Focus, Drive, and Motivation in Secondary School Populations

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Focus, Drive, and Motivation in Secondary School Populations

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December 2, 2021
Focus, Drive, and Motivation in Secondary School Populations

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

National College of Education
National Louis University
December 2021
ABSTRACT

This study, Focus, Drive, and Motivation in Secondary Populations, addresses the topic of middle and high school student motivation to succeed in school. The aim was to discover what motivates and inspires student success. In this study, I delved into issues of low levels of student motivation, drive, and focus and the relative effect of these issues on school performance. The central purpose of this research was to find ways to foster greater levels of student focus, drive, and motivation during their middle and high school experience. The context of the study was a medium-sized charter middle school and a small charter high school. The charter school organization was located within a larger independent school district. The study focused predominantly on a Hispanic and Black demographic. The outcomes were reported via a mixed method of data collection that included quantitative and qualitative measurements.
I began this research inquiry as a middle school teacher grappling with low student focus, drive, and motivation. I continued the research as a high school principal in the same organization with the same students who had grown older and matriculated from middle to high school. I remained invested in this work as a grandparent and elementary school principal. As a child, I recall growing up in an era where my parents, grandparents, and community, in general, valued education and instilled in their children the desire to go to school and do well. As a child, it was my job and responsibility to get an education because it was important to ensure my life would be better as an adult. My motivation to do well in school was largely extrinsic, as I wanted to please my family and caregivers. The extrinsic motivation became intrinsic as I got older and learned how education is the grand equalizer and bridge from poverty to prosperity.

During this study, I realized there is no magic bullet to solving the motivation crisis. I discovered the solution is simple, practical, and effective when applied in the educational context. When relationships are strong, students flourish. Personal success criteria are an important life skill and have demonstrably yielded increases in student motivational levels. Social-emotional health and mindfulness resulted in fewer disciplinary infractions as students learned coping mechanisms and how to manage their emotions proactively and positively and interact with peers in a healthy manner.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

God is my strength and my redeemer. With God, I am not afraid. I feast from the table of plenty. I am favored and wonderfully made. Greatness is within me. He orders my steps and guides my heart. It is with God that this life, accomplishment, and all things are possible. Lord God, I thank you!

Dr. Sparks, thank you for being on this journey with me. I am appreciative of the encouragement and support over the years. I am not sure how possible this accomplishment would have been without you being my angel along the way. You will forever hold a special place in my heart.

I’d like to acknowledge my work families at KCC and IPS. Thank you for your support and encouragement. I am proud to have served side by side with you in the journey to educate and empower children to realize and achieve their highest potential. You are all educational rockstars!

Shawn, thank you for being my ride-or-die and lifelong schoolmate! I started on this school journey because of you, and it is largely because of you that I am finishing as Dr. Cook!

AJ, you joined a lady on a crazy voyage and you’ve not missed a beat. I am not sure what that says about you, but I am glad you joined me!

To my cohort members, NLU TA013: It was a wildly insane, fantastic journey through a global pandemic, blood, sweat, and many tears, but we did it!

Last but certainly not least, to my family, I love you and thank you for putting up with all of the late nights, stressful weekends, and fits of procrastination and perfectionism. I will always love you!
DEDICATION

I dedicate this research and accomplishment to my family—you are the wind beneath my wings. To my daughter, you, my love, are my reason why. When I realized I would be a mom at sixteen years old, I knew I had to provide the life for you I never had and prove to my very small world that becoming a teenage mom would not doom me to a life of poverty, pregnancies, and dependence. Though I have made mistakes along the way, I am thankful to God for ordering my steps and providing the pathway he has for your life and mine. I love you to the moon and back!

To my incredibly sensitive and stubborn son, I love you to the moon and back. Parenting doesn’t come with an instruction manual; it is hard and doesn’t always make sense. Sometimes even the smartest parents get a few things twisted. What I didn’t get wrong is the love I have for you and the motivation you have always been for me to be the perfect example of a mom, grandmother, sister, wife, and friend. In perfectionism, there lives the tendency to be a perfectly flawed human, to which I am not exempt. I am forever grateful God chose me to be your mom and am extremely proud of the hard-working, gentle, sensitive, stubborn soul you are.

To the love of my life, I am forever grateful for the years of sacrifice and support you poured into providing and creating a great life for our young family. I appreciate you for being the wind beneath my wings when I could not find it on my own. Thank you for the memories and the love. You will always have a special place in my heart.

Mama: I did it, girl! I am a DOCTOR!! I am a smart, strong, loving, black woman who made family history! I miss you like crazy, but I know you’re proud of me and you’re probably up there driving the angels crazy as you celebrate with me.
Brother, it’s always been you and me making waves, creating new traditions, and breaking generational chains. I love you and appreciate you for keeping me grounded when you felt like I was losing my way. Whether you know it or not, it is your voice that I hear in my head when I have thought about giving up on this degree and many other things in life. You have been my motivating force, my cheerleader, and the voice of reason when I needed it most. You are equally my partner in craziness and constant when I need a reality check. By default, I am the crazy, non-traditional matriarch of our family. I am not sure how I inherited such a hefty title and responsibility, but I will do my best to make you, our ancestors, and generations to come proud. I love you and my sister in love with all my heart!

Stormie and Mani: I have set this example for you to know that the sky is the limit. There is nothing you cannot do; don’t be limited by society’s expectations of you. Create your own world and don’t be afraid to color outside of the lines. I am the first of the Doctors in our family; I earned this degree in part to leave a legacy of learning, achievement, hope, and excellence for you and generations to come. Live life on purpose. Laugh every day and love hard. Kee-Kee loves you!

To my extended family and friends, I love y’all! Thanks for the encouragment, the love, the friendship, and the fun along the way. Thank you for supporting me when I had class and for understanding the sacrifice I had to make to get ‘er done. I appreciate the reprieve and laughs you provided when school and work-life were overwhelmingly hectic.

To the special lady in my life. You came into my life unexpectedly and have been side by side with me providing endless encouragement, support, and motivation when I
needed it most. When I felt like giving up you were there to cheer me on, and I am forever grateful for you. Since we met, you have filled my days and nights with smiles, laughs, and love. I am free to love and live a life that I only ever imagined existed. Thank you for seeing my inner beauty and encouraging me to love, appreciate, and celebrate myself. It is by your example that I am learning to love selflessly; live life courageously in color and laugh abundantly. I am happy to dance like no one is watching under the rainbow with you!
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Chapter One: Introduction

While serving as a teacher, team leader, and principal, I became concerned about the focus, drive, and motivation of middle and high school students. I had an interest in what inspired student success in the secondary grades. Motivation is perhaps the greatest determinant of student achievement but motivating students who are not engaged in school is challenging. Educators and parents grapple with ways to motivate students who have negative attitudes toward life and especially toward school. Such students seem closed to what school has to offer and often seem to think they already have life figured out. Through this investigation, I sought to understand the student motivational crisis and to define and prescribe a treatment to remedy the systematic anemic state of school engagement that low levels of student focus, drive, and motivation have caused in schools.

Motivation is not an innate trait; it can be encouraged or discouraged by individuals who have a major influence on one’s life. Likewise, children can be discouraged or encouraged by the actions of important people in their lives (Crotty, 2013). Students cannot benefit from improved standards, increased rigor, or better assessment tools if they are bored, inattentive, and put little effort into tasks and assignments. Parents, teachers, and school leaders must exercise concerted, collaborative efforts to address the lack of motivation. Crotty’s research study indicated that “students who are motivated to learn have higher achievement, show better understanding of the concepts they are taught, are more satisfied with school, and have lower dropout rates” (Crotty, 2013, para 5).

Students can learn, not some students, but all students. Teachers not only teach;
they inspire, motivate, and encourage. Because I observed classrooms where students and teachers became discouraged, unfocused, and unmotivated, I wanted to learn what factors must exist for students to avoid the pitfalls of amotivation. Studies suggested that students are more academically motivated when the four following criteria are present:

When they feel competent enough to complete the task at hand; when they see the direct link between their actions and an outcome and have some control over whether or how to undertake a task; when the task has interest or value to them; and when completing the task brings social rewards, such as a sense of belonging to a group or approval from someone they care about. (Crotty, 2013, para 7)

The school under study was part of an independent group of charter schools in a suburban community whose demographic initially consisted of 68% white, 16% black, and approximately 12% other races. The demographic of the school had changed since its inception. The demographic composition at the inception was 35% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL) based upon their socioeconomic status but had shifted over time to approximately 70% of students eligible for FRL. The once white majority had become Hispanic and Black, respectively. In 2017, 85% of the students were two years or more below grade level in reading and math. In 2018-2019, the school under study had 178 referrals (average of 19 referrals per month) to the office with exactly 50% (89) of the referrals being for disruption/defiance/disrespect.

The school’s mission was dedicated to the well-being and educational success of every child. Its activities were directed toward student success based on Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory (Marenus, 2020). The foundational system of learning and the theory of the educational program were taught through the specific
learning modality of each student. The Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scale (MIDAS) was used to develop Individual Development and Education Plans (IDEP) that “serve as the beginning dialogue that maximizes motivation, allows the formation of action plans to focus efforts and for the most effective instructional approach for the student” (Citation withheld to preserve confidentiality).

Focus, drive, motivation, and the lack thereof, are not unique to the school under study. The investigation, research, and prescription herein are intended to benefit middle and high schools across the local community, school district, state, and country.

**Purpose of the Program Evaluation**

Through this study I delved into issues of student achievement at Kid’s Can Learn Charter School (pseudonym) and the relative effects of low levels of student focus, drive, and motivation. The central purpose and the focus of this research were to improve student focus, drive, and motivation in middle and high school students. “Motivation is a central part of a student’s educational experience from preschool onward, but it has received scant attention amid an education reform agenda focused mainly on accountability, standards, and tests, teacher quality, and school management” (Usher & Kober, 2012, p. 1). Before one can get to the root of the motivation crisis, it is important to point out that schools do more than transmit knowledge. The concept of a hidden curriculum can be understood as aspects of a learned curriculum that are outside the boundaries of a school’s intentional efforts (Glatthorn et al., 2016). There are explicit teacher-directed aspects of learning that produce changes in student values, perceptions, and behaviors. Teachers are front-line workers with the power to directly impact student levels of motivation and drive.
The most salient aspects of the hidden curriculum take place in the classroom where the teacher employs the skillful use of accountability measures to engage, motivate, inspire and encourage students to be the best version of themselves. Students unconsciously learn how the teacher and world perceive them. It is in this same unconscious manner that students learn how invested the teacher is, how important the class is and how critical it is or is not that they attend class. In order for students to really learn how to take control of the many aspects of individual motivation, the teacher must understand the power they hold to nurture the whole child via the skillful navigation of the hidden curriculum.

My previous research on middle school populations concluded the ultimate student motivator is the student and his or her own desire to succeed. However, I found other critical aspects of schooling that contributed to students being motivated. Student-teacher relationships, establishing success criteria, and mindfulness are components of the motivation equation.

I hypothesized that student-teacher relationships, emphasis on establishing success criteria, and the inclusion of mindfulness would increase levels of intrinsic motivation and positively impact student achievement. In this study, I sought to provide a prescription to cure the anemia this epidemic caused in school culture, climate, and performance. The findings of this research may provide aid to school and district leaders for generations to come while increasing the capacity and value of human outputs to the community.

Increased levels of motivation seem to lead to greater academic performance, as well as to greater satisfaction with school, self-esteem, school completion rates and social
adjustment (Usher & Kober, 2012). Motivation is a difficult term to understand, measure, and describe. It is even more difficult to effectively employ. The lack of motivation can have serious consequences. “For example, in a 2006 survey exploring why students dropped out of school, 70% of high school dropouts said they were unmotivated” (Bridgeland et al., 2006, as cited in Usher & Kober, 2012, p. 2).

Students must attend school regularly for instruction to be effective, progress to occur, and learning to take place. Robert Balfanz discussed chronic absenteeism in his 2016 article in Phi Delta Kappen, the Professional Journal for Educators. Balfanz named disengagement as one of the four broad categories of reasons why students are chronically absent. According to Balkans, students are disengaged from school because they feel that little is going on or that no one notices or misses them if they do not attend (Balfanz, 2016). This is especially true for many of America’s students since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of virtual learning. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the opportunity gap for students who suffer chronic disengagement and absenteeism and also those who are at risk of becoming disengaged. Low levels of motivation plus chronic disengagement are a disastrous formula leading to student dropouts. Educators can decrease the levels of chronic disengagement and lack of motivation by norming the impact of teacher-student relationships, making social-emotional curricula a mandatory part of the curriculum and investing all learners in work that is rigorous, challenging, and meaningful.

**Rationale**

Professionally, I was compelled to arrive at a solution for the benefit of my students, teachers, school, and professional community at large. I was intrigued to
discover how positive student-teacher relationships, the inclusion of mindfulness, and the implementation of success criteria would impact the overarching goal: improved student achievement. As an administrator, I anticipated the knowledge and research acquired through this investigation would provide a framework to lead and direct change in the school under study, the surrounding county, and the country.

As a school leader, the connection between focus, drive, and motivation, and overall student achievement is important to understand. As I reflected on my personal experience, I recalled my son’s middle through early high school years and his struggle with focus and motivation. He was fairly easy to redirect, but not all students are as amenable. The students I encountered were altogether different than my own child; they were stubborn, opinionated, and without regard to undesirable consequences. My son has since graduated from high school, but I am a school leader and grandmother who needs to solve this motivation-achievement dilemma and the long-term implications the COVID-19 pandemic will have on the future of education.

Internal and external stakeholders may benefit from the findings of this research investigation as I provided suggestions into what causes the shortage of focus, drive, and motivation in our middle and high school students. Furthermore, through this research, I emphasized the strength of student-teacher relationships and the efficacy of mindfulness and social-emotional curricula. The goal of education should be to nurture the whole child. The hurt of the global COVID-19 pandemic could have effects that last a lifetime. The long-term impact of the pandemic has yet to be fully recognized; the urgent call to action is in the here and now as our nation’s most at risk and chronically disengaged students are experiencing a motivation and drive crisis like never before. The
findings of this research may provide aid to school and district leaders while increasing the capacity and value of human outputs to the community.

**Goals**

I sought to identify what motivated middle and high school students to want to do well in school. My previous research findings indicated middle school students were more motivated by intrinsic motivation factors. I assumed the response would be the same for the high school population. My critical issue for the continuation of research was, “What are specific remedies to cure the lack of motivation in this fragile population?” The intended goals were to improve relationships, establish and implement student success criteria, and use mindfulness as a personal pathway to success. My overarching goal for this research project was to improve student achievement in middle and high school grades. I planned to study the effect of relationships and mindfulness on students’ personal satisfaction and learning outcomes.

Rita Pierson said, “Kids don’t learn from people they don’t like” (Pierson, 2013, 1:41). I have also learned students cannot learn around other students they do not like. When students are having conflicts with their teacher or with each other, they will not learn. In my professional experience, I observed improved relationships lead to improved learning outcomes and personal satisfaction. Establishing personal success criteria helps teens to become the best, most productive versions of themselves. As students recognize that behavior and outcomes are a product of their choices, they are better equipped to navigate through tough issues, relationships, and life-changing decisions.

In my professional experience, I have observed that mindfulness may lead to elevated levels of self-awareness and self-confidence. Mindful students are more focused
and more engaged. Mindfulness increases self-awareness, improves relationship skills, emotional management, and decision making as the foundation for maximum student focus and concentration. Implementing mindfulness as a non-negotiable adds to levels of academic performance and drives achievement goals. By determining what specific motivators most affect students’ willingness and eagerness to perform academically, teachers and school leaders are better equipped to serve middle school populations, driving high levels of academic engagement and performance. During the course of this study, *Purpose Prep* (2012), a social-emotional learning curriculum was used for seven months to teach students mindfulness and address their social-emotional learning needs.

**Definition of Terms**

In this section, I listed relevant terms that I used in my dissertation along with their definitions.

- **Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences Theory**: Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences challenged the traditional notion that there is one single type of intelligence; Gardner proposed that people are not born with all the intelligence they will ever have (Marenus, 2020).

- **Gardner’s eight diverse types of intelligences**: Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical, Spatial, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Musical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Naturalist (Marenus, 2020).

