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Exploring Principals' Perceptions about Collective Efficacy in Urban K-8 New Jersey Schools

Designated for the School Improvement Process

Crystal M. Joye

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The Degree of Doctor of Education

Department of Education Leadership, Management & Policy

Seton Hall University

2023

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT & POLICY

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Crystal M. Joye has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during this **Spring** Semester.

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Abstract

Exploring Principals' Perceptions about Collective Efficacy in Urban K-8 New Jersey Schools

Designated for the School Improvement Process

Crystal M. Joye

Leadership plays an important role in determining organizational culture and maintaining a commitment to the collective goal. Leaders not only play a critical role in developing and implementing policies to direct an organization toward a goal, but also serve as role models for those with whom they work. Research has shown that relationships between principals and teachers are critical to impact teaching practices, school climate, and students positively, yet these relationships can affect student learning and achievement.

Research has also shown that students' overall performance in school and any decrease in their overall achievement data are directly related to teacher self-efficacy (Hoy & Hoy, 2009). Prior to the designation of underperforming, a school's data indicated academic deficits for 3 years or more. The public identifier as targeted and/or comprehensive may have further implications of reduced teacher and principal efficacy.

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore principals' perceptions about collective efficacy in urban K-8 schools in New Jersey designated for the school improvement process. Principals' responses to the research question and sub-questions guided this study:

1. What are principals' perceptions of community collective efficacy as a means towards school improvement?
 - a. How do principals describe the value/possibility of community collective efficacy?

b. How do principals describe the challenges of community collective efficacy?

Collective efficacy in schools identified as in need of improvement is critical to enhancing student achievement. Significant findings revealed that collective efficacy contributes to improved student outcomes and can be fostered by effective leadership strategies. Teacher collective efficacy has also been shown to have a positive effect on the school environment for all parties involved in the educational process. Recommendations for districts included implementation of professional development, research-based and targeted interventions, and efficacious practices directly related to school improvement. Policy recommendations are relevant to teacher and leadership programs, including effectiveness and cultural programs.

An avenue of future research is the investigation of whether increasing the DEI initiatives of K-12 schools leads to differences in student self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy, which would, in turn, impact collective efficacy. An interesting concept is the idea that collective efficacy promotes inclusion. Recommendations for practice include an early warning indicator evaluative structure to support principals and schools at risk of being identified as in need of improvement.

Keywords: efficacy, self-efficacy, comprehensive school, failing schools, principal perception, data-driven, school improvement, stigmatized, underperforming, school culture

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C. M. J.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

One of the most enduring challenges facing schools and those who study them regards how to improve learning while also closing persistent achievement gaps. When teams have a shared belief in collaborative efforts, researchers have found these challenges can be overcome, at least in some respects (Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). When teachers at school believe in collective ability to influence student performance, they become more creative and productive. Bandura found this interesting pattern of human behavior as “self-efficacy” (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). It is defined as a group’s collective belief in the group’s collective ability to organize and implement the practices necessary to achieve a certain level of success (Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). Self-efficacy is an individual’s self-awareness of the ability to learn, perform, or receive a particular task.

Donohoo and Katz (2017) found a strong positive correlation between student efficacy and achievement. Several studies have confirmed the relationship between positive self-efficacy and student performance. The Bandura Framework for Social Cognitive Theory states that teachers are role models for student learning. Learning is the process of repeating what the student sees in the (teacher’s) model and is enhanced by an interactive experience. Previous research has emphasized a consistent relationship between performance and achievement learning by all ages, genders, races, learning environments, and socioeconomic statuses. Studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between teacher and student self-efficacy and the level of commitment to achieve the goals and objectives involved in the school improvement process (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Prenger & Schildkamp, 2018). Teachers have also shown that they are obsessed with overcoming obstacles and challenges faced during the high-level school

improvement process. It has produced a higher level of overall effectiveness at school that improves academic performance throughout the school community.

Labeling poorly performing people alters educational and learning behaviors and leads to negative implications associated with interpreting scores that indicated poor performance. Of further concern is the potential misconception among the school community that poor grade labels are a direct measure of student performance as evaluated by schools. Other indicators that viewers do not necessarily associate with poor score scales may include situations such as (a) schools that rate less than 95% of students enrolled at the beginning of the semester; (b) lack of annual progress in smaller subgroups of students; and (c) number of English Language Learners (Wilcox & Lawson, 2018).

Other aspects that prevent attendance at school, especially in middle and high school classrooms, include displacement, homelessness, parenting children, guardianship of younger siblings, and family members (Ni et al., 2018). All factors negatively affect attendance and encourage disciplinary action that promotes poor academic performance. Problems that can adversely affect school scores occur at a disproportionately high level in schools in urban and geographic areas affected by risk factors. These problems include rising poverty rates, homelessness, crime, abandonment of education, teen pregnancy, and parental involvement to drop out of school. Schools serving disadvantaged students are often forced to improve on factors unrelated to school-based education. Lower asset values within a school's proximity can prolong the cycle of poor grades due to the public's lack of awareness of the quality of school education (Ninković & Knežević, 2018). Depleted property values due to low-performance scores can facilitate student enrollment that is disproportionately biased because of its low socioeconomic background.

The surrounding poor school community needs to interpret and navigate the negative implications associated with poor school performance labeling. Widespread opportunities for school selection and negative perceptions within the surrounding community can affect the level of neighborhood support that poorly performing schools receive when initiating and mediating the school improvement process (Zheng et al., 2019). Schools with already low levels of self-efficacy can be even less efficient. Such levels hinder the successful implementation of school improvement and strengthen the negative perceptions of the public.

Teacher performance is closely linked to the perception of overcoming the everyday challenges and pressures faced when performing daily tasks in the classroom. Teacher responsibilities are more diverse because they facilitate each student in succeeding within the expectations of a series of learning lessons. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory identified experience as a factor and promoted efficiency (Zheng et al., 2019). Effective teachers recreate success from previous successful classroom experiences. Strengthening teachers helps them overcome challenges. Schools who have low self-efficacy teachers face and should address the additional needs and stresses that teachers have when working in such a school environment. However, this may not always be possible; as a result, the success of school improvement efforts becomes even more difficult.

Schools with traditionally poor grades have higher employee turnover rates than other schools. Schools that are considered poor performers in the community face challenges in attracting and retaining working teachers (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). While developing the specialized expertise needed to support student performance, union agreements and school board policies for low-level employees are a fruitful new school appointment intended for teachers.

Lack of contact with the school community impedes the development of self-efficacy that teachers need to become educational leaders in their classrooms.

Studies have shown a positive relationship between students with a high level of self-efficacy and students with a high level of academic performance (Donohoo & Katz, 2017; Prenger & Schildkamp, 2018). They have also shown a positive relationship between teachers with a high level of self-efficacy, student success, and teachers with high student achievement. Bandura confirmed this relationship when he identified a positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy and student performance (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). Other studies have identified a triangular effect between levels of self-efficacy levels of teachers, high levels of student self-efficacy, and higher-level achievement.

Evidence of the potential impact of a negative relationship between self-efficacy and student performance during the school improvement process is not widespread. Since the founding of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), schools have been labeled as having poor grades and designated as disadvantageous by the public (Reaves & Cozzens, 2018). Government agencies are free to design state labeling systems using terms that imply poor performance, such as *failure* or the actual term *poor performance* itself. Use of personal data sources leads to the expansion of policy outcomes from both individual and collective policymakers and may affect the self-efficacy of affected members. School teachers who are affected by the school community must work within boundaries and perceptions with unacceptably low grade scores. The challenges faced by school leaders during the school improvement process are heightened by the impact of low academic performance scores on climate and culture, and the overall effectiveness of the school community. Additional challenges are expected as similar processes continue within the framework for assessing social and environmental systems.

Much research exists on self-efficacy and its influence on these challenges. However, less research has used collective efficacy as a frame with which to view how individuals who work in schools move to overcome challenges. Collective efficacy is defined as a group's shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action (Bandura & Walters, 1977, p. 477). Like self-efficacy, it is shaped by four major sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and affective state (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Goddard et al., 2004); these are detailed further in Chapter 2.

Statement of Problem

Through my research and analysis, I sought to explore collective efficacy in urban K-8 schools in the state of New Jersey. I designed this qualitative study to understand the principal's school-wide use or failure to use collective efficacy strategies during the school improvement process.

The research problem I sought to understand was the use of collective efficacy and its impact on urban schools under review in the state of New Jersey. The role of collective efficacy was explored for whether principals' perceptions and the use of collective efficacy within their school communities have an influence on the decisions they make—specifically, the implementation of academic intervention strategies to improve practice and school-wide professional development plans during the school improvement cycle process.

Thus, I investigated if principals in urban K-8 schools designated as in need of improvement commonly face such issues as lack of strategies to improve instructional outcomes, selection of appropriate interventions, and barriers in the classrooms. According to Elmore (2008) and Mulford (2003), the prerequisite skills for functional school leadership require the

principal to engage in organizational learning and leadership to build capacity among all constituents in the school community through collective learning.

I also wished to explore further if the perception of principals differed among faculty members in urban K-8 New Jersey schools. Perceptions of principals varied among faculty members, contingent on such factors as faculty tenure status, years of experience in education, or time spent at a dedicated site. According to Bandura (1993), previous research has demonstrated that collective efficacy positively predicts students' academic achievement (also see Goddard et al., 2004). Current research has not addressed if collective efficacy is a factor in the reduction of inequities to close the achievement gaps in urban New Jersey schools.

This study will add to the current body of literature on the topic of collective efficacy. The framework used for this research study; Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), is a conceptual framework that underlies qualitative research (Reaves & Cozzens, 2018). The secondary conceptual framework for this study was Carol Dweck's theory of mindset (Linares, 2019). For this research, I considered the role of collective efficacy during the school improvement process and the principals' implementation of strategies and best practices that support school improvement. Thus, I sought to identify considerations for collective efficacy and how principals' thoughtful choices and implementation of school-wide structures can align with the school improvement process.

Research Questions

The following research questions and sub-questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1: What are principals' perceptions of community collective efficacy as a means towards school improvement?

SQ1a: How do principals describe the value/possibility of community collective efficacy?

SQ1b: How do principals describe the challenges of community collective efficacy?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore urban principals' perceptions of collective efficacy and the role it has played in their journey to implement strategies and structures during the school improvement process in New Jersey. This study investigated aspects of professional development and embedded intervention strategies either enacted or not enacted during the school improvement process. The study further determined if principals' perceptions of collective efficacy influenced them in their overall decision-making. Lastly, this study explored if collective efficacy and school-wide efficacious perceptions of leaders and teachers varied among staff members, contingent on years of service in education, tenure status, and the number of years employed at an urban school location in New Jersey.

Principals serve as the driving force in the school improvement process. This study can add to the existing body of literature on collective efficacy as it relates to the school improvement process in urban New Jersey schools.

More specifically, this study examined principals' perceptions of collective efficacy and how these perceptions influenced their work of school improvement. The process of classifying the school as a poor-grade school is, therefore, the goal of the school improvement process. However, the overall assignment as a school with low-grade scores in the school improvement process can undermine the self-efficacy of the school community (Ni et al., 2018). Self-awareness within the school community of poor-performing challenges can have a negative

impact that can impede behavior and sustainable progress in improving the school. Fluctuations in the level of teacher self-efficacy can change over time during the school's improvement process (Boyce & Bowers, 2018). To complete the school's improvement process, the school must demonstrate its ability to use indicators to measure academic success. The scale contains information about student grades, as measured using metrics set by relevant policymakers. Studies have shown that increased student grade data should be associated with increased levels of teacher self-efficacy. Principals who lead the school improvement process need to understand the effectiveness and impact the process has on academic performance.

Significance of the Study

Each state has the option of including additional school quality indicators under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA, Every Student Succeeds Act) to assess school performance and responsibilities (Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). This applies to all students and subgroups, including post-higher education preparations. Student participation or school atmosphere grades may be constructed as indicators such as school climate, but ESSA does not address this directly.

Interventions in schools that are considered poor include increased opportunities for professional development at the school level. Such professional development is based on each teacher's minimum ability level. Studies have shown that teacher performance influences attitudes and willingness to adhere to new educational practices (Donohoo & Katz, 2017). The present study provided a deeper understanding of resource allocation and the setting of standards and norms that guide school leadership. This understanding includes support systems and resources to help overcome undiscovered obstacles and unintended challenges facilitating a more efficient and manageable process for improving schools. The continued education and training of

principals help school and district leaders lead the school improvement process in understanding the importance and role of collective efficacy in achieving success. Policymakers and decision makers can gain a deeper understanding when allocating resources and setting standards for guiding school leadership. In turn, strategic preventive plans to educate the public can reduce the potential for negative perceptions of school abilities.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is a conceptual framework that underlies qualitative research (Reaves & Cozzens, 2018). Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as people's belief in their ability to succeed. According to Bandura, students who have a higher level of self-efficacy are more successful than students who do not; the latter group was comparable and considered low self-efficacy. Students make continuous cognitive assessments of their learning experience, including observations, opinions, and personal beliefs to determine if their performance is effective within their abilities and/or controls. Bandura's research focused on the triangular interactions of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors that affect learning outcomes and performance. Students develop more personal and effective behavior if they succeed in aggressive strengthening to overcome challenges and pitfalls (Ninković & Knežević, 2018). Heuristic feedback that guides students' learning by clearly distinguishing between correct and incorrect learning behavior leads to effective results (Sun & Xia, 2018). Many opportunities in a learning environment to observe peers who are considered equal when striving to overcome similar challenges and succeed will enhance students' self-efficacy. This triangle of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors has the greatest impact on self-efficacy.

The second conceptual framework for this study was Carol Dweck's theory of mindset (Linares, 2019). Dweck's research showed that the ability of individuals to achieve results could

influence their perception of their ability to succeed (Maier et al., 2017). Fixed thinking imposes limits on a person's ability to achieve beyond the perceived limits of one's ability. The idea of growth pushes the boundaries of success through academic flexibility (Ford et al., 2019). The difference in learning attitudes between fixed and growing thinking complements students' willingness to tackle academic challenges. Predefined limits on fixed thinking lead to some skill acquisition. The idea of growth recognizes limits and enduring difficult situations with the determination to overcome adversity (Smith et al., 2018a). This present study determined whether school staff can determine the adequacy between grade data and teachers' effective attitudes during the school improvement process.

Study Design and Methodology

Implementing a school improvement process requires the ability of school administrators to assess or coordinate all aspects of the school community effectively. Understanding the self-efficacy of teachers, students, and parents facilitates a centralized decision-making process that leads to change in organizational management decisions, professional development, and resource allocation; building capacity for sustainable school improvement depends on maximizing professional growth and student performance (Lee & Louis, 2019). A low level of self-efficacy can undermine or disrupt administrative efforts to initiate timely changes that lead to the sustainable improvement of the school. School leaders continually look for the right resources as well as an exemplary professional growth model educational skills training that supports the diverse needs of teachers throughout the school improvement process. A support system that addresses the flaws identified in the school community is important for resolving issues that lead to poor academic performance (Donohoo, 2018). Low self-efficacy and group effectiveness can hinder the successful implementation of professional practices and actions that improve overall

performance, rely on an effective school community to improve consistent academic performance, and create and reinforce the willingness to design positive paths to improvement. Long-term continuous improvement requires a cohesive and effective school community.

Information about school effectiveness is not a direct measure of the public school system. Limited information about the school atmosphere and culture contained in a school quality survey varies from school to school (Donohoo, 2018). It depends on the system to which one condition survey is assigned from region to region. As a result, for the present study, the qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate approach for conducting such research. The interviews were conducted by using a semi-structured process to gather the interviewees' perceptions through free-form, discussion-led questions. Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017) suggested that interview questions can be divided into six distinct categories according to the guidelines, given that the interviewer's intended experience and behavior can provide information about his or her specific experience and behavior. This qualitative study explored how principals' awareness of effectiveness played a role in the decision-making process during the school improvement process in New Jersey schools. This led to a great understanding of the effects of the principals' perceptions of effective change while leading the school improvement process.

Designating the overall school quality labeling process and the school improvement process influences research methods. Principals run schools that are officially considered inappropriate for inefficient classification and school improvement labels. Thus, the researcher of this study used a semi-structured interview approach to mitigate the principals' concerns and encourage participation through more engaging discussions about the school. The semi-structured interview method allowed the principals to reflect on their ideals and professional

experience in an unlimited manner as they work to improve the school. The researcher thus collected and analyzed qualitative data that informed how the school improvement decision-making process was associated with effective perceptions by New Jersey school municipal school principals. The technique of intentional sampling was used to investigate a particular group of principals who promoted the development of a school. Interviews were conducted specifically with selected principals who lead or have previously led part of the modern school improvement process and how their effective beliefs and perceptions influenced their leadership and decision-making process. The researcher interviewed 10 principals from urban K-8 elementary schools in New Jersey who responded to the school improvement process progress questionnaire.

Trilateral analyses of the encrypted field recorded professional development content and the difference in explanations of effectiveness between strategic intervention teachers. The coded data revealed subjects and patterns that matched the questions that led to the research framework. Analysis of the data was completed to determine if awareness of the principals' effectiveness played a role in the decision-making process during the school improvement process in urban New Jersey schools.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations may include research bias as the researcher is an educator and former principal of an urban school currently working in New York. As a Director of Student Support Services in a turnaround school, the researcher was fully aware of the possibility of researcher bias, given the topic of the study. Given the researcher's experience and understanding of the school improvement process through the lens of an educator, it was necessary to remain true to the IRB process and interview structure to safeguard the integrity of the study. This researcher

collected qualitative data from urban K-8 schools designated for the school improvement process in the state of New Jersey.

The principals of the selected schools were either currently engaged or had prior experience with leading a school identified as needing improvement. This study was designed to document the perceptions of 10 principals across urban schools in New Jersey. However, one cannot assume that the interpretation of the findings can apply to school districts outside those selected for this research study. Additionally, the findings were not related to grade ranges or school levels other than the K through 8 population.

The data collected from this research served as a ‘snapshot’ of time, reflecting the 10 principals’ open and honest perceptions of the collective effectiveness of the schools designated for the improvement process. Professional experience, educational personality traits, and the school improvement process itself constituted the boundaries of the school administrators’ perceptions. The researcher also brought personal perceptions of and experiences with the research topic being investigated. The researcher was also aware of the limited benefits of using semi-structured interviews with the principals, which did not allow for the researcher/interviewer to build rapport.

