School Staff, Faculty and Leaders:

Mr. Smith has a colleague from Kansas City, Missouri conducting a research on our school for her doctoral degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She has a consent form that briefly explains her study, and needs you to sign should you decide to participate in the study. Then, she has an online survey/questionnaire for you to fill out only if you agree and sign the consent form. This is strictly voluntary on your part. In order to participate in the study you would have to sign the consent form and fill out the online survey coming to you soon. Please return your signed consent form to the box marked "MU RESEARCH" by the 12th of March. In addition, the researcher would like to conduct several individual interviews and a couple focus groups of 5-8 people. If you would be willing to participate in the interview OR focus group, please fill in the boxes below. Mary Laughlin, the researcher, will then contact you regarding the date and time. The interview and focus groups will take 45-60 minutes. You can accept or deny this focus group opportunity. The researcher will systematically sample the two groups from this form. Remember, there is the opportunity to win a Starbuck's or Jimmy John's gift card by participating in the study, and paid for by the researcher.

I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely, Stephanie George   Sincerely, Mary Laughlin

Director of Stellar Charter School   Researcher

I [   ] am willing to be considered to

                    (print name please)

participate in an individual interview OR focus group made up of leaders, if in that category by job description or teacher/staff. Please circle which job description is you. My phone number is [   ]

Please check any unavailable dates below you have for the week of March 19th.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM/ PM	AM/ PM	AM/ PM	AM/ PM	AM/ PM

March, 2012

Stellar Charter School Parents:

Mr. Smith has a colleague from Kansas City, Missouri conducting a research on our school for her doctoral degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She has a consent form that briefly explains her study, and needs you to sign should you decide to participate in the study. Then, she has a survey/questionnaire for you to fill out only if you agree and sign the consent form. This is strictly voluntary on your part. In order to participate in the study you would have to sign the consent form, fill out the paper survey and return to the office with your signed consent form, and put in the box marked "MU RESEARCH" by the 12th of March. In addition, the researcher would like to conduct one parent focus group of 5-8 parents. If you would be willing to participate in the 45-60 minute focus group, please fill in the boxes below. Mary Laughlin, the researcher, will then contact you regarding the date and time. You can accept or deny this focus group opportunity. The researcher will systematically sample from these forms to form the focus group(s). Remember, there is the opportunity to win a Starbuck's or Jimmy John's gift card by participating in the study, and paid for by the researcher.

I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely, Stephanie George   Sincerely, Mary Laughlin
Director of Stellar Charter Schools   Researcher

I [   ] am willing to be considered
to

            (print name please)

participate in a parent focus group. My phone number is [   ]

Appendix J

Demographic Questionnaire: Teacher and Administrator Individual Interviews and Focus Groups

Demographic Questionnaire

Name _____**Teacher or Leader** (circle one)

Date _____ **Type of Interview:(circle one please)**

Individual / Focus Group

Mark the correct box:

How many years have you been teaching?					
0- 5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	20-25 years	25+ years

How many years have you been teaching at Stellar Charter School?				
1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5+ years

What is your gender?		
Male	Female	

What is your current level of education (select all that apply)		
Bachelors Degree in Education	Bachelors Degree in Field Other Than Education	Advanced Degree (Higher Than Masters)
Master's Degree in Education	Master's Degree in Filed Other Than Education	

Which best describes you?		
White (not Hispanic)	Hispanic	Asian
African American		Other (please specify/ write)

Which range best describes your current age?		
18-30 years	40-49 years	50-59 years
30-39 years		60 years or older

Thank you for your time and agreeing to participate in my study. I stayed home with my kids for about 15 years before returning to college and then working full time.

Following a 19-year marriage and then a divorce, my kids and I found ourselves in situational poverty for a couple of years while I finished the last 18 months of undergrad, secured a teaching job and began my master's in science-reading specialist. Then I went through the process for National Board status and immediately following that started the doctorate program. My oldest, my daughter, is finishing her law degree from Michigan State this spring. My second child, a son, finished his Master's in accounting and is working in St. Louis now, the youngest is at Washburn University, a freshman.

I enjoy coming to your state in the summer, as my folks have a cabin out here. I like to "read-for-fun" but do not have much time for this yet.

MY STUDY: To learn what you do here at Stellar Charter School. What might be embedded in your culture to improve student learning, especially for low SES and minority students?
YOUR privacy is kept. Your names will be changed to secure your privacy and maybe gender too.