- **The Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scale (MIDAS)**: The Multiple Intelligences Development Assessment Scales (MIDAS®) provides an efficient method for obtaining a descriptive understanding of a person’s multiple intelligences profile. The MIDAS is a research-based self-report measure of
intellectual disposition for people of all ages. The MIDAS Profile describes a full range of skills, abilities and intellectual potential while providing information regarding intellectual development, activities, and propensities not usually available from standard academic tests and most aptitude tests. Likewise, the MIDAS provides experience-based information that can be used to create personalized learning plans. Parents can learn a great deal about their children that will help them to motivate and guide each child’s unique intellectual development (Shearer, 2021)

- **7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens:** The 7 Habits for Teens training is a means for educators, administrators, and parents to build students’ self-confidence and interpersonal skills, elevate student achievement, and reduce school-wide discipline problems (Covey, 2020).

- Personal success criteria: The standards/levels by which to judge whether an objective/goal/target/outcome has been achieved/successful (University of Saint Joseph, 2018).

- Grit: Grit is passion and perseverance for long-term goals. Grit is having a goal you care about so much that it organizes and gives meaning to almost everything you do. Grit is holding steadfast to that goal even when you fall down (Duckworth, 2016).

- Growth mindset: In 1988, Dr. Carol Dweck first presented a research-based model to show the impact of mindsets. Dr. Dweck found that people’s theories about their own intelligence had a significant impact on their motivation, effort, and approach to challenges. Those who believe their abilities are malleable are
more likely to embrace challenges and persist despite failure. Having a growth mindset leads to a desire to learn, and therefore, a tendency to embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, see effort as the path to proficiency and learn from criticism. People with a growth mindset find lessons and inspiration in the success of others. As a result, they reach higher levels of achievement which gives them a greater sense of free will (Mindset Works, Inc., 2017).

• COVID-19: COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a coronavirus and its first outbreak was in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organization declared it as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Many countries responded to the pandemic by implementing travel restrictions, quarantines, and stay-at-home orders. The impact was crippling, not only on the global economy, but also on education where student learning was disrupted. Due to restricted movement control ordered by respective law-making officials and agencies, students were unable to attend classes in their normal face-to-face format. In the meantime, teaching faculty had to quickly make changes to the delivery mode from traditional teaching methods to online learning. This adaptation has had a significant impact on the teaching and learning process (Tan, 2021).

• Mindfulness: Mindfulness is a state of active, open attention to the present. This state is described as observing one’s thoughts and feelings without judging them as good or bad (Psychology today, 2021).

Research Questions

The primary research questions guiding my program evaluation were as follows:

• What impact does mindfulness have on student motivation?
• To what extent do personal success criteria impact student motivation?
• How do student-teacher relationships impact student motivation?
• What factors must exist for students to be motivated?
• How has the global COVID-19 pandemic impacted student motivation levels?

Conclusion

It is critical to understand the ebb and flow of focus, drive, and motivation of middle school populations to cure the epidemic that is the lack of focus, drive and motivation in both middle and high school populations. Perhaps, increasing intrinsic motivation is the only way to truly increase student learning outcomes.

The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it’s not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives.

(Dweck, 2006, para. 1)

In chapter two I examined the literature relevant to motivation, personal success criteria, and the value of social-emotional supports.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

I collected literature for this review from a variety of sources that were representative of the current state of the field based on scholarly research. The library at National Louis University was the source of my research. I used a combination of scholarly and peer reviewed research articles. The years of the research collected spanned a seven-year period from 2010-2017. There were a few articles, chosen for relevance, which dated back to 1994 and 2007, respectively.

In this literature review I explored the following topics: types of motivation, personal success criteria, student-teacher relationships, social-emotional supports and the impact of COVID-19 on student levels of motivation. Exploring these topics provided a variety of lenses through which I could understand student motivation and extenuating factors that contribute or detract from students’ ability to find and maintain academic motivation. The main bodies of research came from references Ayub (2010), McClintic-Gilbert et al. (2013), and Paulino et al. (2017).

“Motivation to learn is an essential component of academic success, particularly at the middle and high school levels, which is marked by declines in school grades, competence beliefs, the quality of teacher-student relationships, and the perceived value of school” (McClintic-Gilbert et al., 2013, p. 1). Parents and educators alike grapple with how to motivate students when they get to middle and high school. They wonder if intrinsic or extrinsic motivation works best. They also wonder what happens to the child who doesn’t seem to be motivated by anything. It is not atypical to find parents of adolescents to be in a state of frustration, concern, panic, and fear over what appears to be a digression in academic performance, attitude, and overall concern for school.
Types of Motivation

Motivation is an important contributor to academic learning and student achievement. The self-determination theory is a theory of human motivation that differentiates motivation in terms of being autonomous and controlled (Lange et al., 2012). Accordingly, the theory identifies three types of motivation that I considered throughout this study: intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation (Ayub, 2010).

Intrinsic

“Students who are intrinsically motivated persist longer, conquer more challenges, and demonstrate more accomplishments in their academic endeavors than those who are extrinsically motivated” (Pintrich & Garcia, 1991, as cited in Ayub, 2010, p. 369). Intrinsic motivation is driven solely by internal factors with no regard for external rewards. Intrinsic motivation refers to being in an activity for itself, and the pleasure and satisfaction one gets from participating in the event or activity. “Academic intrinsic motivation plays a significant role in achievement, competency, and academic learning. Intrinsic motivation stems from the innate psychological needs of competence and self-determination” (Ayub, 2010, p. 364). Intrinsic motivation predicts regular completion of homework, high grades, and high scores on standardized tests (Gilbert et al., 2013). Literature from Gilbert et al. suggested three types of intrinsic motivation exists: to know, to experience stimulation, and to accomplish things. Collectively, these intrinsic motivators create an internal lust for seeking out and accomplishing tasks. Ultimately, the desired outcome for students is for them to possess the inner lust for academia driving them to reside in the upper echelons of academic achievement.
**Extrinsic**

Extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards, like money, candy/food, prizes, and grades. Extrinsic motivation “pertains to a wide variety of behaviors that are engaged in as a means to an end and not for their own sake” (Deci, 1975 as cited in Ayub, 2010, p. 364). Excessive reliance on extrinsic motivation can decrease a student’s intrinsic motivation. The delicate balance of both is necessary. Typically, extrinsic motivation is a negative indicator of achievement outcomes. However, research indicated when combined with goal setting, extrinsic motivation can facilitate intrinsic values while fulfilling the quest for extrinsic rewards (Ayub, 2010).

**Amotivation**

Amotivation is the lack of motivating forces; there is no extrinsic or intrinsic motivation that influences the amotivated individual. The student who displays characteristics of amotivation often lacks confidence and feels as though their behavior is due to forces outside of their realm of control. The overwhelming feeling of incompetence may lead the amotivated student to stop participating in school activities, eventually leading them to question why even go to school at all (Ayub, 2010).

**Perfectionism**

Perfectionism is the refusal to accept anything that is not perfect. Perfectionists tend to set difficult goals and evaluate their own performance critically against the goal (Bong et al., 2014). While this type of personal motivation can be an effective indicator of student achievement, it can also become a slippery slope. Research studies suggested students who are perfectionists by way of personal ideals relate positively to academic achievement and have a lower tolerance for academic dishonesty (Bong, et al., 2014).
These personal ideals plague students and can quickly spiral out of control, causing a quick nosedive onto the slippery slope between high achievement and tendencies toward perfection. Bong et al. posited students who are perfectionists by way of social construct often experience higher levels of test anxiety, procrastination increases, and the willingness to engage in academic dishonesty increases. In my classroom, students who were traditionally high achieving, high honor roll students often hit rock bottom when they could no longer hold onto their historical records of perfection, plummeting into the abyss of low levels of confidence, self-esteem, motivation, and perseverance. What often began as a positive motivating force could quickly lead to academic destruction. Social factors can encourage or discourage the pathway to academic destruction.

**Social Status**

In middle school populations, social status is very important. Adolescents grapple with being accepted by their peers and blending in socially. Some students in this age group even go as far as to perform poorly so they won’t stand out. “Social control refers to an individual’s skills in engaging the social environment in ways that support and reinforce his or her learning activities” (Castillas, et al., 2012, p. 409). Castillas et al. indicated inadequate social relationships contributed to substandard levels of academic achievement due to absenteeism, lack of friends, and possible bullying. Castillas et al. asserted students with higher rates of absenteeism and school moves were more likely to drop out of school during middle school or during the transition from middle to high school (2012). Conversely, involving parents in school life, having good relationships with school personnel, and being involved with extracurricular activities improved social status and social control, ultimately leading to higher academic achievement. Student
drop-out studies showed, “devoting time and attention to school activities and getting along with teachers and peers showed a reduction in dropout behaviors” (Castillas, et al., 2012, p. 409).

**Self-Regulation**

Self-regulation is an aspect of motivation. Self-regulation is what allows learners to set goals for themselves and then monitor, regulate, and control motivation, behavior, and cognition (Castillas, et al., 2012). Students who have shown higher levels of self-regulation are associated with higher grade point averages (GPA). Research depicted a linear relationship between self-regulation and academic achievement (Castillas, et al., 2012). Students must be able to control their behavior by maintaining appropriate behaviors and avoiding disruptive ones. Academic achievement suffers when students lack self-regulation; academic achievement plummets and early dropout becomes a possibility.

A review of the literature (Castillas, et al., 2012) indicated motivation as reflected in study habits and homework compliance has a direct, positive relationship with grades, standardized test scores, and academic achievement. The researchers went on to assert self-regulation, as measured by orderly conduct, has a relatively high association with GPA and standardized achievement. Likewise, social control, as measured by students’ perceptions of family attitudes toward education, has a moderate association with GPA and academic achievement. Educators and parents must realize the imperative need to address these motivational needs before they manifest into student dropouts. Students’ interests must be peaked for them to learn. Students are more intrinsically engaged when
they find the material to be interesting—or at least taught in a manner that employs cognitive and metacognitive strategies (McClintic-Gilbert et al., 2013).

**Student Engagement as Motivation via Learning Strategies**

Researchers determined strategic approaches to schoolwork may be systematically related to intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation. Students pursuing schoolwork as a means to an extrinsic end may adopt superficial strategies that involve minimal effort when completing tasks. Employing the use of meaningful motivation strategies may shape students’ tendency to act as self-regulated learners who employ cognitive and metacognitive strategies that affect how they are to learn and perform (McClintic-Gilbert et al., 2013).

Deep learning strategies represent active cognitive engagement on the part of the learner and include strategies such as elaboration, summarization, critical thinking, organization of information, and metacognitive regulation (McClintic-Gilbert et al., 2013). Research showed a connection between deep learning strategies and achievement indicators which have been linked to intrinsic motivation and goals that make learning and mastery a priority. Deep strategies are expected to be related to intrinsic motivation “because students who are driven by curiosity to seek challenges and master new material would presumably be drawn to the use of deep learning strategies” (McClintic-Gilbert et al., 2013, p. 3).

Surface learning strategies include rote memorization and rehearsal (McClintic-Gilbert et al., 2013). These require less cognitive engagement than deep processing strategies, though a certain level of effort is required. Surface learning strategies include reading and re-reading material, memorizing statistics and vocabulary, and copying notes.
over and over until the material can be recalled. Such tasks are typically driven due to a desire to perform better than other students—a key attribute of extrinsic motivation. However, some students may find enjoyment in these sorts of tasks making the reason for the action intrinsic (McClintic-Gilbert et al., 2013). Therefore, one can reasonably assume surface learning strategies may contribute to both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators.

Superficial strategies rarely impact GPA and exam performance; they include activities such as copying others’ work, guessing, completing the easy parts of an assignment and turning in work without checking it over (McClintic-Gilbert et al., 2013). Superficial strategies are techniques students use when they want to complete their work but may not be invested in learning or elevated levels of achievement (McClintic-Gilbert, et al., 2013). McClintic-Gilbert et al. (2013) asserted it is expected superficial learning strategies to be positively related to extrinsic motivation because students who embrace challenging work seem unlikely to copy others’ work or blindly guess at answers. Based on my professional experience and classroom observations, participation in superficial strategies is for the pure sake of pleasing others and is entirely extrinsic.

**Personal Success Criteria: Goal Setting and Self-Efficacy**

Paulino et al. conducted research around the topic of personal success criteria. They said,

Motivation is the internal circumstance that both encourages and focuses on goal-oriented behavior, thus cognitive determinants of motivation must be considered. When students are convinced that their learning task is important, interesting, and useful, they are more willing to make an effort and persist longer towards
finishing the task. Students must consider school tasks as valuable for the achievement of personal plans, otherwise, their motivation to engage in a process of self-regulated learning will most likely decrease. There are several hypotheses as to why students perceive school to be worthless for their future, including low perceptions of personal competence that may influence educational aspirations. Another widespread problem relates to gaps in the establishment of personal goals that strengthen students’ relationship with schools. (2017, p. 198)

Students set goals for themselves that will determine their school performance, though the path to achieving the goals may vary from student to student and year to year. Students typically set two types of goals: mastery goals and performance goals. “Mastery goals are related to the learning process and the challenge for gaining expertise. Performance goals are associated with ego orientations, seeking, and maintaining a positive image of oneself, skills and self-worth” (Paulino et al., 2017, p. 199). Some students engage in and interact with their goals, while others avoid them. Paulino et al. assign the terms performance approach goals and performance avoidance goals, respectively, to these actions. “Performance approach goals imply engagement in achievement tasks for performance reasons, whereas performance avoidance goals concern disengagement in order to avoid being considered less intelligent” (Paulino et al., 2017, p. 199).

The belief that people have about their own abilities to succeed in certain situations is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy affects how people approach goals, tasks, and challenges. “The beliefs that people have about their abilities and the consequences of their efforts determine the cognitive process, aside from motivational and emotional
functioning” (Paulino et al., 2017, p. 199). To comprehend students’ motivation to achieve, it is imperative to understand how students see themselves, project their goals, and exert effort towards meeting said goals. Students face or deflect away from their goals differently; some are able to convince themselves to forge ahead because they want to learn more or become better learners. Perhaps students are able to recall the reason they wanted to succeed at the goal in the first place. On the other hand, students who have low levels of confidence assume they will never be successful. . . no matter what. The former students eagerly seek assistance when needed while the latter sink inward and avoid seeking the necessary help, appearing to be completely unmotivated to learn.

Help-seeking allows students to re-connect and engage in academic activities when they face trouble. Highly engaged students seek help intuitively while others avoid or conceal the fact that they need help. Concealment prohibits students from continuing to work on a given task, ultimately eroding engagement with learning activities over time (Marchand & Skinner, 2007). The assumption is that help-seeking arises from interest and enthusiasm, or the desire to participate in the learning activity. If the help-seeking, however, is motivated by anxiety, this may eventually interfere with the desire to participate and learn. Because concealment is often identified with anxiety, it is safe to assume this anxiety may reflect the desire to protect one’s ego from public displays of shortcomings and misunderstandings (Marchand & Skinner, 2007).

A Portland State University research study by Marchand and Skinner (2007) indicated students who sought help at high levels early in the year became even more engaged as the year progressed. Children who relied more on concealment in the fall became even more disaffected over the course of the school year. Further analyses
depicted concealment as a strong predictor of decreases in engagement, motivation, and performance over time.

Understanding help-seeking and concealment contributed to the subject of student motivation and focus as it provided an additional perspective into what affects or disaffects adolescents and their approach to goal setting, motivation, and cognition when they encounter challenges and difficulties in the academic environment (Marchand & Skinner, 2007). Perhaps what the business of education calls for is a global motivation orientation for learning, combining achievement goals, self-efficacy expectations, and task value beliefs (Paulino et al., 2017).

**Student-Teacher Relationships**

Students spend on average 40 hours per week with teachers, often interacting with their teachers more than their families. In their 2014 article, published in the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Education*, Jasmi and Hin suggested five interconnected themes in the student-teacher relationship that directly influenced the participants’ level of academic motivation. The five identified themes were care, support, trust, approachability, and expectations.