Definitions of Terms

This list provides the definitions of terms used in this study and related to concepts used in education.

Underperforming or Comprehensive schools - Schools performing at or below the fifth percentile of all Title 1 schools (Lee & Louis, 2019).

ESEA - Elementary and Secondary Education Act, formerly known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), was completed when the President Barack Obama signed the Every Student

Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law on December 10, 2015. Its main purpose is as a civil rights law to address the need for equal opportunities in education for all students, including students with disabilities (Lee & Louis, 2019).

ESSA Accountability - The accountability indicators in the ESSA State Plan measure the progress of schools as they prepare students for a successful life after high school. Stakeholders, including New Jersey parents and educators statewide, provided input into New Jersey's ESSA State Plan (Voelkel & Chrispeels 2017).

School Culture - School culture encompasses all the attitudes, expected behaviors, and values that impact how the school operates (Goddard et al., 2017).

NJSLA - The New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA) is a statewide test administered in New Jersey to students in elementary, middle, and high school. Subjects tested include English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science. Grades 3-8 sit for ELA and Mathematics tests, while Grades 5, 8, and 11 sit for the Science test. The aim of this statewide test is to measure the progress of students in satisfying the level of set academic standards (Donohoo, 2018).

Title 1 Schools - Schools that receive supplemental funding to educate low-income students are identified as having a significant percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (Linares, 2019).

Collective Efficacy - The effectiveness of the community (school) in overcoming obstacles to success in a particular task (Donohoo, 2018).

Culture - Integrated programming that separates the characteristics of one group from another (Boyce & Bowers, 2018).

Efficacy - Ability to achieve a specific goal or skill.

School Administration - All assigned school administrators and administrators.

Self-Efficacy - The beliefs that people have about their ability to acquire or achieve skills.

Senior Faculty Members - Faculty with the longest tenure or teachers appointed to a single school.

Sense of Efficacy - Overall efficiency or self-efficacy.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) – Bandura’s theoretical framework for learning through an integrated observational context of social factors (Maier et al., 2017).

Summary

An effective metacognitive process may not be particularly necessary for the school’s improvement process. However, specific guidelines for improvement can guarantee simple and timely success results. Studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between teacher self-efficacy and student self-efficacy. The high academic performance of students is the result of positive and effective relationships. Studies have also shown a positive correlation between overall school performance and student performance. School principals need to lead their schools’ improvement process and support the development of effective behaviors that keep students performing well. The overall evaluation of the school and its placement in the school improvement process can affect the level of effectiveness of the entire school community. A deeper understanding of the unintended consequences of the labeling process leads to more informative practices regarding the framework for publicly sharing findings. School naming and existing policies that inadvertently lead to negative public perceptions challenge school principals to drive their schools’ improvement process. Understanding the full impact of policy

on the school improvement process gives school management a broader perspective on how to guide a successful journey.

This research study is divided into five chapters to provide the reader with the context of collective efficacy in urban New Jersey schools designated for the school improvement process. This Introduction chapter consisted of the foundational elements of the study. The background, purpose, significance, and theoretical framework as it relates to collective efficacy were outlined. Chapter 2 provides a literature review inclusive of the definition of collective efficacy, the theory behind collective efficacy, an overview of the collective efficacy framework, research on collective efficacy in urban schools, and the identification of gaps in the literature. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research design used to capture 10 principals' perspectives of collective efficacy in underperforming urban schools. The study's methodology, design, selection of principal participants, and data collection and analysis are discussed. Chapter 4 presents the findings and results of this investigation. It also analyzes and interprets the data through descriptive findings tied to the research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the research, identified limitations, connections of the findings to previous research, and suggested implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, the purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to explore principals' perceptions of collective efficacy in urban K-8 schools designated for the school improvement process in the state of New Jersey. Chapter 2 now reviews key literature on this topic and explores performance effects that may be relevant to the school improvement process. It also reviews the study's theoretical framework, self-efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, collective school efficacy, and principal and school collective efficacy. Finally, this chapter provides a review of the literature on performance issues that can undermine or disrupt the school's improvement process.

The main theoretical framework that underpinned this research was Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). This chapter outlines SCT and discusses its impact on educational and learning processes. This chapter also provides a brief survey of ideas to describe the potential impact of previous constraints on the ability to achieve. A successful school improvement process requires a school community that is confident in its ability to achieve results and overcome challenges (Goddard et al., 2017). The use of overt high-performance behaviors helps schools achieve academic performance. The SCT explains the impact of social behavior and interaction on academic performance. Academic performance contributes to an undefined range of awareness of the school community's ability to succeed.

Literature Review

National Student Achievement Standards

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was signed into law in 2001 by President George W. Bush in response to waning national academic competitiveness and widening achievement

gaps. The legislation served primarily as a means of holding schools responsible for student achievement. The intent was to bring more attention and assistance to underachieving students; failure to comply with the new requirements put schools at risk of losing federal Title 1 funding (NCLB, 2001). Among the requirements of the NCLB Act was to ensure proficiency of all students, as determined in part by the results of standardized testing. The legislation was intended to reduce the achievement gap by incentivizing schools to put more resources towards students in special education, English Language Learners (ELLs), and children belonging to other disadvantaged groups (NCLB, 2001). However, NCLB has been widely criticized for its overemphasis on testing and excessive regulations micromanaging the educational process, as well as for being costly and ineffective (Butzin, 2007; Guilfoyle, 2006; Simpson et al., 2004). In fact, in 2004, the Virginia legislature passed a resolution calling NCLB “the most sweeping intrusions into state and local control of education in the history of the United States” (Simpson et al., 2004, p. 68). The dependence on testing as the primary metric of school success and coupling of funding to this outcome placed an additional burden on teachers, leading to educational practices that neglect some of the important but intangible aspects of learning in favor of material on which students will be tested (Guilfoyle, 2006).

The NCLB Act was eventually replaced by the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which represents a significant advancement from NCLB, but nonetheless retains some of the drawbacks of its predecessor (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Under ESSA, schools are still identified as needing improvement largely via the results of standardized testing, but additional parameters measuring student achievement may be included in this metric, as determined by individual states (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). This offered states more flexibility in determining how to evaluate schools, and specifically allowed for more comprehensive methods than those

used under NCLB, which were limited to standardized tests in reading/language arts and mathematics skills. Because of NCLB's narrow focus on these subjects, many schools eliminated supporting curriculum in favor of emphasizing those areas on which they would be tested, leading to diminished availability of art, music, and physical education and decreased emphasis on subjects such as science and history (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). However, while ESSA opened up the possibility of states incorporating additional metrics into their evaluation of school, it did not require them to do so. Even today, there is insufficient consideration of other measurements of school success beyond quantitative academic performance, which represents a critical gap in the ability to evaluate schools and student success appropriately. Significantly, the student achievement gap has persisted under ESSA, with students of low socioeconomic status or from racial minorities demonstrating lower average test scores and grade point averages, as compared to wealthy and/or White students (Hung et al., 2020). ESSA still requires states to identify the "lowest-performing" 5% of schools; these districts, and any that fail to graduate more than one third of high school students, are required to complete a comprehensive support and improvement plan, wherein they describe their plan to address the identified inadequacies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016).

Targeting Underperforming Schools

Among the major criticisms of NCLB and ESSA is the identification of schools as failing to meet certain standards of achievement. Under NCLB, there was considerable pressure for schools to meet certain testing standards at the risk of losing federal Title 1 funding. While these standards were largely determined at a federal level under NCLB, ESSA has shifted some of the responsibility for this to individual states (Hodge & Welch, 2016). While this has offered states more flexibility to address the unique needs of their student populations, it has also resulted in

several states lowering their proficiency standards from those set federally under NCLB. Thus, rather than actually reducing achievement gaps, these new standards often result in schools being able to claim proficiency, despite students remaining underserved. The National Education Policy Center further recognized that much of the performance gap can be attributed to income inequality, and schools tasked with educating children from disadvantaged demographics should receive increased funding to better serve this population rather than be punished for failing to meet a universal standard that may be unrealistic, given their resources (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Unfortunately, ESSA remains underfunded; while considered a step in the right direction, it is unlikely to address the underlying causes of school inequities adequately (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016).

School Improvement Process

After a school is designated as having failed to meet academic standards, the school is faced with the challenge of making improvements, with the expectation of meeting state-determined criteria within a period of no more than 4 years. Under ESSA, the “lowest-performing” 5% of schools are required to complete a comprehensive support and improvement plan. This not only requires schools to develop a strategy to improve student outcomes but also requires that this strategy be informed by the state’s accountability system, identify specific resource inequities, and include evidence-based interventions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). These requirements have been criticized as being ambiguous, which may pose a difficulty for schools to address the requirements of ESSA appropriately in their efforts to improve (Herman et al., 2017). Some researchers have argued for the need for increased oversight by state and local education agencies with regard to implementation of school improvement plans (Dunn & Ambroso, 2019).

ESSA places a substantial burden for the school improvement process on school leadership, acknowledging principals as playing a key role in driving educational outcomes (Haller et al., 2016; Herman et al., 2017). Many of the evidence-based practices supported under ESSA relate to improving leadership strategies, including certifications, increased training, and professional development opportunities for principals (Herman et al., 2017). An example of such a program is the McREL Balanced Leadership Program, which consists of 10 2-day training sessions focusing on 21 identified leadership responsibilities and has been shown to have a beneficial effect on principal self-efficacy with respect to leadership practices as well as principal and teacher turnover (Jacob et al., 2015). This top-down approach of intervening in underperforming schools at the level of school leadership has been shown to have an overall positive effect on school culture while being more efficient than interventions focused on individual teachers, as principals have a wider reach and can disseminate information to the rest of the school staff (Herman et al., 2017).

ESSA requires school leaders to focus on three core principles in developing a plan for school improvement: a focus on meaningful learning, development of professional capacity, and targeted allocation of resources. Together, these should be approached through a mindset of continuous improvement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). In the state of New Jersey, continuous improvement is explicitly considered via a requirement for yearly progress monitoring as a part of the annual needs assessment and planning cycle for schools identified as underperforming and receiving funds to be put towards improvement. This involves setting timelines for monitoring progress towards specific, actionable goals and regular review of data to assess the efficacy of interventions (Riley et al., 2019).

A case study focusing on strategies employed by an underprivileged, underperforming high school in New Jersey as a part of the school improvement process identified building a team and cultivating trust as the most significant leadership strategies that should be adopted by other principals involved in this process. The study additionally identified increased reliance on data-driven approaches, improved professional development opportunities, and willingness to listen to feedback as important skills that can be employed by principals as a part of the school improvement process (Shelton, 2020). Increased utilization of stakeholder feedback was also identified as an important component of the school improvement process in a study focusing on principals at public elementary schools throughout the northeastern United States (Harrison, 2021). This willingness to listen is consistent with implementation of distributed or collective leadership strategies and has been identified as having a beneficial effect on collective efficacy (Ni et al., 2018). Distributed leadership has also been recognized by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education as a useful strategy for achieving meaningful and sustainable school improvement (Supovitz et al., 2019). A separate case study focusing on the experiences of teachers involved in the New Jersey school improvement process identified increased participation in professional development opportunities as the primary way in which teachers were involved, and this was associated with an increase in teachers' sense of self-efficacy (Mount, 2018).

Difficulties Faced by Urban Schools

There is a persistent achievement gap affecting the academic performance of poor and minority students relative to their peers. Schools in urban areas are more likely to serve these populations as well as to be overcrowded and underfunded (Kainz, 2019; Knight, 2017). This

population has also been identified as having the greatest potential for improvement with Title 1 interventions (Kainz, 2019). It is thus all the more important that these schools continue to receive Title 1 funding, which is jeopardized by their being identified as underperforming.

In addition to challenges related to funding and student demographics, urban schools are often located in areas that are affected by higher rates of violent crime, high traffic and pollution levels, and generally less safe environments, all of which have been shown to impact absenteeism and school performance negatively (Berman et al., 2018). Several factors that can adversely affect school scores occur at a disproportionately high level in schools in urban areas, including rising poverty rates, homelessness, crime, abandonment of education, teen pregnancy, and weapons possession (Barnett & Stevenson, 2016).

Teachers in urban schools report high levels of student misbehavior and disengagement, with almost half of teachers reporting that they encounter aggressive behaviors from students on a weekly basis (Camacho & Parham, 2019). Schools serving disadvantaged students are thus often forced to improve on factors unrelated to education itself. This can present a challenge for urban teachers, who are often less experienced and have fewer resources to help them than teachers in suburban areas (Knight, 2017). Urban schools also face barriers to teacher recruitment and retention, which has been shown to have a negative impact on student performance (Wronowski, 2018). Overall, the stresses of working in an urban school serving high-poverty minority students, coupled with the added pressures of NCLB and the legacy thereof, can have a negative effect on teacher morale (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010). This is likely to impair self-efficacy among teachers, which can, in turn, have negative effects on student outcomes.

Student Self-Efficacy

Student self-efficacy is the belief of students that they are capable of succeeding in their education. Central to the research questions addressed by the present study is the premise that student self-efficacy is enhanced by teacher self-efficacy as well as collective efficacy. Student self-efficacy is associated with increased emotional and behavioral engagement and improved academic performance (Bandura, 1993; Olivier et al., 2018; Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Bandura proposed that self-efficacy incorporates cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes, which collectively influence an individual's mindset about their capacity to learn or otherwise achieve a certain goal (Bandura, 1993). Bandura alternatively described self-efficacy as being highly related to an individual's belief in their own agency, and in this way, self-efficacy can be related to Dweck's mindset theory, described below. Students with high self-efficacy are more motivated to learn and show greater persistence, consistent with a greater belief in their own capability and expectations of success (Bandura 1993; Zimmerman, 1995). Bandura (1993) also demonstrated that self-efficacy was a greater predictor of success in a mathematics task than was ability itself.

Importantly, whereas efficacy theory describes perceived efficacy as a purely innate drive, Bandura proposed in his self-efficacy theory that self-efficacy is an acquired trait (Zimmerman, 1995). While some students may be more naturally inclined towards higher levels of self-efficacy than others, several studies have demonstrated that self-efficacy can be deliberately enhanced either through cultivation by parents at an early age or later in life (Bandura, 1993; Shin & Bolkan, 2021; Uchida et al., 2018). Uchida et al. (2018) demonstrated that increased self-efficacy could be manipulated in a classroom setting by inducing successful performance. A cohort of 12- and 13-year-old students performed a cognitive task wherein one

group of students received significantly easier problems than the other and thus had higher success rates. Significantly, the group of students who underwent manipulated success reported higher levels of self-efficacy that persisted for as long as a year following the study (Uchida et al., 2018).

Self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation can also be enhanced by specific instructional strategies, such as providing students with sufficient intellectual stimulation as part of a transformational leadership approach to teaching (Shin & Bolkan, 2021). Effective teaching techniques included using an interactive teaching style, challenging students, and encouraging independent thought. Additionally, students' perceptions of the learning environment, and specifically their sense of shared control and whether they were encouraged to make contributions to the classroom, were predictive of behavioral engagement and self-efficacy (Sökmen, 2021). Alternatively, negative teacher behaviors have been shown to have a detrimental effect on self-efficacy, such that students who were admonished by teachers and perceived them as being dissatisfied had significantly lower levels of self-efficacy (Shukla et al., 2020).

Teacher Self-Efficacy

As mentioned above, increased teacher self-efficacy is positively associated with student self-efficacy, which, in turn, has a highly beneficial effect on student performance. Several factors have been identified that promote a sense of self-efficacy among teachers, including a perception of a safe and supportive school environment (Reaves & Cozzens, 2018). The same study identified teacher self-efficacy as being promoted by increased supervision from administrators and clarity of expectations, and additionally associated with increased motivation

and better relationships with other staff members. Teacher self-efficacy can be directly related to instructional quality, which is, in turn, related to student motivational beliefs (Burić & Kim, 2020). Increased teacher confidence in their abilities has also been associated with improved relationships with students and decreased levels of conflict (Hajovsky et al., 2020). In turn, teacher self-efficacy has also been shown to indirectly mitigate the negative effects of bullying and victimization on student self-esteem via improved social dynamics and students' perceptions of the student-teacher relationship (van Aalst et al., 2021). Teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy are also more likely to engage in mastery-oriented teaching practices focused on creativity, understanding, and meaningfulness, as compared to teachers with lower levels of self-efficacy who are more likely to employ performance-oriented teaching strategies (Poulou et al., 2019).

In addition to its positive impact on students, teacher self-efficacy has been shown to be associated with decreased burnout and lower stress levels for teachers themselves. This was particularly true in urban schools, in which teachers are more likely to report stress and burnout (Bottiani et al., 2019). In fact, a meta-analysis of data from the Teaching and Learning International Survey, including results from over 400,000 teachers around the world, indicated that teacher self-efficacy was highly associated with increased job satisfaction (Kasalak & Dagyar, 2020). Teacher self-efficacy is not a universal quality and can be divided into, among other categories, self-efficacy towards classroom instruction and self-efficacy towards student engagement. Inadequate self-efficacy in only one of these domains has been shown in some circumstances to reduce teacher job satisfaction, while interventions targeted to increase teacher self-efficacy must consider not only general confidence but also self-efficacy within a given domain (Perera et al., 2019).

Professional Development

Professional development for teachers has been shown to increase feelings of competence and self-efficacy, with important implications for student outcomes (Schipper et al., 2018). Teacher professional development may be subject-specific or focus on broader educational practices such as classroom management, with individual teachers having different needs (Perera et al., 2019). For example, professional development training targeted specifically towards mathematics teachers can have a beneficial effect on self-efficacy related to both subject knowledge and general classroom management practices (Carney et al., 2016; Ross & Bruce, 2007). Professional development opportunities have also been developed to improve teacher self-efficacy particularly with respect to the use of the internet and other technologies in the classroom (Watson, 2006) as well as for specific instructional techniques such as inquiry-based science teaching (Tsivitanidou et al., 2018). Professional development training can also take multiple formats, with one study indicating that formats that include follow-up coaching and focus on mastery have the strongest positive effects on teacher self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009).