Participants turn to share:

While filling out the three-quarter demographic paper will you each state your name and tell about your journey and what brought you to this profession?

What do you enjoy most when not working on Stellar Charter School business?

****
PARENT FOCUS GROUP:

Talking about how we spend time with family after I give a brief history about my journey….

My oldest son has a Master's in accounting and works in St Louis for an accounting firm, my daughter finishes law school this spring and the youngest just started college.

Enough about me: Share a bit about you and your family, and what you enjoy doing together please.

Appendix L

Email Communication

Faculty/Staff:

Mr. Smith has a colleague in Kansas City, Missouri where he formerly taught, that wants to conduct her research for her dissertation on our school. <u>I want you to know that this is VOLUNTARY on your part.</u> I know, as does the researcher, that this will take up some of your time. She has a letter attached to this email that will tell you more about the time commitments and what she is studying, etc. In a nutshell, you would complete one online survey (about 20 minutes), and then either a one-time focus group (5-8 participants) or a one-time interview (about 45-60 minutes). She is going to provide pizza or sandwiches for the interview and focus group sessions and offer a chance to win one of two $25 gift cards to Starbucks and Jimmy Johns. <u>Again, I want to make clear that this is not an expectation from me.</u> I have agreed to the study and we will send home the parent surveys and the consent form for parents during our March parent-teacher conferences. Parents interested in participating in the study must sign the consent form and return on the 12th along with the completed paper survey document. The researcher will conduct one parent focus group (5-8 parents) along with the paper survey.

Thank you,

Stephanie George

Director of Stellar Charter School

Families:

Mr. Smith has a colleague from Kansas City, Missouri conducting a research on our school for her doctoral degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia. If you participate in the survey, she is offering a chance to win one of four $25 gift cards to Starbucks and Jimmy Johns. She has a consent form that briefly explains her study, and needs you to sign should you decide to participate in the study. Then, she has a survey/ questionnaire for you to fill out only if you agree and sign the consent form. <u>This is strictly voluntary on your part</u>. In order to participate in the study you would have to sign the consent form, fill out the survey and return to the office in the box marked "MU RESEARCH" by the 12th of March. In addition, the researcher would like to do one parent focus group of 5-8 parents and if you participate in this, she is offering a chance to win one of two $15 gift cards of either Starbucks or Jimmy Johns. Mary Laughlin, the researcher, will send more information about the focus group opportunity soon. I wanted you to know a little about the research project and to let you know it is voluntary on your part. Much of

this study will transpire this month, beginning during conference times as we hand out the questionnaire and consent form to you at that time.

I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely, Stephanie George

Director of Stellar Charter School

Appendix M

Epic Award

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 11, 2011

Contact:

[redacted] Middle School Receives National Recognition for
Driving Dramatic Student Achievement Gains
School leaders and teachers will receive up to $ 72,500
in appreciation of their impact and for sharing information about their practices

[redacted] **Middle School** is one of just 18 charter schools from across the country to be honored by the New Leaders for New Schools' Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) program for accomplishing breakthrough student achievement gains. Educators at the school will receive individual financial rewards in exchange for working with New Leaders for New Schools to document and share the practices that led to their successes.

This year, 18 schools were selected from the 175 charter schools from 23 states and the District of Columbia competing in the EPIC National Charter School Consortium for $1.8 million in incentive funds. School leaders will receive awards ranging from $5,000 to $12,000 while most teachers at each school will receive awards ranging from $3,000 to $4,000. Once this fourth cohort of schools is awarded, the total amount of EPIC incentives distributed to charter educators will top $6.4 million.

"We are thrilled by this recognition from New Leaders for New Schools," said [redacted] Middle School Director. "The hard work of our teachers to ensure student achievement and growth is key to [redacted]'s continued success and we are honored to be among the top 18 schools recognized nationally."

"The EPIC award for [redacted] Public Schools' founding middle school is a well deserved recognition for an outstanding team of educators. I am proud of our teachers and leaders for their continued dedication to [redacted] students. We look forward to sharing our practices with schools nationally to help improve public education in our country," said [redacted] Public Schools CEO.