In the study conducted by Jasmi and Hin (2014), research participants mentioned they felt it was important for students to ensure they maintained good relationships with the teachers, especially the caring teachers’ classes. The participants strongly believed that when the teacher was not happy with the class, they would not teach the class wholeheartedly. Student participants indicated they could tell when teachers were not invested in them, and they found it more motivating and rewarding when their teachers cared. As a result, the students made more of an effort to keep a good relationship with
the teachers who cared. “The findings of this study also suggest that teacher support increased students’ academic motivation. The participants stressed that the teachers’ support, especially in academic tasks, kept them interested in completing the task, while the lack of support often had the reverse effect” (Jasmi & Hin, 2014, p. 80). Additionally, the research findings suggested that reluctant learners were more motivated to learn from teachers who supported them and had a genuine interest in wanting them to succeed.

Jasmi and Hin (2014) suggested trust is the ultimate pillar of the student-teacher relationship. The authors asserted trust makes students feel safe to try and to learn. Trust is translated into motivation to engage in class and complete tasks the teacher assigns. Student-teacher trust is built over time based on interactions inside and outside of the classroom. Teacher expectations also contribute to student levels of motivation. High teacher expectations increased academic motivation when students felt the teacher cared for and supported them.

**Social-Emotional Supports**

In Australia, researchers Dix et al. (2012) investigated 260 schools employing the whole-school mental health promotion initiative, KidsMatter, across a two-year period. Schools that implemented KidsMatter improved their standardized assessment scores at an equivalent of 6 months’ additional schooling. Dix et al. (2012) found that most teachers agreed that students who are socially and emotionally competent learn more. “It is well established in literature that adolescents who experience mental health concerns during secondary school are at an educational disadvantage” (Allen et al., 2017, p. 34). Allen et al. also suggested social and emotional learning (SEL) programs were
significantly and positively associated with higher levels of achievement, potentially increasing academic achievement by as much as 11%.

The Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 global pandemic shifted the educational paradigm in the United States almost overnight; the traditional classroom was replaced by a virtual one. Tan, 2021 conducted a research study on a combination of middle and high school student groups. The 2020 research findings on the impact of COVID-19 on student motivation, community of inquiry, and learning performance indicated during the COVID-19 pandemic, students lost motivation and learning performance using online learning methods. “With the imposing of restricted movement or movement control order by respective authorities, students are unable to attend classes in their normal face-to-face format. In the meantime, teaching faculty must quickly make changes to the delivery mode from traditional teaching methods to e-learning or online learning. Either method has caused an enormous impact on the teaching and learning process” (Tan, 2021, p. 308).

In March 2020, our nation was impacted by the global pandemic: COVID-19. Students had to learn overnight to take classes online and engage with teachers and classmates virtually. The pandemic created a learning crisis among the nation’s students who were already identified as chronically disengaged. As an education professional, I observed the motivation chasm widen even further for this subpopulation of students as they were impacted by lack of resources, access, and opportunity. Based on the analysis of Tan’s research, students were very happy and satisfied with their learning and highly motivated in their study prior to the movement control order enacted as a result of the
COVID-19 pandemic. Most of them agreed that social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence existed and helped students to cope well in their studies. Unfortunately, due to the movement control order (restrictions on assembly travel, movement, and mandated business closures) and the impact of the global pandemic, students’ learning styles had to change and many of them found themselves having difficulty concentrating, lacking social interactions, lacking motivation, and in need of timely feedback from their teachers through online learning. Subsequently, learning performance declined, and students were stressed with their studies (Tan, 2021).

According to self-determination theory, student engagement in school is influenced by the degree to which they perceive that the school context meets their psychological needs (Zaccoletti et al., 2020). Home confinement, school closures, and distance learning may have threatened the satisfaction of competence, autonomy, and relatedness needs, thereby hindering students’ academic motivation (Zaccoletti et al., 2020). Students need clear tasks, feedback, deadlines, individualized support, and activities with appropriate levels of difficulty. Zaccoletti et al. suggested the situation of uncertainty, at times, without clear instructions and expectations from teachers, led to the need for competence not being fulfilled and student motivation being lost. Moreover, teachers had fewer opportunities to become aware of individual students’ emotional and academic difficulties. This may have further impacted students’ perceptions of competence and declining levels of motivation (Zaccoletti et al., 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic students rapidly had to become more autonomous in organizing their time and completing tasks assigned by teachers. Younger children may have had more difficulty managing themselves and a more substantial need
for support from parents, who had diverse levels of preparedness and availability to assist their children in school matters. While the satisfaction of the need for autonomy is fundamental to promoting intrinsic motivation, it is important to underline that the ability to self-manage develops over time. Therefore, younger students may not have fully developed this ability. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that younger students are more likely to be affected by contextual factors (Sameroff, 2021). Older students’ self-regulation strategies are more developed, which probably allowed them to cope more adaptively with the emergency and to preserve - albeit to a limited extent - their academic motivation.

Lastly, during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, students’ opportunities to interact directly with teachers and peers were drastically reduced, resulting in decreases in connectedness. In this regard, it has been widely demonstrated that the need for relatedness is likely to occur when teachers and peers create supportive relationships. Indeed, teacher support has been positively related to indicators of behavioral engagement, including higher participation in school activities, academic motivation, and fewer disruptive behaviors (Bong et al., 2014).

Conclusion

My review of literature focused on effective motivational supports and the identification of individual student motivational influences in order to provide students with maximized learning, engagement and achievement outcomes at the secondary level. Academic success depends on a student’s motivation to learn especially as students get older and often exhibit a decline in school grades, self-esteem, and academic competency
beliefs. The next chapter will define my research methodology and data analysis structure.
Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I discussed the methods used in this investigation and analysis of student focus, drive, and motivation. The overarching goal was to provide the reader with the overall research design, data collection methods, and findings. I defined my research questions and explained the limitations of the study.

Research Design Overview

The purpose of my study was to delve into issues of student achievement at the school under study and the relative effects of low levels of student focus, drive, and motivation. The impetus for this research was to improve student focus, drive, and motivation in middle and high school. Research by Usher and Kober (2012) asserted motivation is a central part of the student educational experience, but education reform has focused more on accountability, standards, testing, teacher quality, and school management than on the student motivation crisis. In this developmental evaluation, I sought to transform the process, systems, and student outcomes in the organization under study. This work required adapting altering tactics to achieve the desired outcome. Developmental evaluation involves adapting to changing circumstances and altering tactics based on emergent conditions (Patton, 2008). “Developmental evaluation is designed to be congruent with and nurture developmental, emergent, innovative, and transformative processes” (Patton, 2008, p. 137).

I began to research student focus, drive, and motivation as a middle school teacher. Through my research, I concluded that students were intrinsically motivated by their own desire to succeed but there were aspects of schooling that impacted students’ ability to be intrinsically motivated. It was my hypothesis that student-teacher
relationships, emphasis on establishing success criteria, and the inclusion of mindfulness will increase levels of intrinsic motivation and have a positive impact on student achievement. In this study, I sought to provide a prescription to cure the anemic posture of focus, drive, and motivation in school culture, climate, and performance. I expected the findings of this research to provide aid to school and district leaders for generations to come while increasing the capacity and value of human outputs to the community.

**Participants**

There were three major stakeholder groups in this program evaluation: teachers, parents, and alumni. The participants included 15 teachers, 7 parents, and 12 alumni. Participants were ages 18-65 of all genders. I chose the participant groups because they were the prominent stakeholders involved and impacted by this study. I invited participants to participate in the survey via email, text, and social media platforms. I explained the purpose of the research study and survey to the invited participants. I advised participants that the survey was completely voluntary; there would be no adverse consequences for individuals who elected not to participate in the survey. I collected consent forms prior to the start of the survey.

**Data Gathering Techniques**

I gathered data from surveys. Surveys allowed me to quickly gather data from groups of participants including teachers, parents, and alumni (Appendix A, B, and C). The survey administration was efficiently presented to participants electronically. I emailed the consent form and the survey link. Participants completed the survey via Google Forms. I captured anonymous responses and I stored and sorted them electronically.
Research Questions

I intended to use the data I gathered to provide information relevant to my guiding research questions:

- What impact does mindfulness have on student motivation?
- How do personal success criteria impact student motivation?
- How do student-teacher relationships impact student motivation?
- What factors must exist for students to be motivated?
- How has the global COVID-19 pandemic impacted student motivation levels?

Data Analysis Techniques

I collected data in qualitative and quantitative forms to measure the success of the programs prescribed to the cohort of students under study. Programs included: a social-emotional/mindfulness learning curriculum, implementation of personal success criteria using Covey’s 7 Habits of Highly Successful Teens (2014), and the Love our Students campaign centered around creating strong teacher-student relationships. I conducted ongoing observations as to the overall effect of the programs on the student group. Open-ended surveys were distributed at the conclusion of the research project.

Due to the untimeliness of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the quantitative and qualitative data I was able to gather was minimal. I derived the quantitative data collection from internal tracking mechanisms for office and discipline referrals. Qualitative data came from parent, teacher, and alumni open-ended questionnaires.

Ethical Considerations

I chose the participants for this study from the cohort of teachers and parents who were in direct support or contact with the students involved. I invited all teachers on staff
to participate along with the parents and guardians of the students. There were no anticipated risks to participants in this program evaluation beyond that of everyday life. I provided a consent form for each participant for the surveys. Names and identifying information were not collected. I did not interact with minors under age 18; therefore, no assent was needed. Additional ethical considerations included:

- Beneficence - Do not harm
- Confidentiality and anonymity
- Non-bias in interpretation and communication of results

Limitations

The research study was impacted in March of 2020 due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional school was replaced by remote learning and instruction. Standardized assessments were canceled by the states, and the educational landscape as we knew it was changed; there were no standardized data to collect beyond the spring testing season of 2019. I was unable to see the cohorts of students matriculate through the program as originally designed. Consequently, remote learning became a limitation for this study.

The virtual classroom posed unintended consequences and exacerbated the motivational crisis. The need for personal success criteria became more evident while the lack of student-teacher contact made sustaining meaningful relationships increasingly more difficult. Moreover, behavior tracking was no longer possible or meaningful to the study. Due to the abrupt nature of the end of the school year, the ability to collect data was limited and in the case of state assessments, data were not available. Survey participation was extremely low because it was difficult to contact parents, teachers, and
alumni once school was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic; however, 15 teachers, 12 alumni, and 7 parents participated in the survey.

The study was limited due to the small size of the student population. Over the duration of the research period, I included extant data from 200 students in middle school and 250 students in high school. The unique nature of the charter school environment was another possible limitation of the study. Unlike the traditional school district, charter schools attract a specific set of students and parents depending on the unique programs offered by the charter school. Parents and students are typically more invested in schooling due to the specific academic purpose of the charter school than they might be in a traditional public school. Charter schools are governed by an independent governing board that oversees school operations, and compliance, and is responsible for all legal obligations.

**Conclusion**

My overarching goal for this research study was to improve student achievement among middle and high school students. My plan was to emphasize the importance of relationships, establish student success criteria, and include mindfulness to improve personal satisfaction and student learning outcomes. The expected outcome was that the implementation of these strategies would serve as a remedy that drives student learning outcomes and increases external and internal stakeholder engagement and satisfaction. I discussed the results of the research in the next chapter.
Chapter Four: Results

In this chapter, I discussed the state of the school under study at the onset of this research investigation. I painted the picture of the current assets and challenges as they related to the problem of student focus, drive, and motivation. The contexts deeply impacted the work of the organization and included external factors that appeared to be beyond one’s control such as politics, economics, and cultural factors. Culture shaped the behavior in the school and included internal organizational patterns and shared assumptions. The conditions section of this chapter provides more tangible insight into internal structural, cultural, economic, and symbolic factors that shaped how the organization operated. I discussed the competencies and skills of school leaders, teachers, and staff prior to going beyond the data to extrapolate the interpretations and judgments based on the research.

Contexts

All too often, educators have found that students in secondary populations lack the motivation and drive to achieve academic success. “Parent involvement is a large key to unlocking student motivation and helping students to be as successful as possible by offering the support and guidance needed for their educational journey to be a successful one” (Sorbo, 2020, p. 4). The element of parent involvement may appear beyond the school’s control, but it is worth the attention of school officials to find ways to invest in parents. Parent involvement deeply impacts the work educators do at the school, organization, local, state, and national levels.

School leaders and faculty encourage parents in elementary schools to take an active role in their child’s education. This expectation wanes as children get older and
transition into middle and high school. School leaders and educators in general traditionally do less to engage and involve parents in middle and high school and the children are also not as fond of their parents being around as much as they were in elementary school. Researchers such as Lloyd-Smith and Baron (2010), Hill (2018), and Simon (2001) have invested decades of work on the impact of parent involvement at the elementary and middle school levels. Researchers explored the anemic posture of student motivation at secondary levels and are learning students at the high school level also require the same support and involvement from parents and family members to continue to be successful in school (Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010). Research shows that parent involvement tends to decrease as students get older, but the need for their involvement does not decrease. Simon (2001) also mentioned parent involvement at the high school level has a significant impact on many aspects of a student’s success, including behavior, attendance, and standardized test scores.

Parents’ at-home support of school deeply impacts the motivation and performance of middle and high school students. The home environment provides the foundation for learning and is an element of the student's life that can affect grades. Providing opportunities to learn outside of school helps facilitate student success in the school environment. Education success has been positively impacted by opportunities for children to learn at home such as parents reading to their children, taking them on trips to the library, and encouraging play with letters and numbers (Hill, 2018). As students get older, parents do not do as much to provide learning opportunities outside of school. Consequently, students are not as motivated to learn beyond the classroom as they once were in elementary grades.
Motivation involves the student's own beliefs about his skill level and what the results will be if he tries a new task, notes the Arkansas State Parental Information and Resource Center. Parental expectations and communication about the value of learning and the child's skills have a powerful effect on the child's motivation to learn. (Hill, 2018, para. 4)

School administrators tell teachers to make learning meaningful by making connections to the real world, life experiences, or to other texts. However, the curriculum itself doesn’t always do an excellent job of making learning relevant for middle and high school students. Students in my study expressed a lack of motivation to learn material that is not relevant to them now or in the future. Preparing a curriculum to be connected with the real world can support student participation, motivation, and understanding of the academic subjects, as well as preparing them for adult life (Alismail & McGuire, 2015). As I explore the motivational levels of middle and high school students, the organization under study will benefit from the data collected from alumni and parents relative to the topic of curriculum impact on motivational levels.

The data collected as a result of my study revealed the school under study suffered from a decline in parental support as students got older. Parents stated they struggled with their aging children not wanting the parents to be as involved at school as they did when the children were in elementary school. Other parents suggested the common assumption is as students age, parents should gradually release some of their responsibility for schooling to their children. A small percentage of parents believed their role in school should increase as students age. Consequently, alumni surveys revealed
varying degrees of at-home support and opportunities to engage in learning outside of the school setting.

Alumni asserted they did not find value in most of what they learned in school; they found it irrelevant to their current life and life in the future. They found learning most relevant when it was directly connected to current, real-world situations, careers, and events. They commented they would benefit more from learning how to get a job, create a resume, and other life skills. They were concerned with filling out college applications, managing finances, and how to survive in college and the real world.

**Culture**

The vision of the school under study was to offer a system of learning that taught to the learning modality of every student using Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligence approach as a way to maximize student motivation (Marenus, 2020). The school leaders’ intention was to use the curricula as a catalyst to formulate action plans and focus differentiation efforts. School administrators expected the instructional experience at the school under study to include the use of students’ natural strengths to drive instructional practices and bridge the gaps in learning and development, ensuring optimal student success.

School culture is the patterns, shared assumptions, and interpretations that shape behavior within an organization (Wagner et al., 2006). Positive school culture promotes safety and security and provides an environment conducive to learning, growth, and development. Schools set out with a vision for school culture designed to achieve these things, but the culture is the reality of what is actually happening on campus (Wagner et
al., 2006). The findings of my research study revealed a culture of excuses, where teachers were not always willing to give 100% every day.

At the school under study, the message educators sent to parents and students was one of elevated expectations. However, the message that was modeled on campus was inherently one of varying expectations and standards. When surveyed, high school teachers indicated the school failed to invest in necessary student programs and services to support the instructional model. Middle and high school teachers asserted they were not fairly compensated for the amount of work required; this led to teachers not being fully invested in giving 100% every day. Student expectations were high while student accountability was low.