School Collective Efficacy

The overall concept of collective efficacy derives from SCT and is defined as a collective belief in the ability to work together to achieve a common goal. Bandura (1997) noted that “perceived collective efficacy is an emergent group-level attribute rather than simply the sum of members’ perceived personal efficacies” (p. 478). As such, while individual self-efficacy is related to collective efficacy, it is not a sufficient replacement for a shared belief in the group’s effectiveness as a team. Lee and Louis (2019) suggested that collaboration, trust, and social control are key behavior-oriented elements of group effectiveness. Collaboration and trust are

two forms of social capital, instilling group members with a common community consciousness and the perception that common goals are mutually beneficial.

In a school setting, teacher self-efficacy and effective school leadership practices are predictive of perceived collective efficacy (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). Furthermore, collective efficacy among teachers is associated with increased teacher leadership and communication as well as a shared goal of academic excellence. Additionally, collective efficacy is tied to increased job satisfaction, increased commitment to their job, and more positive attitudes towards professional development (Donohoo, 2018). Consistent with an increased openness to professional development opportunities, effective implementation of professional learning communities is positively associated with collective efficacy, as well as increased collaboration between teachers and higher levels of student achievement (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017).

School collective efficacy has, in fact, been widely established to have a positive impact on student performance (Bandura, 1993; Donohoo, 2018). Not only is collective efficacy beneficial to student performance in general, but it has been specifically demonstrated to reduce the achievement gap between Black and White students (Goddard, 2017). Collective efficacy also promotes parent and community engagement, contributing to improved relationships not only between staff but also with other members of the learning community (Kirby & DiPaola, 2011).

Principal and School Collective Efficacy

Leadership plays an important role in determining organizational culture and maintaining a commitment to the collective goal. Leaders not only play a critical role in developing and implementing policies to direct an organization towards a goal, but also serve as role models for those with whom they work. Transformational leadership, in particular, can have a positive

impact on an organization's culture, as these leadership qualities are associated with vision, motivation, and innovation (Bass & Avolio, 1993). This applies not only to corporate institutions but also to educational settings.

Attitudes of principals have been shown to have a significant impact on the overall school culture, and use of transformational leadership strategies by principals has been shown to increase school collective efficacy (Ninković & Knežević, 2018). Transformational leadership by principals was also associated with increased teacher job satisfaction and commitment to the institution. Some of the transformational leadership practices employed by principals in this study included providing individualized support and intellectual stimulation, building programs to encourage collaboration and parent engagement, and contributing to the development of a shared vision (Ninković & Knežević, 2018). Additionally, teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy were reciprocally influential with principal self-efficacy. A separate study identified principal leadership strategies as having direct and indirect effects on teacher professional learning; indirect effects were at least, in part, mediated by an increase in teacher self-efficacy (Liu & Hallinger, 2018). In a case study of a high-poverty rural school, principal self-efficacy was associated with increased collective efficacy and promoted effectiveness of the school by improving teaching and learning and enhancing the school's overall climate. Teachers identified maintaining an instructional focus, developing teacher leaders, and leading by example as critical behaviors that this principal used to foster collective efficacy (Versland & Erickson, 2017).

Another means by which principals can foster collective efficacy is by encouraging collective leadership. Ni et al. (2018) found that increased influence over decisions by other stakeholders did not diminish the decision influence of principals and has the potential to create a more positive and inclusive school environment. Sun and Xia (2018) demonstrated that such

distributed leadership strategies were associated with increased teacher job satisfaction which was in part mediated by an increase in teacher self-efficacy. Liu et al. (2021) expanded on this finding, demonstrating that the beneficial effect of distributed leadership on teacher self-efficacy was, in part, mediated by collaboration and a supportive school culture. Thus, it has been widely demonstrated that principals can exert substantial influence over school culture and collective efficacy, and specific leadership strategies such as transformational leadership can help facilitate this. Distributed leadership has also been suggested by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education as an effective technique to bring about meaningful and sustainable school improvement (Supovitz et al., 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) contended that self-efficacy is the driving force that drives people to achieve more than originally they thought of their ability to achieve (Donohoo & Katz, 2017). The theoretical framework of this present study also asserted that people with a high level of self-efficacy tend to recognize themselves as accomplishing tasks that they interpret as difficult. Bandura found that the higher the level of self-efficacy, the more resilient, sustainable, and determined they were to achieve successful results. Self-efficacy is defined as a social cognition of students' belief in their ability to be successful in new learning. It means recognizing that everyone has the unique ability to learn, organize, and apply new skills. The SCT states that social interaction in the learning environment is one of the most influential factors in student learning. According to Bandura (1993), cognitive processes, motives, and effects are interrelated and mixed and act as catalysts for interactions. Academic performance refers to how students and teachers perceive their ability to succeed as well as the capacity of the

people with whom they interact. Teachers with a high level of self-efficacy can motivate and engage students in the learning process.

Mindset Theory

Mindset theory, developed by Carol Dweck (2006), describes the phenomenon whereby individuals who believe that certain skills and traits can be developed as opposed to being innate are more likely to find success in these endeavors. This is referred to as a growth mindset, whereas the alternative belief that most individuals are born with certain abilities which cannot be changed is referred to as a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006). In short, mindset theory demonstrates that an individual's self-perception can profoundly affect the way they live their life. This is particularly true with respect to beliefs about that which an individual is capable of as well as attitudes towards their malleability. A growth mindset is not necessarily the same as a positive outlook, but it is simply the belief that one can improve oneself with targeted effort (Dweck, 2016). The framework has been applied to several different fields and has implications for social and emotional skills development, physical and technical skills, and perhaps most commonly—as is discussed here—education (Bernecker & Job, 2019; Dweck, 2006).

Mindset theory was originally developed in response to the observation that different children respond very differently to obstacles. While some children were easily deterred by difficult problems, others actively sought these out, seemingly enjoying the challenge (Bernecker & Job, 2019). Consistent with this, individuals with a growth mindset tend to value effort put into a task as opposed to a mere outcome. Alternatively, this might be thought of as an emphasis on learning goals instead of performance goals (Bernecker & Job, 2019). In fostering a growth mindset, Dweck recommended praising children for their hard work and efforts rather than for their innate abilities and achievements (Dweck, 2006). Mindset interventions in adults have been

shown to increase challenge-approach motivation and self-determination and to be associated with an internal locus of control (Burgoyne et al., 2018).

Importantly, a growth mindset has not only been shown to improve student achievement, but it also can itself be taught (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Among the first to demonstrate this using a controlled study, Blackwell et al. (2007) performed an intervention study in which seventh grade students attended an 8-week workshop consisting of 25-minute sessions once per week focused on the malleability of intelligence. Following the intervention, students in the experimental group demonstrated increased classroom motivation and a math grade point average 0.3 points higher than that of a control group who attended workshops that included the same information about the brain and study skills but not about malleable intelligence (Blackwell et al., 2007). Through a longitudinal study, the authors also found that students' preexisting belief in incremental theory, or tendencies towards a growth mindset, was predictive of future academic performance (Blackwell et al., 2007). Despite extensive findings now demonstrating that educating students on resilience and promoting a growth mindset result in improved academic and social outcomes, this remains an area for increased focus in most schools today (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Gaps in the Literature

The literature on self-efficacy and collective efficacy clearly demonstrates that these phenomena are mutually dependent and have a reciprocal influence. Furthermore, in an educational context, collective efficacy contributes to improved student outcomes and can be fostered by effective leadership strategies. Teacher collective efficacy has been shown to have a positive effect on the school environment for all parties involved in the educational process. However, while collective efficacy is generally recognized to have a positive impact on both

school culture and academic outcomes, there has been little focus on how this relates to the school improvement process for schools identified as underperforming or how this may be influenced by an urban environment. Specifically, there is little research concerning how urban principals perceive of, respond to, and facilitate collective efficacy in this context. This present study explored the perceptions of principals about collective efficacy and how these perceptions influenced their leadership strategies related to the school improvement process. Finally, this study related findings about principals' perceptions of collective efficacy to the theoretical frameworks of social cognitive theory and mindset theory, both of which have been used to describe phenomena associated with self and collective efficacy.

Summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive literature review, providing context for the present study as it relates to the role of leadership practices in promoting collective efficacy in urban schools. The legislative history of student achievement gaps and how this has led to labeling schools as failing to meet standards, as well as the challenges associated with urban school districts, are presented, as is a review of self-efficacy and collective efficacy in the context of various educational roles. Finally, the theoretical frameworks of social cognitive theory and mindset theory were described in detail and related to the central research questions.

This literature review established a firm basis upon which to conduct the present research study, which interrogated principals' perceptions of collective efficacy in urban K-8 schools designated for the school improvement process in the state of New Jersey. Chapter 3 next builds on the framework established here, elaborating on the specific research questions addressed by this study and outlining the planned research objectives and methodology. It also includes a discussion of relevant ethical considerations, assurances of reliability and effectiveness of the

survey instruments, and limitations of the study, as well as a plan for how the present study addressed these issues.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methods of carrying out research to answer the research questions, as well as the population and samples that were selected for the study. In addition, this chapter provides a synopsis of the participants who engaged in the study and the setting in which the study took place. A description of the devices used in the studies, data acquisition process and data analysis and reporting procedures are also reported. The interview process and protocol are discussed, followed by a detailed summary of the method for data collection. The method for data analysis is also described, followed by a conclusion and discussion of proper considerations for the research study.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore principals' perceptions of collective efficacy in urban New Jersey schools designated for the school improvement process. Schools that are publicly flagged and identified as underperforming may have exhausted effective structural and collective efficacy strategies within the school community based on current conditions. As a result of school improvement identifiers, one might assume that school district officials, teachers, students, and families internalize public perception and enact minimal collaborative practices. This fixed mindset can inadvertently hinder the implementation of practices that promote sustainable progress and collective efficacy practices. Previous studies have confirmed a relationship between student self-efficacy and academic performance (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). With the present study, the researcher sought to better understand the principals' perceptions of collective efficacy in underperforming schools in New Jersey as a means of

school improvement. As stated in Chapters 1 and 2, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore principals' perceptions about collective efficacy in urban K-8 New Jersey schools designated for the school improvement process. The research conducted was guided by the following questions and sub-questions:

RQ1: What are principals' perceptions of community collective efficacy as a means towards school improvement?

SQ1a: How do principals describe the value/possibility of community collective efficacy?

SQ1b: How do principals describe the challenges of community collective efficacy?

Research Design

The researcher selected a qualitative study design to acquire emotion, insight, and stories as told from the perspective of educators in schools designated for improvement. The use of a qualitative research design can be thought of as a rough sketch to be filled in by the researcher as the study proceeds (Frankel & Devers, 2000). This research was guided by a qualitative methodology and a narrative research design. For this research, narrative analysis was a selected method used to capture the lived experiences of principals and their perceptions of collective efficacy. Narrative research was used to describe the principals' experiences through their own stories (Butina, 2015). To conduct the research for this study, the researcher used a semi-structured interview approach with the principals. The study was designed to understand the structures that have been effective in underperforming schools and to determine how collective efficacy assists leaders in improving the schools' status.

Qualitative methods are appropriate when the goal of a study is to better understand why or how a phenomenon occurs, rather than quantifying the prevalence or extent of a phenomenon (Taylor et al., 2015). Qualitative research also involves the collection of detail-rich data. In the case of this research, the aim was to explore the principals' perceptions of collective efficacy in urban K-8 schools in New Jersey designated for the school improvement process and whether these perceptions play a role in their decision-making. Principals may seek out and implement specific methods for their schools' improvement process based on their perceptions of student performance within the school community.

Data Collection

The researcher obtained direct permission to recruit participants via district email from the deputy superintendent and superintendent of the Central Public School district. To this end, the researcher sent out email invitations introducing herself and explaining the study. The solicitation was sent out at the completion of the IRB approval process. This research study's data sources included an interview survey with eight open-ended interview questions designed to obtain answers to the research questions (please see the semi-structured interview section below). These open-ended interview questions, which took approximately 30 minutes to complete, were emailed to 15 potential participants who responded to the researcher's call for participation. Of those 15 participants, only 10 met all the inclusion criteria. Briefly, one respondent was not a principal; three respondents were not principals in the state of New Jersey; and one respondent was a director, not a principal, of an elementary school in Trenton, New Jersey. These five participants were disqualified from participating in the study.

Upon confirmation that potential participants met the inclusion criteria, the researcher distributed informed consent forms that were required to participate in the study. Upon receipt of the completed informed consent forms, the researcher distributed the open-ended interview surveys to the participants via email. Participants were able to complete the interviews on their own time, in the location of their choosing. Each participant emailed the completed survey to the researcher. Although the interview data was already in written form directly from the participants, member checking was still conducted (Candela, 2019). There was a need for member checking since member checking is a method used to address the study's credibility (Johnson et al., 2019). The participants were assigned pseudonyms, namely P1, P2, ..., and P10, to protect their identity and ensure anonymity. The surveys were directly uploaded without alteration to the NVivo Software for analysis and coded by themes to determine the similarity, dissimilarity, or collaboration of the participants' responses.

Research Protocol

The research protocol for data analysis was conducted as described in this chapter. The data analysis procedure consisted of the following steps. The researcher first performed four critical readings of each interview survey. In the first reading, the researcher read each survey for overall impressions. In the second reading, the researcher read each survey line-by-line to become familiar with all of the data. Third, the researcher read the surveys by each interview question instead of by participant. This allowed the researcher to identify important themes that emerged from each survey question. It also provided the researcher with insight into which survey questions the participants "grouped" into common themes. For example, Survey Questions 1 and 3 dealt with the participants' perceptions of collective efficacy generally, and

then specifically the state of collective efficacy at their schools. These questions were grouped together to comprise Subsection 1 of the data analysis and results. Similarly, Survey Questions 2 and 4 were grouped together to form Subsection Two, which analyzed the effect of the *needs improvement* school rating on collective efficacy. Survey Questions 5 through 8 dealt with how the principals utilized collective efficacy in various leadership-based activities; these survey questions were grouped to form Subsection Three of the data analysis and results section. Finally, the researcher did a fourth reading of the surveys, by participant, to regain a holistic appreciation of the entire data set.

The researcher next reviewed the interview transcripts to determine if the data correlated to the research question. A thematic coding system was utilized to code the data for each survey question. Within each research question, codes were given to different ideas that the participants expressed. For example, Interview Question 2 asked the participants to explain the impact, if any, the label *school designated for improvement* has had on their school community. The themes for this question were derived from exhaustive cases—namely, the participants could report the rating as having a *positive* effect, a *negative* effect, or *no effect*. Within each of these three themes (*positive, negative, no effect*), subthemes were found by analyzing participants' responses. For example, for this question, within the positive theme, a subtheme of having a *common goal* emerged from the participants' responses. All survey questions were coded in this manner. The codebook in Appendix A contains a comprehensive account of all themes, subthemes, and codes assigned to the participants' responses.

After the identification of themes and different ideas contributing to the development of each theme, the researcher chose direct quotations from participants to help explain the themes.

If a variety of participants had similar responses within a theme, the researcher ensured that the chosen quotation within each data table was representative of the general sentiment of all participants. In this study, there was little disagreement between participants in that many of them expressed the same thoughts or individualized thoughts that were not replicated by any other participant. However, participants did offer contrasting positions on a few subthemes. Notably, any and all differential opinions and contrasts are noted in the data analysis section. This type of data was not chosen by the researcher for omission. Finally, after the researcher identified themes, subthemes, and quotations, the researcher did a fifth reading of the entire data set to ensure that all themes, subthemes, and quotations chosen were representative of the participants' intentions and perceptions.

Participants

All of the participants in the study were principals at public elementary and high schools in the state of New Jersey. Further, all of the participants led schools that were placed on the state's *school in need of improvement* list. The researcher attempted to recruit participants statewide in New Jersey. However, all participants who responded to the call for participation led schools in a large urban city of New Jersey. As such, the target population of the study was modified to be principals who led K-12 schools in need of improvement in this large urban city. This modification may limit the generalizability of the study, a concept that is discussed further in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. The demographics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants*

Participant	Years of Experience as a Principal	Current School	Number of Years as Principal at Current School
P1	5	Elementary	3
P2	1	Elementary	1
P3	8	Elementary	6
P4	3	High School	5
P5	2	Elementary	1
P6	2	High School	1
P7	3	Elementary	2
P8	4	High School	1
P9	2	Elementary	5
P10	6	Elementary	6

In this large urban city in New Jersey, the public school system only consists of two types of schools—namely, elementary schools (K-8) and high schools (Grades 9-12). In the study, 70% of the participants were elementary school principals, while 30% of the participants were high school principals. The principals had, on average, 3.6 ± 2.1 years of experience of being a principal at any school and 3.1 ± 2.1 years of experience of being a principal at their current school. Interestingly, these data indicated that the majority of the principals have spent their principalship at the same school in which they are currently serving.

Semi-Structured Surveys

The researcher created an interview survey to ask participants open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of collective efficacy at their respective schools. The survey questions prepared were clear, concise, and well-defined to obtain quality responses from

participants. The interview questions and how they correlated to each research question, sub-research questions, and theoretical framework are shown below.