Learning from Effective Practices
The power of EPIC lies in the opportunity for educators to learn from one another about the practices that contribute to achievement gains. All EPIC award-winning schools engage in a thorough investigation with the EPIC team to study and document the school practices and leadership actions that contributed to their student success. Case studies and profiles from all 18 award-winning charter schools will be posted on the EPIC Knowledge System, a rich online professional development resource that educators can use to build capacity for school improvement and impact student achievement.

Determining EPIC Award-Winners
EPIC partners with Mathematica Policy Research, an independent, nationally recognized research firm, in the creation and refinement of a Value Added Model to measure the impact of a school on its students over time. EPIC awards are based on a school's annual gains rather than their overall proficiency rates for students. The EPIC value added model for charter schools is unique in that it compares gains from schools in 23 different states and Washington D.C. Award winners are selected solely based on growth made over the previous three years in student test scores.

About ▮▮▮▮Public Schools

▮▮▮▮▮ Public Schools (▮▮▮▮ operates open-enrollment STEM charter schools and is part of the ▮▮▮▮ Public Schools ▮▮▮▮ system. ▮▮▮ currently serves over 1,000 students with three schools on two campuses. ▮▮▮▮has been approved to open three additional secondary school campuses (grades 6-12) in 2011, 2012 and 2013. At full enrollment, ▮▮▮▮Public Schools will serve over 4,200 students, and will double the number of four year college-ready ▮▮▮ graduates by 2020.

▮▮▮▮Public Schools was founded as the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ in 2001 and the founding campus at ▮▮▮▮▮ opened in 2004 ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ serves students from all parts of ▮▮▮▮with a student population of 65% minority and 45% low income. ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ student population is 83% minority and 55% low income. ▮▮▮▮will open its 3rd campus at ▮▮▮▮▮in the ▮▮▮▮ neighborhood in July 2011.

▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮is widely considered to be one of the leading open enrollment STEM schools (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in the U.S. and has become a destination for educators nationwide. ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ has consistently been the highest performing secondary school in ▮▮▮based on growth and absolute performance. ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ High School's first four graduating classes earned 100% acceptances into four-year colleges. Fifty percent of ▮▮▮s 2010 graduating class is first generation college-bound.

Students are selected to attend ▮▮▮through a random lottery; there are no admissions criteria. Additional information about ▮▮▮Public Schools and the admission process is available on the school's web site at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

About EPIC and New Leaders for New Schools

New Leaders for New Schools launched the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) in 2006 to link principal and teacher incentives to the wide-scale sharing of effective educational practices.

EPIC's National Charter School Consortium, currently in its fourth year, is made up of 175 eligible schools in 23 states and the District of Columbia. In its first three years, the EPIC National Charter School Consortium awarded more than $4.8 million to over 1,200 educators in 47 schools in 13 states. The EPIC program is also active in Memphis City Schools, D.C. Public Schools, and Denver Public Schools. EPIC is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), school district and charter school partners, and private philanthropic funders.

New Leaders for New Schools is working to address the national crisis in urban public education by selecting and preparing outstanding leaders and supporting the performance of the urban public schools they lead at scale. New Leaders for New Schools has set clear goals and strategies to help schools led by New Leader Principals succeed while also supporting the success of its partner school systems and, over time, education practitioners and policymakers nationwide. Its strong focus on its mission and long-term goals is allowing New Leaders for New Schools to make a powerful contribution toward its vision that one day every student will graduate from high school ready for college, career, and citizenship. Additional information about New Leaders for New Schools can be found at www.nlns.org.

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Mary Laughlin grew up on a farm; however, she has lived the majority of her life in Parkville, Missouri. Like others, Mary Laughlin has done various jobs and attended several colleges. First was Missouri Southern College in Joplin, Missouri, studying business, and then transferred to the University of Missouri, Columbia as a home economics education major. School was suspended for 17 years as she raised her family, worked in fabric stores, Wal-Mart and ran her own day care. In 1998 she returned to school at Maple Woods Community College, and then she transferred to Park University and completed her elementary education degree with a social studies emphasis in 2004. While working as a first year teacher, she enrolled in Northwest Missouri State University's Masters of Science in Reading program, April, 2005. Upon the completion of that degree with additional certification as a K-12 Reading Specialist the summer of 2007, she pursued National Board Certification and earned that by 2009. She has taught fifth grade for nine years as she pursued the Master's and National Board status, and currently teaches the same while completing her doctorate from the University of Missouri, Columbia. In sum, she has been in higher education for the past 14 years.