The expectation set forth by school leaders for teachers was to not “fail” students. As a result, students were given an abundance of grace and opportunities to turn in late work and make up assessments where students scored below passing. Consequently, there was no sense of urgency for students to meet deadlines or try their best on their first assessment attempts. One teacher stated, “Students around here know we have to accept their late work and give them chances to re-do tests when they don’t pass the first time.” Teachers expressed frustration with this expectation and said the expectation was not one of high expectations; high school student surveys revealed the same sentiment. Student comments indicated they were not motivated to do their best because they knew they would have the chances to do assignments and assessments over. While the school faculty, staff, and leaders said the expectation was high, students tended to disagree. Alumni indicated they liked the chance to make up the work late or improve test scores, but they would try harder initially if the expectation were higher.
Unspoken assumptions were also in play. Advancement opportunities were limited and provided to selected individuals regardless of qualifications. Politics influenced who was selected for Governing Board positions and decision outcomes. The school was primarily operated as a business with little consideration for student needs. Though school administrators required parents to be engaged and complete 20 volunteer hours per year per child, parent engagement was 40% on average in high school and 65% in middle school. Students were highly social and highly apathetic; 75% of alumni surveyed stated they did not find the curriculum relevant. As a result, classroom disruptions in 2017 were at an all-time high averaging five major disruptions to the learning environment per day.

In the first year of this study, 2017, 85% of the students in high school were two years or more below grade level in reading and math. Among the student population, 70% had a history of chronic behavior problems and extensive disciplinary records. While the high school boasted its focus on college and career preparation, the feeling on campus was contrary. Teachers asserted they felt like they were working at an alternative education school for students with chronic behavior problems, a history of poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and even lower levels of motivation.

Parents were generally satisfied with the school culture and academic model (89% average parent satisfaction rate). Among parents, 25% stated their child was able to make the honor roll and feel successful for the first time in their educational career. Parents expressed relief that teachers made their children feel important and took the time to build relationships before passing judgment. Alumni surveys indicated that 92% of respondents felt like their teachers and administrators genuinely cared about them. The
implementation of a social-emotional learning curriculum in 2019 prompted a decrease in student behavior referrals by 49% over the previous years.

**Conditions**

The school under study was an independent group of charter schools in a suburban community whose demographics consisted of 68% white, 16% black, and approximately 12% other races. The demographics of the school had changed since its inception. The demographic composition was 35% of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) but had shifted over time to approximately 70% FRL. The once white majority had since become Hispanic and Black, respectively. The community had grown significantly in the 10 years prior to my study from 66.3 thousand people to 91.2 thousand people (World Population Review, 2018).

The school’s mission was dedicated to the well-being and educational success of every child. Its activities were directed toward student success based on Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory (Marenus, 2020). The foundational system of learning and the theory of their educational program was taught through the specific learning modality of each student. The Multiple Intelligences Developmental Assessment Scale was used to “develop Individual Development and Education Plans that serve as the beginning dialogue that maximizes motivation, allows the formation of action plans to focus efforts and for the most effective use of the curricula for the student” (Citation withheld to protect confidentiality).

The school under study was governed by a Governing Board consisting of at least four elected members. The governing board was legally liable for school policies. The role of the Governing Board was to oversee the quality of school programs, ensure proper
use of public and philanthropic funds, and oversee the fulfillment of public obligations and the conditions of the school’s charter. Members of the board were unpaid volunteers from within the school or local community. Three school campuses were managed by the district staff comprised of a superintendent, school compliance officer, human resources manager, a two-person Information Technology (IT) department, finance manager, and a legal officer. The district staff once included one additional IT person, a director of staff engagement, a director of procurement, and an athletic director. Budget cuts due to lower-than-expected enrollment and the closure of a campus resulted in the dissolution of the aforementioned district positions (Citation withheld to protect confidentiality).

There was a problem-solving leadership team to address campus and organizational concerns. The Problem-solving leadership team was comprised of grade team leaders, teachers, parents, assistant principals, and the campus principal. This group met monthly for a tactical meeting aimed at solving campus-based problems. As determined by this committee, the conditions contributing to the anemic posture of motivation at the school under study were a lack of emphasis on teacher-student relationships, a historical lack of support for the social-emotional needs of high school students, and the absence of personal success criteria for students in middle and high school. Additionally, parent engagement and at-home opportunities for learning were drastically less than in the elementary school years. The organizational culture and politics placed business functions as the top priority rather than student needs, causing teachers to feel unsupported, under-paid, and unmotivated.
Competencies

Competencies are the various skills needed to carry out change in an organization. Hard competencies include actual skills and knowledge required to execute specific tasks while soft competencies may be leadership and communication styles, personal affects, and dispositions. Both hard and soft competencies exist in organizations and must be examined when considering long-term, sustainable change (Wagner et al., 2006).

Leaders in the school under study lacked leadership competency. Leadership competency is an essential skill necessary to carry out change in an organization. The transformational leader shares a vision that is compelling enough that people will apply their best thinking and efforts to figure it out, regardless of the obstacles and opposition (Hyatt, 2020). Transformational leadership requires the capacity to inspire positive change in those who follow as sustainable change is a function of a shared value system, not a totalitarian authority. The transformational leader is involved in the process of change while helping all members of the team to be successful (Hyatt, 2020).

“Children don’t learn from people they don’t like” (Pierson, 2013, 1:41 ).

Likewise, adults do not feel obligated to give 100% every day to leaders whom they do not like. When considering competencies necessary to sustain long-term change, focusing on relationships as a component of change is critical. Love and belonging are among the basic physiological needs by which humans survive. Therefore, it is important to build the school culture on the importance of love and belonging, effective relationships for children and adults, and trust. When surveyed, 99% of teachers, alumni, and parents at the school under study, agreed that interpersonal relationships directly impacted student motivation. In fact, a parent agreed with Rita Pierson (2013) asserting her children did
not perform their best in the classes of the teachers they did not like. Consequently, the change leader must invest time and money into staff development and team-building initiatives focused on building and sustaining peer and student relationships.

Cultural competency is required to fully engage every stakeholder in the change initiative with equity and inclusion. It is a model for shifting the culture of the school organization; it is a model for individual transformation and organizational change (Lindsey, 2009). Teachers at the school under study received very little if any cultural competency professional development. The lack of cultural competency often impedes teachers’ ability to interact with and build relationships with students they do not understand or identify with. Leaders must possess a level of cultural proficiency that prompts them to address issues that emerge when cultural differences are not valued (Lindsey, 2009). “Cultural proficiency is to be applied to both organizational practices and individual behavior” (Lindsey, 2009, p. 4).

Lindsey suggested that most teachers agreed that students who are socially and emotionally competent learn more (2009). Research by Lindsey also asserted that adolescents who experience mental health concerns in the secondary years are at an educational disadvantage. Social-emotional learning programs are proven to positively impact student motivation and levels of achievement, potentially increasing student academic achievement. The need for a social-emotional curriculum in secondary education is critical. Lack of such competency impacts the conditions for effective campus level and system-wide change.

Students in secondary populations may lack the motivation and drive to achieve academic success. The competencies needed to improve the motivation and drive in the
school under study were the ability to create and sustain relationships, cultural proficiency, and awareness of the impact social-emotional and mental health has on academic achievement. Teachers also needed to learn how to connect the curriculum to students’ current reality. Alumni perception at the school under study was the content taught in the academic curriculum was irrelevant and therefore they were not always motivated to learn the content.

**Interpretation**

Among the alumni responses to the survey question about feeling unmotivated in the past time in their middle and high school experience, 66.7% of respondents indicated they were unmotivated some of the time. Among the alumni of the school, 8.3% claimed they were unmotivated all of the time, while 25% of the alumni reported never being unmotivated (Figure 1). According to alumni surveyed, factors that contributed to their amotivation included teachers and school leaders who were not invested in their well-being. Alumni indicated they didn’t feel accepted or that they were good enough; classes were boring; they were tired or in a bad mood or did not have anyone to motivate them. Alumni also reported feeling unmotivated when they could not figure out something. When asked what motivated them, alumni responses were relatively simple and straightforward: success, friends and peers, parents, and caring school staff. They also cited recognition, working towards and achieving goals, and success in college and career as motivators.
Figure 1

*Survey Question One: In Middle and/or in High School, Did You Feel Unmotivated all or Some of the Time?*

Note. N = 12 students

Alumni did not state grades motivated them, although 90% of alumni responses indicated grades were important. The remaining 10% of alumni were asked why grades were not important (Figure 2), and one alumnus asserted,

To me I think grades really didn’t prove anything but if you did the work that was assigned or not. Grades never really told you how intelligent or unintelligent [you were]. Grades to me are really just numbers and letters that are used to consider if you move on to the next grade or not.

Another alumnus said,

If I seem not to get along with my teacher, I just don’t feel comfortable in the classroom, and I won’t want to continue in the same class. When I get along with my teacher I seem to do very well and get good grades in that specific class.
Middle and high school alumni of the school under study asserted relationships with teachers impacted their level of motivation. An alumnus said,

I felt more motivated in classes which the teacher had set up a relationship knowing that they are there for us, in classes where that wasn’t established, I did feel less motivated and kinda [sic] wanted to leave the class.

Most alumni (90.9%) claimed teacher relationships matter when it comes to motivation while 9.1% chose the opposite: teacher relationships do not matter (Figure 3). Even those alumni who said relationships did not affect their level of motivation had comments that established the importance of teacher-student relationships.
Preparing a curriculum to relate to the real world can support student participation, motivation, and understanding of the academic subjects, as well as preparing them for adult life (Alismail & McGuire, 2015). I asked alumni if the school’s curriculum impacted their level of motivation. I received varying responses to this question. Among the alumni who responded, 41.7% said yes, the curriculum impacted their level of performance and 33.3% said no; the remaining 25% of alumni said maybe (Figure 4). “The curriculum didn’t really affect my motivation but instead my understanding of whatever it is I was learning about . . .,” said one alumnus. Another alumnus added,

I think that the curriculum wasn’t really a big impact. I think that it was the way the curriculum was taught. Some of the teachers I had in the past would teach the most boring subjects that would literally make me fall asleep, but others could
teach that same subject and I guarantee you they would know how to keep a student entertained and still have a student ready to come in the next day asking, “What’s on the agenda?”

**Figure 4**

*Survey Question Four: Do You Think the Curriculum Taught in School has an Impact on Your Motivation to Learn?*

[Diagram showing survey results]

*Note.* N = 12 students

COVID-19 in many ways negatively impacted student motivation levels. In the spring of 2020, when the schools initially went to online learning, there was limited support for all stakeholders. Teachers were struggling to understand the platform to share content, communication techniques in a virtual setting, and how to engage students in a virtual setting. Parents were unsure of their expectations and students were unfortunately caught in the middle. Students soon found out that there would be no state testing that spring and all students would be “passed on” to the next grade. Motivation was at an all-time low.

Fast forward to school years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Students were severely challenged academically and struggled with working to achieve goals, whether academic
or behavioral. Their motivation was almost non-existent, as for the past couple of years school and classroom expectations had been at an all-time low. One teacher survey participant said, “The students that did not feel invested in the classroom, crashed and burned online.” The COVID-19 pandemic completely hindered and unmotivated most students. The willingness to learn and to pursue goals was not as noticeable or mentioned. The pandemic shifted the dynamic since there was no in-person interaction.

Students were forced to continue school at home and try to adapt to their way of life and education all within a week. Those home environments were not always the best and school had often been the escape for them, but now they no longer had school as an escape, so motivation declined from not being in a more positive environment. Ultimately, the onset of virtual learning disconnected the student from the teacher. Despite every effort to retain a sense of normalcy, students struggled to maintain connections with teachers who had been able to encourage them between classes and create routines for them. Communication between teachers and students was reduced to the impersonal nature of a text message. This caused students to withdraw and feel unseen. Feeling that they no longer held a valuable role and were unable to identify how they could continue with their own plans, students lost motivation to complete assignments, show up for class, grow relationships, or maintain personal hygiene.

Interestingly, when I asked parents how the onset of virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their child's level of motivation, their responses were different than the responses of teachers and alumni. Of the parents surveyed, 50% said their children did not do well in the virtual environment because they were isolated from their peers and lacked consistent academic support from teachers. Of the parents who
responded to the survey, 33% reported their child thrived in virtual learning while 17% said virtual learning had no impact. One parent said,

   My daughter thrived in virtual learning. She was her best self. She didn’t feel the stress and anxiety of the social impact at school. She was able to stay in touch with her circle of friends. Educationally, she liked working at her own pace and taking ownership of what her day-to-day would look like.

   The results of my research study suggested the physiological need for love and belonging are at the heart of what motivates or demotivates students in middle and high school. When surveyed, alumni, parents, and teachers all agreed students are motivated to work hardest when they know teachers care. When asked what factors must exist for a student to be motivated, teachers cited intangible needs like care, safety, and trust. Parents shared similar needs but added a few additional factors that must be present for a student to be motivated. Among the additional needs listed, parents said teachers must be motivated, knowledgeable, and engaging. One parent said,

   Students need to interact with more positive people who look like them to be motivated. There must be engagement by the teacher on a genuine level, along with materials being presented in more ways than just a book or steady talking. A sense of pride must also be established within the child and an actual desire to learn more. Need to create a balance between things they need to or must learn with things they want to learn.

   A teacher said,

   A strong student-teacher relationship encourages students to take risks and work harder. The student finds the need to make that teacher proud. An underdeveloped
student-teacher relationship may leave a student to feel hopeless during class and possibly alone. The teacher benefits from a positive relationship by being able to trust students and having leverage to maintain a disciplined classroom.

When parents were asked, if teachers having a relationship with students is important to student motivation, 100% of respondents said yes. A parent who was a former teacher asserted,

As a former teacher, I couldn’t be effective unless I had a form of relationship with students. I felt because I prioritized this, I have saved lives. I hope my daughter can have a teacher at school she could confide with in case it’s dealing with bullying or a friend going through something.

Among the parents who were surveyed, 100% agreed their child’s level of motivation was highest with teachers who had built relationships with their students. A parent said,

She does her best in classes with teachers with whom she has bonded. They are more prone to work with her, talk to her more, explain things better. She enjoys going to their classes more because she actually likes the teacher, despite not liking school in general. She also doesn't want to disappoint them because she likes them.

Based on my professional experience and observations, establishing personal success criteria helps teens to become the best, most productive versions of themselves. As students recognize that behavior and outcomes are a product of their choices, they are better equipped to navigate through tough issues, relationships, and life-changing decisions. The success criteria are expected to boost motivation and drive, thereby directly impacting learning outcomes. When I asked teachers what they see as the impact
of establishing personal success criteria, one teacher asserted,

It would be beneficial. Students would be able to measure their own success and see what their strengths and opportunities are to improve or continue them. It would help their morale and be a boost of confidence when they feel like they haven’t achieved much academically. Students are able to choose what is necessary for their lives. It [personal success criteria] equips them with the knowledge to make positive decisions, to focus on what will be of value to them, and create a plan to reach their goals.

I asked teachers if they would recommend establishing personal success criteria as a mandated part of school programming. Of the teachers surveyed, 83.4% said they would recommend personal success criteria to be a mandated part of school programming; 33.3% strongly agree and 46.7% agreed with the recommendation. Among teachers who participated in the survey, 8.3% of respondents strongly disagreed that mindfulness should be a part of school programming while 8.3% of respondents were neutral (Figure 5). The students at the school under study engaged in a study of personal success criteria. Students read *7 Habits of Highly Successful Teens* by Sean Covey (2014) and were challenged to implement the seven habits in their daily lives. The school leaders adopted the initiative requiring students to use the seven habits at school; teachers and school leaders reminded students of the seven habits daily in interactions and in practice. Though the data were inconclusive, there was a notable improvement in students taking ownership of their academic performance, goal setting, and interactions with peers.
In my professional experience, I have observed mindfulness leads to high levels of self-awareness and self-confidence. Mindful students are more focused and more engaged. Mindfulness increases self-awareness and improves relationship skills, emotional management, and decision-making as the foundation for maximum student focus and concentration. Implementing mindfulness as a non-negotiable is expected to add to levels of academic performance and drive achievement goals. By determining what specific motivators most affect students’ willingness and eagerness to perform academically, teachers and school leaders will be better equipped to serve middle school populations, driving high levels of academic engagement and performance.