1. How would you define collective efficacy? **[RQ1, Social Cognitive Theory]**
2. Explain the impact if any the label *school designated for improvement* has had on your community. **[SQ1a, SQ1b, Theory of Mindset]**
3. Describe the state of collective efficacy in your school. **[RQ1, Social Cognitive Theory]**
4. Can you share how your staff and students feel about being employed and attending a school with a lower performance rating? **[RQ1, SQ1a, SQ1b, Theory of Mindset]**
5. Describe the process you engage in to develop strategic plans and strategic decision-making at your school. Explain the role of collective efficacy in the process. **[SQ1a, Social Cognitive Theory]**
6. How does/did your perceptions about collective efficacy influence your decisions for the school during the improvement process? **[RQ1, SQ1a, SQ1b, Theory of Mindset]**
7. During this process, did you make or have you made purposeful decisions based on your perceptions about collective efficacy? Why or why not? **[RQ1, Social Cognitive Theory]**
8. Explain the process for identifying interventions for your targeted population. Do your beliefs and perceptions about collective efficacy influence your decision-making with regard to interventions? **[RQ1, SQ1b, Theory of Mindset]**

Saturation

The sample size of qualitative research varies according to the amount of data that must be obtained pending data saturation (Guest et al., 2020). Attaining data saturation is a cyclical process. The researcher identified themes throughout the data analysis and kept building on the themes as additional participants were interviewed until they no longer yielded different themes (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). The sample size of 10 participants was selected because this sample size generally ensures that data saturation is reached in interview-based qualitative studies (Guest et al., 2020; Vasieleiou et al., 2018). Specifically, Guest et al. (2020) demonstrated that a sample size of 10 participants led to data saturation in 92% of interview-based qualitative studies. Accordingly, the present researcher observed that data saturation was generally achieved after conducting the 10 interviews, as the same ideas were expressed in the 10 different interviews. This led the researcher to conclude that data saturation had been reached and no further interviews would lead to the identification of different ideas or themes.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability denotes the consistency of an instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 153). To ensure reliability, all participants were asked the same interview questions developed from and aligned with the same research questions using an interview protocol; they were also provided with the same amount of time during the interviews. The interview questions and the interview protocol were shared with an expert panel to elicit feedback on the clarity of the questions and whether they would provide information to address the research questions. The feedback was then incorporated into the interview protocol. The school principals vetted to participate were not a part of any group who made up the participants for the study. The researcher did not use an independent transcriptionist that could potentially compromise the

confidentiality of the research study. Instead, the researcher used NVivo to transcribe the responses to the interviews. Finally, the researcher made a concerted effort to adhere to all the conditions set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). As Creswell and Creswell (2018) said, “Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account” (p. 199). To ensure validity, the researcher recorded the interviews using pseudonyms (i.e., P1, P2), and the transcripts of these interviews were sent back to the participants for member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1990) related the use of member checking in qualitative research as the “most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). This process gave the participants an opportunity to review their responses to ensure that their words were transcribed accurately. Any changes found by participants were changed immediately to best capture their point of view.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is that it was conducted solely within the Central Public School district. The researcher intended for participants to be drawn from multiple counties in New Jersey. However, the only participants who volunteered for the study who met the inclusion criteria were from Central Public Schools. Therefore, the actual target population of the study is Central Public School principals who lead schools in need of improvement. This may impact the transferability of the study to other counties in New Jersey; furthermore, the findings of the study may not be generalizable to other schools in other states. However, the researcher believes that the results of the study are transferable to any urban school district in the United States, as research as shown that most urban schools experience the same challenges and barriers (Howard & Milner, 2021).

Another limitation of the study was the sample size. The researcher was only able to purposefully recruit 10 participants for the study. Low numbers of participants can lead to a lack of data saturation. However, in this case, the researcher believed that data saturation was reached. In some cases, 80-90% of the participants highlighted ideas within the same theme (see the codebook in Appendix A).

A third limitation of the study is that the survey was done via email rather than using in-person interviews. The researcher was not present when the participants were completing the surveys. Therefore, the researcher was unable to read and interpret the participants' nonverbal responses, including body language. As such, it is impossible for the researcher to make suppositions based on the participants' nonverbal communication.

Finally, the paper-based survey also served as another important limitation. By confining the interview to a specific set of questions on paper, the researcher was unable to ask follow-up questions when needed. However, this limitation was, in part, mitigated by the fact that the participants took care in explaining their thoughts and did so thoroughly.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the use of the narrative qualitative approach needed for this study. This chapter also described the participants surveyed, the measuring instruments used for data collection, and the data analysis procedure. Also discussed were the effectiveness and reliability of the survey, important ethical considerations related to the survey, and limitations.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

Collective efficacy is “the group’s shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). While important in all organizations, collective efficacy is significant in educational settings (Goddard et al., 2004). Within education, collective efficacy can transform school settings into vibrant communities where collaborative learning is facilitated by school administrators, support staff, teachers, and the students themselves (Goddard et al., 2004). Consequently, schools needing improvement could turn to collective efficacy to help improve their school communities, thereby increasing student achievement. The school leaders who participated in this study utilized inclusive structures. These structures included professional development that focused on tiny shifts academically by using PLC cycles to analyze data. Teaching sprints were introduced to school administrators and instructional coaches by the Office of Teaching and Learning as a means of analyzing small data output connected to the curriculum. There was evidence in six of the 10 schools that principals and teachers were engaging in teaching sprints that allowed all stakeholders to come together to determine a focus for practice improvement. However, it is presently unknown how principals who lead schools that need improvement view collective efficacy and its role in improving the school community.

In Chapter 4, the researcher presents the data analysis and results from this study on principals’ perceptions of collective efficacy. The data analysis and results are divided into three subsections based on the research questions to address an important gap in the literature. The following research questions and sub-questions were developed to guide this study:

RQ1: What are principals' perceptions of community collective efficacy as a means towards school improvement?

SQ1a: How do principals describe the value/possibility of community collective efficacy?

SQ1b: How do principals describe the challenges of community collective efficacy?

Data Analysis and Results

The data analysis and results sections are divided into three subsections based on the research questions. Participants answered questions related to their definition of collective efficacy, the state of their school collective efficacy, how collective efficacy affects decision-making, identifying interventions, and the role of collective efficacy in strategic management. Participants also filled out a questionnaire on the school improvement process. The data were organized into tables based on the answers to the questionnaire; however, the researcher organized the data results here in subsections based on the research questions. In the first subsection, the researcher presents the principals' definitions of their perceptions of collective efficacy (Table 2), their perceptions of the state of collective efficacy at their schools (Table 3), and their perceptions of decision-making (Table 4). In the second subsection, the principals' perceptions of the benefits of collective efficacy are examined, including positive effects on the school and decision-making. Finally, in the third subsection, the challenges associated with collective efficacy were examined, including mind shift, works in progress, identifying interventions (Table 4), decision-making (Tables 6-7), and improvement ratings (Table 8).

Subsection One: Principals’ Perceptions of Community Collective Efficacy as a Means of School Improvement

Principals’ Definitions of Collective Efficacy

Before beginning to understand the principals’ perceptions of community collective efficacy as a means of school improvement, it was necessary to understand their definitions of collective efficacy. Therefore, the first survey question asked the principals for their definition of collective efficacy. This question resulted in three general definitions; some participants defined collective efficacy as an ability, others defined it as collaboration and teamwork, and the remainder of the participants defined it as working towards a common goal (Table 2).

Table 2

Principals’ Definitions of Collective Efficacy

Definition of Collective Efficacy		
Theme	Participants	Excerpt
Ability	P3, P5, P6, P8, P10	“A group’s shared understanding gives that group the ability to control other behaviors. It’s a way to create an order using a system of understandings” (P10).
Collaboration, Teamwork	P2, P4, P5, P6, P9	“Collective efficacy is the belief that everyone can and will succeed” (P9).
Works Towards a Positive Goal	P1, P2, P5, P7	“Having a sense of togetherness as an organization. Using that togetherness to foster common beliefs in the ability to accomplish goals and to work effectively” (P5).

Collective Efficacy as an Ability. Three general themes emerged from the principals’ definitions of collective efficacy. Some defined collective efficacies as an ability that is shared by a group. For example, P3 said that collective efficacy is “a group’s ability to produce the desired result.” Similarly, P8 said, “I would define collective efficacy as the ability to have

collective trust. [It is] confidence individuals within an organization have towards achieving success.” In this way, some of the participants believed that collective efficacy was a matter of ability, in that the organization needed to have the ability or capacity to achieve collective goals. It should be noted that ability is an intrinsic property of a group or an organization (Riegelsberger et al., 2005). Ability can be nurtured and fostered to meet the goals of an organization (Lysova et al., 2019), but, ultimately, the ability to effect change begins with intrinsic motivation and the properties of individuals within a group (Locke & Schattke, 2019). Therefore, bringing individuals in or out of the organization could directly affect the perception of the collective efficacy of the organization (Chen et al., 2019). Therefore, this suggests that strong positive leadership from principals and administrators can positively influence the perception of collective efficacy of schools.

Collective Efficacy as Collaboration and Teamwork. The majority of the principals surveyed in the study gave a definition of collective efficacy that focused on collaboration and teamwork. For example, P6 described:

I would describe collective efficacy as the ability to collaborate with parents, students, and staff (instructional and non-instructional) to hire, develop and sustain staff members who are firmly committed to transforming any underperforming academic institution.

This process requires ongoing communication, parental support, and ongoing monitoring.

(P6)

P6 highlighted the notion that collective efficacy is grounded in teamwork and collaboration between all parties and stakeholders, including staff, parents, and students. In the eyes of P6, collective efficacy is an ongoing process that requires the consistent cooperation of all parties. These sentiments were echoed by a variety of other participants. Indeed, P4 said:

Collective efficacy complements organizational systems, which are the underpinnings of collaboration.... Collective efficacy ensures that stakeholders work with fidelity to achieve school-wide goals to leverage the greatest impact to supersede pockets of the greatest throughout the school community. (P4)

Both P4 and P6 emphasized that collective efficacy requires collaboration between all stakeholders to achieve school-wide goals. Many other principals shared the same thoughts. For an exhaustive list of the principals' definitions of collective efficacy, please see Table A-1 in Appendix A.

Collective Efficacy as Work Towards a Positive Goal. The last theme that emerged from the analysis of the principals' definitions of collective efficacy was the notion that collective efficacy is working towards a positive goal. In many ways, this theme was intertwined with other themes, but was distinct in that work towards a positive goal implies there is a perception of action by individuals. For example, P5 intertwined the theme of collaboration, ability, and work towards a common goal. P5 said, "[Collective efficacy] is having a sense of togetherness as an organization. Using that togetherness to foster common beliefs in the ability to accomplish goals and to work effectively." Importantly, P5 highlighted that ability and working towards a goal are different. Ability is an intrinsic characteristic of an individual that can be fostered, whereas working towards a goal involves consistent action. Similarly, P1 argued that "Collective efficacy is the work that happens toward a shared and collective belief that all students can learn and excel." In this way, many of the participants believed that significant action and work are required to foster collective efficacy. This idea may seem incongruent with the idea that perceived collective efficacy is an ability of a group. However, abilities can be fostered, which can, at times, take a significant amount of work. In summary, the principals

perceived collective efficacy as an ability of a group to foster collaboration and teamwork in an effort to work together to meet a common goal.

Current State of School Collective Efficacy

Next, the principals were asked about the current state of their school's collective efficacy. This question resulted in a wide variety of responses. One principal (P5) reported their school had high collective efficacy; another principal (P3) reported that collective efficacy was initially positive and then turned negative; yet another principal (P10) reported that their school had low collective efficacy. Other themes mentioned by participants included: (a) the school had to shift its mindset; (b) improved collective efficacy led to positive effects in the schools; and (c) the school's collective efficacy was a work in progress. These results are summarized in Table 3. The *Resulted in Positive Effect* theme is examined in Subsection Two, and the *Mindset Shift* and *Work in Progress* themes are examined in Subsection Three.

High Collective Efficacy. One principal (P5) reported that their school had high collective efficacy, in part because the principal was adding another school to the school community. As such, this required a large amount of collective efficacy to join the schools together to function as one collective and effective community. P5 said:

My school community consists of two buildings that were recently merged for the first time. This upcoming school year requires laser-sharp focus in having the teachers and staff embark on a major shift in seeing the school community as one. (P5)

As such, P5 described that their school required a high collective efficacy to effectively join the two schools, even in spite of the *needs improvement* rating.

Table 3*Principals' Perceptions of the State of School Collective Efficacy*

State of School Collective Efficacy		
Theme	Participants	Excerpt
High Collective Efficacy	P5	“My school community consists of two buildings that were recently merged for the first time. This upcoming academic year requires laser-sharp focus in having the teachers and staff embark on a major shift in seeing the school community as one” (P5).
High Collective Efficacy, Then Low Collective Efficacy	P3	“Initially, the collective efficacy is high due to the feeling of ‘this is our school, and we must protect it.’ Over long/extended periods of time, the momentum tends to wane” (P3).
Low Collective Efficacy	P10	“I think it is lacking in my school. That is why we are currently dealing with chaos. There is a lack of structure and a lack of confidence in the administration. It feels like everyone is out for themselves” (P10).
Mindset Shift	P1, P9	“There is a strong urge to be devoid of the ‘school in need of improvement’ label. Thus, we worked hard on mindset shifting” (P1).
Resulted in Positive Effect	P1, P2, P4, P7, P8	“I am now in my third year at my school, and I am proud that although there were negative perceptions around our school’s performance in my first year, we have worked hard to build trust again with all stakeholders.... While building trust and confidence in a school is iterative, we have made strides in building” (P8).
Work in Progress	P6, P8, P9	“The state of collective efficacy at my school can be described as a work in progress where most stakeholders see the need to improve and support most of the changes implemented, but some tend to give up when immediate results are not evident or a challenge/ setback arises” (P6).

High Collective Efficacy, Then Low Collective Efficacy. Like P5, P3 described an initial positive amount of collective efficacy. However, P3 observed that over time, the positive aspect of the schools' collective efficacy started to mellow, until there was little collective efficacy at the school. In the words of P3, "Initially, the collective efficacy is due to the feeling of 'this is our school, and we must protect it.' Over long or extended periods of time, the momentum tends to wane" (P3). P3 described a situation in which a school began an academic year with high collective efficacy, but it began to wane as the year progressed. This is perhaps not surprising, as teacher motivation and self-efficacy have been reported to decrease throughout the progression of the academic school year (Maulana et al., 2016). Similar trends have been seen with student motivation and self-efficacy throughout the academic year (Opdenakker et al., 2012). Consequently, a decrease in the self-efficacy of teachers and students would, in turn, lead to a decrease in collective efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Low Collective Efficacy. One principal reported that their school had a low collective efficacy this school year. P10 said, "I think [collective efficacy] is lacking in my school. That is why we are currently dealing with chaos. There is a lack of structure and a lack of confidence in the administration. It feels like everyone is out for themselves" (P10). P10 described a situation that was very different from situations with the other principals examined so far. For P10's school, the administrators and teachers seemed to be "out for themselves," meaning that they were more focused on self-preservation and job preservation than on the team, the collective. As such, this situation led to an instance where the school had low collective efficacy, when students do not rally behind their teachers and teachers do not rally behind their students. Indeed, in their study, Sørli and Torsheim (2011) found that a lack of organizational structure led to an overall decline in the collective efficacy of the organization.

Utilizing Collective Efficacy for Identifying Interventions

The last survey question asked principals whether they utilized collective efficacy to identify interventions. Three themes were derived from the analysis of this question. Principals reported using a data-driven approach to identify interventions, a response-to-intervention (RTI) system, and finally, team-driven interventions (Table 4). Each theme is discussed in turn.

Table 4

Principals' Perceptions of Process for Identifying Interventions

Process for Identifying Interventions		
Theme	Participants	Excerpt
Data-Driven Process	P1, P6, P7, P9	“We look at data to determine and isolate standards that students have not mastered, and we then group them and remediate those who have not” (P7).
Response to Intervention (RTI)	P1, P2	“We then determine what support will look like for those students. It could be various forms of RTI (Response to Intervention, Tutoring, Additional Guided Readings Sessions, Saturday Academy, etc.” (P1).
Team-Driven Intervention	P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9	“Interventions are identified by a team that has direct knowledge/ interaction with said population, ability to identify root causes, analysis of work samples or data, and can offer solutions for correction. The team is also responsible for benchmark review of the effectiveness of agreed upon intervention” (P3).

Data-Driven Process. Four principals (P1, P6, P7, and P9) reported utilizing a data-driven process for identifying interventions. Importantly, three of the four principals indicated that this data-driven approach was a team effort. For example, P1 said:

We determine which teachers are the strongest at which content. We analyze student data. Teachers create corrective instruction plans based on the data. This determines which students need support with which priority and/or pre-requisite standards. (P1)

P1 indicated that the intervention plans are a collaborative effort between teachers and administrative staff, which is fundamentally data-driven. P6 also emphasized a data-driven team process. P6 said, “The first step is pulling and analyzing student data as a team to determine which educational areas are in need of support for each child.” This process was not unique to P1 and P6. Indeed, P7 also described a data-driven, team-oriented approach to interventions. P7 said, “We look at data to determine and isolate standards that students have not mastered, and we then group them and remediate those who have not [mastered the material].” Importantly, within this theme, each of the principals expressed using collective efficacy in a data-driven, team-oriented process to identify interventions.

Response-to-Intervention (RTI). Two principals (P1 and P2) reported using a response-to-intervention (RTI) system to help identify students in need of intervention. Importantly, both P1 and P2 described this process in a team-oriented way, suggesting that collective efficacy does play an important role in the identification of interventions. For example, P1 said, “We then determine what support will look like for those students. It could be various forms of RTI (response-to-intervention, tutoring, additional guided reading sessions, Saturday academy, etc.).” While P1’s response may not seem interesting, the use of the word “we” is important, as it indicated that more than one person was involved in the intervention process. As such, even though P1 was utilizing a different method than other principals, they all still used collective efficacy to identify interventions. P2 echoed these sentiments, saying, “We use our RTI system and our I & RS system to make decisions collectively.” Therefore, P2 also indicated that collective efficacy plays an important role in identifying interventions, even when using an RTI system.

Team-Driven Interventions. Six of the principals reported using team-driven interventions that directly involve collective efficacy. For example, P3 said:

Interventions are identified by a team that has direct knowledge/interaction with said population, the ability to identify root causes, analysis of work samples or data, and can offer solutions for correction. The team is also responsible for a benchmark review of the effectiveness of the agreed-upon intervention. (P3)

P3 described a system in which a team is utilized to identify students in need of intervention. The team also determines what intervention is needed and whether an intervention is effective. In this way, P3 described utilizing collective efficacy to identify interventions effectively. P4 similarly utilized collective efficacy in the intervention process. P4 said, “Identifying interventions for the targeted population is done in collaboration with central office leaders, content area specialists, research-based practices, and reflection.” Thus, P4 also indicated that collective efficacy is important in the intervention process, given that administrators, as well as content area specialists, are tasked with identifying the correct intervention. Many of the principals reported similar processes, a complete list of which is detailed in Table A-8 in Appendix A.

Role of Collective Efficacy in Strategic Management

Strategic management is defined to be the process of setting goals, procedures, and objectives in order to make an organization more competitive (Jasper & Crossan, 2012). In particular, for schools, strategic management involves improving student achievement by substantially improving instructional practice and the effectiveness of teachers and principals by setting goals and making academic procedures and interventions (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2022). Each of the principals identified one of two themes as the role of collective efficacy in strategic management. The first of these themes is utilizing data analysis and SMART goals, and the

second theme is expanding the planning network to include more stakeholders. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Principals' Perceptions of Role of Collective Efficacy in Strategy Planning

Role of Collective Efficacy in Strategic Management		
Theme	Participants	Excerpt
Data Analysis, SMART Goals	P1, P4, P6, P9	“Being a school driven by DDI (Data-Driven Instruction), we always begin with Data Analysis to determine where we are & where we need to go. Teachers are part of this process. The Leadership Team develops SMART Goals within the Strategic Plan based on the Data. As we meet with teachers to support the creation of their SGO (Student Growth Objectives), they are clear about how their respective data fits into the scope of the whole” (P1).
Expand Planning Network	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10	“Over time, I have come to expand the collective efficacy in hopes that the more hands/minds involved, the more widespread the breadth of work would become. I purposefully create multilayered committees that staff pick to focus on areas of interest to them. The hope is that they will hold each other accountable because they are genuinely interested and invested in that area” (P3).