Extant data from 2018-2019 showed the school under study had 178 referrals (average 19 referrals per month) to the office with exactly 50% (89) of the referrals being for disruption/defiance/disrespect. As a result, school leaders purchased, and the faculty
implemented, a social-emotional curriculum centered around mindfulness for the 2019-2020 academic year. From August 2019 to March 2020, the number of disciplinary referrals decreased by 37% from approximately 19 referrals per month on average to an average of 12 referrals per month. I asked teachers at the school under study, “How do teaching mindfulness and personal success criteria impact students' motivation and overall academic outcomes?” One teacher responded,

Teaching mindfulness allows students to focus on those things that really matter. It gives them a chance to quiet the outside world and pay attention to self and things that they can control. Once they have received information about personal growth and have learned to focus on their emotions and desires, they are motivated to take action. Being aware of their reaction and emotions and receiving info about their personal success gives them the opportunity to create a plan, which drives their academic success.

When students learn mindfulness and social-emotional learning techniques, they can monitor and self-regulate their levels of motivation. As they do this their level of academic success improves. When students see measurable and attainable success and are conscious of their actions toward academic outcomes and goals, their mindfulness toward what is “right or wrong” and what needs to be done to be successful begins to expand. Their creativity even begins to flourish and provide them an outlet within a safe space.

**Judgments**

My primary research questions were:

- What impact does mindfulness have on student motivation?
- Do personal success criteria impact student motivation?
• How do student-teacher relationships impact student motivation?

• What factors must exist for students to be motivated?

• How has the global COVID-19 pandemic impacted student motivation levels?

The data analysis revealed mindfulness was a key factor in student motivation. After the implementation of the social-emotional curriculum in the fall of 2019, the number of disciplinary referrals decreased by 37% from approximately 19 referrals per month on average in 2018-19 to an average of 12 referrals per month in 2019-2020. Teachers reported, as a result, higher levels of engagement and motivation in the classroom and improved grades in classes. Teachers observed how the implementation of the social-emotional curriculum impacted their students. Teachers asserted that mindfulness helped students to develop personal awareness by supporting emotion management, reducing stress, and disciplining the mind. They noticed when minds were stressed it was difficult for students to focus or be motivated to work or learn. When students began to learn mindfulness and social-emotional learning techniques, they were better able to monitor and self-regulate their levels of motivation. As they did this, their levels of motivation and overall academic success improved.

My second research question was: Do personal success criteria impact student motivation? The data showed that personal success criteria had a significant impact on student motivation. Teachers at the school under study were surveyed and 83.4% of teachers would recommend establishing personal success criteria impactful enough to be a mandated part of school programming; 33.3% strongly agreed and 46.7% agreed with the recommendation. Of the teachers surveyed 8.3% of respondents strongly disagreed
that personal success criteria should be a part of school programming. The quantitative data suggested by establishing personal success criteria students were able to measure their own success and see what their strengths and opportunities were. Students were able to take an inventory of their habits and decide what habits they should continue and which of their habits were impeding their success. Personal success criteria helped students to be more mindful of their interactions with others, increased overall morale, and was a boost of confidence for those who struggled to be and feel successful academically.

When I asked parents, teachers, and alumni if teacher-student relationships had an impact on student motivation, 100% of all surveyed respondents said yes; teacher-student relationships have an impact on student motivation. An alumnus participant asserted,

Yes, I felt more motivated in classes in which the teacher had set up a relationship knowing that they are there for us. In classes where that wasn’t established, I did feel less motivated and kinda [sic] wanted to leave the class.

Another alumnus shared there were some teachers you could tell were only there for a paycheck and even just to have some level of authority over the students. According to survey data, there were times when the alumni reported they were ridiculed, embarrassed, and punished unreasonably for behavioral problems. Teachers and students were beneficiaries of weekly professional development targeted at student-teacher relationships. Alumni reported, that overall, they were motivated to do well in classes where they had strong relationships with their teachers.

My third research question was: What factors must exist for students to be motivated? When asked what factors must exist for a student to be motivated, teachers
cited intangible needs like care, safety, and trust. Parents said teachers must be motivated, knowledgeable, and engaging. One parent said students needed to interact with more positive people who looked like them to be motivated. Additionally, there must be engagement by the teacher on a genuine level. Alumni cited they were motivated by peers, family, and success. They also stated recognition and achieving goals motivated them. Alumni indicated they were not motivated by teachers who didn’t care, had boring classes and schoolwork, and when there was an absence of goals. The data did not suggest a single motivating factor; however, trends emerged providing a gateway into the complexities of student motivation. The factors that contributed to student motivation were largely intrinsic and met students’ basic physiological needs for love and belonging. These factors were care, safety, trust, success, peers/family, and goal setting. Success and recognition must be a part of the motivation equation.

The last of my research questions addressed the unanticipated COVID-19 pandemic that brought my research and school, as I knew it, to a halt. The question was: How has the global COVID-19 pandemic impacted student motivation levels? In many ways, COVID-19 negatively impacted student motivation levels. Interestingly, when I asked parents how the onset of virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their child's level of motivation, their responses were different than the responses of teachers and alumni. Parents were surveyed and 50% of respondents said their children did not do well in the virtual environment because they were isolated from their peers and lacked consistent academic support from teachers. The small sample size of 450 students in middle and high school was a possible limitation of this research, but the experience of the 50% of parents in this survey who said their child did not do well in the virtual
environment was consistent with the assertion of teachers and alumni of the school under study. At this time, there was no answer to the challenges COVID-19 unveiled. The research did, however, point to student need for supportive peer and teacher relationships.

**Recommendations**

The issue of what motivates and drives middle and high school students is one of consternation that plagues schools and educators across the country. This evaluation of motivation, focus, and drive at the school under study provided an overview of the foundational needs to address motivation and drive at the school level and organizational level. The quantitative and qualitative data showed the need for change based on feedback from three major stakeholder groups: alumni, teachers, and parents. The organizational leaders at the school under study are compelled to react to the findings of this evaluation to improve the anemic posture of student motivation at their schools.

When asked what factors must exist for a student to be motivated, teachers cited intangible needs like care, safety, and trust. Parents said teachers must be motivated, knowledgeable, and engaging. Alumni asserted they were not motivated to learn from teachers they did not like or with whom they did not have a relationship. My recommendations are practical and have been categorized in phases by areas of priority, responsibility, and feasibility.

**Phase I: Love our Students**

I recommend priority one is an organizational focus on building caring teacher-student relationships of trust as the data indicated this basic physiological need is an essential component of motivating students. Launch a *Love Our Students* campaign to unite all stakeholders in the relationship initiative. Align monthly professional
development sessions to the mission of building relationships with students. Professional development should focus on the findings in this evaluation and the urgent call to action. Sessions should address teaching teachers cultural competency and proficiency, de-escalation techniques, and restorative practices. I recommend quarterly surveys be conducted to monitor progress and identify areas of strength and opportunity. Leaders should be prepared to act on any areas of need.

Phase II: School Principals Implement Personal Success Criteria as a Part of School Culture

The data demonstrated personal success criteria had a significant impact on student motivation. When teachers responded to the survey, 83.4% said they considered establishing personal success criteria impactful enough to be a mandated part of school programming; 33.3% strongly agree and 46.7% agreed with the recommendation. To start, I recommend leaders and teachers engage in a book study of personal success criteria and plan for implementation, monitoring, and data collection. Sean Covey’s, The 7 Habits of Happy Kids (2008) and The 7 Habits of Highly Successful Teens (2014) provide an interactive, practical, and engaging framework for schools to introduce to students and parents and implement.

Phase III: Governing Board and School Leaders Adopt a Social-Emotional Curriculum That Includes Mindfulness

The data analysis revealed mindfulness is a crucial factor in student motivation. After the implementation of the social-emotional curriculum in the fall of 2019, the number of disciplinary referrals decreased by 37% from approximately 19 referrals per month on average in 2018-2019 to an average of 12 referrals per month in 2019-2020.
Teachers reported, as a result, higher levels of engagement and motivation in the classroom and improved grades in classes. Teachers observed how the implementation of the social-emotional curriculum impacted their students. *Move this World* (2021) and *Purpose Prep* (2012) are programs that address the social-emotional needs of students and teach students how to exercise mindfulness.

**Phase IV: The Problem-Solving Committee Addresses the Gaps in the System Exposed During the Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Teachers, alumni, and parents identified gaps in motivation due to the absence of interaction with teachers and peers and inconsistent academic supports and feedback from teachers. Though the qualitative data were limited, the quantitative data exposed a need for the gaps in online learning to be closed and the organization to develop a strategic virtual learning plan that addresses the social-emotional, relational, and academic needs of all learners, especially groups who were chronically disengaged during traditional, on-campus instruction. One teacher asserted, “The students that did not feel invested in the classroom, crashed and burned online.”

**Conclusion**

My evaluation of focus, drive, and motivation at the school under study answered my research questions. My findings suggested there is no silver bullet answer to addressing the anemic posture of motivation and drive in middle and high school, but there are practical answers and solutions that when applied can help to close the motivational gap in schools. Love and belonging are basic physiological needs that transfer into the classroom in the form of teacher-student relationships; when relationships are strong, students flourish. Personal success criteria are an important life skill and have demonstrably yielded increases in student motivational levels. Social-
emotional health and mindfulness resulted in fewer disciplinary infractions as students learned self-coping mechanisms and how to manage their emotions proactively and positively and interact with peers in a healthy manner. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed gaps in America’s educational landscape; school leaders at the school under study must take action to close the gaps by developing a strategic virtual learning plan that addresses the social-emotional, relational, and academic needs of all learners, especially groups who were chronically disengaged during traditional, on-campus instruction.
Chapter Five: To-Be Framework

The issue of student motivation in middle and high school has been an ongoing concern within the institution under study for years. Though the levels of motivation ebb and flow, the perplexing dilemma has yet to be resolved. What is it that impacts adolescent minds that causes students who were once passionate about school to become demotivated and uninterested? Castillas et al. (2012) examined the differential effects of prior academic achievement, psychosocial, behavioral, demographic, and school context factors on early high school grade point average. This psychological framework set up a valuable lens for my evaluation as it provided additional context relative to the varying environmental factors that impact student academic performance, drive, and motivation. Environmental factors such as demographic and socioeconomic status, in conjunction with psychosocial factors, are determinants in the overall focus, drive, and motivation achievement cycle.

Teachers often react to these environmental factors not knowing they are the root causes of the amotivation many students experience. The data from this evaluation asserted building relationships with students allows teachers to view the problems students face from a different lens. It provided insight to help educators triage the wounds of the achievement gap that affects so many of their students. The evaluation findings supported the urgent need for positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom as the relationship has a direct impact on student motivation and drive. The findings also revealed the basic physiological need for love and belonging extends into the classroom perpetuating itself in the form of teacher-student relationships. An alumus in this program evaluation asserted,
If I seem not to get along with my teacher, I just don’t feel comfortable in the classroom and I won’t want to continue in the same class, and when I get along with my teacher I seem to do very well and get good grades in that specific class. My change leadership plan aims to increase focus, drive, and motivation in middle and high school students at the school under study and provide practical solutions for teachers and school leaders within the community and county.

**Envisioning the Success To-Be**

My To-Be vision (Wagner et al., 2006) is to increase student focus, drive, and motivation among middle and high school students to ultimately increase student achievement. My vision includes ideal contexts, culture, conditions, and competencies (Wagner et al., 2006) for student motivation in the organization under study and its community (Appendix D). If my goal is achieved, the students will be more connected to their teachers, experience higher levels of intrinsic motivation, be more successful, more motivated, and higher achieving. The organization will benefit from improved academic outcomes, more disciplined students, and higher levels of focus, drive, and motivation from its students. The community will experience cohorts of young citizens who add value to the local economy and community.

**Ideal Context**

All too often, educators find that students in secondary populations lack the motivation and drive to achieve academic success. “Parent involvement is a large key to unlocking student motivation” (Sorbo, 2020, p. 4). An ideal future context will include investing parents to become more involved in their child’s schooling in middle and high school. Ideally, parents will engage in the educational environment by joining the
Campus Parent Advisory Committee, volunteering on and around campus, and 80% or higher will engage through participation at school-hosted events such as conference nights, open house events, and awards ceremonies.

At home, support of school deeply impacts the motivation and performance of middle and high school students. The home environment provides the foundation for learning and is an element of the student’s life that can affect grades. It is my professional observation that providing opportunities to learn outside of school helps facilitate student success in the school environment. An additional context includes at-home support for school. The school will host parent nights to teach parents how to engage their middle and high school students in valuable, relevant, learning opportunities outside of school. The school leaders will partner with local businesses and agencies to offer internship opportunities and provide in-the-field lessons that connect classroom instruction to experiences in real life. Students are not as motivated to learn beyond the classroom as they once were in elementary grades, so the school, parents, and community will offer intriguing opportunities to invest teens and preteens in learning beyond the confines of the classroom.

Alumni in this evaluation expressed a lack of motivation to learn material that is not relevant for them now or in the future. Preparing a curriculum to relate to the real world can support student participation, motivation, and understanding of academic subjects, as well as prepare them for adult life (Alismail & McGuire, 2015). An ideal future context will include a district requirement for teachers to internalize lessons to be prepared to discuss the relevance of the day’s learning to students’ current stage in life and provide context for future application. The district leaders and school principals will
invest time and money into professional development opportunities for teachers to develop the skills necessary to spiral the relevance of the lesson into their delivery cycle.

**Ideal Conditions**

Improving focus, drive, and motivation in the school under study’s middle and high school students was the overarching goal of my program evaluation. By successfully addressing the inconsistent teacher-student relationships, student motivation and focus will improve. Teachers will be more satisfied at work and students will be more successful in class. Students have told school leaders and teachers they are most motivated in classes where they know teachers care and with whom they have a connection. By ensuring the basic needs are addressed and met, the gap in student motivation and drive will begin to close.

Student and teacher connection is the foundation of the school relationship. Parents, teachers, and alumni agreed that teacher-student relationships promote higher levels of motivation and drive. By getting this right, the organization under study will have joyful schools where the foundation of learning outcomes is rooted in strong teacher-student relationships. When students experience self-actualization and have their basic needs met, their behavior, self-confidence, and academic outcomes all improve. The ideal condition will be one in which teachers and students have strong relationships that drive students to be intrinsically motivated to do well where they otherwise may not be. The result will be fewer behavior infractions, improved grades, and self-actualization. The governing board, district leaders, and school leaders will invest time and money into teacher development in the areas of relationship building, cultural competency and proficiency, and restorative practices to support teachers as they work on building
Survey data suggested that most teachers agreed that students who are socially and emotionally competent learn more. Research also asserts that adolescents who experience mental health concerns in the secondary years are at an educational disadvantage. Social-emotional learning programs are proven to positively impact student motivation and levels of achievement, potentially increasing student academic achievement (CASEL, 2020). The need for a social-emotional curriculum in secondary education is critical. Lack of teacher competency in social-emotional pedagogy impacts the conditions for effective campus and system-wide change. Under the ideal future conditions, the social-emotional needs of students will be considered and addressed with urgency. Educators will have dedicated curricula to teach students mindfulness and healthy ways to cope with stressors. Students will be more mindful and aware of how to deal with their problems in a healthy way. The school will experience fewer behavior issues, trips to the counselor, and improved learning environments. Students will feel more successful and will be more motivated to do well, set goals, work towards goals, and achieve goals.

Future conditions will include school-based personal success criteria such as Sean Covey’s 7 Habits (2020) initiatives to invest and motivate students. Establishing personal success criteria will help teens to become the best, most productive versions of themselves. As students recognize that behavior and outcomes are a product of their choices, they will be better equipped to navigate through tough issues, relationships, and life changing decisions. School leaders expect success criteria will boost motivation and drive, thereby directly impacting learning outcomes.
**Ideal Culture**

Students will be more motivated by the effective use of student success criteria such as Covey’s *7 Habits* (2020). According to Wehmeyer et al. (2003), the idea of self-determination includes people choosing and setting their own goals. It also includes people being involved in self-advocacy, making life decisions, and working toward their goals. Self-determination can allow students to experience life events that alter their brain chemistry thereby empowering students to seek out more personal success because of the feeling they get when success is realized. The effect of implementing personal success criteria is increased self-worth, self-reflection, and self-monitoring. Students can choose what is necessary for their lives. Using success criteria equips them with the knowledge to make positive decisions, focus on what will be of value to them, and create a plan to reach their goals.

The future culture will be one where students will exhibit mindfulness in their daily interactions and exercise control of their actions, thereby increasing their focus and motivation. The implementation of social-emotional programs, not just teaching mindfulness, is allowing the opportunity for students to have a place to exercise mindfulness and complementary activities that give students comfort so they can reset themselves in their moment of distress. Additionally, students’ emotional and social health will improve as a result of implementing a mental health curriculum with a focus on mindfulness. Students will be more motivated and have improved relationships with peers, teachers, and staff. When students learn mindfulness and social-emotional learning techniques, they can monitor and self-regulate their levels of motivation. As they do this their level of academic success will improve.

In my study, student disciplinary infractions decreased with the implementation of
the social-emotional curriculum and practicing mindfulness. By identifying and implementing a social-emotional curriculum at the middle and high school levels, the organization, students, teachers, and parents will benefit from a population of students who are aware of their own actions and the impact of how their responses affect others. This not only provides benefits in the school context but promotes responsible global citizenship. Fewer behavioral disruptions to the learning environment will increase academic achievement and allow students to feel successful. Student assertions in the survey responses confirm when they feel successful, they are more motivated. The decline in disciplinary infractions will be on a positive forward trajectory and will be a positive contribution to current and future culture.

**Ideal Competencies**

The Problem-Solving Committee, a diverse group of stakeholders working to resolve school-based problems, must address the implications of the school system not being prepared for virtual instruction. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed gaps in the educational landscape that were not as glaring before as they were during the pandemic. As a result of addressing the gaps in infrastructure, technology, and teaching skills, the system will be better equipped to offer virtual learning that is effective and closes achievement gaps. Based on my experience as a teacher and school leader, neither teachers nor students know how to sustain relationships in the virtual environment which has led to lower levels of focus, drive, and motivation. As an ideal competency, the benefit of getting this right is schools will be better equipped to provide virtual solutions to students in the community.
A future competency aligns with teachers having the capacity to create and sustain meaningful relationships with students. Relationships and motivation go hand in hand. If there is a poor relationship, students will feel unmotivated to do well. If there is a strong positive relationship, students will be more motivated to learn the content being taught. Professional development will focus on the findings in this evaluation and the urgent call to action. Sessions will address instructing teachers about cultural competency and proficiency, de-escalation techniques, and restorative practices. I recommend quarterly surveys be conducted to monitor progress and identify areas of strength and opportunity. Leaders will be prepared to act on any areas of need.

The lack of cultural competency often impedes teachers’ ability to interact with and build relationships with students they do not understand or with whom they do not identify. Leaders must possess a level of cultural proficiency that prompts them to address issues that emerge when cultural differences are not valued (Lindsey, 2009). “Cultural proficiency is to be applied to both organizational practices and individual behavior” (Lindsey, 2009, p.4). In the future, teachers will receive training and will learn the best cultural competency practices to build relationships and implement in the classroom. As teachers become more culturally aware and inclusive, they will be able to build relationships with students from diverse backgrounds.

Preparing curricula to relate to the real world can support student participation, student motivation, and understanding of the academic subjects, as well as preparing them for adult life (Alismail & McGuire, 2015). Teachers will learn best practices to understand how to make learning relevant to the students’ current level of experience and understanding. I analyzed student data and concluded that it was not the curriculum itself
that was uninteresting, but rather the way the teachers taught it. One alumnus said, “The curriculum didn’t really affect my motivation but instead my understanding of whatever it is I was learning about . . .” Another alumnus said similarly, “I think that the curriculum wasn’t really a big impact. I think that it was the way the curriculum was taught.” By teachers gaining expertise in this area, students will be more invested in the content and thereby more motivated and focused to engage in doing the work.

The final future competency I identified rests in continuing to meet the social-emotional needs of middle and high school students. When school leaders and teachers implemented a social-emotional curriculum in 2019, it prompted a decrease in student behavior referrals by 49% over the previous years. My analysis of these data indicated that mindfulness is an important factor in student motivation. After the implementation of the social-emotional curriculum in the fall of 2019, the number of disciplinary referrals decreased by 37% from approximately 19 referrals per month on average in 2018-19 to an average of 12 referrals per month in 2019-2020. Teachers reported, higher levels of engagement and motivation in the classroom and improved grades in classes. Teachers observed how the implementation of the social-emotional curriculum impacted their students. *Move this World* (2021) and *Purpose Prep* (2012) are examples of programs that address the social-emotional needs of students and teach students how to exercise mindfulness.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this evaluation was to identify what motivates middle and high school students to want to do well in school. My overarching goal for this research project was to improve student achievement in middle and high school grades by emphasizing the
importance of relationships, establishing student success criteria, and including mindfulness to improve personal satisfaction and student learning outcomes. The outcome of implementing these strategies can be a remedy that will drive student achievement and increase external and internal motivation, as well as stakeholder engagement and satisfaction.
Chapter Six: Strategies and Actions

Envisioning the success To-Be and its alignment to the As-Is conditions (Wagner et al., 2006) of the school under study, I will bridge the conceptualizations with strategies and actions grounded in research and educational best practices. The strategies and actions will address the specific issues identified in the four areas of change: context, culture, conditions, and competencies. I modified Kotter’s (2012) 8-step process for leading organizational change as I approached the strategies and actions for my change leadership plan.

At the onset of this research investigation, gaps at the school under study existed in student focus, drive, and motivation. In the As-Is chart (Appendix D), I outlined areas of work in culture, context, conditions, and competencies that needed to be addressed in order to improve focus, drive, and motivation at the school under study.

My To-Be vision (Wagner et al., 2006) is to increase student motivation and drive in middle and high school students to ultimately increase student achievement (see Appendix E). My vision includes ideal contexts, culture, conditions, and competencies (Wagner et al., 2006) for student motivation in the organization under study and the surrounding community. The strategies and actions (see Appendix F) have been aligned to achieve the goals of the change plan and to accomplish the future vision To-Be.

The strategies and actions that are outlined in this chapter align with the problems I identified in Chapter 4 and for which I said in Chapter 5 that I would attempt resolution. The issues addressed by my strategies and actions are outlined in the following four areas of change:

- Context:
• Parent involvement declines as children get older
• There is a lack of at-home support for schooling
• Students perceive the academic curriculum as not relevant to real life.

• Culture:
  • There is a culture of excuses and low expectations
  • There is low organizational trust and negative unspoken assumptions
  • Teachers are not 100% invested

• Conditions:
  • There is an absence of personal success criteria for students
  • There is a lack of strong culture grounded in teacher-student relationships
  • There is an absence of social-emotional programming

• Necessary Competencies:
  • The ability to create and sustain relationships
  • Cultural competency and proficiency
  • The impact of social-emotional learning and how to implement a social-emotional curriculum model

**Strategies and Actions**

The strategies discussed in this section are based on Kotter’s (2012) 8-step process for leading organizational change. Strategies are the methods or plans that I will use to reach the goals of my change leadership plan described in Chapter Five. The actions associated with the strategies are the things I will do or the steps I will take to accomplish the goal. Together, the strategies and actions are the framework that guides the process of change in the organization under study (Appendix F).
**Create a Sense of Urgency**

Using the data from my evaluation to ground my proposal in facts with supporting evidence, I will hold a conversation with the school principal and governing board to discuss the anemic posture of the motivational levels of students in middle and high school. I will share my findings with the school leadership team as they will become a critical part of the guiding coalition. The governing board is the ultimate decision-making authority in the organization; therefore, I will submit an agenda item to present data from the program evaluation to the governing board to build urgency and support from the top down. Lastly, I will share this information with teachers, parents, and community members in a town hall meeting to build a sense of the urgent need for action.

**Build a Guiding Coalition**

I will build a guiding coalition of stakeholders who are invested in the work, ready to act, and create momentum for the change. “A guiding coalition that operates as an effective team can process more information, more quickly. It can also speed the implementation of innovative approaches because powerful people are truly informed and committed to key decisions” (Kotter, 2012, pp. 55-56).

According to Kotter (2012), no one individual has the information needed to make all major decisions or the time and credibility needed to convince lots of people to implement the decisions. Teachers, students, parents, board members, community partners, and district leaders will be considered and invited to join the guiding coalition for this work. I will seek out educators to join the guiding coalition to diversify their strengths and expertise. The coalition members will be invested in the work through
regular meetings, with updates on data collection, and feedback that may require adjustments to the initiative.

According to Kotter, “The typical goal that binds individuals together on guiding change coalitions is a commitment to excellence, a real desire to make their organizations perform to the very highest levels possible” (2012, p. 65). To govern itself, the guiding coalition will create a set of core values and norms that align with the mission and priorities of the collective group. The guiding coalition will create the To-Be vision for success (Wagner et al., 2006) and a plan for implementation and monitoring.

*Develop a Vision and Strategy*

The guiding coalition will create a written vision for the change plan and will develop a written, prioritized plan of strategies, tactics, and metrics for implementation and monitoring. “Vision refers to a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future” (Kotter, 2012, p.68). Kotter described the impact of a good vision. First, a good vision clarifies the general direction for change and simplifies more detailed decisions. Second, it motivates people to act in the right direction. Lastly, it helps coordinate the actions of different people, in a remarkably fast and efficient way. The guiding coalition will engage in three initiatives aimed at improving focus, drive, and motivation in middle and high school students at the school under study. The three initiatives are:

1. Establish personal success criteria as a mandated school expectation for all students.

2. Invest time, money, and human capital in social-emotional programming with mindfulness.
3. Initiate a *Love Our Students* campaign to establish teacher-student relationships as part of the critical foundational components of student motivation, learning, and success.

Paulino et al. said, “Motivation is the internal circumstance that both encourages and focuses on goal-oriented behavior, thus cognitive determinants of motivation must be considered” (2017, p. 199). One of the recommended strategies to achieve the change in student motivation levels is the implementation of personal success criteria. The seven habits described in *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful Teens* (Covey, 2014) will be implemented as an initiative for personal success criteria and their impact on student motivation. Students will set goals for themselves that will determine their school performance, though the path to achieving the goal may vary from student to student and year to year. Students typically set two types of goals: proficiency goals and performance goals. “Mastery goals are related to the learning process and the challenge for gaining expertise. Performance goals are associated with ego orientations, seeking, and maintaining a positive image of oneself, skills, and self-worth” (Paulino et al., 2017, p. 199).

The seven habits of highly successful teens are a set of performance goals, and when used with fidelity they will affect mastery goals. The seven habits are:

1. Be proactive
2. Begin with the end in mind
3. Put first things first
4. Think win-win
5. Seek first to understand, then be understood
6. Synergize

7. Sharpen the saw (Covey, 2020)

Social-emotional learning (SEL) programming plus mindfulness will be introduced to students by faculty members. The SEL program will be used daily to help mitigate some of the external factors and relationship challenges that contribute to the decline of student motivation levels. “It is well established in literature that adolescents who experience mental health concerns during secondary school are at an educational disadvantage” (Allen et.al, 2017, p.34). The authors also suggested social and emotional learning (SEL) programs were significantly and positively associated with higher levels of achievement, potentially increasing academic achievement by as much as 11%.

*Purpose Prep* (2012) was the evidence-based social-emotional curriculum used in the school under study, and I recommend it as part of my strategic plan to sustain the change vision. *Purpose Prep’s* 6-8 curriculum focuses on personal development, character and leadership development, and teaching students how to find their unique purpose. The *Purpose Prep 9-12* curriculum focuses on developing healthy social and emotional skills, mental health and wellness, and readiness for life beyond high school. As students begin to near adulthood, they will receive the tools and resources necessary to strengthen their social capacities and emotional intelligence. The implementation of a social-emotional curriculum in 2019 prompted a decrease in student behavior referrals by 49% over the previous years at the school under study.

Teachers will build relationships with students. In the study conducted by Jasmi and Hin (2014), student research participants mentioned they felt it was important for them as a class to make sure they kept good relationships with the teachers, especially the
caring teachers’ classes. The participants strongly believed that when the teacher was not happy with the class, they would not teach the class wholeheartedly. Student participants indicated they could tell when teachers were not invested in them, and they found it more motivating and rewarding when their teachers cared. As a result, the students made more of an effort to keep a good relationship with the teachers who cared. My findings from the survey responses from alumni of the school under study supported the findings of Jasmi and Hin (2014). One alumnus wrote, “I felt more motivated in classes in which the teacher had set up a relationship knowing that they are there for us, in classes where that wasn’t established, I did feel less motivated and kinda [sic] wanted to leave the class”

Among the alumni who responded to the survey, 90.9% claimed teacher relationships matter when it comes to motivation while 9.1% chose the opposite: teacher relationships don’t matter. Even those students who said relationships don’t affect their level of motivation had comments that established the importance of teacher-student relationships.

Jasmi and Hin (2014) said,

The findings of this study also suggest that teacher support increased students’ academic motivation. The participants stressed that the teachers’ support, especially in academic tasks, kept them interested in completing the task, while the lack of support often had the reverse effect. (p. 80)

Additionally, the research findings suggested that reluctant learners were more motivated to learn from teachers who supported them and had a genuine interest in wanting them to succeed.
Communicate the Change Vision

Kotter said, “Nothing undermines the communication of a change vision more than behavior on the part of key players that seems inconsistent with the vision” (2012, p. 97). The guiding coalition will be charged with creating a clear, concise vision that is easy to remember and internalize. The coalition will be responsible for communicating the message over various mediums to increase awareness and build urgency. Posters will be placed in prominent places across the school campus. The initiatives will be promoted on the school’s website, in the school newsletter, and at parent and board meetings. The guiding coalition will communicate the change vision to stakeholders in the following order:

- Submit agenda item to communicate change vision to the governing board
- Communicate change vision to co-principals and the district leadership team
- Communicate change vision to the school leadership team
- Communicate change vision to teachers
- Communicate change vision to parents, students, and community members

Kotter said,

A great vision can serve a useful purpose even if it is understood by just a few key people. But the real power of a vision is unleashed only when most of those involved in an enterprise, or activity have a common understanding of its goals and direction. That shared sense of a desirable future can help motivate and coordinate the kinds of actions that create transformations. (2012, p.85)
Institute Change and Empower Employees

The change plan will be implemented by organizational and school leaders in phases. Leaders will roll out the change plan to teachers during pre-planning professional development. School officials will communicate the plan to parents, students, and community members at the beginning of the year town hall meeting. School officials will empower staff to fully engage in the change plan. Leaders will remove as many barriers to the implementation of the change vision as possible (Kotter, 2012, p.6). Leaders will empower staff members through professional development and leaders’ strategic alignment of systems and resources to support the change vision. Personnel who undermine the change plan will be addressed by school administrators so as to not destroy forward momentum.

The change plan will be rolled out by school leaders in phases. Phase I of the change plan will begin on the first day of the school year.

Phase I: Love our students. I recommend priority one is an organizational focus on building caring teacher-student relationships of trust as the data indicate this basic physiological need is an essential part of motivating students. School leaders and faculty will launch a Love Our Students campaign to unite all stakeholders in the relationship initiative. The leadership team will align monthly professional development sessions to the goal of building relationships with students. Professional development should focus on the findings in this evaluation and the urgent call to action. Sessions should address teaching teachers cultural competency, de-escalation techniques, and restorative practices. I recommend school leaders conduct quarterly surveys to monitor progress and
identify areas of strength and opportunity (Move This World, 2021) and should be prepared to act on any areas of need.

**Phase II: School principals will implement personal success criteria as a part of the school culture.** Based on the data I collected in my study, I concluded personal success criteria have a significant impact on student motivation. Among the teachers who responded to my survey, 83.4% said they would recommend establishing personal success criteria impactful enough to be a mandated part of school programming; 41.7% strongly agreed and 41.7% agreed with this recommendation. To start, I recommend leaders and teachers engage in a book study of personal success criteria and plan for implementation, monitoring, and data collection. Sean Covey’s, *The 7 Habits of Happy Kids* (2008) and *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful Teens* (2014) provide an interactive, practical, engaging framework for schools to introduce to students and parents and implement.