Data Analysis and SMART Goals. Four of the principals shared that they use data-driven analysis and SMART goals tools for strategic management in their schools. The SMART acronym was first used in business to guide the development of quality goals and objectives (Lazarus, 2004). With respect to goal making, SMART stands for specific, measurable, attainable, routine-based, and tied to a functional priority (Lazarus, 2004). P1 described using data-driven analysis coupled with SMART goals (Table 5). Importantly, P1 named this as part of collective efficacy, as the teachers and the leadership team are integral to the development of goals that fit the needs of the students as well as the needs of the school. P1 also described that

data analysis of student performance is integral to the development of the SMART goals (Table 5). P4 also addressed the use of data-driven analysis, saying, “Additionally, teachers are given two periods a week to work collaboratively to discuss student data, analysis and action plans to address deficiencies or maintain gains” (P4). In this way, P4, like P1, described that the teachers are integral to the establishment of goals and plans for strategic planning. As such, for these principals, collective efficacy plays an important role in the strategic management process with respect to goal setting and data-driven analysis.

Participants P6 and P9 described similar processes for data-driven analysis and goal setting. For example, P6 said, “We also pull and analyze student achievement data (including staff and student attendance) as well as teachers’ observation data and resources available before setting goals for the strategic plan” (P6). Similarly, P9 said, “We prepared to develop strategic plans in Aug[ust] of every year. We brainstorm as a team and use previous data to set goals” (P9). Importantly, both P6 and P9 described their strategic management process as involving the individuals closest to student achievement—namely, the teachers. Working as a team, the principals and teachers design goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, and, most importantly, tied to the functional priority of improving student and school outcomes. As such, these principals indicated that utilizing collective efficacy was an integral part of the strategic planning process.

Expanding Planning Network. Nine of the 10 principals expressed that they utilized collective efficacy in strategic planning by expanding the strategic planning network to include community stakeholders. For a complete list of the participants’ responses regarding expanding their planning network, please review the codebook presented in Table A-4 in Appendix A.

P2 and P4 included stakeholders in important strategic planning meetings and committees. For example, P2 said, “There is a stakeholder representative of every group on our Strategic Planning Committee” (P2), whereas P4 recounted:

The process I employ includes weekly meetings with key stakeholders.... Collective efficacy in my school community will allow for a cohesive vision to systematically improve student outcomes. Such an approach will eliminate pockets of greatness and increase student achievement exponentially by working together. (P4)

Therefore, P2 and P4 approach strategic planning and management by including community stakeholders in regular meetings, thereby utilizing collective efficacy to their advantage.

Similar to P4, both P3 and P5 included a wide range of community stakeholders in strategic planning meetings. P3 described:

Over time, I have come to expand the collective efficacy in hopes that the more hands/minds involved, the more widespread the breadth of work would become. I purposefully create multilayered committees that staff pick to focus on areas of interest to them. The hope is that they will hold each other accountable because they are genuinely interested and invested in that area. (P3)

Like the other principals, P3 included multiple types of community stakeholders on all committees in an effort not only to increase the chances of success but also to build collective efficacy. P3 also employed a unique strategy compared to the other principals interviewed in this study—namely, that the staff chooses the areas of focus in the meetings. This is an important strategy for promoting collective efficacy with respect to strategic management because the staff is invested in choosing topics they believe are important for the students. P5 also included a

wide range of individuals with different specialties in the strategic planning process. P5 said, “Strategic planning and decision making occur in formal and informal meetings. There are weekly leadership team meetings that include school leadership and instructional coaches. Student and staff support meetings occur biweekly” (P5). As such, P5 also contributed unique ideas that were not discussed by other principals, including the notion that staff and students need support meetings. These actions would also serve to promote and increase the collective efficacy of the school community. In essence, the principals each described ways in which they utilized collective efficacy in strategic planning, but they also noted the use of collective efficacy in strategic planning, in turn promoting further collective efficacy. Thus, these results indicated that the use of collective efficacy promotes the strategic planning process, which, in turn, promotes collective efficacy.

Subsection Two: Perceived Benefits of Collective Efficacy

Role of Collective Efficacy in Decision-Making

This section now examines the principals’ perceptions of how collective efficacy alters their decision-making processes. Four themes emerged from the analysis of this question (Table 6). A summary of these themes is presented in Table 6. The first theme is that collective efficacy did not affect the decision-making process, as is discussed in Subsection Three which examines the perceived challenges associated with collective efficacy and decision making. Another theme is that some of the principals made goals with collective efficacy in mind. The remaining two themes are: collective efficacy allows for a team orientation, and trust and transparency.

Table 6*Principals' Perceptions of How Collective Efficacy Affects Their Decision-Making*

How Perceptions of Collective Efficacy Affect Decision-Making		
Theme	Participants	Excerpt
Collective Efficacy Does Not Drive Decisions	P10	“It doesn’t. Whether or not the school community is on the same page or not. Improvement needs to take place. The reality of it is that it falls on my shoulder as the lead to make sure the process is implemented and actually happens. While the goal is to have a shared vision, it is not always reality” (P10).
Make Goals with Efficacy in Mind	P5, P8	“As a leader, I value collective efficacy as I recognize that it is the glue that allows a school in need of improvement the opportunity to move forward. Trust and confidence in the leaders, the goals, and the mission of the organization are paramount” (P8).
Team Orientation	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9	“As a school administrator, I always make team-informed decisions based on data. The teams’ inputs are always considered before making any decision. All decisions are based on probabilities to yield higher students, stronger parental support, and the development of high-performing teachers” (P6).
Truth and Transparency	P1, P8	“These teams meet with fidelity. We remain transparent with our data and where we are as a school” (P1).

Principals Make Goals with Efficacy in Mind. Two of the principals (P5 and P8), in direct contrast to P10, expressed that they make goals and decisions with efficacy in mind. For example, P5 said, “It is always important for goals to be realistic and not seem too far-fetched to ensure that collective efficacy remains as high as possible” (P5). P5 demonstrated that the goals and decisions made regarding school improvement are done with collective efficacy at the forefront, so that collective efficacy can be utilized to achieve the stated goals. P8 guided their team in a similar manner, saying:

As a leader, I value collective efficacy as I recognize that it is the glue that allows a school in need of improvement the opportunity to move forward. Trust and confidence in the leaders, the goals, and the mission of the organization are paramount. (P8)

P8, like P5, expressed that effective decisions and goals require that collective efficacy be considered. Importantly, P8 recognized that collective efficacy is “glue,” meaning that without it, the organization would lack structure and support. As such, P8 emphasized the importance of using collective efficacy when making decisions.

Team Orientation. The majority of the participants reported that they utilize collective efficacy when making decisions because it promotes the school community to be team-oriented and inclusive. P2 recognized that others may have alternative solutions to complex problems. P2 said, “I believe the answers are in the room, and not ‘only’ one person or group knows it all. It is important to do this hard work together.” Similarly, P3 expressed that making decisions alone has not been effective in the past. P3 said:

I now believe heavily in the idea of collective efficacy after years of silo planning but expecting collective execution. The processes became misunderstood and disjointed, leading to limited overall success. The collective efficacy allows the community to develop, execute and refine from one lens. (P3)

P3’s response is interesting in that it clearly demonstrated that in the past, P3 tried to make decisions on their own, but expected the collective to execute those plans and decisions, which ultimately was not proven effective. P3 also implied that since moving to utilize collective efficacy to make decisions, the school’s situation has improved. P5 also emphasized the importance of team-oriented decision making by saying:

As a school administrator, I always make team-informed decisions based on data. The teams' inputs are always considered before making any decision. All decisions are based on probabilities to yield higher student [achievement], stronger parental support, and the development of high-performing teachers. (P6)

This response by P5 has a subtle difference from the responses of P2 and P3. P5 emphasized the importance of making *team-informed* decisions, which are not necessarily the same as team decisions. P5 appeared to be saying that, like P10, they are the sole decision maker, but unlike P10, P5 takes the information derived from the collective into consideration when making decisions for the school.

P1, P7, and P9 emphasized the importance of having multiple stakeholders present in the decision-making process. P1 reported having a team for almost every aspect of school decision making. As P1 said, "There is a team for every aspect of how we do school. [We have] an operations team, a student support team, a leadership team, vertical teacher teams, horizontal teacher teams, and a school improvement panel." In this way, P1 emphasized that the different collaborative efforts of the teams are critical for their decision-making process. Similarly, P7 said, "I always accept and garner feedback from stakeholders. I'm open to a collaborative initiative to yield the intended results and I do not work in a silo." Therefore, like P1, P7 discussed the importance of the collective perspective on important decisions, noting that it is important to get feedback from stakeholders. P9 echoed these thoughts, saying, "It is important to allow the stakeholders to be involved in the decision-making. We have open house sessions, and while I keep the school's vision at the forefront, I also value the input from the team." Thus, for many of the principals, utilizing collective efficacy in the decision-making process

strengthens the team-oriented nature of the school community, which, in turn, positively feeds back to promote collective efficacy.

Truth and Transparency. Two of the principals (P1 and P8) emphasized that making decisions utilizing collective efficacy allows for truth and transparency in the decision-making process, which they believe is important for the further development of collective efficacy. For example, P8 said:

We openly shared [the results of the teacher survey data] at staff meetings in an effort to be transparent and to continue to build our rapport with staff on how we are going to address deficient areas. (P8)

Interestingly, P8 demonstrated that the decision-making process is based on staff-reported data. This, in essence, is utilizing collective efficacy to make decisions. Such actions not only show the teachers that they are valued members of the community, but they also promote more collective efficacy. P1 expressed similar thoughts, saying, “[Our] teams meet with fidelity. We remain transparent with our data and where we are as a school.” This is an important theme because recent studies have shown that transparency can promote the collective efficacy of education-based groups (Sun et al., 2019). Therefore, by being truthful and transparent, the principals not only enhance the decision-making process, but they also promote the development of further collective efficacy.

Current State of School Collective Efficacy: Perceived Benefits

This section examines the perceived benefits and positive outcomes associated with the current state of school collective efficacy. The first themes were discussed in Subsection One. The theme of *Collective Efficacy Results in Positive Effects* is now discussed. Refer to Table 3 for all responses to the question on the *State of School Collective Efficacy*.

Collective Efficacy Results in Positive Effects. Five of the principals (P1, P2, P4, P7, and P8) indicated that the collective efficacy being built at their schools was having a positive effect on teachers, students, and support staff. P1 focused on the positive effect on teachers, describing a system where teachers stayed with the same students for multiple years. P1 said:

Teachers needed to understand the benefits of this strategy and be open to moving with those same students to the next grade level. This strategy worked and increased ELA scores in the building right before the pandemic started and we moved to remote learning. To that end, strategic collective efforts are happening to ensure that strategic plan goals are being met. (P1)

In this way, P1 demonstrated that when teachers believe in a system or a strategy, their perceived collective efficacy grows, which, in turn, positively impacts student achievement. P2 and P7 both described positive effects, but at the school level rather than the teacher level. P2 said, “It takes a village. The school goal is shared and individually, the buy-in overall is good. This helps the team work effectively” (P2). Similarly, P7 reported that collective efficacy gives “power to produce and effect change” (P7). Thus, P2 and P7 highlighted that at the school level, the collective efficacy of everyone involved has a positive impact on the school community and, most importantly, on the students. Finally, P8 saw the changes they made to their school as having a positive impact on the entire community. P8 said:

I am now in my third year at my school, and I am proud that although there were negative perceptions about our school’s performance in my first year, we have worked hard to build trust again with all stakeholders.... While building trust and confidence in a school is iterative, we have made strides in the building. (P8)

P8 described the efforts of collective efficacy as reaching everyone in the school building, as well as community stakeholders, including parents and local businesses. Indeed, numerous researchers have shown that improving the collective efficacy of schools improves and strengthens neighborhoods and communities (Goddard et al., 2004; Higgins & Hunt, 2016). Taken together, the participants described their efforts towards collective efficacy as having a positive impact on their school community, including on teachers (P1), on the entire school (P2 and P7), and on the community at large (P8).

Principals Generally Make Purposeful Decisions Based on Perceived Collective Efficacy

In a similar survey question, the researcher asked the participants whether they made purposeful decisions based on collective efficacy. In general, the answer was a resounding yes. The themes that emerged from participants who said “Yes” were similar to the themes derived from the last question, indicating that data did research saturation. Specifically, the themes of team orientation and utilizing collective efficacy to maintain morale emerged from the analysis of the survey question (Table 7). Importantly, two principals (P2 and P10) noted that some or all of their decisions were not based on collective efficacy (Table 7). These negative responses to collective efficacy are discussed in Subsection Three.

Yes, Purposeful Decisions with Collective Efficacy Enhance Team Orientation. Five participants (P1, P3, P4, P8, and P9) reported that they do make purposeful decisions regarding collective efficacy. These participants discussed that the reason for these decisions was to promote the team-oriented nature of the school community. For example, P3 simply said, “Yes. I have. As mentioned previously, I intentionally structure groups that can work toward one collective end.” Thus, P3 demonstrated that purposeful decisions are made to maintain and promote collective efficacy. P4 similarly commented, “Yes, given all the competing priorities, it

Table 7*Principals' Decision-Making Is Generally Based on Collective Efficacy*

Purposeful Decisions Made Regarding Collective Efficacy?		
Theme	Participant	Excerpt
No, Collective Efficacy Hinders Decision-Making	P2, P10	“No, my school’s climate does not allow me to practice collective efficacy with the school community. Collective efficacy is based on collaboration and a joint understanding. That partnership does not exist in my school. While we try to foster that kind of environment, it just has not happened. So, any decisions are made in spite of the collective” (P10).
Yes, Team Orientation	P1, P3, P4, P8, P9	“Yes, I have made purposeful decisions in terms of the hiring of staff, partnerships, and spending of funds on programs and exposure opportunities for my students. Collective efficacy plays a huge role in this because I realized that people needed someone or something to believe in. The process, when communicated, fully resonated with so many” (P9).
Yes, To Maintain Morale	P5	“Yes, I have had to at times to ensure that morale and confidence among staff remain high” (P5).

Importantly, P4 added that making purposeful decisions with collective efficacy in mind will advance school-wide goals, which will, in turn, lead to school improvement as well as increase collective efficacy. P8 added to these thoughts, saying:

Yes, as we develop new initiatives, we constantly think about how we, the leadership team, will garner buy-in from all stakeholders. To illustrate, we prepared to order new texts to support small group instruction and independent reading. Three years ago, we invited our staff and students to participate in a book-tasting event where they could sample a variety of books and elect which texts they wanted to see in their classrooms. (P8)

P8 gave a concrete example of a purposeful decision that was made to promote collective efficacy. In this example, P8 involved the students and the staff in the decision-making process regarding what textbooks they wanted in the classroom. In essence, this decision brought staff and students together in a collective, collaborative event that promoted the collective efficacy of the school, thereby increasing the team-oriented nature of the school community.

Yes, Purposeful Decisions with Collective Efficacy Maintain Morale. Only one participant (P5) noted that they make purposeful decisions with collective efficacy to maintain the morale of the school community. Since this was a unique and novel answer to the question, it warrants further discussion. As shown in Table 7, P5 indicated that they made some decisions with collective efficacy to maintain the morale and confidence of the staff. Recent studies in sports have shown that increasing the confidence of the players increases the collective efficacy of the team (Chow & Fultz, 2007; Munroe-Chandler & Hall, 2004). Similar results were seen in other non-sports-related groups (Goncalo et al., 2010). Importantly, this increase in collective efficacy is linked to an increase in team performance, in sports (Leo et al., 2016; Myers et al., 2004), and in academic achievement (Hoy et al., 2002). Moreover, increasing the morale of teachers leads to increased teacher confidence (Mackenzie, 2007). Therefore, increasing morale increases confidence, and increased confidence leads to increased collective efficacy, which, in turn, increases performance.

Subsection Three: Challenges Associated with Collective Efficacy as a

Means Towards School Improvement Efforts

Current State of School Collective Efficacy: Perceived Challenges

The principals were asked about the current state of their school's collective efficacy; some principals had positive perceptions (discussed in Subsection One), while some principals

discussed challenges associated with their current state of school collective efficacy (Table 3). These specific challenges included: (a) the school had to shift its mindset, (b) improved collective efficacy led to positive effects in the schools, and (c) the school's collective efficacy was a work in progress.

Mindset Shift. Two of the principals (P1 and P9) believed that the state of collective efficacy in their schools required a mindset shift by all members of the school community. Still referencing the *needs improvement* rating of their school, P1 said, "There is a strong urge to be devoid of the 'school in need of improvement' label. Thus, we worked hard on mindset shifting" (P1). Similarly, P9 simply said, "It's a mindset shift." P1 and P9 were indicating that they were leading their school to have a growth mindset, which is important for embracing the work necessary to promote positive change. Indeed, the literature has suggested that a growth mindset on the part of teachers improves teacher self-efficacy and, in turn, student outcomes (Lin et al., 2022). Other research has suggested that when principals focus on a growth mindset, collective efficacy follows (Nordick, 2017). As such, this shift in mindset described by P1 and P9 may lead to an increase in the collective efficacy of their respective schools.

Work in Progress. Interestingly, P8 touched on this theme earlier, saying that "building trust and confidence in a school is an iterative process," highlighting that collective efficacy is a consistent work in progress. P6 and P9 echoed the opinion of P8. P6 said:

The state of collective efficacy at my school can be described as a work in progress, where most stakeholders see the need to improve and support most of the changes implemented, but some tend to give up when immediate results are not evident or a challenge/setback arises. (P6)

Importantly, P6 highlighted that setbacks prove to be difficult for community stakeholders, who become discouraged when improvements are not made immediately. Indeed, this response appears to be consistent with the culture of instant gratification that is prevalent in all levels of society in the present day (Biesta, 2019). Research has shown that communication and mentoring can effectively combat the instant gratification culture in school-based settings (Tondreau & Barnes, 2022), suggesting that the principals could increase communication with staff and community stakeholders, as well as provide mentoring services to teachers to increase school collective efficacy.