**Phase III: The governing board and school leaders will adopt a social-emotional curriculum that includes mindfulness.** My analysis of data I collected in my study revealed mindfulness is a crucial factor in student motivation. At the school under study, after the implementation of the social-emotional curriculum in the fall of 2019, the number of disciplinary referrals decreased by 37% from approximately 19 referrals per month on average in 2018-19 to an average of 12 referrals per month in 2019-2020. Teachers reported, as a result, higher levels of engagement and motivation in the classroom and improved grades in classes. Teachers observed how the implementation of the social-emotional curriculum affected their students. Move this World (2021) and
*Purpose Prep* (2012) are curriculum programs that address the social-emotional needs of students and teach students how to exercise mindfulness.

**Phase IV: The problem-solving committee will address the gaps in the system exposed during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.** Teachers and parents identified gaps in student motivation due to the absence of interaction with teachers and peers and inconsistent academic supports and feedback from teachers. Though the qualitative data are limited to office and discipline referrals, the quantitative data exposed a need for the gaps in online learning to be closed and the organization to develop a strategic virtual learning plan that will address the social-emotional, relational, and academic needs of all learners, especially groups who were chronically disengaged during traditional, on-campus instruction. One teacher, in his survey, asserted, “The students that did not feel invested in the classroom, crashed and burned online.”

**Generate Short-Term Wins**

Stopping to celebrate short-term wins will offer the change participants an opportunity to relax for a moment to celebrate the sacrifice and hard work that has gone into driving the change. Generating short-term wins is necessary to maintain the momentum of change and keep the people in the organization engaged. Short-term wins are used to eliminate any organizational discouragement that may be caused by the slow pace of major organizational changes (Patton, 2008). Generating short-term wins will provide evidence that the sacrifice is worth it and is an opportunity for all change agents and stakeholders to reward themselves and others with a pat on the back.

As data are analyzed, the short-term wins, less obviously, will help to fine-tune the vision and strategies. Short-term wins will undermine cynics because they can’t argue
with the data. Clear improvements in performance make it difficult for people to block needed change. The short-term wins will keep managers, board members, leaders, and community stakeholders invested in the change plan. Lastly, generating short-term wins will build momentum as they turn neutrals into supporters and reluctant supporters into active helpers (Kotter, 2012).

The guiding coalition will be updated regularly on student behavior, academic achievement, specific teacher engagement strategies and wins, and counselor referral data points. The guiding coalition will have goals and regular data checkpoints to celebrate small wins along the way. Monthly updates will be provided to all stakeholders. The guiding coalition will establish criteria for success for monthly recognition to celebrate the short-term wins along the way.

**Sustain Acceleration**

Kotter said, “Whenever you let up before the job is done, critical momentum can be lost and regression may follow” (2012, p. 133). Momentum will continue as the programmatic changes are made a permanent part of the school culture. The guiding coalition will be invested in the changes and updated regularly to continue to build momentum and support from stakeholders. Stakeholders will be updated monthly and offered the opportunity to provide feedback on the progress of the change plan via quarterly surveys.

In Jon Gordon’s, *The Energy Bus* (2007), rule five is: Don’t waste your energy on those who don’t want to get on your bus. Rule six is: No energy vampires allowed on the bus (p. 157). It is the role of school leaders to halt activity that impedes the change
process. People who undermine the change process will be confronted by school leaders, so they do not halt the change momentum.

**Make the Change Permanent**

School culture will change at each campus to align with the new direction of the organization. Culture is not something that one manipulates easily. “Culture changes only after you have successfully altered people’s actions, after the new behavior produces some group benefit for a period, and after people see the connection between the new actions and the performance improvement” (Kotter, 2012, p. 156). Changes in an organization can come undone, even after years of effort, because the new approaches haven’t been anchored firmly in group norms and values (Kotter, 2012). The guiding coalition must take a series of actions to make the change permanent.

School leaders will evaluate the efficacy of the plan throughout the year with a final evaluation at the year’s end. Leaders will make adjustments to the plan for the upcoming year based on lessons learned, what worked, what did not work, and the needs of the upcoming student cohort. Leaders must hire the most qualified candidates who are not only qualified but are also an appropriate fit for the vision and mission of the organization.

The school leaders will dispose of old norms. The coalition will establish new norms for their school and continue to enforce the norms as non-negotiable expectations. Teachers will build and value student-teacher relationships. The school leaders will continue to invest resources of people, time, and money in social-emotional curriculum and programming. Personal success criteria for students will remain part of the school’s obligation to create a student culture of inter and independence. Faculty and staff
members who are new to the school and organization will automatically accept the new way because they do not know any different; this helps institutionalize the change.

Assessing the Effectiveness of the Strategies and Actions

The effectiveness of the strategies and actions will be monitored monthly. Data from office and discipline referrals will be used to monitor effectiveness. The look-fors will be a decline in referrals for behavior and the need to see the school counselor for behavior-related issues. Teacher anecdotal data will be considered in the problem-solving leadership team meetings. Feedback from the teacher, alumni, and parent surveys will also be used to assess the effectiveness of the strategies and actions (Appendix A, B, and C).

Involving Community Partners in Decision Making

The community is a direct benefactor of students who are self-motivated, mentally, and socially equipped to handle the demands of life and who can establish personal success criteria. Because the school under study is in the heart of a community, having leaders engaging the area in school initiatives was imperative. Based on my professional experience and observations, the more invested the community is in the school, the more valuable the school will appear to be.

The community became involved in this change plan by attending publicly held town halls, open houses, and board meetings. At these events, parents, faculty, staff, and community members were updated on the progress of the initiatives. Primary data communicated was derived from office and discipline referrals. Community members were invited to partner with the school for in and out-of-school field lessons, internships, and employment opportunities.
Conclusion

The strategies and actions in this section bridge the As-Is state of the school under study and the desired school To-Be. The strategies and actions in this section serve as a foundation for policies and recommendations for changes to the Governing Board and stakeholders of the school under study. The change becomes permanent after innovative approaches have been anchored firmly in the school’s norms and values.
Chapter Seven: Implications and Policy Recommendations

Currently, there is no policy that mandates social-emotional curriculum be taught as a part of school programming to middle and high school students in the organization under study. Research shows that social-emotional and mental health is a critical part of student development. “It is well established in literature that adolescents who experience mental health concerns during secondary school are at an educational disadvantage” (Allen et al., 2017, para 12). Students who lack the skills needed to cope with social and emotional factors are less likely to be focused on school and lack motivation to perform well. This policy mandating social-emotional curriculum be taught to all students, K-12, at all campuses in the organization under study fits into my organizational change plan as it will create a mandate sustaining the change that leaders have already put into place at a high school campus. This policy will affect each campus in the network and could potentially become a part of the public policy in other charter and public schools.

Policy Statement

The policy I am recommending mandates social-emotional curriculum be taught to all students, K-12, at all campuses in the organization under study. I am recommending the policy because research has shown students who experience mental health concerns during their secondary years in school are at an educational disadvantage (Allen et al., 2012).

The findings from my research showed a need for a social-emotional curriculum in schools. The implementation of a social-emotional curriculum in the school under study in 2019 prompted a decrease in student counselor visits and behavior referrals by 49% over the previous years. Social-emotional learning programs are proven to positively
affect student motivation and levels of achievement, potentially increasing student academic achievement. The need for a social-emotional curriculum in secondary education is critical. Lack of such competency affects the conditions for effective campus-level and system-wide change.

The recommended policy connects to student learning because when students learn mindfulness and social-emotional learning techniques, they can monitor and self-regulate their levels of motivation. As they do this, their level of academic success improves. When students see measurable and attainable success and are conscious of their actions toward academic outcomes and goals, their mindfulness toward what is “right or wrong” and what needs to be done to be successful begins to expand. According to Allen et al. (2017), in Australia, researchers Dix et al. (2012) investigated 260 schools employing the whole-school mental health promotion initiative, KidsMatter. Across a two-year period, schools that implemented KidsMatter improved their standardized assessment scores at an equivalent of six months’ additional schooling. Dix et al. (2009) found that most teachers agreed that students who are socially and emotionally competent learn more. A teacher at the school under study asserted,

Teaching mindfulness [from SEL curriculum] allows students to focus on those things that really matter. It gives them a chance to quiet the outside world and pay attention to self and things that they can control. Once they have received information about personal growth and have learned to focus on their emotions and desires, they are motivated to take action. Being aware of their reaction and emotions and receiving info about their personal success gives them the opportunity to create a plan, which drives their academic success.
Analysis of Needs

The analysis of need section considers the policy recommendation from six disciplinary areas: education, economic, social, political, legal, and moral and ethics. This section serves to supply a careful analysis of the policy and the impact adoption of the policy could have beyond the immediate school setting. As a change leader, this section is particularly important because it caused me to take pause and examine the larger implications of the policy change I am making.

Educational Analysis

Student motivation has plagued educators for years. Among the alumni of the school under study 67% reported feeling unmotivated some of the time; eight percent report they felt unmotivated all of the time. The impact of social-emotional competency affects students in many ways, to include social interactions, academic motivation, and achievement. Social-emotional learning (SEL) programs improve classroom behavior, teach students to manage stress and improve attitudes about themselves, each other, and school.

Research findings asserted, “SEL programs yielded significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school. They also enhanced students’ behavioral adjustment in the form of increased prosocial behaviors and reduced conduct and internalizing problems and improved academic performance on achievement tests and grades” (Durlak et al., 2011, para 1). The research findings of Durlak et al. showed SEL participants demonstrated an 11% gain in achievement and exhibited improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behaviors. As a result of my evaluation findings and scholarly research, I am advocating for school
leaders to incorporate evidence-based social-emotional learning programs as a standard policy and educational practice.

**Economic Analysis**

The economic impact of implementing social-emotional learning programs in the school under study extends beyond the internal budget; there is an economic impact to the local and global communities. The internal budgetary impact is dependent on the cost of the program chosen which could range from $0 to $50 per student. *Purpose Prep* (2012), the program implemented at the school under study was $30 per student per year, less than 0.5% of the 2020-2021 $7,692.66 student funds per Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) (Senate Appropriations Committee, 2021 – full citation withheld to protect confidentiality). The impact of not implementing social-emotional learning programs could be a possible loss in revenue from school recognition funds (up to $100 per student FTE) and loss of the charter contract for underperformance based on school accountability ratings. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), cost-benefit research demonstrates the value of social-emotional learning programs. The report found an average return on investment for six evidence-based programs of 11 to 1, meaning for every dollar invested there was an $11 return (CASEL, 2021).

The impact of adopting the policy to mandate social-emotional programming has local and global economic impacts. Students who are not motivated in school are more at risk of dropping out than students who are motivated to do well. Based on data from the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), high school dropouts are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates. High school dropouts earn about $8,000
a year less than high school graduates and approximately $26,500 a year less than college graduates (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2018). Additionally, the nation could save as much as $18.5 billion in annual crime costs if the high school male graduation rate increased by only five percentage points (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2018). According to the Alliance for Excellence in Education (2018) increasing the national high school graduation rate to 90% for just one high school class would create as many as 65,700 new jobs and boost the national economy by as much as $10.9 billion.

**Social Analysis**

There is a tremendous need for social-emotional competence in our schools. One teacher in my study said, “Social-emotional learning teaches students to be empowered and have control over their own self-worth and confidence which will or can help increase achievement.” Teaching mindfulness allows students to focus on those things that really matter. It gives them a chance to quiet the outside world and pay attention to self and things that they can control. Once they have received information about personal growth and have learned to focus on their emotions and desires, they are motivated to act. Being aware of their reaction and emotions and receiving information about their personal success gives them the opportunity to create a plan, which drives their academic success. “Social and emotional assets promoted in SEL can support the positive development of students from diverse family backgrounds and geographic contexts” (CASEL, 2021). Alumni of the school under study reported feeling unmotivated on bad days when it felt like everything was going wrong, when their best didn’t seem good enough, and when they felt out of place.
The implications of adopting a policy to mandate social-emotional learning include improved social skills, peer interactions, coping skills, and academic performance. According to CASEL (2021), students taking part in SEL programs showed improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school. A 2021 systematic review found that universal SEL interventions enhanced young people’s social and emotional skills and reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety in the short term (CASEL, 2021).

The impact of adopting the social-emotional learning policy extends beyond the school setting, affecting the local and national communities. Social and emotional competencies lead to overcoming obstacles and achieving success beyond the classroom. Teaching social skills leads students to be more likely to graduate high school, go on to college, and secure stable employment. Without social-emotional competency, students may lack the fundamental skills needed to obtain and maintain stable employment. According to CASEL,

Six of the identified top ten skills for the future involve social and emotional competence, including complex problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity. Thirty-one percent of employers worldwide struggle to find qualified employees. A major reason for the qualified labor shortage is that fewer students are graduating high school with the social and emotional skills required for today’s workplace. In another survey, 92% of surveyed executives said skills such as problem-solving and communicating clearly are equal to or more important than technical skills, yet 89% said they have a very or somewhat difficult time finding employees with those skills. (2021, para. 14)
Political Analysis

Because the governing board is the official governing body and is legally responsible for all policies, the board of the school under study must vote to approve policy changes. Although 85.7% of teachers surveyed at the school under study asserted that social-emotional programming should be required, the majority of board members must see the value in the recommended policy, or there is a risk the policy will not be approved. The board must consider the use of taxpayer funds to support the program and the obligation it has to the community to produce citizens who add value to the local economy and community.

A community town hall made up of community members, parents, and parent groups of varying beliefs, values, and ideals could possibly supply widespread opposition to the policy. Because the school is using public tax dollars to fund the initiative, the unintended consequences must be considered. Conversely, the community could be in full support of the mandate if presented with positive social and economic value to the local community.

Legal Analysis

Social-emotional and mental health competency is urged at a higher rate than ever before in U. S. schools. Additionally, research points to the positive impact of teaching SEL competencies in schools. According to CASEL, 2021,

There are statistically significant associations between social and emotional skills in kindergarten and key outcomes for young adults years later. Specifically, social and emotional skills decreased the likelihood of living in or being on a waiting list for public housing, receiving public assistance, having any involvement with
police before adulthood, and ever spending time in a detention facility. (CASEL, 2021, para. 8)

Because the policy would require every child in K-12 to take part, this policy could have legal implications if parents do not want their child to participate. The legal implications could be small or large scale but must be considered. Considering such, it may be prudent for the board to supply an opt-out choice for parents who do not wish for their child to participate.

The adoption of the policy to mandate SEL programs could result in a positive legal impact. Research has proven the positive impact of social and emotional learning. It produces well-balanced human beings that contribute to the local and global economies. As a result, an unintended positive impact of mandatory social-emotional programs could be decreased incarceration rates due to fewer legal issues in society.

**Moral and Ethical Analysis**

The State’s Principal Leadership Standards are core expectations for school leaders (Citation withheld to protect confidentiality). Domain four of these standards specifically set expectations for professional and ethical behaviors. Standard 10.C. challenges school leaders to demonstrate a commitment to the success of all students, and to identify barriers and their impact on the well-being of the school, families, and local community (DOE, 2010 – full citation withheld to protect confidentiality). Adopting a policy to mandate social-emotional learning for students in Grades K-12 aligns with the expectation for school leaders to commit to the well-being of the whole child.

Likewise, the State’s Principles for Professional Conduct for the education profession in the state asserts, “The educator’s primary professional concern will always
be for the student and for the development of the student’s potential” (DOE, 2010 – full citation withheld to protect confidentiality). Educators are compelled to commit to the development of the student’s full potential. It would be unethical for leaders and teachers to not address the social, emotional, and mental health of their students.

**Implications for Staff and Community Relationships**

As a result of the policy implementation, staff relationships with students are projected to improve. Students will learn mindfulness, social, emotional, and mental coping strategies that will ultimately decrease discipline problems and improve student focus and motivation in class. As a result, teachers will have more time to teach and build relationships with students in the absence of excessive disciplinary problems. When students are not trapped in a negative emotional space, they are more prone to nourish positive relationships, think creatively, set goals, and focus on academic performance. Students taking part in SEL programs showed improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school (CASEL, 2021).

The adoption of the policy will likely have positive implications as 85% of surveyed teachers believe SEL should be a mandated part of school programming. Research also showed that “80% of educators from across 15 countries believe positive emotions are critical for academic success, and emotional well-being is crucial for developing foundational literacies and communication skills” (CASEL, 2021, para.11). Staff relationships with peers could also strengthen as staff members interact with the content. They will learn ways to cope with stress and emotions and approach their work with children with a more positive attitude.
According to CASEL, the adoption of the SEL policy will have positive community implications. Eighty-two percent of the broader public said that it is highly important for schools to help students develop interpersonal skills, such as being cooperative, respectful of others, and persistent in solving problems (CASEL, 2021). The community will benefit from the positive economic effect of socially and emotionally competent citizens.

**Conclusion**

The findings from my research indicated a need for a social-emotional curriculum in our schools. When students learn mindfulness and social-emotional learning techniques, they can monitor and self-regulate their levels of motivation. Research shows social, emotional, and mental health is a critical part of student development. Students who experience mental health concerns during their secondary years in school are at an educational disadvantage. Students, staff, parents, and the community stand to benefit from the implementation of the policy to mandate social-emotional learning in Grades K-12 at the school under study.
Chapter Eight: Conclusion

I evaluated focus, drive, and motivation in middle and high school populations. This evaluation delved into issues of student achievement at the school under study and the relative effects of low levels of student focus, drive, and motivation. The central purpose and focus of this research were to improve academic achievement by examining the effects of student focus, drive, and motivation in middle and high school. It is my goal that the findings of this evaluation and change leadership plan are implemented as a mandated part of school programming in the organization under study and other schools in the local community. The findings here will serve as a practical guide for teachers and school leaders to address the motivation crisis in their schools.

Discussion

The purpose of my program evaluation was to find a solution to the anemic posture of focus, drive, and motivation at the school under study. The overarching goal was to improve student academic achievement by examining the effects of student motivation in middle and high school students. My research was derailed by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I used the pandemic opportunity to briefly explore the impact the pandemic had on the already anemic posture of student motivation.

I developed a change leadership plan grounded in scholarly research and best practices. I started researching this topic as a teacher for the purpose of addressing the lack of motivation in my middle school students. I continued the process as a high school principal for the same reason—high school students’ motivation levels were even lower than my middle school students. This process allowed me to implement and monitor the success of programs that would address the root cause of amotivation. I learned from
students what factors must exist for them to be motivated and what caused them to be unmotivated. Students were able to share their opinions on the school curriculum and the role student-teacher relationships play in motivation.

At the onset of this evaluation, I had two goals: (1) to find out what motivates students to do well and (2) to improve academic achievement. I addressed the goal of what motivates students to do well through teacher, parent, and alumni surveys. Scholarly research added to my background knowledge and served as a basis for my treatment plan. Goal 2 was unaddressed due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I began collecting report card assessments and data from standardized tests but was unable to continue with this part of my data collection because schools transitioned to virtual instruction and state standardized tests were canceled in the spring of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

My organizational change plan addressed issues raised by my program evaluation. The change plan pushed me to examine the current As-Is state of the school under study and plan the To-Be vision for the future. Through my strategies and actions plan, I was able to bridge the gap from the start of my research to the vision To Be.

The data showed 66.7% of alumni felt unmotivated some of the time while 8% of alumni suffered from amotivation all of the time. Alumni said they were unmotivated when they felt out of place when they felt their best wasn’t good enough and when everything in their life was going wrong. Teachers and alumni indicated the following factors were needed to improve motivation: trust, empathy, safe environment, relationships with teachers and peers, and relevant, engaging lessons. Teachers, parents, and alumni pointed to student-teacher relationships as perhaps the single most important
motivating factor in addressing the motivation dilemma, while research I collected supported the theory finding love and belonging as a basic, human, physiological need.

The organizational change plan addressed the motivation crisis at the school under study by implementing initiatives aimed at strengthening student-teacher relationships, implementing a social-emotional learning program, and spiraling in personal success criteria as a part of campus expectations. The quantitative data needed to determine the impact of the strategies implemented in the change plan was inconclusive because I was unable to collect data beyond the initial data points due to a change in school structure to a virtual learning environment. Qualitative data suggested the programs were effective. After using a social-emotional program for seven months, 85% of teachers said it should be part of mandatory school programming. One hundred percent of teachers, parents, and alumni agreed teacher-student relationships are at the core of what motivates students daily. One hundred percent of teachers were in favor of implementing student success criteria as a part of campus expectations.

I advocate for a policy that would mandate all students in grades K-12, at the campuses of the school under study, take part in social-emotional learning. The policy addresses the impact of the mental, social, and emotional health of students and the effect it has on motivational levels. “It is well established in literature that adolescents who experience mental health concerns during secondary school are at an educational disadvantage” (Allen et.al, 2012, p.34). Students who lack the skills needed to cope with social and emotional factors are less likely to be focused while in school and lack motivation to perform well. This policy, mandating social-emotional curriculum be taught to all students, Grades K-12, at all campuses in the organization under study, fits
into my organizational change plan as it will create a mandate sustaining the change that I have already put into place at the high school campus.

The findings from my research indicated a need for social-emotional curriculum in schools. The implementation of a social-emotional curriculum in 2019 prompted a decrease in student counselor visits and behavior referrals by 49% over the previous years. Social-emotional learning programs are proven to positively affect student motivation and levels of achievement, potentially increasing student academic achievement. The need for a social-emotional curriculum in secondary education is critical. The lack of this curriculum and the competency to implement it affects the conditions for effective campus level and system-wide change.

**Leadership Lessons**

I have grown as a leader from this process. I have learned how to approach leading organizational change including the pitfalls and adaptive leadership skills needed along the way. The change process is not effective if driven by a single individual. To make an impactful sustained change, a guiding coalition of change agents with varying skills, talents, abilities, and levels of experience is needed. The strategies and actions bridge the current reality to the future vision of the program.

The policy recommendation and implications helped me to understand how the implementation of a policy has an extended reach that has implications for a variety of stakeholders and in varying contexts. It was a valuable learning experience to go through the exercise of the needs analysis from the lens of six very distinct perspectives. The needs analysis forced me to look beyond the immediate school setting and analyze the educational, economic, political, legal, and moral and ethical implications of the policy
change I was recommending. It required critical thought about the intended outcome of the policy and the impact it has beyond the confines of the school.

I also learned even the best-laid plans do not always go as planned. The COVID-19 pandemic bought my program evaluation to a halt in March of 2020, and I was unable to finish data collection. It became extremely difficult to get parents and alumni to participate in the surveys and, by the end of the year, I had lost contact with most of them. I was disappointed and felt my project had failed. It was through this process of change leadership I realized research, like life, has unplanned setbacks and unintended consequences.

**Conclusion**

The student motivation crisis is not new; it has plagued America’s schools for years. There is research that spans decades on what motivates and what causes amotivation. The COVID-19 pandemic came along and changed the educational landscape across the country, adding another layer to the already complex issue of student motivation. The onset of virtual learning disconnected the student from the teacher. Despite every effort to retain a sense of normalcy, students struggled to maintain connections with teachers who were able to encourage them between classes and create routines for them. School was reduced to the impersonal nature of a text message. This caused students to withdraw and feel unseen. Feeling that they no longer held a valuable role and were unable to identify how they could continue with their educational plans, their motivation to complete assignments, show up for class, grow relationships, or maintain personal hygiene routines dwindled.
This program evaluation, in its practicality and uniqueness, outlines a four-phase approach to closing the student motivation gap. Phase I: Love our students: start with building strong teacher-student relationships. Phase II: School principals implement personal success criteria as a part of school culture. Phase III: Governing board and school leaders adopt a social-emotional curriculum that includes mindfulness. Phase IV: The problem-solving committee addresses the gaps in the system exposed during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. When students have supportive relationships and opportunities to develop and practice social, emotional, and cognitive skills across many different contexts, academic learning accelerates (CASEL, 2021).
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Appendices

Appendix A. Alumni Survey
Appendix B. Teacher Survey
Appendix C. Parent Survey
Appendix D. As-Is Chart
Appendix E. To-Be Chart
Appendix F. Strategies and Actions
Appendix A

Alumni Survey

Student Survey: Focus, drive, and motivation in middle through high school populations

The purpose of this study is to investigate the issues of student achievement and the relative effects of low levels of student motivation. The central purpose of this research is to improve student motivation, focus and drive in middle and high school. The findings of this research may provide aid to school and district leaders for generations to come, while increasing the capacity and value of human outputs to the community. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary; there will be no adverse consequences for individuals who elect not to participate in the survey.

1. Were/are grades important to you in middle and/or high school?

   *Mark only one oval.*

   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

2. Were/are grades important to you in middle and/or high school? Why or why not?

   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________
3. What motivated you to do well in middle and/or high school?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

4. What are some causes for you to NOT be motivated in middle and/or high school?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

5. In middle and/or high school, did you feel UNMOTIVATED all or some of the time?

*Mark only one oval.*

☐ all of the time

☐ some of the time

☐ I never felt unmotivated

6. Why did you feel unmotivated? Please be specific.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
7. What could teachers have done to help your level of motivation?


8. Do you think the curriculum taught in school has an impact on your motivation to learn?

   Mark only one oval.

   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
   ☐ Maybe

9. Please explain how the curriculum impacted your motivation to learn.


10. How did virtual learning due to the Covid 19 pandemic impact your level of motivation?


11. Did the relationship you had with your teachers impact your level of motivation?

*Mark only one oval.*

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

12. Did the relationship you had with your teachers impact your level of motivation? Why or why not?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Appendix B
Teacher Survey

Teacher Survey: Focus, Drive and Motivation in Middle through Secondary Populations

The purpose of this research study is to delve into the issues of student achievement in middle and high school students and the relative effects of low levels of student motivation, drive and focus. The central purpose and focus of this research are to improve student motivation, focus and drive. Completion of this survey is voluntary; there will be no adverse consequences for individuals who elect not to participate in the survey.

1. What factors must exist in order for students to be motivated?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. What is the impact of student-teacher relationships?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
3. What is the correlation between the student-teacher relationship and students' levels of motivation?

4. What impact did the onset of virtual learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic have on students' level of motivation?

5. Mindfulness is a component of mental health and well-being. How does teaching mindfulness and personal success criteria impact students' motivation and overall academic outcomes?
6. As a teacher, what do you see as the impact of students establishing personal success criteria?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. Is the impact of establishing personal success criteria impactful enough to be a mandated part of school programming?

*Mark only one oval.*

- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Neutral
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Strongly agree
Appendix C

Parent Survey

Parent Survey Form: Focus Drive and Motivation in middle and secondary populations

The purpose of this research investigation is to delve into the issues of student achievement in middle and secondary populations. I will explore the relative effects of low levels of student motivation, drive, and focus to improve academic outcomes. The expected outcomes of this research is to serve as a remedy that not only drives student learning outcomes, but also increases accountability for school stakeholders, communities, and educational change agents. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary; there will be no adverse consequences for individuals who elect not to participate in the survey.

1. What factors must exist in the educational environment for your child to feel motivated?

_____________________________________________________________________________

2. Is having a relationship with students important to student motivation?

*Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes  
☐ No

3. If answered ‘yes’ to the previous question, what is the importance of having student teacher relationships?

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________
4. What is the correlation between the student-teacher relationship and your child’s level of motivation?

5. How did the onset of virtual learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic impact your child’s level of motivation?
Appendix D

As-Is Chart

As-Is 4Cs Analysis for Focus, Drive, and Motivation in Middle and High School Populations

**Context**
- Lack of support for school at home
- Decline in parental involvement as students get older
- Relevancy of academic curriculum to real life

**Culture**
- Inconsistent standards/ low expectations of excellence
- Lack of teacher investment: teachers not giving 100% everyday
- Culture of excuses
- Lack of organizational trust: negative unspoken assumptions

**Conditions**
Lack of:
- A relationship-based school culture
- Social emotional programming
- Personal success criteria for students

**Competencies**
- Staff capacity to sustain meaningful relationships
- Cultural competency lacking
- Lack of competency in social emotional teaching and learning
- Lack of preparedness for virtual learning at onset of COVID-19 pandemic

**Problem Statement:**
Students in secondary populations lack motivation and drive to achieve academic success
Appendix E

To-Be Chart

As-Is 4Cs Analysis for Focus, Drive, and Motivation in Middle and High School Populations

- Involved parents
- At home supports for schooling
- Teachers able to make curriculum relevant and meaningful

- Mindful students
- Motivated, successful students
- Low rates of disciplinary infractions
- Social and emotionally healthy students

- Motivated students
- Happy, satisfied teachers
- Successful students due to student success criteria
- Strong teacher-student relationships
- Socially and emotionally competent students

- Teachers who create and sustain meaningful relationships
- Organization prepared for virtual instruction
- Faculty and staff able to meet the social and emotional needs of students
- Culturally competent teachers
- Teacher who can make relevant connections between curriculum and real world

Students in secondary populations exhibit motivation and drive to achieve academic success
Appendix F

Strategies and Actions Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Actions</th>
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</table>
| Create a sense of urgency          | • Using the data from the project evaluation, hold a conversation with the school principal and district leadership team to discuss the anemic posture of the motivational levels of our students in middle-high school.  
• Share the findings with the school-based leadership team as they will become a part of the guiding coalition.  
• Submit agenda item to present data from the program evaluation to the governing board to continue to build urgency.  
• Share this information with teachers, parents, and community members in a town hall to build the urgent need for action. |
| Build a guiding coalition           | • Build a guiding coalition of stakeholders who are invested in the work, ready to take action and create momentum for the change.  
• Teachers, students, parents, board members, community partners, and district leaders will be considered and invited to join the guiding coalition for this work.  
• The coalition members will be invested in the work through regular meetings, with updates data collection, and feedback that may require adjustments to the initiative.  
• The guiding coalition will create a plan for implementation and To-Be vision for success. |
| Develop a vision and strategy.     | • The guiding coalition will create a written vision for the change plan.  
• The guiding coalition will develop a written, prioritized plan of strategies, tactics, and metrics.  
• The *7 Habits of Highly Successful Teens* will be implemented as an initiative to for personal success criteria and its impact on student motivation.  
  o 1. Be proactive  
  o 2. Begin with the end in mind  
  o 3. Put first things first  
  o 4. Think win-win  
  o 5. Seek first to understand, then be understood  
  o 6. Synergize  
  o 7. Sharpen the saw  
• SEL programming will be introduced and used daily to help mitigate some of the external factors and relationship challenges that contribute to the decline of student motivation levels.  
• Teachers will build relationships with high-priority students. |
| Communicate the change vision       | • Communicate change vision to stakeholders in the following order:  
  o Submit agenda item to communicate change vision to the governing board  
  o Communicate change vision to co-principals and district leadership team  
  o Communicate change vision to the school leadership team  
  o Communicate change vision to teachers  
  o Communicate change vision to parents, students, and community members |
| Institute Change                                                                 | • The change plan will be implemented in phases based on priority.  
|                                                                              | • The change plan will be rolled out to teachers during the beginning  
|                                                                              | of the year professional development  
|                                                                              | • The change plan will be communicated to parents, students, and  
|                                                                              | community members at beginning of the year town hall.  
|                                                                              | • Phase I of the change plan will begin on the first day of the school  
|                                                                              | year |
| Generate short-term wins                                                      | • The guiding coalition will be updated regularly on the behavior,  
|                                                                              | academic, specific teacher engagement strategies and wins, and  
|                                                                              | counselor referral data points.  
|                                                                              | • The guiding coalition will have goals and regular data checkpoints  
|                                                                              | and celebrate small wins along the way.  
|                                                                              | • Monthly updates will be provided to all stakeholders  
|                                                                              | • The guiding coalition will establish criteria for success for monthly  
|                                                                              | recognition to celebrate the wins along the way |
| Sustain acceleration (momentum)                                               | • Momentum will continue as the programmatic changes are made a  
|                                                                              | permanent part of the school culture.  
|                                                                              | • The guiding coalition will be invested in the changes and updated  
|                                                                              | regularly to continue to build momentum and support from  
|                                                                              | stakeholders.  
|                                                                              | • Stakeholders will be updated monthly and offered the opportunity to  
|                                                                              | provide feedback on the progress of the change plan via quarterly  
|                                                                              | surveys. |
| Make the change permanent                                                     | • Evaluate the efficacy of the plan throughout the year with final  
|                                                                              | evaluation at year’s end  
|                                                                              | • Make adjustments to the plan for the upcoming year based on lessons  
|                                                                              | learned, what worked, what didn’t work, and the needs of the  
|                                                                              | upcoming student cohort. |