Impact of Needs Improvement Rating on Collective Efficacy

Having now defined collective efficacy according to the principals' perceptions, the researcher now turns toward the impact of the *needs improvement* rating on the school's collective efficacy. The researcher designed this question to address SQ1a and SQ1b. The majority of participants reported that the *needs improvement* rating had a negative impact on the school, students, and staff, highlighting some of the challenges of collective efficacy (SQ1b). The subthemes under the negative effect theme include: (a) assumptions that parents and staff do not care about the children, (b) the rating results in low enrollment and lack of retention, (c) there is a lack of trust in the school, and (d) the rating puts stress on the staff. By contrast, some staff members reported the needs improvement rating had a positive impact on the school, students, and staff, which highlighted some of the benefits of collective efficacy in the school setting (SQ1a). Some staff described a generally positive effect, while others described the school community as having a common goal.

Table 8*Principals' Perceptions of the School's Needs Improvement Rating*

Impact of Needs Improvement School Designation			
Theme	Subtheme	Participants	Excerpt
Negative Effect	Assumption Parents, Staff Don't Care	P1, P8, P10	“That there would be a negative impact on the community. This would be because of the negative assumptions that this designation would bring. It is the assumption that the school is not up to par and that the school was not providing the students with adequate services and support” (P10).
	Lack of Enrollment, Low Retention	P1, P7	“The label makes parents feel as if they are making a better choice for their child by transferring them to either a higher performing school in the district or a charter school. It becomes a ripple effect of low enrollment and/or high mobility from parents taking their child out but then re-enrolling them at a later time (later that year or the following year)” (P1).
	Lack of Trust	P6, P7	“At the beginning of my career as an administrator at the school, we noticed the lack of trust and support from the internal and external school community. Most parents, business owners, teachers, and students did not believe the administration was at the school to the state. They were defensive and did not buy in until they started seeing small changes” (P6).
	Stress on Staff	P3, P7, P9	“The designation has provided minimal opportunities for highly effective teachers to become interested in our community as a career choice. We have unfortunately been restricted in spending funds” (P9).
Positive Effect		P4, P6	“The strategic plan outlines the development of all school-related activities” (P4).
	Common Goal	P2, P5	“I believe our school goals are impactful. It gives us a common language and common footing to begin with. It defines our focus” (P2).

Needs Improvement Rating: Negative Effects on Schools. The majority of participants indicated that when their school was labeled with a *needs improvement* rating, the rating had a negative effect on the school, students, and staff, as well as the collective efficacy of the school. Four general themes emerged from the analysis of the data, each of which will be discussed in turn.

Assumption That Parents and School Staff Do Not Care. Three of the principals (P1, P8, and P10) indicated that the *needs improvement* rating led the community to the assumption that the parents and school staff did not care about their children's academic progress. For example, P1 said, "[The rating] lends itself to the assumption that the staff does not care. It lends itself to the assumption that the parents do not care and/or are not involved in their child's education." In this way, P1 argued that the rating has a negative impact on collective efficacy in that the community does not have faith in the school or the parents. Consequently, without the community's support, collective efficacy would decrease. P8 echoes these thoughts, saying:

My first year at my school, the community saw the school as a 'failing school.' Although the administrative team had a beautiful vision and goals to move our school forward, we constantly faced negative comments/views from the parent community about the poor performance and attention to students, parents, and staff concerns. (P8)

P8's response was slightly different from that of P1 in that P1 described the community as not contributing to the schools' collective efficacy, whereas P8 described the parents as not contributing. Together, these results implied that the *needs improvement* labeling of schools has a negative impact on the collective efficacy of the school community.

Lack of Enrollment and Lack of Retention. Two of the participants (P1 and P7) highlighted that the *needs improvement* rating of schools actually decreases the number of

families and students serviced by the school. As shown in Table 8, P1 described that the rating may cause parents to rethink whether they want their children to attend school. Some parents removed their children from school mid-year, leading to a lack of retention, whereas other parents simply chose not to enroll their children, leading to low enrollment. This negatively affects collective efficacy because low enrollment and lack of retention would effectively remove people who could contribute to collective efficacy. Moreover, this likely has a negative effect on other students and families, as their friends silently disappear from school. P7 had similar thoughts to P1, saying, “There is low enrollment and retention of students. Parents normally transfer to charter schools once they become proficient” (P7). P7 also described a situation in which the rating led to low enrollment and retention, which, again, decreased the school community that could engage in collective efficacy. Consequently, according to P1 and P7, the *needs improvement* rating had a negative effect on schools as well as collective efficacy.

Lack of Trust in School Administration. Two participants (P6 and P7) described the *needs improvement* rating as causing students and parents to not trust the school administration and teachers to educate their children properly. As shown in Table 8, P6 described a lack of both internal and external trust in the school community. P6 stated that many of the parents, community stakeholders, and even teachers did not trust that the school administration was taking proper action to improve the school and quality of education for the children. This lack of trust, in turn, led to a decrease in school efficacy, as teachers, parents, and students became defensive. P7 echoed the thoughts of P6, saying that “the labeling is a barrier for parents who want their kids in a successful school environment” (P7). P7, like P6, argued that the *needs improvement* rating caused parents to lose trust in the school, thereby leading to a decrease in collective efficacy.

No, Collective Efficacy Hinders Decision Making. Two principals (P2 and P10) said “No” to the question of whether they made purposeful decisions regarding collective efficacy. Interestingly, both said no for the same reason—namely, that collective efficacy can sometimes hinder the decision-making process. For example, P10 said:

No, my school’s climate does not allow me to practice collective efficacy with the school community. Collective efficacy is based on collaboration and a joint understanding. That partnership does not exist in my school. While we try to foster that kind of environment, it just has not happened. So, any decisions are made in spite of the collective. (P10)

P10 vividly described that their school was not at the point of having collective efficacy. As such, P10 did not feel comfortable making decisions with the collective, likely due to the large amount of arguing that would ensue. As such, P10 found it easier to make decisions in a silo, without utilizing collective efficacy. Similarly, P2 indicated that it is sometimes difficult to be productive when using collective efficacy. P2 said, “Sometimes it is easier to get things done without so many hands in the pot.” While P10 appeared to avoid utilizing collective efficacy to avoid argumentation and conflict, P2 sometimes avoided utilizing collective efficacy to increase productivity.

Collective Efficacy Does Not Drive Decision Making. Only one principal reported that collective efficacy did not drive their decision making, but their opinion was so different from the other principals that it was noteworthy of its own theme. P10 reported that collective efficacy did not drive the decision-making process, saying:

It doesn’t. Whether or not the school community is on the same page or not.

Improvement needs to take place. The reality of it is that it falls on my shoulders as the

lead to make sure the process is implemented and actually happens. While the goal is to have a shared vision, it is not always [a] reality. (P10)

Participant 10 highlighted an important point—namely, that sometimes it is easier and more efficient to make decisions on one’s own rather than always involving other individuals in the decision-making process. Importantly, different people may have different ideas regarding what decisions should or should not be made. This is the essence of collective efficacy. However, P10 appeared to highlight that collective efficacy can sometimes halt progress. If everyone disagrees about the correct course of action, decisions may never be made and, consequently, goals may never be attained. As such, it is important to note that collective efficacy may not always be the answer. Instead, strategic and laser-focused decision making on the part of the leader may be appropriate at times.

Negative Perceptions. Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of principals reported that the *needs improvement* rating led the teachers and students to have negative perceptions about their schools. For example, P7 spoke about the impact on staff:

Staff doesn’t like the status. It is debilitating. Some students feel less than others and feel they don’t have to push themselves because the future is set. They struggle with a growth mindset. Some are resilient, and they push themselves even further. (P7)

Importantly, P7 highlighted two important ideas. First, students and staff have the opposite of a growth mindset, believing that their future success is fixed and cannot be changed. Second, this effect is likely the opposite of what the New Jersey Department of Education designed for the rating. It is doubtful that the New Jersey Department of Education meant for the rating to debilitate the staff and instill a sense of hopelessness in the students. Unfortunately, other students expressed similar feelings to their principals. For example, P6 said, “Many of my

students have eloquently shared that attending a school with a lower performance rating than all of the schools in the district is unfair because they know they are smart and talented students.” Similar to P7, P6 described the *needs improvement* rating as having a negative impact on the psyche of the students.

P8, P9, and P10 vividly described the negative effects the *needs improvement* rating has on teachers. P8 recounted:

My first year, I vividly remember sitting at Organization Day and seeing our school being placed last on the list during the Convocation Ceremony. It made all of us feel terrible.

Some staff felt saddened by the school’s placement, despite their efforts. (P8)

P8 highlighted another important point—namely, that the *needs improvement* rating does not accurately reflect the level of time and effort the staff and administration put into the school and the students. This impacts the staff in a negative way, diminishing their collective efficacy and morale. P10 also highlighted the negative impact on the staff, saying, “Some staff internalizes it as an indicator of their lackluster performance.” As such, P10 described a similar situation to P8, demonstrating that the *needs improvement* rating genuinely diminishes the effort teachers and administrators put into their respective schools.

P9 echoed a different point that is reminiscent of an answer from P3 in Theme 3. When speaking about the impact of the *needs improvement* designation, P3 spoke about outside evaluators being present on school grounds, which, in turn, increased stress on staff (Appendix A, Table A-3). Similarly, in response to this question, P9 said, “It can be difficult at times due to the number of people who visit and are involved in the improvement process. We also must report to the state regularly. The teachers are often overwhelmed with all of the checkboxes.” P9 appeared to be indicating that collective efficacy is difficult with outside evaluators on the school

campus, especially when staff and administrators feel as if they are always looking over their shoulders. Importantly, for this group of principals, the *needs improvement* rating had a drastic negative impact on the students' and teachers' perceptions of themselves, of each other, and of the school community.

Impact of Needs Improvement Rating

When asked about the impact of the *needs improvement rating* on collective efficacy, as well as the rating's impact on students, staff, and the community, the results were genuinely mixed. With respect to collective efficacy, some principals reported that the rating had a positive impact on collective efficacy, with the major theme emerging from the analysis that the school community benefited from rallying behind a common goal. This result partially addressed SQ1a, highlighting the value of collective efficacy. However, the majority of the participants reported that the *needs improvement* rating negatively affected collective efficacy, highlighting themes such as lack of enrollment, low retention of students, lack of trust in the school administration, and faculty and community assumptions that the parents and staff do not care about the school. These results partially addressed SQ1b, highlighting some of the challenges of collective efficacy.

When asked about the impact of the *needs improvement* rating on staff and students, the principals again reported mixed results. Some reported that the rating promoted collective efficacy as the staff, students, and the community rallied around the school. This further highlighted the value of collective efficacy as well as its potential to mediate change. Other principals described a similar positive effect at the beginning of the school year, which waned as the school year progressed. This suggested that collective efficacy is sometimes hard to sustain, thereby indicating a challenge associated with it. Still, other principals reported that many of the

staff, students, and community members viewed the *needs improvement* rating negatively, which inhibited the promotion of collective efficacy.

Summary

In Chapter 4, the researcher presented the results derived from the research study. The chapter began with a review of the research questions employed in the study. This section was divided into three subsections in line with the research questions. The principals reported mixed results with respect to the collective efficacy at their schools. Some reported high collective efficacy, others reported low collective efficacy, and yet others reported that collective efficacy was a work in progress. The role and impact of the *needs improvement* rating on collective efficacy in the principals' schools were also examined. Again, these questions were met with mixed opinions, but the majority of the principals reported that the *needs improvement* rating negatively impacted the collective efficacy of the school community. Additionally, the researcher examined the role of collective efficacy in the strategic planning and decision-making processes of the principals as well as the role of collective efficacy in identifying interventions. Many of the principals reported that collective efficacy played an important role in strategic management as well as in identifying interventions. Some of the principals reported using collective efficacy in the decision-making process, but others reported that the collective was sometimes unproductive for making decisions. However, the general consensus among the principals is that collective efficacy plays an integral role in the school improvement process. These results are further discussed in the context of social cognitive theory and the theory of mindset in the next chapter. Moreover, the researcher discusses implications for practice and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summary

To date, it is presently unknown what the role of the perception of the collective efficacy of the school community is in mediating positive school improvements, especially in schools labeled as needing improvement. This study attempted to explore these perceptions of principals. During the semi-structured interviews for the present study, the researcher asked participants about their perceptions of the role of collective efficacy in a variety of tasks, including goal making, strategic management, decision making, and identifying interventions. The researcher also investigated the principals' perceptions of collective efficacy, both in general and in their schools. For the most part, the principals believed that collective efficacy positively affected the different tasks and processes utilized to modulate school improvement.

Contextual Analysis of Themes

The findings add to the research on collective efficacy and principals' perceptions of collective efficacy. Specifically, the principal consensus is that collective efficacy is integral to the school improvement process. However, some principals identified challenges with the practice and implementation of collective efficacy. These findings supported past studies indicating that collective efficacy can positively influence educational goal making (Glassman et al., 2021). Additionally, the findings showed that robust and sound leadership from principals and administrators can positively influence the perception of the collective efficacy of schools. As a result, the school has low collective efficacy, as neither pupils nor teachers support their teachers.

Similarly, Srlic and Torsheim (2012) found that a lack of organizational structure led to a deterioration in the collective efficacy of the company. Consequently, for many administrators,

leveraging collective efficacy in the decision-making process increases the team-oriented nature of the school community, which positively feeds back to increase collective efficacy. Therefore, by being truthful and transparent, principals not only improve the decision-making process but also foster the growth of greater collective efficacy. Overall, the participants viewed their efforts toward collective efficacy as having a good impact on their school community, including instructors (P1), the entire school (P2 and P7), and the community at large (P8). The findings that collective efficacy can be difficult to maintain and may necessitate a shift in the school's mindset indicated a challenge linked with it. However, some principals indicated that a significant number of staff, students, and community members viewed the needs improvement ranking unfavorably, hindering collective efficacy development.

Research Question 1

What are principals' perceptions of community collective efficacy as a means of school improvement?

Influence of Collective Efficacy on Decision Making, Strategic Planning, and Identifying Interventions

Many of the principals saw immense value in utilizing collective efficacy in decision making, strategic planning, and identifying interventions. With respect to strategic management, 90% of the principals interviewed in the study indicated that expanding their planning network facilitated positive outcomes (Chapter 4, Table 5). That is, when the principals included staff and community stakeholders, including parents, in the strategic planning and goal-making process, schools saw improvement. This indicated that collective efficacy can positively influence goal making in educational settings, in concordance with the literature findings (Glassman et al., 2021). Importantly, this is reminiscent of studies in which the empowerment of individuals led to

the empowerment of the group, thereby promoting psychological well-being (Bagci et al., 2018). Within the context of social cognitive theory, individual self-efficacy can lead to more resilient, sustainable, and determined students (Bandura, 2001). Self-efficacy, in turn, can lead to collective efficacy (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). Moreover, the literature has indicated that collective goal making is positively correlated with increased group performance (Mulvey & Klein, 1998). Therefore, the principals' choice to utilize collective efficacy in strategic management and goal making will likely allow for school improvements.

Many, but not all, of the principals reported that utilizing collective efficacy in making important decisions for the school resulted in positive school outcomes (Chapter 4, Table 7). Some principals reported that they made decisions with collective efficacy in mind. However, the majority reported that utilizing collective efficacy in decision making promoted the team orientation of the school community. In essence, collective efficacy begets collective efficacy. These data suggested that the more principals involve the collective, the more the collective will be inspired to promote school and community growth. Indeed, increasing stakeholder buy-in and involvement is positively correlated with school reform efforts (Fuller et al., 2018; Garnett et al., 2020). Still, other literature has advised that school administrators consider the timing of soliciting stakeholder buy-in because incorrect timing can actually hinder school reform (Foote et al., 2019). The principals also reported that the use of collective efficacy in decision making increased the truth and transparency of the school's decision making. Notably, transparency in education, particularly with the distribution of educational resources, has become a somewhat contentious topic in education. Some researchers believe that some school leaders' lack of transparency regarding educational resources is akin to taking democracy out of education (Faubert, 2019). Indeed, many scholars, as well as the general public, insist on transparency and,

therefore, accountability in the K-12 education system (West et al., 2018). As such, utilizing collective efficacy in school-based decision making satisfies some of the principals whom the general public examines with respect to school reform.

Finally, a majority of principals believed that collective efficacy was critical in the process of identifying interventions. Importantly, many of the principals reported that identifying interventions and monitoring progress was a team-oriented event, involving multiple individuals to help the children needing remediation more effectively (Chapter 4, Table 4). Importantly, the principals expressed that the involvement of a small group of individuals with different skills enhanced the effectiveness of the intervention. That is, utilizing collective efficacy to identify interventions positively affects the intervention outcome. Importantly, this is congruent with the literature, which overwhelmingly indicated that utilizing collective efficacy to identify educational interventions can result in increased student well-being and mental health (García-Carrión et al., 2019). Thus, it appears that, in identifying interventions, teams should be formed to look holistically at each student's situation and outcomes.

Sub-question 1a

How do principals describe the value/possibility of community collective efficacy?

Mindset for Change, or Growth Mindset

Many positive themes recurred throughout the results section that described the value and possibility of community collective efficacy. One of the most prominent themes was that the schools took on a mindset for change, or a growth mindset, in direct concordance with Dweck's theory of the mindset. Recall that mindset theory describes the phenomenon whereby individuals who believe that certain skills and traits can be developed, as opposed to being innate, are more likely to find success in these endeavors (Dweck, 2006). This is referred to as a growth mindset.

Mindset theory argues that an individual's self-perception can profoundly affect one's accomplishments. The principals applied a growth mindset to their entire school community. In believing that the community can accomplish goals, the principals promoted collective efficacy, and the collective, in turn, sought higher goals, thereby raising the limits for what they believed could be achieved. It is important to note that collective thinking in groups is not always positive. For example, in a mob mentality, individuals sometimes take on characteristics of a large group of people that are not characteristic of each individual (Chiantera-Stutte, 2018). As such, collective efficacy, when turned negative, can hinder the growth mindset of a community. However, when viewed positively, collective efficacy can work in a positive fashion.

Growth mindset was emphasized by the principals in a number of different contexts. When asked about the state of collective efficacy at their schools, some principals reported that their schools underwent a mindset shift (Chapter 4, Table 3), and other principals suggested that collective efficacy was a work in progress (Table 3). Both of these findings are consistent with Dweck's mindset theory. In undergoing a mindset shift, the schools had to leave their *status quo* mindset and move towards a growth mindset so they could mediate the school improvement process. Indeed, a national experiment demonstrated that a growth mindset led to positive student achievement (Yeager et al., 2019). Similarly, considering a goal as a work in progress is consistent with a growth mindset, as it indicates an individual's propensity to think about growth (Murphy & Reeves, 2019).

A mindset for change, or a growth mindset, was also referenced extensively by the principals in response to the impact of the *needs improvement* rating on the students, staff, and overall school community (Chapter 4, Table 8). The *needs improvement* rating is discussed extensively in SQ1b below. However, the results from this line of questioning were generally

negative, indicating that the *needs improvement* rating has a negative effect on students, staff, and collective efficacy (Table 8). However, the staff and students taking a mindset for change after receiving the *needs improvement* rating is one positive derivation from the school rating. As stated above, a growth mindset allows for goals to be pliable and constantly moving towards a higher target. Importantly, the growth mindset of individuals can promote the growth mindset of a group. This has been shown to be the case in classrooms, where teachers transfer their growth mindsets to the students (Smith et al., 2018b). Similarly, the growth mindset of students can be contagious for teachers (Dweck, 2015). As such, the growth mindset resulting from the *needs improvement* rating can increase the growth mindset of the entire school community, resulting in an increased sense of collective efficacy.

Increased Collective Efficacy, Increased Inclusion

Many of the principals reported that when the collective efficacy at their schools is high, students and parents are actively engaged in school activities. There are many positive outcomes when students, parents, and community stakeholders participate and are actively engaged in school activities. First, this creates a greater sense of community, which could promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the school community. Researchers studying the relationship between collective efficacy and inclusion found that collective efficacy facilitates inclusion, and vice versa (Lyons et al., 2016). Thus, it is imperative that teachers be fluent in DEI initiatives, as well as how to increase inclusion in the classroom. Strikingly, it has been reported that secondary school teachers are the least likely to implement DEI principals and initiatives in the classroom (Pozas et al., 2020). Therefore, it stands to reason that the promotion of DEI initiatives by the school administration may lead to greater inclusion in the classroom, thereby raising collective efficacy.

Sub-question 1b

How do principals describe the challenges of community collective efficacy?

The Needs Improvement School Rating

One of the biggest challenges associated with community self-efficacy in schools needing improvement is the *needs improvement* rating that the New Jersey Department of Education gives to schools. Interview Questions 2 and 4, for which results are shown in Tables 4 and 5, respectively, examined the principals' perceptions regarding the impact of the needs improvement ratio on the school community. The results from these questions were overwhelmingly negative. The principals reported that the *needs improvement* rating led to a variety of issues, including the community's assumption that the staff and parents are not invested in the education of the children (Chapter 4, Table 8); lack of enrollment and difficulties with retention (Table 8); lack of trust of the community in the school administration and staff (Table 8); increased stress on staff (Table 4); and negative perceptions of students and staff regarding themselves (Chapter 4, Table 6).

Many of the negative situations mentioned by the principals are self-perpetuating feedback cycles that only serve to decrease collective efficacy. For example, the principals reported that, due to the *needs improvement* rating, students and staff have negative perceptions of themselves. The literature has suggested that negative self-perceptions can lead to low self-esteem (Baumeister, 1993). Groups with individuals characterized by low personal self-esteem, in turn, have low group self-esteem, a property that inhibits the growth of collective efficacy (De Cremer & Oosterwegel, 1999). Therefore, transitivity might indicate that the negative self-perceptions of students and staff would lead to decrease collective efficacy. Decreased collective efficacy, then, leads to further negative perceptions of group members (Kirk & Matsuda, 2011).

Importantly, these findings are consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which posits that self-efficacy is the driving force that compels people to achieve more than their perceived abilities (Donohoo & Katz, 2017). In this case, negative perceptions lead to low self-efficacy, which leads to lower levels of achievement.

As another example, some principals reported that the *needs improvement* rating caused a large amount of stress on the staff, including teachers. Teacher stress can actually transfer to students via what Bakker and Schaufeli (2000) called a contagion effect. Increased teacher stress has also been associated with poor student outcomes (Herman et al., 2018; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Indeed, when viewed through the lens of Bandura's social cognitive theory, high stress can lead to teachers with low self-efficacy (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995), which can, in turn, affect student achievement (Bandura, 2001). Low student achievement is associated with low levels of collective school efficacy (Goddard et al., 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Therefore, high amounts of teacher stress can decrease the academic performance of students, leading to low collective efficacy. Then, low collective efficacy, in turn, leads to higher amounts of teacher stress (Klassen, 2010), perpetuating the cycle.

Collective Efficacy Can Hinder Effective Decision Making

While most of the principals indicated that collective efficacy generally promotes their decision-making process, some principals highlighted the notion that collective efficacy can actually hinder the decision-making process. At least one participant indicated that collective efficacy did not drive their decision-making process (Chapter 4, Table 6) and collective efficacy hinders decision making in general (Chapter 4, Table 7). This is an important finding because it highlights a drawback of collective efficacy, especially if all parties do not have the same goals or vision in mind. Participant 10 and, at times, Participant 2, expressed that utilizing collective

efficacy was similar to having too many cooks in the kitchen. In particular, P10 shared that the administrators and teachers at their school were not always in agreement regarding goals and visions. This led to arguing over the correct course of action, which, in turn, hindered the decision-making process of the principal. Indeed, previous studies have indicated that poor conflict management strategies of educational administrations lead to decreased efficacy of the educational organization as a whole (Balay, 2006). Importantly disagreements between teachers, administrators, and school districts are an important cause of principals choosing to leave the profession (Alenezi, 2020). Differences in opinions between administrators and teachers can also lead to teacher turnover (Redding et al., 2019). Therefore, when teachers and administrators do not share a common vision or goal, collective efficacy suffers, as does the school environment.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is that it was conducted solely within the Central Public School district. The researcher intended for participants to be drawn from multiple counties in New Jersey. However, the only participants who volunteered for the study that met the inclusion criteria were from Central Public Schools. Therefore, the actual target population of the study is Central Public School principals who lead schools in need of improvement. This may impact the transferability of the study to other counties in New Jersey; furthermore, the findings of the study may not be generalizable to other schools in other states. However, the researcher believes that the results of the study are transferable to any urban school district in the United States, as research has shown that most urban schools experience the same challenges and barriers (Howard & Milner, 2021).

Another limitation of the study is the sample size. The researcher was only able to purposefully recruit 10 participants for the study. Low numbers of participants can lead to a lack

of data saturation. However, in this case, the researcher believes that data saturation was reached. In some cases, 80-90% of the participants highlighted ideas within the same theme (see the codebook in Appendix A).

A third limitation of the study is that the survey was done via email rather than using in-person interviews. The researcher was not present when the participants were completing the surveys. Therefore, the researcher was unable to read and interpret the participants' nonverbal responses, including body language. As such, it is impossible for the researcher to make suppositions based on the participants' nonverbal communication.

Finally, the paper-based survey also served as another important limitation. By confining the interview to a specific set of questions on paper, the researcher was unable to ask follow-up questions when needed. However, this limitation was, in part, mitigated by the fact that the participants took care in explaining their thoughts and did so thoroughly.

Implications for Future Practice

One important implication of this research is that Departments of Education should consider rethinking the public labeling of schools. Members and staff of schools that are in need of improvement suffer from the stigma of being associated with a poorly performing school. Indeed, the literature has a plethora of studies demonstrating that labeling schools stigmatizes not only the school but also its members (Murillo & Flores, 2002). Indeed, some researchers have argued that the stigma associated with poorly performing schools is the equivalent of shame-based motivation (Bowen & Trivett, 2014). The researcher, therefore, recommends that Departments of Education turn toward a softer way of labeling schools, when appropriate, as to not hinder the collective efficacy of the school. The rating could, perhaps, be changed from *needs improvement* (New Jersey), *F* (Florida), or *unsatisfactory* (South Carolina) to *needs*

support. This name change could serve two important purposes. First, it could focus on a positive, namely support, rather than the negative *needs improvement*. Second, a school in need of support could need a variety of types of support, including academic, financial, maintenance, or architectural. Such a label would not indicate what type of support is needed, thereby lessening the stigma associated with needing improvement. Moreover, a *needs support* rating may encourage community members to support their local school, thereby increasing the collective efficacy of the school community.

Another implication for practice is the critical importance of the growth mindset. Growth mindsets in individuals and in groups can serve to lift and motivate other individuals to achieve more than they believe possible (Dweck, 2006). Indeed, the growth mindset of a group promotes community collective efficacy, especially in education (Hanson et al., 2016). The results of the present study suggested that collective efficacy, in turn, promotes positive school change and improvement. Therefore, adding courses in professional educational education that teach the growth mindset could be helpful to all future school leaders, teachers, and support staff. Therefore, the researcher recommends that preparation programs for educators include such courses in different mindset practices, including growth mindset, which may address challenge associated with collective efficacy. Then, future educators would have an opportunity to bring a growth mindset to their schools, thereby influencing other teachers and students. Such actions could increase the level of collective efficacy of all schools, not just schools in *need of improvement*.

Previous studies have shown that high student self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy lead to positive changes in the school environment as well as school reform. This study was unique in that it evaluated the perceived effect of collective efficacy on the school environment and school

reform. Given that the findings indicated that increased collective efficacy can positively affect school performance and improvement, the researcher suggests that a course on how to promote self-efficacy and collective efficacy be added to professional development courses for school leaders as well as to teacher preparation programs. Perhaps educating teachers, administrators, and future school leaders regarding the positive effects of community collective efficacy would allow these leaders to bring collective efficacy to their schools and classrooms, thus becoming essential mediators of school improvement.

Suggestions for Future Research

An interesting notion is the idea of collective efficacy promoting inclusion. An avenue of future research could investigate whether increasing the DEI initiatives of K-12 schools leads to differences in student self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy, which would, in turn, impact collective efficacy. It would be interesting to compare the findings of this study with another study that examined the state of school community efficacy throughout the states, including rural areas and throughout the country. Such data may give national educators, as well as state and local educators, a better understanding of the actual state of collective efficacy in our nation's schools. This would, in turn, have implications for positive social change regarding school improvement and school reform.

Summary

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of principals regarding the role of community collective efficacy in mediating the school improvement process. It found that the principals generally viewed collective efficacy to be positive in providing for school improvement. Generally, the study found that the principals utilized collective efficacy in all important aspects of educational leadership, including strategic management, goal making,

decision making, and identifying interventions. The collective appears to be greatly important in allowing the school to have a common goal: allowing students, staff, and the community to rally around the school. This environment, in turn, promotes the growth mindset needed for school improvement. Principals' use of collective efficacy, however, was contingent on their years of experience in an administrative role and number of years at their current schools. Principals who were employed at the same school over the course of their career were highly committed to building collaborative culture and aligning practice to the school's mission and vision.

Sustaining practices such as weekly professional learning communities (PLCs), professional development, and continuous data analysis was a priority to improved student achievement and instruction. Those new to the role of the principal shared that they relied heavily on their districts for support and training on collective efficacy and school transformation. Principals new to the role spent more time working to identify and embed targeted professional development and codify systems and structures. The use of collective efficacy appears to be greatly important in allowing the school to have a common goal: allowing students, staff, and the community to rally around the school. This environment, in turn, promotes the growth mindset needed for school improvement. Regardless of who is reading this dissertation—a student, a teacher, a principal, or a community stakeholder—it is the researcher's profound hope that the reader will be open to the positive message of the study: Promote collective efficacy in all of your educational pursuits, as this will uplift those around you and, ultimately, uplift your community. We all have the power and ability to be sources of inspiration for our communities by promoting the collective above ourselves.

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Appendix A: Codebook

Table A-1

Principals' Definitions of Collective Efficacy Codebook

Definition of Collective Efficacy		
Participant	Theme	Excerpt
P1	Works Towards a Positive Goal	"Collective efficacy is the work that happens towards a shared & collective belief that all students can learn and excel" (P1).
P2	Collaboration, Teamwork Work Towards a Positive Goal	"It means that everyone works together to meet a common goal" (P2).
P3	Ability	"A group's ability to produce the desired result" (P3).
P4	Collaboration, Teamwork	"Collective efficacy compliments organizational systems, which are the underpinnings of collaboration...Collective efficacy ensures that stakeholders work with fidelity to achieve school-wide goals to leverage the greatest impact to supersede pockets of the greatest throughout the school community" (P4).
P5	Ability Collaboration, Teamwork Works Towards a Positive Goal	"Having a sense of togetherness as an organization. Using that togetherness to foster common beliefs in the ability to accomplish goals and to work effectively" (P5).
P6	Ability Collaboration, Teamwork	"I would describe collective efficacy as the ability to collaborate with parents, students, and staff (instructional and non-instructional) to hire, develop and sustain staff members who are firmly committed to transforming any under performing academic institution. This process requires ongoing communication, parental support, and ongoing monitoring" (P6).
P7	Works Towards a Positive Goal	"Collective efficacy is an overall product of a positive effect" (P7).
P8	Ability	"I would define collective efficacy as the ability to have collective trust. [It is] the confidence individuals within an organization have towards achieving success" (P8).
P9	Collaboration, Teamwork	"Collective efficacy is the belief that everyone can and will succeed" (P9).
P10	Ability	"A group's shared understanding gives that group the ability to control other behaviors. It's a way to create order using a system of understandings" (P10).

Table A-2

Principals' Perceptions of the School's Needs Improvement Rating Codebook

Impact of Needs Improvement School Designation			
Participant	Theme	Subtheme	Excerpt
P1	Negative Effect	Assumption Parents, Staff Don't Care	"It lends itself to the assumption that the staff does not care. It lends itself to the assumption that the parents do not care and/or are not involved in their child's education" (P1).
		Lack of Enrollment, Low Retention	"The label makes parents feel as if they are making a better choice for their child by transferring them to either a higher performing school in the District or a charter school. It becomes a ripple effect of low enrollment and/or high mobility from parents taking their child out but then re-enrolling them at a later time (later that year or the following year)" (P1)
P2	Positive Effect	Common Goal	"I believe our school goals are impactful. It gives us a common language and common footing to begin with. It defines our focus" (P2).
P3	Negative Effect	Stress on Staff	"Designations for improvement signal that "outside" evaluators would be coming in to oversee work and observe on a consistent basis" (P3).
P4	Positive Effect		"The strategic plan outlines the development of all school-related activities" (P4).
P5	Positive Effect	Common Goal	"Having a sense of collective efficacy can help with increasing optimism. It can be a confidence builder as school personnel works to improve student achievement" (P5).
P6	Negative Effect Positive Effect	Lack of Trust	"At the beginning of my career as an administrator at the school, we noticed the lack of trust and support from the internal and external school community. Most parents, business owners, teachers, and students did not believe the administration was at the school to the state. They were defensive and did not buy in until they started seeing small changes" (P6).
		Positive Effect	"Caring for the school facility also played a huge role in the community. Walking around daily to greet parents, neighbors, business owners and "the young crew" that always hangs out in the school surroundings helped us gain their trust" (P6).
P7	Negative Effect	Lack of Trust	"The labeling is a barrier for parents who want their kids in a successful school environment" (P7).
		Lack of Enrollment, Low Retention	"There is low enrollment and retention of students. Parents normally transfer to charter schools once they become proficient" (P7).

		Stress on Staff	"Teachers leave to higher-performing schools" (P7).
P8	Negative Effect	Assumption Parents, Staff Don't Care	"My first year at my school, the community saw the school as a "failing school." Although the administrative team had a beautiful vision and goals to move our school forward, we constantly faced negative comments/views from the parent community about the poor performance and attention to students, parents, and staff concerns" (P8).
P9	Negative Effect	Stress on Staff	"The designation has provided minimal opportunities for highly effective teachers to become interested in our community as a career choice. We have unfortunately been restricted in spending funds" (P9).
P10	Negative Effect	Assumption Parents, Staff Don't Care	"That there would be a negative impact on the community. This would be because of the negative assumptions that this designation would bring. It is the assumption that the school is not up to par and that the school was not providing the students with adequate services and support" (P10).

Table A-3*Principals' Perceptions of the State of School Collective Efficacy Codebook*

State of School Collective Efficacy		
Participant	Theme	Excerpt
P1	Mindset Shift	"There is a strong urge to be devoid of the "school in need of improvement" label. Thus, we worked hard on mindset shifting" (P1).
	Resulted In Positive Effect	"Teachers needed to understand the benefits of this strategy & be open to moving w/ those same students to the next grade level. This strategy worked & increased ELA scores in the building right before the Pandemic started and we moved to remote learning. To that end, strategic collective efforts are happening to ensure that strategic plan goals are being met" (P1).
P2	Resulted In Positive Effect	"It takes a village. The school goal is shared and individually, the buy-in overall is good. This helps the team work effectively" (P2).
P3	Initial Positive, Then Negative	"Initially, the collective efficacy is high due to the feeling of "this is our school, and we must protect it." Over long/extended periods of time the momentum tends to wane" (P3).
P4	Resulted In Positive Effect	"My school community consists of two buildings that were recently merged for the first time. This upcoming academic year requires laser-sharp focus in having the teachers and staff embark on a major shift in seeing the school community as one" (P4).
P5	High Collective Efficacy	"My school community consists of two buildings that were recently merged for the first time. This upcoming academic year requires laser-sharp focus in having the teachers and staff embark on a major shift in seeing the school community as one" (P5).
P6	Work in Progress	"The state of collective efficacy at my school can be described as a work in progress where most stakeholders see the need to improve and support most of the changes implemented, but some tend to give up when immediate results are not evident or a challenge/set back arises" (P6).
P7	Resulted In Positive Effect	"Power to produce and effect" (P7).
P8	Resulted In Positive Effect	"I am now in my third year at my school, and I am proud that although there were negative perceptions around our school's performance in my first year, we have worked hard to build trust again with all stakeholders...While building trust and confidence in a school is iterative, we have made strides in building" (P8).
P9	Work in Progress	"While it is evident it is in pockets amongst some grade teams and individual teachers. It is a work in progress" (P9)
	Mindset Shift	"It is a mindset shift" (P9).
P10	Low Collective Efficacy	"I think it is lacking in my school. That is why we are currently dealing with chaos. There is a lack of structure and a lack of confidence in the administration. It feels like everyone is out for themselves" (P10).

Table A-4*Principals' Perceptions of the Effect of the School's Rating on Staff and Students Codebook*

Effect of Schools' Needs Improvement Ratings on Students and Staff		
Participant	Theme	Excerpt
P1	Mindset for Change	"We work hard on climate & culture aspects. We use staff & student surveys throughout the year to keep a pulse on building morale. We have managed to make staff & students feel empowered...even with having low state test scores. There is a fostered belief that we will move the needle & get out of status. We try to keep the work of Carol Dweck at the forefront & ensure that we are moving from a growth mindset frame of reference" (P1).
P2	Positive Perception, Effect	"Our school is outperforming the local public school. Our scores are a major focus for our teachers. They come second to our primary focus, the well-being of our students" (P2).
P3	Rating Has No Effect on Perceptions	"Only veteran staff actually mention a time when students performed better. New members tend to not mention ratings at all but are drawn to the location of the school in relation to where they live. Ratings overall are not a factor." (P3)
P4	Mindset for Change	"In the blended conversations I have had with teachers, support staff, and the previous administration, I understand that there is a desire to improve" (P4)
P5	Positive Perception, Effect	"Our school is considered a top-performing school among schools in the school district. We ranked second for math achievement and fourth for ELA achievement" (P5).
P6	Negative Perceptions	"Many of my students have eloquently shared that attending a school with a lower performance rating than all of the schools in the district is unfair because they know they are smart and talented students" (P6).
	Rating Has No Effect on Perceptions	"[The students] have also shared that it is simply a label and that such a label does not define who they truly are" (P6).
	Mindset for Change	"[The students] expressed that they are committed to changing the narrative by showing on state assessments that they can perform as high as any other student in the district. Bilingual and ESL teachers take the lower performance rating more seriously. They are more competitive, believe in their students and invest more time planning/tailoring instruction and pushing students to acquire the language to properly exit out of the bilingual program" (P6).
P7	Negative Perceptions	"Staff doesn't like the status. It is debilitating. Some students feel less than others and feel they don't have to push themselves because the future is set. They struggle with a growth mindset. Some are resilient, and they push themselves even further" (P7).
P8	Negative Perceptions	"My first year, I vividly remember sitting at Organization Day and seeing our school being placed last on the list during the Convocation Ceremony. It made all of us feel terrible. Some staff felt saddened by the school's placement, despite their efforts" (P8).

	Mindset for Change	"[Staff] felt empowered to do more. [Teachers and students] felt that they could do more to move the school forward. As an administrator, my message the first few months of the year was, "this is where we are; this is not who we are," and so slowly, we began to change these sentiments" (P8).
P9	Negative Perceptions	"It can be difficult at times due to the number of people who visit and are involved in the improvement process. We also must report to the state regularly. The teachers are often overwhelmed with all of the check boxes" (P9).
	Negative Perceptions	"Some staff internalizes it as an indicator of their lack luster performance" (P10).
P10	Positive Perception, Effect	"While some staff looks at the benefits of the additional funding as a way to get needed supplies" (P10).
	Rating Has No Effect on Perceptions	"The kids really don't know the difference" (P10).

Table A-5*Principals' Perceptions of Role of Collective Efficacy in Strategy Planning Codebook*

Role of Collective Efficacy in Strategic Management		
Participant	Theme	Excerpt
P1	Data Analysis, SMART Goals	"Being a school driven by DDI (Data Driven Instruction), we always begin with Data Analysis to determine where we are & where we need to go. Teachers are part of this process. The Leadership Team develops SMART Goals within the Strategic Plan based on the Data. As we meet with teachers to support the creation of their SGO (Student Growth Objectives), they are clear about how their respective data fits into the scope of the whole" (P1).
	Strategic Planning Leads to Collective Efficacy	"This process lends itself to collective efficacy" (P1).
P2	Expand Planning Network	"There is a stakeholder representative of every group on our Strategic Planning Committee" (P2).
P3	Expand Planning Network	"Over time, I have come to expand the collective efficacy in hopes that the more hands/minds involved, the more widespread the breadth of work would become. I purposefully create multi-layered committees that staff pick to focus on areas of interest to them. The hope is that they will hold each other accountable because they are genuinely interested and invested in that area" (P3).
P4	Expand Planning Network	"The process I employ includes weekly meetings with key stakeholders...Collective efficacy in my school community will allow for a cohesive vision to systematically improve student outcomes. Such an approach will eliminate pockets of greatness and increase student achievement exponentially by working together." (P4).
	Data Analysis, SMART Goals	"Additionally, teachers are given two periods a week to work collaboratively to discuss student data, analysis, and action plans to address deficiencies or maintain gains" (P4).
P5	Expand Planning Network	"Strategic planning and decision-making occur in formal and informal meetings. There are weekly leadership team meetings that include school leadership and instructional coaches. Student and Staff Support meetings occur biweekly" (P5).
P6	Expand Planning Network	"We form committees, and take time to norm/calibrate as a team before conducting formal observation. After goals are set we share them with the community." (P6).
	Data Analysis, SMART Goals	"We also pull and analyze student achievement data (including staff and student attendance) as well as teachers' observation data and resources available before setting goals for the strategic plan" (P6).

P7	Expand Planning Network	" A collaborative process. Review progress and prior goals with teachers and parents. We look at it over the summer and garner feedback in PLC's. we use opportunities for professional development and further develop goals. The plan is presented to parents and community partners" (P7).
P8	Data Analysis, SMART Goals	"As we prepared to develop strategic plans at our school, we used previous data to set SMART goals and engaged in a brainstorming discussion around how we were going to move our school forward" (P8).
	Expand Planning Network	"We utilized staff, parent, and student survey data to frame our conversations...We set strategic timelines over how we would monitor each goal and allowed opportunities to revise the goal. During GLM's and PLC's, we shared our strategic plan with staff to gain input and feedback from staff" (P8).
P9	Data Analysis, SMART Goals	"We prepared to develop strategic plans in Aug of every year. We brainstorm as a team and use previous data to set goals" (P9).
	Expand Planning Network	"In terms of collective efficacy, we involve all stakeholders by inviting them to plan with us, looking at staff surveys, and collaborating with parents" (P9).
P10	Expand Planning Network	"The process begins by trying to get the stakeholders together to work together to try to get specific goals of the school. We try to get input from each stakeholder is important to ensure everyone's views have been heard and seen. After the initial engagement it is important to create a realistic plan of action, which will enable the group to be focused on the created end goals" (P10).

Table A-6*Principals' Perceptions of How Collective Efficacy Affect Their Decision-Making Codebook*

Collective Efficacy Affects Decision-Making		
Participant	Theme	Excerpt
P1	Team Orientation	"There is a Team for every aspect of how we do school...an Operations Team, a Student Support Team, a Leadership Team, Vertical Teacher Teams, Horizontal Teacher Teams, SIP Team (School Improvement Panel), etc" (P1).
	Truth and Transparency	"These teams meet with fidelity. We remain transparent with our data and where we are as a school" (P1).
P2	Team Orientation	"I believe the answers in the room and not "only" one person or group knows it all. It is important to do this hard work together" (P2).
P3	Team Orientation	"I now believe heavily in the idea of collective efficacy after years of silo planning but expecting collective execution. The processes became misunderstood and disjointed, leading to limited overall success. The collective efficacy allows the community to develop, execute, and refine from one lens" (P3).
P4	Team Orientation	"Research confirms that gains in achievement have to be done in collaboration instead of silos. This reform strategy builds capacity through shared perspectives, pedagogy, and supportive relationships. To ensure that such measures permeate my school community, I will implement collective efficacy" (P4).
P5	Make Goals with Efficacy in Mind	"It is always important for goals to be realistic and not seem too far-fetched to ensure that collective efficacy remains as high as possible" (P5).
P6	Team Orientation	"As a school administrator, I always make team-informed decisions based on data. The teams' inputs are always considered before making any decision. All decisions are based on probabilities to yield higher students, stronger parental support, and the development of high-performing teachers" (P6).
P7	Team Orientation	"I accept and garner feedback from stakeholders. I'm open to a collaborative initiative to yield the intended results and I do not work in a silo" (P7).
P8	Team Orientation	"During our discussions and yearly reviews, we continuously used teacher survey data to evaluate staff trust, buy-in, and confidence" (P8).
	Truth and Transparency	"We openly shared [the results of the teacher survey data] at staff meetings in an effort to be transparent and continue to build our rapport with staff on how we were going to address deficient areas" (P8).
	Make Goals with Efficacy in Mind	"As a leader, I value collective efficacy as I recognize that it is the glue that allows a school in need of improvement the opportunity to move forward. Trust and confidence in the leaders, the goals, and the mission of the organization are paramount" (P8).

P9	Team Orientation	"It is important to allow the stakeholders to be involved in the decision-making. We have open house sessions, and while I keep the school's vision at the forefront I also value the input from the team" (P9).
P10	Collective Efficacy Doesn't Drive Decisions	"It doesn't. Whether or not the school community is on the same page or not. Improvement needs to take place. The reality of it is that it falls on my shoulder as the lead to make sure the process is implemented and actually happens. While the goal is to have a shared vision, it is not always reality" (P10).

Table A-7*Principals' Decision-Making Are Generally Based on Collective Efficacy Codebook*

Purposeful Decisions Made Regarding Collective Efficacy?		
Participant	Theme	Excerpt
P1	Yes, Team Orientation	"Yes. Again, I, as Principal, can not do this work alone. Thus, "Think Tanks" & "Thought Partners" have to be a part of the strategy and decision-making if you are truly going to move your school forward and close academic achievement gaps" (P1).
P2	No, Collective Efficacy Hinders Decision-Making	"Sometimes it is easier to get things done without so many hands in the pot" (P2).
P3	Yes, Team Orientation	"Yes, I have. As mentioned previously, I intentionally structure groups that can work toward one collective end" (P3).
P4	Yes, Team Orientation	"Yes, given all the competing priorities, it is critical to lead purposefully with the end goal in mind—advancing school-wide goals" (P4).
P5	Yes, To Maintain Morale	"Yes I have had to at times to ensure that morale and confidence among staff remain high" (P5).
P6	N/A	
P7	N/A	
P8	Yes, Team Orientation	"Yes, as we develop new initiatives, we constantly think about how we, the leadership team, will garner buy-in from all stakeholders. To illustrate, as we prepared to order new texts to support small group instruction and independent reading three years ago, we invited our staff and students to participate in a book-tasting event where they could sample a variety of books and select which texts they wanted to see in their classrooms" (P8).
P9	Yes, Team Orientation	"Yes, I have made purposeful decisions in terms of the hiring of staff, partnerships, and spending of funds on programs and exposure opportunities for my students. Collective efficacy plays a huge role in this because I realized that people needed someone or something to believe in. The process, when communicated, fully resonated with so many" (P9).
P10	No, Collective Efficacy Hinders Decision-Making	"No, my school's climate does not allow me to practice collective efficacy with the school community. Collective efficacy is based on collaboration and a joint understanding. That partnership does not exist in my school. While we try to foster that kind of environment, it just has not happened. So, any decisions are made in spite of the collective effective" (P10).

Table A-8*Principals' Perceptions of Process for Identifying Interventions Codebook*

Process for Identifying Interventions		
Participant	Theme	Excerpt
P1	Data-Driven Process	"We determine which teachers are the strongest at which contents. We analyze student data. Teachers create Corrective Instruction Plans based on the data. This determines which students need support with which Priority and/or Prerequisite Standards" (P1).
	Response to Intervention (RTI)	"We then determine what support will look like for those students. It could be various forms of RTI (Response to Intervention, Tutoring, Additional Guided Readings Sessions, Saturday Academy, etc.)" (P1).
P2	Response to Intervention (RTI)	"We use our R.T.I system and our I&RS team to make decisions collectively" (P2).
P3	Team-Driven Intervention	"Interventions are identified by a team that has direct knowledge/ interaction with said population, ability to identify root causes, analysis of work samples or data, and can offer solutions for correction. The team is also responsible for benchmark review of the effectiveness of agreed upon intervention" (P3).
P4	Team-Driven Intervention	"Identifying interventions for the targeted population is done in collaboration with central office leaders, content area specialists, research-based practices, and reflection" (P4).
P5	Team-Driven Intervention	"Interventions have to be planned and executed for targeted populations to improve student achievement to ensure equity. Collective efficacy is fostered to ensure that efforts are made to improve student outcomes" (P5).
P6	Data-Driven Process	"The first step is pulling and analyzing student data as a team to determine which educational areas are in need of support for each child" (P6).
	Team-Driven Intervention	"Very frequently, the children in need of educational or socio-emotional support are referred to, then discussed/presented at I&RS meetings. Administration and instructional coaches, as well as academic interventionists, are part of this meeting and always contribute by sharing which supports can best assist the student throughout the school year. It is always communicated to the family and the teachers in hopes of supporting the student to grow academically. Professional relationships, coaching, and ongoing informal conversations with the students and staff also play a huge role throughout the process" (P6).
P7	Data-Driven Process	"We look at data to determine and isolate standards that students have not mastered, and we then group them and remediate those who have not" (P7).

P8	Team-Driven Intervention	"We use an Academic and Behavior Tracker school-wide to identify academic, behavioral, attendance, and disciplinary concerns. There is a sense of collective efficacy as it pertains to the decision-making behind interventions. In addition, we meet as an SST Team that involves our social workers, counselors, our Parent Liaison, Attendance Counselor, and the school administration. During these meetings, there is a sense of collective efficacy to support our students that are in need of interventions" (P8).
P9	Team-Driven Intervention	"I identify interventions and programs with the support of the district, my school constituents, and research. I have a huge population of students who struggle academically. Because I believe in working together, I decided that this process was important to have all parties engaged and involved" (P9).
	Data-Driven Process	"We look at behavior, academic, and assessment data to determine the proper interventions for students" (P9).

Appendix B: IRB Approval



August 23, 2022

Crystal Joye
Seton Hall University

Re: 2022-358

Dear Crystal,

At its Summer meeting, the Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled, "Exploring Perception About Collective Efficacy in Urban K-8 New Jersey Schools Designated to the School Improvement Process" submitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval. Enclosed for your records are the stamped original Consent Form and recruitment flyer. You can make copies of these forms for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR
Associate Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Phyllis Hansell, EdD, RN, DNAP, FAAN
Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Office of the Institutional Review Board

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WHAT GREAT MINDS CAN DO

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent Letter

Title of Research Study: Exploring Principals' Perceptions about Collective Efficacy in Urban K-8 New Jersey Schools Designated for the School Improvement Process

Principal Investigator: Crystal Joye

Department Affiliation: Executive Educational Leadership Management and Policy (Ed.D) Program, Seton Hall University.

Sponsor: This research is supported by the Executive Educational Leadership Management and Policy (Ed.D) Program.

Brief summary about this research study:

The following summary of this research study is to help participants decide whether or not they want to participate in the study. Participants have the right to ask questions at any time. The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to Explore Principals Perceptions about Collective Efficacy in Urban K-8 New Jersey Schools Designated for the School Improvement Process. Within the context of the current study, collective efficacy in a school is the perception of the principal and teachers that the faculty as a whole can execute the course of action required to positively impact student achievement. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 10-12 elementary school principals from one school district in New Jersey. This research focuses on principal in elementary school from Kindergarten to eighth grade. The principals work in a large urban school district and will be selected because of their experience working in a comprehensive or targeted school designated for the school improvement process. The participants have varying years of experience in the principal role.

The participants will be asked to answer eight interview questions. Participants will participate in one interview and one follow-up interview.

We expect that participants will be in this research study for one hour for the initial interview and 30 minutes for the follow-up interview.

The primary risk of participation is possible loss of privacy. Only the necessary personal information will be collected and coded immediately after the interview. The data will securely be stored on a password-protected device so that only the PI can access the information. There are no known risks associated with this study. To mitigate risk, participants are encouraged to skip any questions they feel are not comfortable. Additional time/breaks will be provided to each participant if requested. And finally, each participant can withdraw themselves from the study at any point.

The main benefit of participation is to lend significant new insights pertaining to educational practice and used by theory used by principals. The perspectives collected during this research may inform new understandings of the use of efficacious practices during the school



improvement process. Knowledge gained through this research may contribute to practices and strategies that may prove valuable for schools engaging in the improvement process. Additionally, the results from the study will add to best practice in United States public schools, particularly in New Jersey.

Purpose of the research study:

Participants are being asked to take part in this research study because they have previously led or currently lead a K-8 school urban school in New Jersey identified as needing improvement. Women nor minorities will be excluded from the subject pool. Additionally, prisoners and illiterate persons will be excluded.

Participants who agree to participate in this research study will be expected to engage for one hour for the initial interview and 30 minutes for the follow up.

Participants will be one of 12 people who are expected to participate in this research study.

What you will be asked to do:

Participation in this research study will include: A pre-interview questionnaire that you will complete prior to the consent form and the virtual interview. One interview and one follow up interview. If permission is given to be audio recorded, the researcher will audio record the interviews using an iPhoneX. The interviews will take no longer than one hour virtually with the researcher only. At the start of the interview the researcher will explain the reason for the research. The interview protocol will start as follows:

- The participant will be assigned a pseudonym, which will be used during the transcription of the audio recording.
- The participant will be asked to describe a brief history of their background in education.
- The researcher will share the research questions related to the study:

RQ1. What are principals' perceptions of community collective efficacy as a means towards school improvement?

a. How do principals describe the value/possibility of community collective efficacy?

b. How do principals describe the challenges of community collective efficacy?

Before the interview is over, the researcher will remind you that if you wish to opt out of the study, you still have time before the researcher finalizes the study.



Contact information:

If participants have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research project, they can contact the principal investigator (Crystal Joye) at Crystal.Joye@student.shu.edu or Dr. David Reid, Department: Education Leadership, Management & Policy Email: david.reid@shu.edu Office Phone: 9732752324 or the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board ("IRB") at 9737619334 or at irb@shu.edu.

Optional Elements:

Audio will be performed as part of the research study. Please indicate your permission to participate in these activities by placing your initials next to each activity.

I agree I disagree

The researcher may record my [audio or video] interview. In understanding this is done to help with data collection and analysis. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the study team.

I hereby consent to participate in this research study.

Signature of participant		Date
Printed name of participant		
Signature of person obtaining consent		Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent		