

Administrative Supports that Foster Collective Teacher Efficacy in a High-Poverty
Middle School: An Instrumental Case Study on Teacher Perceptions

by

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ABSTRACT

Teachers in high-poverty middle schools need additional supports from administrators to build collective teacher efficacy. Supportive leadership is the driving force in leading collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools. A qualitative, instrumental case study was utilized to explore how teachers perceive administrative supports that foster collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school. The study found supportive leadership as a critical indicator of building collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools, specifically the leader's visibility as a primary support of collective teacher efficacy. Additionally, the study found supportive leadership as the driver of collective teacher efficacy with goal consensus, empowered teachers, embedded reflective practices, and cohesive teacher knowledge as interdependent factors that foster collective teacher efficacy. The study results found that additional research needs to be conducted on collective teacher efficacy, especially in the context of high-poverty middle schools, and the connection to student achievement.

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LIST OF TERMS/ABBREVIATIONS

Collective teacher efficacy- “a group’s shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1997, p. 447).

High-poverty- Title I, Part A funds make up more than 14 billion dollars annually for students living near the poverty line. The United States Department of Education provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with low-income students to help them meet high academic standards (United States Public Education Spending Statistics, 2021).

Teacher Perceptions- Teacher perceptions of students, colleagues, school, themselves, and administration play a pivotal role in student learning and success (Hite & Donohoo, 2021).

Mindset- A teacher’s mindset can be more impactful than a student’s IQ, socioeconomic status, or reading ability (Tough, 2012).

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In 1993, Albert Bandura began a new conversation around collective teacher efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy is “a group’s shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1997, p. 447). Collective teacher efficacy is the belief that all students can achieve at high levels regardless of socioeconomic status. Through this belief, school leaders must build collective teacher efficacy within their teachers to positively influence student achievement. Additionally, Hite and Donohoo (2021) referred to collective teacher efficacy as the shared belief from all staff that they can positively influence student outcomes. Collective teacher efficacy is ranked as the number one factor impacting student achievement (Hattie, 2016). According to Donohoo (2017), the impact of collective teacher efficacy on student achievement is double the effect of prior achievement and triple the impact of home environment and parental involvement. Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) acknowledged collective teacher efficacy as the belief that teachers in a school, regardless of socioeconomic status, can make an educational difference in students’ lives.

The relationship between a teacher’s perceptions of a student’s background and their beliefs on how they can impact student achievement affects the teaching skills, beliefs, and attitudes of what the student can do (Evans, 2013). When educators have low self-efficacy beliefs, they often set low expectations and goals for their students and are less likely to try different approaches to learning (Hite & Donohoo, 2021). Consequently, Goddard et al. (2017) noted that collective teacher efficacy beliefs are substantially

significant to educational equality. In their findings, collective teacher efficacy was connected to a 50 percent decrease in academic disadvantages for high-poverty students. The research identified the educator's motivation and refusal to accept excuses for low achievement. They concluded that teachers hold the power to close achievement gaps and address inequalities in education.

An essential role of the school leader is to foster collective teacher efficacy. A culture of high expectations and belief in the collective teachers positively impacts student achievement (DuFour et al., 2010). Setting goals and high expectations, creating opportunities for collaboration, providing feedback, and empowering educators create conditions that build collective teacher efficacy (Donohoo, 2017). School leaders who commit to collective teacher efficacy will increase student achievement (Alam & Ahmad, 2017; Cansoy et al., 2022).

Additionally, school leaders set the tone for building collective teacher efficacy and teacher commitment (Qadach et al., 2020). Leaders must step back and effectively evaluate the current realities of the school, how it is operating, and how the staff truly feels, and warn leaders against disconnected influence (Senge et al., 2012). Goulston and Ullmen (2013) agree with the warning and add that leaders tend to get stuck in only their views and beliefs. Instead, they urge leaders to communicate from different perspectives to understand the school's culture effectively and to build, harness, and lead collective teacher efficacy.

Study Context

The study occurred in a high-poverty middle school in the middle Tennessee region of the United States. The school is outside a major city. The city's population is approximately 56,000; over the last ten years, it has increased by 15,000. Specifically, the school's current enrollment is 883, serving students in grades 6-8. The racial and ethnic student groups of the school consist of Hispanic (41%), White (33%), Black or African American (18%), Asian (8%), American Indian or Alaska Native (<5%), and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (<5%). The largest racial group comprises Black/Hispanic/Native American (59%). According to the state's report card and free and reduced reporting, close to 70% of the school's population is economically disadvantaged, 10% are students with disabilities, and 32% are English learners with Transitional 1-4. The school has 63 teachers, with an 88.9% retention rate. In addition to classroom educators, the school has four instructional leaders, three grade-level assistant principals, and the principal.

The context of the study was a qualitative instrumental case study with two embedded units of analysis. An instrumental case study investigates one bound case to understand rather than gain an understanding through multiple cases (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). Within the study context, the researcher examined two perspectives of support: teacher and administrator. Using the critical, single-case design, follows a specific set of circumstances within a school to determine if the framework proves to be true or to examine some alternate set of explanations that might be more prevalent (Yin, 2009). The instrumental case study examined a real-world context through a constructivist epistemological viewpoint. Additionally, the case study followed a chain of

evidence, used a case study database, and viewed multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

This study addressed one major problem: Teachers in high-poverty middle schools need more support from administrators to build collective teacher efficacy. According to Lezotte and Snyder (2011), developing a culture that promotes and encourages learning is a vital responsibility of a school leader. Supporting teachers in high-poverty middle schools should be at the forefront of priorities; however, high-poverty schools often need more resources and support to impact student achievement effectively. Frequently, educators see high-poverty middle schools as stepping stones in their careers (Clotfelter et al., 2010). Unfortunately, many educators in high-poverty schools lack the tools necessary to educate students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Learning Policy Institute, 2020). Moreover, high-poverty middle schools have inexperienced teachers and administrators, resulting in low academic achievement and widening the achievement gap (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003).

Students in high-poverty schools often lack the resources to assist with learning needs, putting them at a disadvantage (Baker et al., 2013). Inequalities can affect economically disadvantaged students (Lazaro, 2005), but schools with strong collective teacher efficacy can positively impact achievement for poor students (Goddard et al., 2017). Collective teacher efficacy is the belief that educators positively influence student achievement, regardless of socioeconomic factors (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Because of this, educators have the potential to address educational inequalities (Hite & Donohoo,

2021); still, collective teacher efficacy tends to be lower in middle schools (Naumann, 2008).

Teacher perceptions impact collective teacher efficacy, and a teacher's mindset can be more impactful than a student's IQ, socioeconomic status, or reading ability (Tough, 2012). Middle school students often feel disconnected from school (Pianta et al., 2012); however, students who feel supported tend to take more academic risks (Wentzel et al., 2012), and high-poverty students depend more on their relationships with their teachers than those with stable backgrounds (Allen et al., 2004).

There is a need to study administrative supports that teachers perceive to help build collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools. The administrator's role in leading collective teacher efficacy is crucial to closing the achievement gaps for students in high-poverty schools.

Purpose of Study

Marzano et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis with 69 studies focusing on school leadership. The research revealed that an effective leader should "build a culture that positively influences teachers, who in return, positively influence students" (p. 47). Others have recently supported these findings in updated meta-analyses (Hattie, 2023). Through extensive research, Hattie argued that a successful school leader's main question should be why. He concluded that the way a school relates to students, teachers, families, and school leaders' vision, passion, and belief that they can impact student's lives.

Considering this, the case for strong leadership to build collective teacher efficacy is essential to influence student learning positively. When teachers believe they can make

a difference in the lives of their students, student outcomes increase; however, when collective teacher efficacy beliefs are low, teachers tend to blame outside factors such as home environment and neighborhood characteristics. Collective teacher efficacy is essential in closing the achievement gap and vital to student success. Therefore, this study examined teacher perspectives on administrative supports that foster collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school.

Significance of Study

Middle school is challenging for students, especially students from high-poverty backgrounds. Effective teachers hold the power to impact student achievement and address inequalities in education. Inequality can negatively impact economically disadvantaged students; however, collective teacher efficacy can influence student achievement. Teachers must have a strong, trusting relationship with their administrators, and the leader's role is vital to the school's survival.

This qualitative instrumental case study examined administrative supports teachers perceive as helpful in building collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school. Collective teacher efficacy increases positive student outcomes and, therefore, must be a top priority for administrators (Donohoo et al., 2018). The administrator's impact and the teacher's influence positively affect student achievement (Donohoo & Katz, 2020). Although studies are inconclusive on the relationship between leadership and student achievement, research links what principals do indirectly influence student achievement by the way they lead the adults in the building (Leithwood & Beatty,

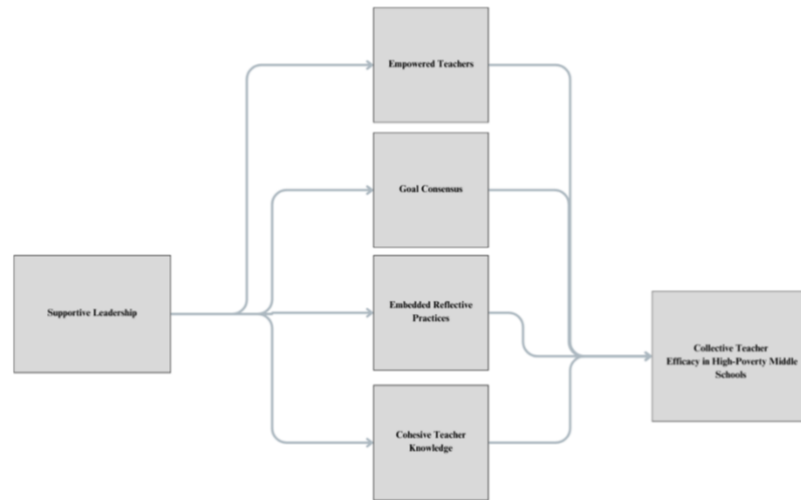
2008); therefore, it is essential to study the administrator's leadership and teacher's perceptions to support economically disadvantaged middle school students.

Theoretical Framework

Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2004) stated that strong collective teacher efficacy in a school could decrease the effects of poverty and provide all students with the necessary support needed to achieve individual success. Moreover, Bandura (1993) stated that collective teacher efficacy could be more powerful toward student success than other factors such as socioeconomic status and race. Supportive leadership drives collective teacher efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy is the number one factor in student achievement, according to Hattie (2016), with an effect size of 1.57. The leader sets the tone for a growth mindset, high expectations, student motivation, and goal census. In the book *Leading Collective Efficacy: Powerful Stories of Achievement and Equity*, Hite and Donohoo (2021) examined supportive leadership and the conditioning factors that contribute to it. The study's theoretical framework mirrors their research. The characteristics of collective teacher efficacy include goal consensus, empowering teachers, cohesive teacher knowledge, and embedded reflective practices (Donohoo et al., 2020). Although the researchers noted that these enabling conditions do not cause things to happen within a school, they will increase the chance of collective teacher efficacy to occur. Supportive leadership feeds the core elements, and the output results in collective teacher efficacy. Figure 1 shows the relationship of perceived administrative supports that build collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools.

Figure 1

Perceived Administrative Supports that Build Collective Teacher Efficacy



Adapted from: (Hite & Donohoo, 2021).

Research Question

Administrative leadership sets the tone, and the organization's success depends on its leader's abilities and actions (Adegbesan, 2013; Donohoo & Katz, 2020; Hite & Donohoo, 2021). Collective teacher efficacy comes from the influence inside the school rather than the student's socioeconomic status (Donohoo, 2017); as a result, the teacher has the most significant impact on student achievement (Bellibas & Liu, 2017; Leithwood & Azah, 2016).

The following research question served as the driving feature for this study:

1. What administrative supports are most conducive when fostering collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools?

Summary

This instrumental case study explored teacher perceptions that help build collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools. The following chapters

provide extensive background of high-poverty schools, collective teacher efficacy, and administrators' influence on collective teacher efficacy to impact student learning. In addition to the research, Chapter 2 overviews the literature and synthesizes perspectives on High-Poverty Middle Schools, Defining Collective Teacher Efficacy in K-12 Schools, Teacher Perceptions of Collective Teacher Efficacy, and the School Leader's Role in Building Collective Teacher Efficacy. Chapter 3 outlines the steps that were taken to conduct the case study using qualitative methodology and the study's data collection and analysis process. Chapter 4 will present the findings of the study from the interviews conducted, artifacts examined, and reflections from the researcher. Chapter 5 will propose future research and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Teachers' beliefs impact student learning, mainly if the perceptions are based on a student's socioeconomic status (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Teacher perceptions of students, colleagues, school, themselves, and administration play a pivotal role in student learning and success (Hite & Donohoo, 2021). Student achievement can suffer if teachers lack belief in themselves, their colleagues, the school, students, the community, and the administrative team (Sandoval et al., 2011). Collective teacher efficacy has almost three times the effect size of socioeconomic status (Hattie, 2019). It is within the school's control to provide the best education to students, regardless of their socioeconomic status (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2003; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Collective teacher efficacy provides opportunities for students in poverty to access education; however, to better understand what students in poverty face, it is important to define what poverty looks like in the United States.

Defining High-Poverty in the United States

According to a study conducted by the United States Census Bureau in 2021, 11.6% of the population lives in poverty, and close to 38 million people live in poverty to make up the overall poverty rate. The findings from the research are based on four characteristics: (1) family structure, (2) age, (3) race and Hispanic origin, and (4) work status. For example, a family of four with an income of \$27,740 is considered at the poverty level. When examining children in poverty, it is estimated that over 15% of children live within the poverty line; however, this number does not consider those

families living narrowly above the poverty line. Moreover, a recent study conducted by Bankrate in 2023 found that 63% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck.

In another report by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), high-poverty is defined as an area with a poverty rate of 20% or more significantly over time. The research also stated that the 20-40% window of high and extreme poverty substantially impacts individuals (2022). In addition to the findings, the USDA indicated that 12.6% of Americans participated in the SNAP program, formally known as the Food Stamps Program. Specific programs are in place to support families in poverty from a financial aspect; however, to fully understand the impact of poverty on education and how schools are funded, it is necessary to look to the past.

The History of High-Poverty in Education

The *Equality of Educational Opportunity* was an influential report by the United States Government (Hanushek, 2016). Its origins came from the work President Lyndon B. Johnson mandated in the Civil Rights Act of 1965. James Coleman led the charge, and due to his leadership, the report is now known as the *Coleman Report*. The report highlighted the importance of equality of opportunity in education. Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Title I became law and influenced the federal government's role in education (Jennings, 2000). The program's main goal was to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged students (ESEA, 1965).

Despite the federal government's efforts to support disadvantaged students, Ruby Martin and Phyllis McClure detailed the confusion surrounding the law in *Title I of ESEA: Is It Helping Poor Children* (McClure & Martin, 1969). They documented three

areas of confusion: (1) many schools made few adjustments to the educational services for disadvantaged students, (2) the distribution of federal aid was disproportionate, and (3) schools spent money on non-Title I students. Furthermore, children receiving the funding demonstrated little to no gains in academic achievement despite the additional funding (Vinoski, 1999).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Amendments of 1969, under the leadership of President Richard Nixon, introduced the terms “supplement, not supplant,” and “comparability,” meaning the federal funds were “in addition to” and “not in place of” local and state funds, and Title I schools were comparable to other schools in the district (ESEA, 1970). In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan passed the Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981. The act allowed states more discretion in using federal funds, and the ECIA’s Title I shifted the accountability requirements and increased the focus on improved academic outcomes (NYSED, 2006/2009).

By 1983, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* introduced holding schools accountable for student achievement. The report brought standards-based accountability measures and increased involvement from the federal government in Title I funding (Birman et al., 2013). In 1988, the federal government required Title I schools and districts to develop measures for student achievement (Jennings, 2000). The creation of the Hawkins-Stafford School Improvement Amendments sought to help improve student achievement, attain grade-level proficiency, and increase opportunities for high-poverty students. The legislation mandated schools to identify Title I schools that did not meet

progress goals, resulting in additional support for students in low-performing schools (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

In 1994, under the guidance of President Bill Clinton, the Improving America's School Act (IASA) reauthorized ESEA. The purpose of IASA was to provide opportunities for all students to apply the performance standard regardless of funding (Wong, 2003). Although IASA increased performance standards in education, there was still a lack of student achievement (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Moving forward to 2001, President George W. Bush enacted No Child Left Behind (NCLB) with new accountability measures: (1) develop and implement academic standards for reading, math, and science for all grade levels, with the focus of aligned-based assessments in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school, (2) establish adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals for benchmark data as well as disaggregated subgroup data, and (3) designate schools or districts that continually fail to meet AYP performance targets and identify for improvement, escalating sanctions, and interventions (NCLB, 2001). The NCLB legislature emphasized improvement measures, making schools and districts that fail to meet AYP goals enter improvement status and face consequences. To exit the improvement status, schools must meet AYP goals for two consecutive years (Boyle & Lee, 2015).

The year 2015 marked 50 years of commitment to equalizing opportunities for all students. To revamp NCLB, President Barack Obama created a new law surrounding education for all students. The new law, Every Student Succeeds Act(ESSA), is the most recent legislation regarding school improvement and high-poverty schools (U.S.

Department of Education, 2015). ESSA included six new provisions that ensure student success:

1. Uphold critical protections for disadvantaged and high-need students.
2. High academic standards for college and career readiness.
3. Vital information is provided to all stakeholders through statewide assessments to measure student achievement toward high academic standards.
4. Support and grow local innovators.
5. Increase access to high-quality preschools.
6. Maintain expectations of accountability for low-performing schools, groups not making progress, and low graduation rates.

Although the government determined the qualifications, stipulations, and funding sources, a deeper examination of high-poverty qualifications is needed to fully understand the complexity of the additional support provided to high-poverty schools.

High-Poverty Qualifications

According to the *United States Public Education Spending Statistics* (2021), Title I, Part A funds make up more than 14 billion dollars annually for students living near the poverty line. The United States Department of Education provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with low-income students to help them meet high academic standards. The allocation of funds through the federal government utilizes four statutory formulas, including census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state (United States Department of Education, 2013). The allocations of

funds are basic grants, concentration grants, targeted grants, and Education Finance Incentive Grants (EFIG). The EFIG distributes funding to State Educational Agencies (SEAs) as measured by comparing funding to relative wealth by its per capita income, and the education expenditures among states are equalized. Once the funding is distributed, the SEAs allocate funding to LEAs, and the LEAs identify the highest percentages of high-poverty students in schools in their district and the highest need. The allocated funds are determined by the number of students from low-income families, resulting in the school being 40% or higher in services.

Although some high-poverty schools receive funding, school districts are being asked to provide more resources to combat poverty than in previous years (Muhammad, 2005). “Poverty is geographically aggregated in neighborhoods, thereby creating high-poverty schools” (Padilla et al., 2022, p. 105). Students in high-poverty schools often come to school with intense educational and emotional needs. Most schools in high-poverty areas lack unqualified teachers, have higher turnover rates, and lower pay (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Due to the barriers of poverty, students often have reading deficiencies due to the lack of exposure to literature, vocabulary, and reading (Cuthrell et al., 2010). Schools with many impoverished students often lack the resources to assist with learning needs, putting students at a more significant disadvantage (Baker et al., 2013). Students from high-poverty are at a higher risk of academic failure, are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school, and are more likely to drop out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Typically, the impacts of poverty on students have been found to persist into adulthood. Lower socioeconomic status is often associated with a negative view of the future (Robb et al., 2009), indicating helplessness as one of the top factors impacting the opposing view. Consequently, in a lower socioeconomic household, positive affirmations to negative reprimands are a 1:2 ratio; however, in a higher socioeconomic household, it is a 6:1 positive-to-negative ratio (Hart & Risley, 1995).

Social scientist Sean Reardon, Professor of Poverty and Inequality at Stanford University (2011) found a significant correlation between poverty and low academic achievement. Through his research, he linked the higher percentage of students in poverty to lower academic achievement. Erik Jensen, author of *Poor Student, Rich Teaching* (2019), defined poverty as “a chronic condition resulting from an aggregate of adverse social and economic factors” (p.6). Poverty negatively affects the brain and can interfere with learning (Noble et al., 2005). To add to the challenges imposed on students in poverty on their education, evidence is that they are increasingly likely to struggle with memory, impulse regulation, visuospatial actions, language, cognitive capacity, and conflict. The brain of students living in poverty is attributed to four main types of factors: (1) health issues, poor diet, and exposure to toxins, (2) chronic stress, (3) weaker cognitive skills, and (4) impaired socioemotional relationships (Evans & Kantrowitz, 2002). High-poverty qualifications set the parameters for funding and additional support from the government. The following section examines high-poverty middle schools and the challenges students face.

High-Poverty Middle Schools

Middle school is a challenging time for students. When students reach young adulthood, their moods tend to be inconsistent and restless (Kellough & Kellough, 2008). Their bodies undergo more changes than in the first two years of their lives. Students living in poverty find this stress more compounded.

During adolescence, the prefrontal cortex is developing. The prefrontal cortex is often underdeveloped for impoverished students, resulting in lagging prefrontal functions such as body regulation, attuned communication, emotional balance, and empathy (Kishiyama et al., 2009). Compressing underdeveloped prefrontal cortexes with the stages of psychosocial development, students in poverty struggle to make sense of the world around them (Erikson, 1950). Through Erikson's research, he created eight stages of development. During each stage, individuals face two opposing states that shape their personalities. Table 1 identifies the eight stages and basic conflicts.

Table 1*The Eight Stages and Basic Conflicts*

Stage	Basic Conflict
Infancy (0-1 year)	Trust vs. mistrust
Early childhood (1-3 years)	Autonomy vs. shame/doubt
Play age (3-6 years)	Initiative vs. guilt
School-age (7-11 years)	Industry vs. inferiority
Adolescence (12-18 years)	Identity vs. confusion
Early adulthood (19-29 years)	Intimacy vs. isolation
Middle age (30-64 years)	Generativity vs. stagnation
Old age (65 onward)	Integrity vs. despair

(Erikson, 1950)

Regarding middle school students, their stage of development aligns with identity vs. confusion. In this continuum, the pathway to adulthood begins, and they seek a sense of identity; however, role confusion emerges when there is no sense of identity. During this stage, adolescents often look to their peers for acceptance. For impoverished students, the social ramifications can affect communicative and academic competence (Garcia, 2011). Students in poverty are faced with navigating an underdeveloped prefrontal cortex, peer pressure, and a lack of basic needs to be successful. Nevertheless, instead of using barriers as an excuse, educational researchers are combating poverty and

stereotypes by researching high-performing, high-poverty schools. Effective high-poverty schools focus on strategies and expectations to assist students rise above the barriers.

Effective High-Poverty Schools

Ronald Edmonds (1979) questioned the *Coleman Report* and examined the correlation between family background and achievement. He analyzed what it meant to be an effective school and how educators could learn from the findings. Edmonds found six predominant indicators of the success of an effective school:

- Strong administrative lead
- Climate of expectations
- School atmosphere conducive to learning
- Basic school skills take precedence over all other school activities
- Focus school energy and resources toward fundamental objectives
- Student progress is monitored frequently

Several decades later, Reeves (2003) studied schools classified as high-performing while simultaneously being recognized as high-poverty. He identified the characteristics of a high-performance, high-poverty school as (1) 90 percent or more of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, (2) 90 percent of students are identified as an ethnic minority group, and (3) 90 percent or more students meet the district or state academic standards in reading or another subject. Reeves affirmed, “The key variable is not poverty, but teaching quality” (p. 8). Reeves found nine characteristics of an effective school. Table 2 labels and explains the nine characteristics.

Table 2*Characteristics of a 90/90/90 School*

The impact of collaboration	The focus of the collaboration was examining student work and collective determination.
The value of feedback	The feedback was timely, accurate, and specific (Marzano et al., 2001).
The impact of time	Leaders made drastic changes in their schedules. The schedules reflected instructional hours in math and English.
Constructive data analysis	The intentional focus on student data moved from comparing year-to-year cohorts. The teachers compared themselves to the students to focus on teaching strategies.
The value of every adult in the system	Leaders recognized the importance and consistency of all staff interacting with students during the day.
Cross-disciplinary integration	A deliberate strategy involved all subjects, such as art, technology, physical education, career education, and music.

(Reeves, 2003)

Reeves emphasized that adult behavior, not poverty, leads to the school's success.

The beliefs of all adults in the building are essential to success in high-poverty schools; therefore, collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty schools should be considered.

Collective Teacher Efficacy and High-Poverty Schools

The *Coleman Report* increased awareness of the disparities in the educational structures in the United States; however, if the country continues at the same pace, it will take approximately two and a half centuries to close the math achievement gap first

reported in 1965 (Hanushek, 2016). In his findings, Hanushek identified two conclusions from the report, stating that families are the most important influence on student achievement and that school resources do not matter. He concluded from the research:

Taking all these results together, one implication stands out above all: That schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context; and that this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their, home, neighborhood, and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. (p. 20)

Richard Rothstein, an American academic author, emphasized in his 2004 book, *Classes and Schools*, the magnitude of social class characteristics in schools and acknowledged that no matter how trained a teacher is, they cannot overcome the influence. On the other hand, more recent research disagrees with Rothstein and Hanushek's statements. Collective teacher efficacy is strongly related to student achievement. Hattie (2019) examined factors contributing to student achievement through his *Visible Learning* research. The researcher noted that socioeconomic status has an effect of 0.52 on student achievement; however, he found that collective teacher efficacy has a more powerful impact on student achievement, with an effect size of 1.36 (Hattie, 2019). Previous research by Goddard et al. (2000) studied the impact of collective teacher efficacy on student achievement and found that collective efficacy "was more important in explaining school achievement than socioeconomic status" (p. 89). According to Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004),

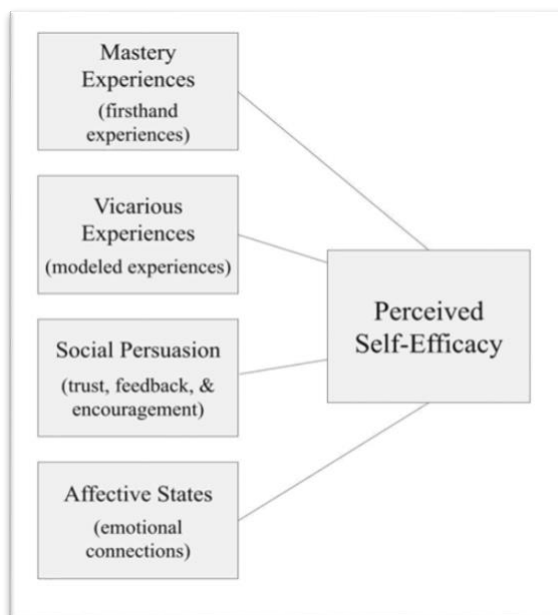
Teachers in schools with high collective efficacy do not accept low student achievement as an inevitable by-product of low socioeconomic status, lack of ability, or family background. They roll up their sleeves and get the job done. (p. 192)

Hite and Donohoo (2021) referred to collective efficacy as a shared belief from all staff that they can positively influence student outcomes, including students from high-poverty. High expectations are a personal belief of educators (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). Their research indicated that expectations influence daily behavior. High expectations are at the core of collective teacher efficacy. Lastly, the researchers added that if teachers have low expectations, it can result in negative outcomes; however, if teachers have high expectations and believe all students can learn, positive outcomes are likely to occur.

Collective teacher efficacy aims to bring about change and impact student achievement through a collaborative effort. It is the educator's choice to be the "allocator" or the "equalizer" (Garcia, 2011). He continued by attesting that it is in the control of educators to create a learning environment with high expectations and the opportunity for students to rise out of poverty; therefore, everyone involved needs to know what is involved in accomplishing this transformational mission, and collective teacher efficacy must be clearly defined.

The Foundation of Collective Teacher Efficacy

According to Bandura (1986), efficacy is future-oriented, meaning current realities and perceptions influence decisions. Through the process, individuals refer to past experiences as a guide for future interactions. The self-efficacy model by Bandura examines four past experiences that shape collective efficacy: (1) mastery experiences, (2) vicarious experiences, (3) social persuasion, and (4) affective states. The four past experiences in Figure 2 define the experiences that lead to perceived self-efficacy.

Figure 2*Bandura's Self-Efficacy Model*

(Bandura, 1986)

Mastery experiences are the most effective way to build a strong sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Successful firsthand experiences build mastery expectations (Bandura, 1977). Moreover, when teams experience success, it builds confidence and becomes a part of their growth. However, when a team does not meet its goals, the repeated sense of failure can lessen the collective efficacy, especially if it is a new team. To achieve long-term success, a team must build a resilient sense of efficacy to emerge stronger (Bandura, 1994). Once individuals believe they can succeed, they are more likely to return from a setback and persevere through adversity (Goddard et al., 2004).

The second predictor of success through self-efficacy is vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1986). Vicarious experiences develop when individuals notice perceived

similarities between others and themselves (Donohoo, 2017). The tighter the perceived connection, the more significant the influence the individual has on the person's belief in their ability to succeed. Furthermore, the greater the similarity, the more vicarious experiences the individual observes (Bandura, 1994). Through vicarious experiences, collective efficacy increases when team members learn from one another while experiencing similar successes (Bandura, 1986).

Social persuasion is the third source of collective efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Hite and Donohoo (2021) described social persuasion as when teams believe they have what it takes to accomplish their goals and rely on each other to take the risk. Trust, confidence, support, and encouragement increase the ability to succeed when faced with a problematic situation (Bandura, 1994). He concluded that the collective measures success through the power of the whole group rather than the individual. Collective efficacy involves all collaborators who believe they can accomplish goals together (Donohoo et al., 2018).

The fourth and final way of fostering collective efficacy through self-efficacy is through affective states (Bandura, 1986). People with higher self-efficacy view their affective state as stimulating; however, for those with lower self-efficacy, affective states lead to self-doubt and negativity (Goddard et al., 2004). Promoting a positive school culture and climate can increase performance in low-performing schools (Ross et al., 2003). This is necessary for fostering collective teacher efficacy.

More recently, various studies have examined collective teacher efficacy and its impact on student achievement through environmental conditions (Donohoo, 2018; Donohoo et

al., 2020; Hattie, 2016). Collective teacher efficacy is a perception that the efforts of teachers will positively affect student learning (Goddard et al., 2000). Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) defined collective efficacy as the

Collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities. (p. 190)

The goal of collective teacher efficacy is to bring teachers together to increase self-efficacy and, in return, motivate students to achieve at higher levels; therefore, collective teacher efficacy in a K-12 setting must be examined.

Collective Teacher Efficacy in K-12 Schools

The foundation of collective teacher efficacy is based on the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, & 1997). Social cognitive theory, previously known as the social learning theory, is the idea that learning occurs through interactions, behaviors, people, and the environment. Groups with higher collective efficacy work better under pressure and have higher productivity and accomplishments (Bandura, 2000). To reach collective efficacy, teachers must believe they can impact student learning, make a difference, and refuse to accept excuses regarding students with low performance due to socioeconomic factors (Goddard et al., 2017).

Collective teacher efficacy is at the heart of an effective school. The school's success depends on the belief that all teachers can improve student achievement and positively influence student outcomes, including students from high-poverty (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). The collective efforts of teachers to impact student learning take persistence and a positive attitude toward school improvement (Leithwood, 2019).

Moreover, positive moods enhance self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). When fostering collective efficacy, it is essential to provide genuine, positive intentions because if not, the process could lead to toxic positivity (France, 2021).

Collective Teacher Efficacy, Toxic Positivity, and Sustainability

Toxic positivity can be described as the overgeneralization of positive thinking, so much so that it encourages individuals to suppress or displace negative thoughts and stress (Sokal et al., 2020). Toxic positivity often leads educators to put their school and students before themselves, leading to silent, harmful compliance (France, 2021). As a result, toxic positivity encourages the thought of teacher dissatisfaction (Alvarez, 2021).

France (2021) clarified that research should be conducted on collective teacher efficacy; however, explanations are needed to sustain the work in a school setting. Table 3 highlights the six conditions to sustain collective teacher efficacy as defined by Donohoo (2017), with a summary from Planche (2019) of each condition.

Table 3*Six Conditions to Sustain Collective Teacher Efficacy*

Collective Teacher Efficacy	Summary
Advanced teacher influence in schools	Impacting teachers by having decision-making opportunities and learning how to lead effectively
Goal consensus among staff	Determining clear goals that can be measured grows confidence and impacts progress.
Teachers' knowledge of one another's work	Strengthening learning relationships
Cohesive staff relationships	Agreeing to shared commitments helps to sustain improvement efforts
Responsiveness of leadership	Demonstrating respect and care for all stakeholders
Effective systems of interventions	Addressing the need to differentiate support for students and staff

(Donohoo, 2017; Planche, 2019)

The study of positive psychology examines characteristics that promote thriving communities (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000). One vital characteristic is a positive outlook (Bonanos et al., 2006). Teachers must welcome optimism instead of toxic positivity because optimism encourages reality (Sokal et al., 2020). Furthermore, the researcher recommended balancing positive and negative emotions and meeting them with optimism. Echoing the research on positive thinking, Aspinwall (2001) acknowledged that positive affect and positive beliefs help people through adversities.

Educators can work to increase sustainability through collective efficacy, optimism, and positive thinking; however, to implement positivity that is not toxic, layers of sustainability are essential (France, 2021). The researcher concluded that educators must share power, embrace doubt, and zoom out to realistic expectations to sustain collective efficacy.

Collective Teacher Efficacy in High-Poverty Middle Schools

Educators hold the power to address inequalities in education (Hite & Donohoo, 2021). Teachers positively affect students' learning when they provide the best education (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2003). Inequality can affect economically disadvantaged students (Lazaro, 2005). Goddard (1998) acknowledged that teacher perspectives influence the school culture and climate.

Collaboration is essential to the survival of public schools (Schlechty, 2009). Jakicic (2008) discouraged teachers from working in isolation and deciding what is necessary individually. More importantly, when educators only focus on their classroom, they lack the knowledge of the school's mission and vision. Wheatley (1992) declared through collaborative efforts that real change and power come through relationships. He concluded that relationships are the foundation of all work and are more important than any task, role, or position. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) recognized that teams work together and complement each other, combining skills and experience.

Previous research concluded that collective teacher efficacy tends to be lower in the middle than in elementary schools (Naumann, 2008). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) observed lower teacher confidence levels regarding classroom management and

instructional strategies in middle schools. A later study by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) revealed that middle school teachers have higher self-efficacy than junior high teachers. To differentiate between middle and junior high school, researchers Friedman et al. (2005) reported that at the beginning of the 20th century, students attended two types of schools: K-8th and high school with 9th-12th grades. In the 1930s, junior high school was a transitional period to high school, with grades 7-8 as the primary focus. Concerns arose in the 1960s that junior high schools were not sufficiently supporting students. Due to these concerns, middle schools formed (Friedman et al., 2005). According to research conducted by Kasak (2004), middle school students excel when leaders and teachers provide (1) a close, mutually respectful environment, (2) high-quality instruction and developmentally appropriate programs, (3) specific training for the middle school level, (4) high-quality, ongoing professional development, and (5) an emphasis on literacy. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2002) suggested that the lower the grade level, the higher the teacher's efficacy. The study also indicated that middle school teachers require additional support and professional development opportunities to increase their self-efficacy and, in return, boost the students' efficacy. Collective efficacy influences student academic success (Sandoval et al., 2011). Their research found a relationship between student achievement at high-poverty schools and the belief of the collective individuals regardless of background or socioeconomic status. Likewise, Jacobson (2010) pointed out that teacher quality is the most significant predictor of student achievement but claimed that leadership matters in motivating educators and the quality of their teaching.

Transformational Leadership & Administrative Supports

School leadership matters (Fullan, 2016), and school principals drive school improvement (Byrk et al., 2010). Transformational leaders set clear and realistic goals, lead with a strong sense of purpose, encourage teachers with hope and optimism, believe in creativity, and focus on the needs of individuals (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Leadership needs to offer self-confidence, trustworthiness, and confidence in teachers' capacity (Dahiru & Kayode, 2022). Teachers must have a strong, trusting relationship with the administration, and a leader's role in fostering collective teacher efficacy can affect student learning (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Versland and Erikson (2017) examined the influence a principal has on collective efficacy and collaboration. They found five critical takeaways for increased support in a school:

- Implementation of instructional initiatives
- Principal leadership
- Relationship building
- Collaboration with an instructional focus
- Principal leading by example

The researchers specified that everyone is responsible for improving the school. Skaalvik and Avolio et al. (2004) contend that the leader's main impact is their influence on beliefs and behaviors within the school. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2021) emphasized that instructional leaders must foster collective teacher efficacy, shared goals and values,

unity, and supportive social interactions. A leader's influence is vital to building collective efficacy and the school's survival.

Teacher Perceptions That Impact Collective Teacher Efficacy

According to Goddard et al. (2004), a teacher's sense of efficacy is essential to reaching collective efficacy. The researchers continued by expressing that collective teacher efficacy and student achievement are connected, and student outcomes depend on the reciprocal relationship among teachers. DeWitt (2019) argued that teacher efficacy takes time, trust, and intentional efforts. Additionally, DeWitt describes self-efficacy as the individual having confidence in themselves, whereas collective efficacy is the confidence in the collective to make a difference in student achievement. Further, Dweck (2000) identified two types of intelligences when working as a collective: fixed and malleable intelligence.

The Theory of Fixed and Malleable Intelligence

The theory of fixed intelligence claims that intelligence is a trait within an individual and cannot change (Bandura & Dweck, 1985; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Additionally, within the theory of fixed intelligence lies the fear of failure, looking incompetent, and the threat to their self-esteem (Dweck & Bempechat, 1983). Moreover, individuals will need more self-confidence to overlook opportunities. Embarrassment, shame, anxiety, humiliation, fear of awkwardness, and worries of failure often hinder growth and negatively influence actions to better a person's craft (Newkirk, 2017). In social settings, humans are "performers" according to Goffman (1959). He believed everyone plays a role, which is how individuals are perceived. In the book

Embarrassment: And the Emotional Underlife of Learning, Newkirk (2017) defined the performative principle as, “in all social encounters, we are playing roles that we desire to perform competently. Embarrassment typically involves this discrediting information that undermines our performances” (p.9). He added that it takes time to learn new tasks, and it is natural to appear competent; as a result, individuals must allow room for awkwardness, feedback, and vulnerability.

The theory of malleable intelligence is the belief that intelligence is not a fixed trait but something that takes time to learn through a process (Dweck, 2000). Likewise, incremental theory is increased intelligence due to effort (Bandura & Dweck, 1985; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Through the theory of malleable and increased intelligence, individuals believe they can obtain more knowledge with effort and guidance (Mueller & Dweck, 1997). Mastery-oriented qualities link to the theory of malleable intelligence (Dweck, 2000). Therefore, a teacher’s mindset strongly influences the outcome of students in their classroom.

Mindsets of Teachers in High-Poverty Middle Schools

According to Tough (2012), a teacher’s mindset can be more impactful than a student’s IQ, socioeconomic status, or reading ability. The teacher’s mindset is the most important indicator of student outcomes (Elliot & Dweck, 2005). In Dweck’s book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, she introduced the concept of a growth mindset.

A teacher’s mindset is especially important in middle and high school grades. Pianta et al. (2012) note that middle school and high school students often feel

disconnected at school. Relatedly, the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research found four crucial components of fostering a growth mindset classroom: (1) belonging in the academic community, (2) competence and growth with ability, (3) succeeding at a task, and (4) the work is valuable (Farrington et al., 2012).

Students are aware of the culture of their schools, teacher's attitudes toward teaching, and their preparedness (Delpit, 2012). In her book *Multiplication is for White People: Raising Expectations for Other People's Children*, she introduced the term "warm demanders." She credited Vasquez (1988) as the first to use the term to describe educators with high expectations for all students. She explained that a "warm demander" has high expectations for their students, encouraging them to achieve their best and helping them reach their potential in disciplined and structured environments.

Students who feel supported by their teacher are more inclined to participate in learning and take risks (Wentzel et al., 2012). Similarly, students who do not feel support from their teacher will often have a more challenging time connecting with the learning (Birch & Ladd, 1998). Also, students from high-poverty backgrounds depend more on student-teacher relationships than those with stable backgrounds (Allen et al., 2004).

Brophy (1985) discovered that negative expectations lead students to disengage from learning. The researcher listed eight forms of negative expectations placed on students (1) giving up easily on low-expectations students, (2) criticizing them more often for failure, (3) praising them less often following success, (4) praising inappropriately, (5) neglecting to give them any feedback following their responses, (6) seating them in the back of the room, (7) generally paying less attention to them or

interacting with less frequently, and (8) expressing less warmth towards them or less interest in them as individuals. Mindsets of teachers in a high-poverty middle school must center around building positive relationships, hold high expectations, and create an environment that welcomes all learners. Educators need to recognize their own stereotypes and unconscious biases so they can effectively educate students in a high-poverty middle school.

Stereotypes, Learned Fear Responses, and Unconscious Bias

Families living in poverty face health concerns and are surrounded by stereotypes (Gorski, 2012). From his research, he noted four stereotypes of poor students and their families: (1) poor people do not value education, (2) poor people are lazy, (3) poor people are substance abusers, and (4) poor people are linguistically deficient. He continued by avowing that stereotypes paint a negative picture and are used to justify the privilege of others. Poverty and adverse social and economic conditions negatively impact the part of the brain responsible for memory, impulse regulation, visuospatial actions, language, cognitive capacity, and conflict resolution (Noble et al., 2005). Table 4 identifies and explains the behavioral effects and perceived behaviors of students in poverty.

Table 4*Poor Students, Rich Teaching*

Behavioral Effects	Perceived Behaviors
Memory	Poor memory/distractibility
Chronic Stress	Learned helplessness, apathy, hypervigilance, aggressiveness
Cognitive Skills	Deficient vocabulary, poor reading skills, weak working memory
Impaired Socioemotional Skills	Poor manners, misbehaviors, overreactions

(Jensen, 2019)

Jensen (2019) identified the correlation between emotion and cognitive ability. He proposed,

Teachers who do not know what these behaviors really mean may inappropriately judge students as lazy, unwilling to follow instructions, poor listeners, low achieving, and anti-social. This may foster classroom friction, a huge achievement gap, annoyed students, and even dropouts. And worse yet, the teacher may blame the behavior on the student. Conversely, when students feel a connection with their teachers and feel respect and trust, they behave and learn better (p. 7).

Because of the behaviors exhibited by students in poverty, stereotypes learned fear responses and unconscious biases could shape student-teacher relationships. Devine (1989) found that stereotypes and attitudes toward specific groups of people do not always reflect conscious thinking, meaning that learned fear responses are associated with previous lived experiences (Amodio, 2014).

Individuals are not born with unconscious biases. In other words, automatic responses are developed over time, resulting in an association with unconscious biases. Kahaneman (2011) described the brain as fast thinking and interpreting information to survive. According to Guynn (2015), unconscious biases are shortcuts in the brain to categorize information. Additionally, unconscious or implicit biases are natural and deeply inclined to influence behaviors (Noon, 2018). Herrnstein and Murray (1994) described the phenomenon of social construct to categorize and gather information according to social thinking.

Nevertheless, despite this, unhelpful biases can be unlearned, and as a leader, it is essential to foster experiences that build bridges and challenge assumptions and misconceptions (Safir, 2017). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) proclaimed that schools have systems that perpetuate inequalities, such as unconscious biases, and many educators are unaware of the depth of the problem—the inequalities in a school lead to the achievement gap.

The Achievement Gap

A recent longitudinal study concluded that teachers' mindsets strongly influence students and the achievement gap (Canning et al., 2019). The achievement gap is defined as the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized test scores, course selections, dropout rates, and college completion rates, among other success measures. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African-American and Hispanic students at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic white peers, and the similar academic disparity between students from low-income families and those who are better off. (p. 1)

The study found that the achievement gap in an educator's classroom with a fixed mindset had twice the negative impact on a student's education than a teacher with a growth mindset. Ansell (2011) defined it in an article to gain familiarity with the achievement gap. The Concentration of Poverty in the New Millennium report concluded that schools with the highest needs often have teachers and administrators with the lowest qualifications (Jargowsky, 2013). Likewise, school leaders and educators more commonly find higher-poverty schools a stepping stone (Clotfelter et al., 2010).

A more recent longitudinal study discovered that teachers' mindsets strongly influence students and the achievement gap (Canning et al., 2019). The study found that the achievement gap in an educator's classroom with a fixed mindset had twice the negative impact on a student's education than a teacher with a growth mindset. The teacher's mindset influences student achievement; for that reason, high expectations for all students should be at the forefront of educating students in high-poverty schools.

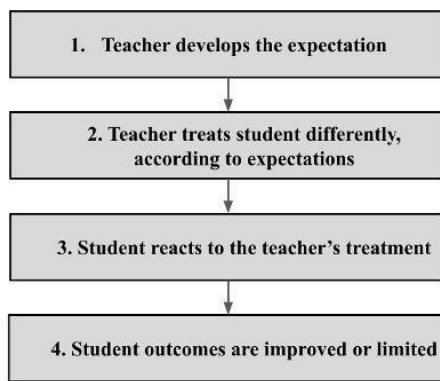
High Expectations for All Students

Teachers make inferences about their students' academic and social results, referred to as teacher expectations (Pantaleo, 2016). Students from low socioeconomic status are more likely to be influenced by their teachers' expectations than by their peers with higher economic status (Rubie-Davies, 2006). According to Parrett and Budge (2020), low expectations of students permeate a toxic school atmosphere. They added that schools that set high expectations for their students do not tolerate excuses for lower achievement, celebrate student accomplishments, and develop a shared vision of powerful learning in every classroom. Lezotte and Snider (2011) measure high

expectations by two critical elements: (1) the belief in the students that they can achieve mastery of standards and (2) the staff's belief in self-efficacy. Having high expectations for students starts with high expectations for themselves. They expressed that to have students meet high expectations, they must have the confidence to teach students the necessary knowledge and skills and provide high-quality instruction and learning experiences.

In the book *Turning High-Poverty Schools into High-Performing Schools*, Parrett and Budge (2020) reiterated the importance of setting high expectations for all students by making sure students feel safe, develop a sense of belonging, and verbalize the belief that all students can learn and will achieve at high levels. Educators lowering student expectations can influence a child's future (Weinstein, 2004). When teachers act upon their perceived expectations, they influence student learning (Isaken, 2012).

Figure 3 explains the process of teacher expectations for students. Researchers Johnson, et al. (2019) adapted the model originally from Brophy and Good (1970). The figure illustrates the steps of setting expectations for students in the classroom. In the model, the authors show the relationship between expectations and student motivation.

Figure 3*Expectation Effect Process Model*

(Brophy & Good, 1970)

Staff with high collective teacher efficacy are characterized by high expectations, effort, and persistence in overcoming the most difficult challenges (Donohoo, 2017). However, when staff has low teacher efficacy, it can negatively impact student achievement (De Boer et al., 2010). This negative impact can have a huge fallout for student achievement.

The Fallout for Students

According to the Race Matters Institute (2014), “The road to equality will not be accomplished through treating everyone equally. It will be achieved by treating everyone justly according to their circumstances.” Relational trust is the belief that educators reciprocate their sense of obligation towards others, and through those interactions, expectations are validated (Bryk et al., 2010).

An earlier study conducted by Bryk and Schneider (2002) measured relational trust among teachers, between teachers and students, and the relationship administrators

have with three groups (teachers, students, and families). The study discovered a significant increase in student achievement when relational trust was high; however, when the level of trust is low, students have a one-in-seven chance of achieving gains.

Chenoweth (2009a) explained the significance of teachers' responsibilities in educating students in poverty. She identified the realities of families in poverty, how they access education, and the insecurities they face when it comes to their child's education. Low-income children rely on schools for their education due to parents in poverty because families can feel incompetent or overwhelmed with daily tasks. Effective teachers are the most beneficial resource for students (Borg et al., 2012). Their study acknowledged that all students have the right to a quality education, regardless of socioeconomic status. Students are entitled to receive a high-quality education as their advantaged peers (DeMatthews, 2015).

Parrett and Budge (2019) expressed the importance of collective efficacy among teachers, "Equity-focused educators build leadership capacity and collective efficacy for moral purposes (p.99)." Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) said shared leadership fosters a strong school culture. Goddard and Salloum (2011) added that collaboration positively affects a school culture. Dahiru and Kayode (2022) identified a shared commitment to a positive school culture. To foster a positive school culture, school leaders must be intentional about clear messages and goals. In addition to clear messages and goals, principals must provide opportunities for shared decision-making. Furthermore, the researchers affirmed that the school's success and failure depend on the relationship

between the administrator and teachers. The school leadership style creates an environment to build collective teacher efficacy.

The School Leader's Role in Building Collective Teacher Efficacy

Fullan and Quinn (2016) recognized a leader's ability to focus on collaborative capacity as the most significant contribution to student learning. Similarly, a principal's leadership is vital in norming a professional community (Byrk et al., 1999). Lezotte and Snyder (2011) identified seven correlates of effective schools. Their research found that effective schools foster collective teacher efficacy while creating a positive school climate. The seven correlates are as follows: (1) high expectations for success, (2) strong instructional leadership, (3) clear and focused mission, (4) opportunity to learn/time on task, (5) frequent monitoring of student progress, (6) safe and orderly environment, and (7) positive home-school relations. Dahiru and Kaynode (2022) echoed the importance of the previous findings and found a link between school effectiveness and instructional leadership.

Theoharis (2007) provided evidence that principals in lower-performing schools raised achievement by increasing staff capacity and school culture. Likewise, Goddard et al. (2015) studied the correlation among leadership, collaboration, collective efficacy, and student achievement. They expressed that the greater the sense of collective efficacy, the greater the levels of student achievement. School leaders are responsible for collaborating with their staff to develop a culture that fosters student achievement (MacNeil et al., 2009). Other research suggests that a school administrator's impact on student achievement is indirect; however, it is noteworthy that strong leadership and fostering

collective teacher efficacy plays an essential role in improving student achievement (Goddard et al., 2015; Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis et al., 2010). Marazno et al. (2005) identified that the principal's ideas/beliefs' mindset correlates with student achievement. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment are positive leadership factors that build collective teacher efficacy and contribute to the school's climate and culture (Nikovic & Knezevic Floric, 2018). The researchers linked collaboration, the school's climate and culture, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and student achievement. There is also a correlation between a teacher's sense of belonging, job satisfaction, and engagement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2021). They echoed the idea that instructional leaders must foster collective teacher efficacy, shared goals and values, unity, and supportive social interactions.

Previous Research on Collective Teacher Efficacy and Leadership

Donohoo (2017) emphasized the importance of fostering the collective efficacy beliefs of educators. The school's success, measured by student achievement, depends on the collective belief that teachers can improve student learning (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, collective teacher efficacy forms through mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states. Hite and Donohoo (2021) shared a model for leading collective teacher efficacy in the book *Leading Collective Efficacy: Powerful Stories of Achievement and Equity*. Their research presented the concepts of leading collective efficacy. They pinpointed five enabling conditions for collective teacher efficacy: (1) goal census, (2) empowered

teachers, (3) cohesive teacher knowledge, (4) embedded reflective practices, and (5) supportive leadership.

Figure 4, created by Hite and Donohoo, articulates the importance of the enabling conditions, with supportive leadership on the outside of the circle, signifying the importance of the leader's role in fostering collective teacher efficacy.

Figure 4

A Model for Leading Collective Teacher Efficacy



(Hite & Donohoo, 2021)

Supportive leadership focuses on the school leader's approach to leading a school with high collective teacher efficacy (Donohoo, 2017). Through supportive leadership, school leaders establish high expectations, procedures, and processes that empower teachers, create opportunities for collaboration, foster teacher knowledge of one another's work, and increase cohesion among staff. A supportive leadership mindset holds high, attainable goals for themselves and their team, believes in and fosters leadership

opportunities for others, creates safe and trusting environments that welcome transparency and seeks feedback from others to help the team grow continuously.

Marazno et al. (2005) identified that the principal's ideas, beliefs, and mindsets correlate with student achievement. They avowed an effective leader's distinct behaviors and characteristics, include

- Possessing well-defined beliefs about the school's teaching and learning,
- sharing beliefs about school, teaching, and learning with the staff,
- demonstrating behaviors that are consistent with beliefs" (p.51).

The principal must be intentional about clear messages and goals and provide opportunities for shared decision-making. Through clear messages, goals, and shared decision-making, a leader can build collective teacher efficacy through mastery experiences.

A Leader's Mindset and Mastery Experiences

A school leader's mindset promotes collective teacher efficacy. Pink (2009) shared three main components of motivation: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. The principal's role in motivating teachers is critical in mastery experiences. Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) explained that mastery experiences are necessary to build self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) indicated that mastery experiences happen in various ways. He continued by expressing that the challenges must be within the person's reach; if the task is too easy or difficult, the mastery experience might not happen. He added that mastery experiences are the primary factor in creating collective teacher efficacy.

As stated earlier, the social cognition theory describes a person's thoughts, feelings, and the environment influencing human behavior (Bandura, 1999). In his

research, he referred to the social cognitive theory as triadic reciprocal causation, meaning that “In this model of reciprocal causality, internal personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective and biological events; behavioral patterns; and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bidirectionally” (p.6). Therefore, educators, including leaders, need a strong sense of self-efficacy to build collective efficacy. Self-efficacy provides a foundation for future success (Bong & Skaalvic, 2003; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Mastery experiences allow educators to build upon successes and raise future expectations, leading to collective teacher efficacy.

Case Studies Surrounding Collective Teacher Efficacy and School Leadership

Versland and Erikson (2017) conducted a case study and examined the influence a principal has on collective efficacy and collaboration. They found five critical takeaways for increased professional capacity in a school: (1) relationships between teachers and implementation of instructional initiatives, (2) principals’ leadership, (3) relationship building, (4) collaborating for learning with an instructional focus, (5) principal leads by example, and (6) sharing responsibility within the organization. The researchers emphasized that it is everyone’s responsibility to improve the school.

Patton and Parker (2017) focused on communities of practice, professional development, and professional learning. Their research accreted four steps to increasing social dynamics in a school setting: (1) identifying common goals, (2) developing personal and professional relationships, (3) creating safe but challenging spaces, and (4) upholding shared commitments. Also, they communicated that the four steps are beneficial to creating a sense of community.

Ninkovic and Knezevic Floric (2018) examined four dimensions of transformational leadership: (1) setting directions, (2) developing people, (3) redesigning the organization, and (4) improving the instructional program. They affirmed that transformational leadership means teachers have a shared vision, values, goals, high expectations, and individualized support. Stostich (2016) examined the implementation of professional development. She identified a model for increasing school capacity: (1) teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching, (2) collaborative practices of the professional community, and (3) teacher leadership. School capacity increases when collegial opportunities are present. The researcher found that most professional knowledge and skills that are necessary to teach ambitious standards are already in the school, collaborative, inquiry-based approaches help support teachers and enhance the professional community, outside expertise is required when teachers learn new strategies, and small groups of teachers can influence the collective by sharing knowledge and resources. With leadership supporting these initiatives, collective efficacy and collaboration drive the school culture.

Leadership Supports in a High-Poverty Middle School

Inequality is one of the biggest obstacles to overcome in education (Hite & Donohoo, 2021). Garcia (2011) identified teachers who educate students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, as "equalizers," meaning they are committed to equality. Goddard et al. (2017) indicated that schools with strong collective teacher efficacy result in higher levels of achievement for high-poverty students. Likewise, Sandoval et al. (2011) investigated the relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student

achievement, particularly among students from economically disadvantaged middle schools. They discovered that teachers could impact student achievement by believing in their colleagues, regardless of the student's socioeconomic status.

The Learning Policy Institute (2020) studied achievement in high-poverty schools. They found that higher-poverty schools have fewer licensed teachers and fewer educators with advanced degrees. Additionally, they found that high-poverty schools have more lateral entry teachers and almost twice as many beginning teachers. Their research concludes that teacher turnover is nearly double that of a low-poverty school at the middle and high school levels. Another concerning fact from the study is that high-poverty schools have more turnover in principals with less experience than lower-poverty schools.

A principal's leadership in a high-poverty school is imperative. The school looks to the leader to develop teacher capacity to build collective teacher efficacy (Kraft et al., 2016). Versland and Erikson (2017) made a case for the leadership to be organic, not mandating collaboration. In addition, they noted that collaborative efforts must be reciprocal. Singleton and Linton (2006) determined that stakeholders in a collaborative environment must have three crucial attitudes if schools want to bridge the achievement gap. Educators need passion, practice, and persistence. Muhammad (2015) built upon the mentioned attitudes and identified three distinct mindsets to close racial, ethnic, and achievement gaps. He labeled them as the superiority mindset, the victim mindset, and the liberation mindset. The liberation mindset aligns with self-efficacy and collective

teacher efficacy because, through this mindset, individuals and their beliefs “can shape and change reality” (p. 53).

Moreover, educational reformers identified the principal’s primary responsibility as instructional leaders (Byrk et al., 2010). In their previous work, Byrk et al. (1999) indicated that trust is essential when implementing instructional leadership. Regularly visited classrooms, frequent contact with faculty, and inclusive facilitative leadership styles positively affect a principal’s leadership. A study by Garcia and Weiss (2019) suggested that teachers are leaving the profession at a high rate, and the pipeline of new potential teachers is limited. The study found a 37.8% decrease in teacher preparedness program enrollment. A response to the crisis is strong leadership, professional capacity, and collective teacher efficacy through a culture of collaboration.

Elmore (2008) stated, “Leaders should be doing, and should be seen doing, that which they expect or require others to do” (p.67). Additionally, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) shared that “professionals understand the power of a team, promote that development of the team, and become integral parts of the team themselves” (p.23). Through collaboration, teachers can become change agents; leadership is essential in fostering collective teacher efficacy.

Collaborative communities are essential to a school’s culture, especially in a high-poverty school. Without collaboration, the school culture is weak and ineffective. The administrator is responsible for providing opportunities for collaboration within the school. Setting a culture with clear expectations and goals, developing personal and professional relationships, creating safe and challenging environments, and withholding a

shared commitment increases collaboration. Through these steps toward collaboration, individuals feel empowered, have a sense of belonging, and take ownership of their journey as educators. Collective teacher efficacy increases student achievement; therefore, administrators must prioritize leading collaborative communities to build professional capacity within their school community.

Table 5 displays the resources supporting strong leadership and collaborative efforts to build collective teacher efficacy, drawn from various research sources.

Table 5

School Leader's Role in Building Collective Teacher Efficacy

Source	School Leader's Role in Building Collective Teacher Efficacy
Marzano, R., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). <i>School leadership that works. From research to results.</i> ASCD.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-defined beliefs about teaching and learning • Shared beliefs with the staff • Demonstrating behaviors that are consistent with the beliefs
Lezotte, L., & Snyder, K. (2011). <i>What effective schools do: Re-envisioning the correlates.</i> Solution Tree Press.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High expectations for success • Strong instructional leadership • A clear and focused mission
Stosich, E. (2016). Building teacher and school capacity to teach to ambitious standards in high-poverty schools. <i>Teaching and Teacher Education</i> , 58, 43–53.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher knowledge of skills • Collaborative practices of the professional community • Teacher leadership
Donohoo, J. (2017). Collective teacher efficacy research: Implications for professional learning. <i>Journal of Professional Capital and Community</i> . 2(2), 101-116.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced teacher influence • Goal consensus • Teachers' knowledge about one another's work • Cohesive staff • Responsiveness of leadership

<p>Patton, K., & Parker, M. (2017). Teacher education communities of practice: More than a culture of collaboration. <i>Teaching and Teacher Education</i>, 67, 351–360.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifying common goals ● Developing personal and professional relationships ● Creating safe but challenging spaces ● Upholding shared commitments
<p>Ninković, S., & Knežević Florić, O. (2018). Transformational school leadership and teacher self-efficacy as predictors of perceived collective teacher efficacy. <i>Educational Management Administration & Leadership</i>, 46(1), 49–64.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Setting directions ● Developing people ● Improving the instructional program ● Shared vision, values, goals, high expectations ● Individualized support of teachers
<p>Hite, S & Donohoo, J. (2021). <i>Leading collective efficacy: Powerful stories of achievement and equality</i>. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Goal consensus ● Empowered teachers ● Cohesive teacher knowledge ● Embedded reflective practices ● Supportive leadership

Summary

Bandura (1997) declared self-efficacy as the basis of an individual's beliefs.

Collective teacher efficacy is the foundation of the belief that all students can achieve at high levels regardless of socioeconomic status. Through this belief, school leaders must build collective teacher efficacy within their teachers to positively influence student achievement.

There are many positive outcomes in building collective teacher efficacy in a school. Smaller achievement gaps (Muttillio, 2019), more significant commitments to students (Lee et al., 2011), and at-risk students are less likely to drop out of school (Wilcox et al., 2014) are a few examples of the positive effects collective teacher efficacy has on a school. Similarly, strong collective teacher efficacy increases persistence in teacher performance. They set high and attainable goals and are resilient when faced with

setbacks and failures (Hoy et al., 2002). It is within the control of the adults in the school to provide opportunities for all students to learn, and it starts with the administrators who build collective teacher efficacy.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Numerous studies have been conducted regarding the impact of collective teacher efficacy on elementary students in high-poverty schools; however, there is a need to examine collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools and the influence school leadership has on collective teacher efficacy. This chapter will outline my proposed methodology and plan with an instrumental case study design, purposeful sampling method, and deductive values coding to guide my proposed research.

Research Purpose and Research Question

It is the responsibility of the school to educate all students equitably; therefore, this qualitative instrumental case study aims to explore teacher perspectives on administrative supports that foster collective teacher efficacy within the context of a high-poverty middle school. With this purpose in mind, my research question is:

- 1) What administrative supports are most conducive when fostering collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school?

Subjectivity/Positionality Statement

While working at a homeless family shelter, my coworker often said, “Education is the one thing that no one can take from you.” She attributed the quote to B.B. King. My career in education started long before the classroom. I spent most of my days with the children at the homeless shelter, helping them on their education paths. Working at the shelter, I witnessed the lack of educational resources and the perpetual cycle of poverty. I would often help the children with their homework. While tutoring a child one day, she looked at me and said, “Why aren’t you a teacher?”

I ran from being a teacher. I began as an education major but took a different path for my undergraduate degree. Instead, I graduated with a degree in mass communications and public relations. My first job out of college was as a producer on a morning radio show. One day, the executive director of the homeless shelter called and asked me to take a tour. After that time, I knew my path was again taking a different direction. I started working there as the communication director and volunteer coordinator. The experience of working with families in poverty opened my eyes to inequities in education and our society. Generational poverty and poverty due to situational factors were the most prevalent in our shelter. I worked at the shelter for seven and a half years and knew I needed to become an educator to get to the root of homelessness and poverty.

I decided to build upon my education and obtain my Master of Arts degree in teaching. I participated in my school's first aspiring teacher program, where I worked with an experienced classroom teacher for a year at a high-poverty elementary school. After my time as an aspiring teacher, I continued teaching there for two years. Our elementary school had a 70% transient population, and the zone served the women with children shelter and a neighborhood of low-income housing. After teaching at the elementary school, my path took me to a similar middle school with a rural setting and an urban makeup. My roles at the school have changed over the years, but one thing remains the same: I am an educator. I taught 5th grade for three years and have held various titles: Interventionist, Academic Facilitator, and Instructional/PLC Coach. More recently, I am in my third year as the Dean of Culture and Learning. Through these positions, I collaborate with my colleagues and find strategies to help support educators in the

building. I model and lead professional development sessions that promote best educational practices, assist teachers in developing instructional plans, offer coaching and advice to teachers, and serve on leadership teams.

As I continued to grow as an educator, more questions arose. After I obtained my master's degree and began teaching, I focused on decision-makers and change agents. In my current role, I look at root causes, reflect on our school, and have ongoing conversations with stakeholders on improving our school. I am intrigued by the school improvement model, and I believe change starts with me. I seek my doctorate with an administrative license in assessment, learning, and school improvement.

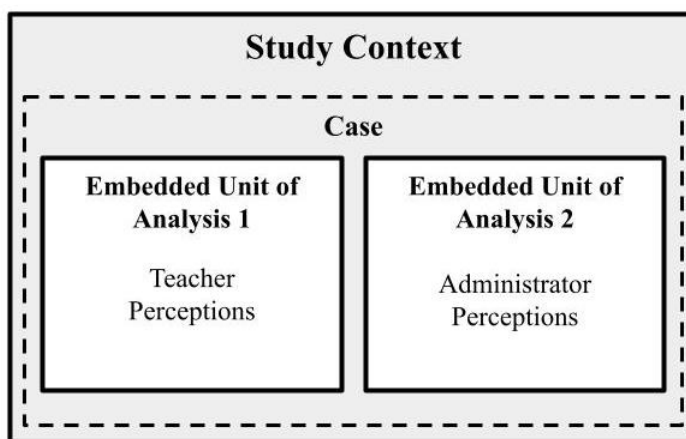
Often, students are viewed differently because of their socioeconomic status and school zone. Education is the most powerful tool an individual has to open doors and opportunities to get out of poverty. Working at the homeless family shelter and linking poverty and systematic educational dysfunction opened my eyes and helped me better understand the B.B. King quote. As an educational change agent, I provide students with opportunities to overcome poverty. My path led me to dig deeper into school structure, especially in high-poverty schools. I aim to become a school administrator, fostering collective efficacy in a high-poverty school. With the research, I seek to understand better perceived administrative supports that cultivate collective teacher efficacy. It is up to educators in the buildings with the students to chip away at inequities. It takes all of us to shift the learning culture for the most vulnerable population.

Research Design/Methodological Approach

According to Scharamm (1971), a case study aims to illuminate decisions or a set of decisions: the reasoning, the why, the how, and the results of the decisions. Yin (1981a, 1981b) characterized a case study as an “Empirical inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in-depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p.59).

I utilized a constructivist epistemological orientation for this study by examining the real-world context. Individuals make meaning through experiences within their social context, and there are multiple perspectives of an event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Three prominent psychologists, Jean Piaget (1952), Lev Vygotsky (1978), and John Dewey (1925), are at the foundation of constructivism. Piaget (1952) explored how children develop through accommodations and assimilation. Together, the two processes focus on how learning happens rather than the influence on learning. Vygotsky (1978) researched the social aspects of learning. He concluded individuals are born with the ability to develop cognitively and adapt to their learning. Dewey (1925) believed learners must connect real-life experiences to future learning. The three researchers presented theories of human knowledge, the social aspect of gaining knowledge, and the cognitive aspect of laying the groundwork for a constructivist approach. I examined human experiences and perspectives through a constructivist paradigm to understand how they make meaning in their social context.

Using the framework described by Yin (2018), I proposed to use a qualitative, instrumental case study method to research administrative supports that are most conducive when fostering collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school. He explained a case study's framework having (1) "how" or "why" questions, (2) little or no control over behavioral events, and (3) a contemporary focus (p. 2). Specifically, I conducted an instrumental case study to explore answering the research question. An instrumental case study investigates one bound case to understand rather than gain an understanding through multiple cases (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). In a qualitative, instrumental case study, "how" and "why" questions will be answered (Yin, 2009). Answering these questions will help understand the complexity of the study (Stake, 1995). According to Erikson (1986), the qualitative research method examines the people being studied, not the researcher's interpretations. Therefore, the research must be conducted qualitatively to gain further knowledge. I used the single-case study design with embedded units of analysis. Yin (2018) identified five appropriate rationales for single-case studies: (1) critical case, (2) unusual, (3) common, (4) revelatory, and (5) longitudinal. My single-case study with embedded units focused on the need for a critical case. The study was at one site, and Figure 5 illustrates the study context, case, and embedded units.

Figure 5*Design of a Case Study*

(Yin, 2018, p.48)

Research Site

The research site selected is a middle school in the southeastern United States. The school is outside a major city. The city's population is approximately 56,000; over the last ten years, it has increased by 15,000. Specifically, the school's current enrollment is 883, serving students in grades 6-8. Their mission is to "educate the whole child and create a culture where students embrace learning and are intrinsically motivated to put forth every effort to utilize education as a means for expanding possibilities to include options that lead to a promising future." The school's vision is to "provide a path to a future with endless possibilities."

The racial and ethnic student groups of the school consist of Hispanic (41%), White (33%), Black or African American (18%), Asian (8%), American Indian or Alaska

Native (<5%), and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (<5%). Most of the school's demographics are Black/Hispanic/Native American (59%). Almost 70% of the school's population is economically disadvantaged, 10% are students with disabilities, and 32% are English learners with Transitional 1-4.

The school has 63 teachers, with an 88.9% retention rate. The educational breakdown per grade and specialty is as follows: 6th Grade (11), 7th Grade (12), 8th Grade (11), English as a Second Language (7), Exploratory (11), Librarian (1), RTI (4), School Counselors (2), and Special Education (8). In addition to the school educators, the school has four instructional leaders, the principal, and three grade-level assistant principals.

Study Context

I studied at the school for the spring semester. I requested and examined artifacts within the study to get an overview of the school culture. The artifacts allowed me to focus on interviewing administrators and teachers to see correlations between what the artifacts state they do and the school's work. I focused on artifacts such as leadership communication and master schedule to gauge how the leadership interacts with the teachers via written communication. I interviewed the administrator first about supports that foster collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school. After interviewing the administrator, I interviewed teachers and conducted focus groups to compare the responses and examine trends throughout the school. Before meeting with teachers and administrators, I developed interview questions and piloted them with a

small sample of individuals from my dissertation committee. The sample group was not a part of the study, and they will assist me in ensuring the questions are clear.

Population and Sampling Frame

The participants for this instrumental case study were selected from the middle school chosen to participate. In qualitative research, participants are best selected to answer the research question (Crestwell, 2008; Kuper et al., 2008). During the interview process, the principal was interviewed first. Then, I interviewed one teacher and conducted two focus groups. The primary purpose of these interviews and focus groups was to streamline the process and gather information to corroborate specific findings (Yin, 2018).

The participants were selected through purposeful sampling. According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling aims to strategically align your sample to meet your research case, questions, and collected data. The type of sample is essential to consider when forming a case. The sample must follow and support the research questions. The principal selected the participants based on PLC times. The teachers will be from the middle school's science department. The selection focused on one department to narrow the focus of participants.

Data Collection

A primary component of data collection in an instrumental case study is to maximize data collection, and three principles will be utilized:

- Multiple sources of evidence
- A case study database

- A chain of evidence (Yin, 2009).

Once I gained approval from the IRB, I collected data from one primary research question; however, looking at multiple sources of evidence, using a case study database and a chain of evidence, allowed me to collect data from multiple sources. According to Yin (2009), six sources are used in case studies, and I utilized participant interviews and artifacts. Additionally, I collected data from two focus groups, strengthening the case. As an added research component, I used a reflective journal better to understand the case (Creswell, 2013).

Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews are one of the most essential case study sources (Yin, 2018). The format of the interviews guided conversation rather than structured queries. The interview questions were fluid rather than rigid (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). When formulating questions, I was mindful of their purpose. Becker (1998) explains that the researcher has two main jobs throughout the interview process:

- (1) following your line of inquiry, as reflected by your case study protocol, and
- (2) verbalizing your actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that serves the needs of your line of inquiry (p. 58-60).

Two types of questions must be asked throughout the interviews: level 1 and level 2. Yin (2018) explains that Level 1 questions are intended to verbalize specific interviews, and Level 2 questions are about each case and represent your line of inquiry. The questions were adapted from the Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale (EC-CTES). Instead of having a survey scale question, I reword the questions to fit an interview-style

question. In addition, the questions were open-ended, allowing the participants to answer in-depth.

In addition to interviews, I conducted two focus groups. Focus groups allow for interactive discussions and reveal a different data source type (Hennink, 2014). Utilizing focus groups presented a collective response and welcomed participants to add to their colleagues' responses. According to Macnaghten and Myers (2004), "Focus groups work best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives—but don't" (p. 65).

Creswell (2018) emphasized interviews, journaling, and artifacts as essential data collection components for case studies. In qualitative research, the most common data collection is through interviews (Taylor, 2005), and a semi-structured interview is defined as an exploratory interview (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). A semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to go in-depth with the participants. The questions were written with the research question in mind and used research-based sources that build collective teacher efficacy. I asked questions to allow participants to share their perspectives and clarify questions to better understand their responses. The questions were similar; however, they were tailored to the participant's role. Tables 6 and 7 provide a sample of questions used in the administrator and teacher interviews and the focus groups.

Table 5*Sample Question for Administrator Interview Protocol*

- As mentioned earlier, this study is about teacher perceptions of leadership supports that are most conducive to fostering collective teacher efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy is the belief that all students can achieve at high levels regardless of socioeconomic status. Through this belief, school leaders must build collective teacher efficacy within their teachers to positively influence student achievement. Additionally, Hite and Donohoo (2021) referred to collective teacher efficacy as the shared belief from all staff that they can positively influence student outcomes. So, this leads me to our first question:
 - What are your general thoughts about collective teacher efficacy?

Table 6*Sample Questions for Teacher Interview Protocol*

- What challenges does your principal face related to CTE, and how do they face those challenges?

Before conducting the research, I sent an introductory email to the principal requesting an interview time and allowing for interview and focus group participant suggestions. The participants consented to audio recording interviews, and I utilized Zoom for audio recording and Otter.ai to transcribe. Once the interviews were complete, I cleaned the transcripts by listening to them while reading them and making corrections. Then, I analyzed the verbatim transcripts for common themes and patterns (Creswell, 2013). I utilized Delve, a qualitative data analysis software, to categorize initial codes, organize categories, and analyze the data.

Physical Artifacts

Another source of information for a case study is physical artifacts or obtrusive data. Obtrusive data equips the researcher with insight into the social phenomenon without interrupting the day-to-day activities (Hatch, 2002). Artifacts are essential to a case study (Yin, 2018). Documents and artifacts provide physical evidence that can be reviewed and contain exact details of an event (Yin, 2009). I will use categorical aggregation in this instrumental case study to establish themes and patterns (Creswell, 2013). Pattern-matching is often another term for categorical aggregation (Yin, 2009). Stake (1995) argued that the need for categorical aggregation is an essential component of an instrumental case study. During the interview, I requested physical artifacts from the principal to gain insight into the school's overall communication. The artifacts were the book study program, leadership communication, and the master schedule. The artifacts allowed me to refer to the research question and strengthen the validity of the case. Patton (2015) refers to this as triangulation, and Yin (2018) indicates triangulation to measure multiple sources of the phenomenon. After requesting the documents, I double-checked that the items were produced organically rather than after asking for them to increase reliability.

Collecting and analyzing artifacts provides insight into how people think and act. Documents allow the researcher to have a "behind-the-scenes" look at systems and processes and how they came to be in the organization (Patton, 1990).

Case Study Database

A case study researcher must organize and systematically archive extensive data (Yin, 2018). For my dissertation, I used my Google Drive (with the Share feature turned off) with labeled folders to reinforce reliability and validity. Additionally, I saved all data on a password-protected external hard drive. I created systems to allow flexibility and flow as I interviewed participants and organized them in separate folders. In Google Drive, I had individual folders for each participant and artifacts. Once the interview data was completed, a new folder was created to house trends and patterns. When collecting artifacts, I was conscious of their sensitivity and vulnerability (Hatch, 2002). To increase security, I provided an informed consent form, allowing participants to opt out of sensitive information.

Research Question: Data Analysis

I used deductive values coding throughout my case study analysis to identify administrative supports teachers perceive to help build collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty school. Through the theoretical framework, I sought to understand the specific perceived teacher supports from administrators using the previous findings from Hite and Donohoo (2021). Their research prompted four categories: goal consensus, empowered teachers, embedded reflective practices, and cohesive teacher knowledge. Trochim (1989) compares the case study's findings with those predicted before the data was collected. If the empirical and predicted data are similar, it strengthens the research's internal validity (Yin, 2018). To enhance the construct validity of the case study, I used data triangulation, using findings from multiple sources of evidence.

Stake (1995) recommended that researchers continue to search for meaning and utilize coded notes and transcripts, and there is no right way to analyze instrumental case study data; however, he understands that the researcher must determine the best way for their specific case study. For my case study, I used random sampling to inform the case. Random sampling added credibility and reduced bias (Patton, 2015). I matched the data to the predetermined categories. Furthermore, I compared the conclusions of the principal's interview and artifacts to the teacher interviews and focus group findings. Throughout the process, I kept a reflective journal to capture my thoughts, actions, and feelings as I interacted with the data.

I also used Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) seven stages of interview inquiry to guide the research. The stages include:

- 1.) Thematising- Formulating the purpose of the study
- 2.) Designing- Planning the design of the study
- 3.) Interviewing- Conducting the interviews and focus groups
- 4.) Transcribing- Preparing the interview material for analysis, including transcribing oral or written text.
- 5.) Analyzing- Decoding which modes of analysis are appropriate for the interviews.
- 6.) Verifying- Ascertaining the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the interview findings
- 7.) Reporting- Communicating findings (p. 102).

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Creswell (2013) referred to reflective journaling as a final data source.

Throughout the instrumental case study, I used a reflective journal to record personal experiences, biases, thoughts, and feelings on the data (Creswell, 2013). A researcher needs to keep a reflective journal to expand on the reflective practice and gain a proper understanding of the case (Stake, 1995)—the reflective journal serves as a review of trends observed throughout the study. To research the case study appropriately and ethically, I was mindful of the pitfalls surrounding preconceived ideas about the topic. Becker (1958, 1967) suggests that researchers are prone to the problem because they must understand the issues beforehand. Avoiding bias is a crucial component of research. For example, during the interviews, I was mindful of leading and reflexivity questions. Yin (2018) suggests that to increase reliability; the researcher should approach the study like someone is looking over your shoulder.

Moreover, reliability aims to minimize errors, inconsistencies, and biases.

Another practice I used to increase reliability and trustworthiness is bracketing. Bracketing dates to Husserl (1913), and it is the concept of inspecting a phenomenon while suspending preconceived ideas and avoiding leaning on an individual's interpretation (Ashworth, 1999; Denzin, 1998b; Giorgi, 1997). The method of bracketing allows the researcher to be aware of their own biases and preconceptions while not compromising the reliability of the research (Hatch, 2002).

Additionally, bracketing notes can be hunches, patterns from the data, reminders of next steps, connecting notes to other data, and monitoring reactions to data. While

using bracketing, I separated my thoughts, feelings, and preconceived ideas while considering my reflections and what I observed. The author concluded that bracketing allows the researcher to record impressions, emotions, and interpretations.

Chain of Evidence

A case study should follow a chain of evidence. The reader of the study should be able to follow the case study in both directions and back and forth (Yin, 2018).

Maintaining a chain of evidence involves the researcher building upon each step, increasing the overall construct validity. The flow should include (a) case study questions, (b) case study protocol, (c) citations to specific evidentiary sources within the case study database, (d) case study database, and (e) case study findings and vice versa. Yin (2018) concluded by stating that the final step of the chain of evidence is linking the protocol question(s) and the original study question(s). The goal of the chain of evidence is to cross-reference the methodological process.

Summary

This research aimed to examine administrative supports teachers perceive to help build collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school. The chapter described how a qualitative instrumental case study must address the research question. Additionally, this chapter addresses my subjectivity/positionality statement. The chapter outlined the research design, methodological approach, research site, study context, and participants. The chapter also provided an overview of the collection and analysis procedures for a qualitative instrumental case study.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This qualitative instrumental case study examined leadership supports that teachers perceive are most conducive to fostering collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools. The following research question was investigated: 1) What administrative supports are most conducive in fostering collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school? The process of collecting, analyzing, and coding interview and focus group transcripts, artifacts, and reflective journaling served as the focal point for the case study, and the researcher gained insight into teacher perceptions of leadership supports that foster collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school. After the data analysis, the researcher compared the findings, noted similarities, and connected the participants' answers to the research question.

Overview of Research, Design, and Data Collection

The researcher began the data collection by communicating with the principal for an in-person interview. The researcher asked for specific artifacts during the interview as the principal mentioned the items. Purposeful random sampling served as the primary tool to access teacher participants, depending on their availability, their PLC schedule, and the day of the week. The participants answered nine specific, open-ended questions, allowing for follow-up questions, as needed, to drive the conversation. (See Appendix A for the interview protocol used in this study.) The interview was semi-structured, and the principal answered the questions in-depth while the researcher focused on additional questions to probe and clarify any answers or follow-up questions. The researcher interviewed the principal before spring break. After spring break and state testing, the

researcher interviewed the teachers. The researcher met with the three PLC teams on two separate days. The first interview and one PLC focus group were in-person; however, the third focus group was conducted online. (See Appendix B for the interview protocol used in this study.)

The principal and participant questions were the same, except the researcher wrote them to fit the participant's role. The questions ranged from general knowledge of collective teacher efficacy to student motivation and success, teacher mindset, and challenges leading to collective teacher efficacy. The process allowed the researcher to gain additional information about the principal's support, overall teacher perceptions, and the staff's mindset.

The researcher also used multiple sources of evidence, a case study database, and a chain of evidence. Throughout the process, the researcher referred to multiple sources of evidence, such as the interviews, focus groups, and artifacts. In addition to the multiple sources of evidence, the researcher utilized a case study database as a source of organization, confidentiality, and structure. Finally, the researcher moved through a chain of evidence. The chain of evidence allowed the researcher to follow the case study from the beginning to the end and vice versa.

Collecting and analyzing transcripts from focus groups and interviews, artifacts, and reflective journaling served as the data sources to understand teacher perceptions of administrative support in building collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school. The different data types allowed the researcher to move through the collection and data analysis. The data collection gave insight into commonalities in leadership and

teachers and differences and challenges in leading collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school. The collection of artifacts allowed for data triangulation and following a chain of evidence, increasing the overall construct validity (Yin, 2009).

The researcher kept a reflective journal of thoughts, actions, and feelings. Throughout the process, the researcher referred to the research question as a guide for the research. Additionally, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling for the teacher interviews and focus groups. After the researcher completed the principal interview, they agreed on a time and date to complete the teacher interviews and focus groups. Purposeful sampling helped increase trustworthiness and reduce bias (Patton, 2015). Moreover, given the available time and resources, purposeful random sampling provided data for the case. Figure 6 defines the process of purposeful sampling.

Figure 6

Steps for Design Alignment



(Patton, 2015)

The initial codes of the research included supportive leadership, embedded reflective practices, empowered teachers, collective teacher knowledge, and goal census. Once the codes were established, the researcher used Delve Qualitative Analysis Software (2024) to disaggregate the transcripts into categories. Deductive values coding was the guide for identifying initial codes, matching participant quotes, and creating themes from the participants' answers. Patterns emerged regarding the participants'

perceptions of leadership that foster collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school.

Participant Profiles

The research participants comprised the principal and six middle school science teachers, grades 6-8. The principal's educational experience ranged from 5-12th grade educator, PLC lead, ELA leader, instructional coach, assistant principal, and current principal.

Additionally, six classroom teachers participated in the study, with their educational experience ranging from (1) 20 years of experience, (2) five years of experience, (1) two years, and (2) first-year teachers. The researcher created pseudonyms to protect the identities of each of the research participants. Table 8 describes participants, their pseudonyms, and years and/or teaching experience.

Table 8

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Pseudonyms</i>	<i>Years and/or Experience</i>
Principal	Brandy	5th-12th grades, PLC lead, high school ELA leader, instructional coach, assistant principal, and principal
Teacher 1	Elizabeth	20 years
Teacher 2	Courtney	Two years
Teacher 3	Rebecca	First-year
Teacher 4	Jeff	Five years
Teacher 5	Nikki	First-year
Teacher 6	Alexis	Five years

Principal Interview: Brandy

The initial interview with the principal guided the entire research process. A principal's primary responsibility is to develop a culture that promotes and encourages learning (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). The researcher noted Brandy's interview as an intricate component of all the research. The researcher gained insight into their mindset, style, and professionalism through the interview with the principal. Brandy's educational experience is in the 5th-12th grade setting. She was the PLC lead, high school ELA lead, instructional coach, and assistant principal in her previous schools. Table 9 displays categories found in the principal interview.

Table 9*Principal Interview: Brandy*

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching • Hands-on • School Pride • Same Vision • Teacher Input • Accountability • Empowering Teachers • Conversations & Communication • Assume Positive Intent • Professional Growth • Professional Development • Collaboration, PLC, & Guidance • High Expectations • Interpersonal Communication • Scheduling • Professional Environment • Consistency & Structure • Positive Relationships • Encouragement • Transparency • Feedback • Goals • Celebrate • Advocate • Reflective Practices • Trust • Buy-in • Goal Census • Flexible • Open-minded
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating with a Large Staff • Managing Different Personalities

Leadership Style: Assuming Positive Intent, Relationships, and Coaching

Brandy's leadership style is personal, assuming positive intent, having side-by-side coaching conversations, leading by example, and forming conversations such as,

This is what I hear from you. And then, from there, so you tell me if I'm wrong. You tell me how I should be and how I should see you. Okay, now, knowing that this is what we need to do to move forward, or 'If you're asking me this, is this how you want me to communicate with you?', you tell me how to best support you.

Brandy's leadership style mirrors collaborative leadership, ensuring individuals in her building understand her leadership while fostering collective teacher efficacy. Brandy welcomes feedback from her leadership team and all staff in the school and is approachable while open to having difficult conversations with all stakeholders, adding,

I really appreciate and welcome feedback. If there's something you don't agree with, we will have behind-closed-doors conversions. Sometimes they're like, 'Okay, I trust you. We can get on board. Other times, it's like, I really don't like this, but you know what, I gotcha.' And then we move forward.

The principal discussed framing conversations with colleagues, assuming positive intent, and providing tools for newer leadership team members. Another example of how she starts conversations with her staff is,

This is happening. What are we? What are you seeking to gain here? What is the outcome that you're looking for? Because what I'm saying is this. So, we can discuss then. So, we'll see how that goes—moving forward.

Leading crucial conversations with a positive intent increases trust among staff. Brandy motivates teachers by building relationships, openly communicating with them, and searching for solutions collaboratively.

High Expectations for All Learners

She spoke highly of her teachers, showed confidence in the students, and expressed an overall joy for the teaching profession. When asked a question about her teachers, Brandy responded,

They are all very much invested in our kids and always have been, and I love that about my staff from day one. It was what I've noticed that I've always loved about them. We just have to... make that work and still hold them accountable with, hey, they know how to do this. They can do this. So, make them do it.

When asked if they focus on student growth or achievement, she responded that they focus on both. She noted that they need realistic goals just out of reach to motivate students. The principal sets the tone for the high expectations of teachers and students. Lezotte and Snider (2011) measure high expectations by two critical elements: (1) the belief in the students that they can achieve mastery of standards and (2) the staff's belief in self-efficacy. Setting high expectations for all learners is essential for collective teacher efficacy.

Professional Growth

Brandy supports teachers' professional growth and encourages them to seek opportunities to continue their teaching knowledge. She reflected on professional development and acknowledged,

As we continue to have professional development and receive more information about things, I'm talking specifically about our trauma-informed practices and things like that. So, we are teachers; we are the bleeding hearts. And so, we receive these, you know, training, we receive this information, we process it, and then we go way left field or is that pendulum swings all the way over in, 'Oh, little Johnny is, you know, he's dealing with his trauma at home,' and they're not holding the kiddo accountable. So, no, that's not

what that means. It just means that you know that this is what's going on. And so, this is how we push this kiddo further: let's not fall back; let's continue to move forward.

Jensen (2009) acknowledged teachers do not have to come from their students' cultures to educate them. Adding empathy and cultural knowledge is key to educating students. Brandy understands the importance of providing empathy and cultural knowledge through professional development and motivates teachers to understand the barriers in students' lives and the importance of holding students accountable for their learning.

Clear Communication, Visibility, and Transparency

Brandy is visible and regularly visits classrooms and PLC meetings. She noted that consistency, structure, and transparency are crucial in creating a safe and welcoming environment for teachers and students. She stated that administrative staff knows most students, their families, successes, and struggles. While she admits she is introverted by nature, Brandy tries to provide opportunities for the staff and students to understand where she comes from when making decisions and fosters opportunities for the staff to learn more about themselves through critical self-reflection. Brandy discussed the importance of open communication and transparency in the school, using examples to illustrate her points. When the researcher asked Brandy about her openness in the building, she responded,

I've learned that I have a lot of literal people in the building. So they need the why. And then they also need me to tell them what it looks like, show them, and script it out...because they want to make sure they are doing the right thing.

She also acknowledged that they could do little about county and state policies but can impact learning through relationships. She regularly celebrates teachers and students through recognition and praise and encourages her leadership team to network and advocate for the school.

Challenges Leading Collective Teacher Efficacy

The researcher concluded the interview by asking Brandy about her leadership challenges. She recognized the challenge of leading a building with over 100 individuals but referred to open and honest conversations, transparency, and goal-setting for students and teachers. Motivating teachers to motivate students is something she spoke about and affirmed,

It's just encouraging them to have positive relationships, get to know your kids, get to know, and listen, even if you know it is completely bogus. And they are sometimes lying through their teeth. Other times, it is their perception, which is not reality. Just listen. There's not some trick to motivating anyone; it's just building great relationships.

The principal's leadership drives collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school. Leadership is the foundation of all school success; collective teacher efficacy is the glue that holds it together. Assuming positive intent, relationships, and coaching conversations are the backbone of all leadership. Encouraging professional growth and providing a professional environment are vital to supporting teachers. Allowing teachers to provide input while approaching situations with an open-minded mind sustains a school's success. Feedback, clear communication, visibility, and transparency provide safety and an understanding of the principal's vision.

Throughout the principal's interview, it was apparent that she leads by example, inspiring students and teachers to achieve high expectations. While leading collective teacher efficacy presents challenges, it is the principal's responsibility to face them and present solutions to ensure the school's overall vision stays focused on growing students and teachers.

Artifacts

During the interview with the principal, the researcher identified three key artifacts to examine: a book study program and materials, the master schedule, and leadership communication. The researcher requested to examine the documents as they were mentioned in the interview. Examining these artifacts gave the researcher a view of her leadership style and the school's leadership team's commitment to the school's vision through tangible records. The artifacts spoke to professional development and growth opportunities, emphasizing professional learning communities and reflective practices. Table 10 presents categories found in the artifacts.

Table 10

Artifacts

Categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Specific & Clear Communication ● PLC Schedule ● Common Grade Level Planning ● 90-Minute Block Schedule ● Professional Growth ● Reflective Practices ● Trust ● Buy-in ● Goal Census ● Accountable ● Open-minded
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Book Study Program

The leadership team participated in a book study and examined their team's strengths and areas of growth. The team read *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni (2002). In the book, Lencioni outlines the five dysfunctions of a team: absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. Lencioni asks five questions in the book study:

- 1) Do team members openly and readily disclose their opinions?
- 2) Are team meetings compelling and productive?
- 3) Does the team make decisions quickly and avoid getting bogged down by the consensus?
- 4) Do team members confront one another about their shortcomings?
- 5) Do team members sacrifice their interests for the good of the team?

The leadership team utilized this book as a guide to self-reflect on current practices. They identified wants for the school, teachers, and students. Furthermore, the leadership team looked deeper into what they saw happening in their school, barriers, and solutions to break the barriers. Table 11 describes the book study questions with the school leadership team.

Table 11*Book Study Questions with the School Leadership Team*

What do you want for our school?	<p>“I want our school to be competitive with other schools academically and to change our reputation.”</p> <p>“I want our students to leave feeling prepared and proud they went to our school.”</p>
What do we want our school to look like for teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be the best middle school in the area • Highly sought workplace • An atmosphere of love (family environment) • Positive reputation • Set and keep high expectations • Every kid is OUR kid • We have one goal...to grow children • To be a place of respect from students and others • Everyone is to be seen and grow
What do we want for our students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove barriers • Safety • Enjoy learning • Understanding of the world around them • Relationships • Confident • Proud • Prepared for life beyond the test • Self-advocacy
What do we see happening in our building?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of trust (accountability) • Buy-in • Politics • Lack of commitment
How do we break those cycles?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders are not afraid of conflict. • Flexible • Open-minded • Collective Teacher Efficacy

Master Schedule

The master schedule displayed a commitment to teachers and students, aligning professional learning communities with common planning. Additionally, the principal organized the schedule with the students in mind, laying out mini-schools to serve all students. When the researcher spoke to the principal about the master schedule, she affirmed it was the best, giving examples of a 90-minute block in a middle school environment. When the researcher asked Brandy about the master schedule and the 90-minute blocks, she added,

“The 90-minute blocks are really difficult. So, this year, we made it a mission to intentionally break up the blocks to have their exploratory in the middle. So they go into ELA, exploratory, then finish ELA, so they have a break. It is like an ESL and SPED hybrid.”

The principal noted she welcomed feedback from the teachers about the schedule and considered their suggestions when designing it. (See Appendix C for the master schedule.) She referred to additional scheduling with her leadership team, where she asked for a pulse on culture and climate, concluding,

“We’ve had some great ideas that have come out of those meetings. I’m like, ‘Okay, do we need to run a candy cart? Or can we look at this procedure?’ Because this is where the teachers are. ‘And I’m like, I need to know those things.’ Because as much as we try, we are going to get disconnected at some point.”

Brandy’s leadership communication is key to the school’s overall organization. Her attention to the school’s culture and climate encourages others to provide feedback and solutions to cultivate the school’s vision. (See Appendix C for the master schedule artifact in this study.)

Leadership Communication

Another artifact the researcher requested was emails and notes from the leadership team. Working collectively, the team created wants for their school and students. From the book study, the leadership team created a list of specific wants for their school. After the team discussed the wants, the principal presented a charge to them, stating, “Discuss the work to be done to accomplish our goal of a unified team that serves our students first while ensuring that we are cultivating a climate that entices educators that want to work here!” A shared vision, collective input, and self-reflection presented itself in leadership communication. Table 12 outlines the wants of the school.

Table 12

Leadership Team ‘Wants’ for the School and Students

Our Wants for School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive reputation • Continued high expectations • To be highly sought • Atmosphere of caring and respect
Our Wants for Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety • Success • Proud, confident • Prepared for life beyond the test
Our Major Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing trust • Fear of conflict
The Principal’s Charge to the Leadership Team	“Discuss the work to be done to accomplish our goal of a unified team that serves our students first while ensuring that we are cultivating a climate that entices educators that want to work here!”

Once the researcher interviewed the principal and examined the artifacts, the focus turned to interviewing and conducting teacher focus groups. Throughout the process, it was important for the researcher to collect additional data from teachers to analyze teachers' perceptions of the principal's leadership, which fosters collective teacher efficacy.

Teacher Interview: Elizabeth

The researcher interviewed the first teacher individually. She noted that her colleague was absent from school that specific day, and she agreed to conduct the interview individually. She is a veteran teacher, having served 20 years at the same school. For almost the entire time, she has taught 6th-grade science. Table 13 below displays the categories found in the teacher interview.

Table 13

Teacher 1 Interview: Elizabeth

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy-in • Mastery Experiences • Goal Census • PLC • Empowering Teachers • Celebration • Visibility • Encouragement • Student Knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Buy-in
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Buy-in and Master Experiences

The researcher first asked Elizabeth about her thoughts on collective teacher efficacy. She acknowledged that she believes that students can achieve no matter their

background; having said that, there needs to be buy-in from all teachers to see collective teacher efficacy work succeed in a school setting. For example, she spoke of her experience leading the school's Science Olympiad team. She noted that teachers are more willing to help the team when they see success. She responded,

They come in, see the kids, and then see what they're doing. And then it's like, 'Oh, yeah, this is really good. I'm going to continue doing this.' The ones that used to help me in the past are now at other schools, and they've run the Science Olympiad team for their school.

At the beginning of every year, she discussed presenting the concept to the faculty but needed help to gather support. When asked what the leader does to assist her in the process, she expressed that the leader encourages new teachers to join the efforts and hopes more opportunities present themselves in the future to discuss the event's promotion.

Professional Learning Community & High Expectations

Elizabeth spoke highly of the school's professional learning community (PLC) process. She referenced student goal folders, where they track their progress. Through goal-setting conversations, students know their goals and what they need to reach them. She described her team's PLC process, how they communicate with each other about pushing students academically and behaviorally, and how they reach each learner.

When asked about high expectations of students, she restated the importance of believing in the students and maintaining high expectations, explaining, "To put it out there a little higher than what they even can do, just a little bit higher so that it is within reach so they can grab it, and they can be successful." Working in

professional learning communities increases collective teacher efficacy. Cohesive teacher knowledge is when teachers are aware of their teaching and their colleague's practices and agree upon effective teaching practices and assessments (Hite & Donohoo, 2021).

Principal's Leadership Approach: Visibility and Transparency

The interview concluded with Elizabeth recognizing that leadership is visible and that they visit the classrooms frequently. When the researcher probed about the value of the pop-ins, she communicated the importance of the visits, encouraging teachers and students to see the administration; she concluded,

It helps the kids because, you know, she questioned them, like, walked around the room. 'What are you working on?' And it gave them a chance to show what they're learning. It's encouraging because it shows that they're invested in our kids, and the kids get excited...they might not say, 'Oh, I'm excited,' but they're eager to show what they're learning.

Opening classroom doors is an explicit practice in which all educators participate in informal observations in classrooms. City et al. (2009) stated that informal observations build a common understanding of what instruction should look like and are designed to improve student learning.

Focus Group: Nikki and Alexis

Once the teacher interview concluded, the researcher met on the same day with a PLC team with two members. Nikki is a first-year teacher, while Alexis is finishing her fifth year. They serve as the 8th grade science team. The researcher used the same questions to guide the conversation. The first question asked was the same as the previous questions. When asked about collective teacher efficacy,

Alexis responded that they try to provide for all students as they work together as a team. She understood the technical term for collective teacher efficacy and noted that they do that at their school; however, they might call it a different term. Table 14 identifies categories found in the focus group.

Table 14

Teachers 5 and 6 Focus Group: Nikki and Alexis

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Expectations • Responsibility • Behavioral Supports • Listener • Cohesiveness • Approachable • Empowering Teacher • Feedback • PLC • Positive Relationship • Positive School Climate • Professional Environment • Transparency • Clear Communication • Visibility
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Involvement • Student Motivation • Student Responsibility • Difference in Point of View • Building Teacher Community • Balancing Stakeholder Relationships • Managing Different Personalities • Student Circumstances

High Expectations and Professional Environment

Nikki spoke about setting high expectations for students. She stated it started in the classroom, set by the teachers, describing them as, “It definitely starts in the classroom, as the teacher, which is having high expectations on a daily basis, you know,

you're responsible for your work.” Alexis echoed the response and added that she believes in all learners, regardless of their socioeconomic status, and it takes teachers incorporating different support for each student to help them. When reflecting on motivating students, Alexis reflected on how she presents herself in her classroom, highlighting teacher content preparation, proactive teaching, personal philosophy, and advising. Moreover, she expressed the importance of showing motivation as a teacher, encouraging students to give the same effort while modeling preparation and displaying a good work effort, adding,

I would say that I think the way I motivate them is through how I do my job and how prepared I am to teach them. And so, if they see me, you know, engaged in the lesson trying to break it down for them, helping them there for them, then that means, ‘Oh, I can give her that same effort.’ So, I think it's about if you want the students to, you know, do the things that you want in the classroom. I think it's important for the teacher to display that. And, you know, give them a good work ethic, be prepared, and support them...all those things.

Alexis reflected on her expectations as an educator. The teacher’s mindset is an influential component of collective teacher efficacy, and it is vital for teachers to self-reflect.

Principal’s Leadership Approach

When speaking about building leadership, both teachers expressed the personal leadership approach displayed by the principal. Nikki pointed out that the principal knows most of the students and is not afraid to have difficult conversations with them, affirming, “So, here, she takes a very personal approach to things, which is very nice for us. I think the personal approach helps.” Additionally, Alexis referred to the principal as

approachable, having their backs, and listening to their concerns without fear of being undermined. She also mentioned that the students trust the principal and often hear them talking about her. Nikki agreed with Alexis, acknowledging that if students or teachers need to know something, it will come directly from her. Both teachers affirmed that the leadership is active, and Alexis voiced that she is impressed by her leadership, being able to balance running a busy school while building relationships and being visible in the hallways. Specifically, Nikki described her perspective as,

She's so active...they're always talking about her. She's always in the hallways and doing things like that; they have communication. And somebody's so busy running a school, it's impressive to see that relationship built. So I think it's very important, especially like being at a Title I school, to have relationships; you have to have a relationship with the students and the teachers; we might not have a lot of time to, you know, connect as teachers, but as long as you're connecting with the students, that people that you see every day. I think that's very important.

Nikki and Alexis spoke about the importance of Brandy's positive communication, visibility, and transparency. A leader's mindset shapes the mindsets of teachers. As a leader, Brandy understands the importance of building relationships, communicating with everyone, balancing running a busy school, and taking time to connect.

Challenges to Leading Collective Teacher Efficacy

The researcher inquired about the challenges of leading CTE in a high-poverty middle school. The teachers reflected on the difficulty of leading individuals from various backgrounds and ages, balancing building relationships with all stakeholders, including students and the community while building trust. Nikki responded,

We've got all sorts of different teachers here, different ages, different backgrounds. It can be hard to bring people together, and then we don't really have a lot of time...to build much like a teacher community. So, I think that's probably difficult for her. And then also balancing that with getting to know the kids and building that community, making sure that you trust her? It's just a lot to do.

Another challenge they mentioned is different points of view from teachers because they are with the students more, and sometimes what the principal might see as the best move for students could be the opposite from their viewpoint; however, the participants added that there is much work to do to make the school successful, and they feel confident having conversations with her regarding different situations. When reflecting on challenges in motivating students, the teachers agreed that motivating middle school students is challenging because they want them to see the value in their education, take responsibility for their learning, and understand the importance of school. They identified that it takes building relationships, caring for students, and providing opportunities for them to feel valued. Additionally, they spoke about their experience working in a Title I school and the outside perceptions. Nikki emphasized the importance of talking to their students about things other than school.

I just think it is a good environment. People are scared to work at a Title I school because of demographics. But it just challenges you to, you know, work on yourself, and you know, present yourself to people that might not have the same opportunities as you, and say, 'You can do it. There's nothing wrong. I'm here to give you the information. You do what you can; everybody has a choice to do what they want to do with it.'

The conversation ended with the two teachers reflecting on their principal, her leadership, and the challenges they would face if they had a different leader. Alexis conveyed her concerns,

I would be scared to leave because I wouldn't know if the principals would be so much more engaged. I just feel like if I go somewhere and the principal is just sitting at their desk, sending emails, and if you need to say something, you'll be scared to say something.

Brandy is an approachable leader who understands the value of fostering a culture where all staff feel welcomed, valued, and supported. She influences her leadership by engaging with teams, providing feedback, and openly inviting conversations about improvement.

Focus Group: Courtney, Rebecca, and Jeff

The previous focus group occurred in person. Due to time restraints during the day, the researcher and the final PLC team decided to conduct the last interviews online the following day. Courtney is a second-year teacher, Rebecca joined the team in January as a first-year teacher, and Jeff is a fifth-year teacher. They serve as the 7th grade science department. The researcher used the exact questions from the previous interviews to keep the interview process consistent. The final PLC team interview consisted of three teachers. Table 15 identifies categories found in the focus group.

Table 15

Teachers 2-4 Focus Group: Courtney, Rebecca, and Jeff

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTI-A+B • Available • High Expectations • Accessible • Supportive • Open Communication • Cheerleader • Professional Growth • Listener • Student & Teacher Knowledge • Supportive Teammates • Open Door Policy • Student Knowledge • Sharing Ideas • Feedback • Interpersonal Communication • Visibility • Family Environment • Empowering Teachers • PLC • RTI-A+B • Realistic Goals • Collaboration • Professional Environment • Compassion • Professional Relationships
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Involvement • Student Attendance • Balancing Stakeholder Relationships • Making Tough Decisions • Managing Different Personalities

Jeff began the conversation about collective teacher efficacy, agreeing that he believed the statement's sentiment but noting the outside factors of leading CTE. He expressed concern regarding their school's high chronic absenteeism rate, which makes it

difficult to educate students due to the lack of attendance. However, he does believe every student has the potential to be a high-achieving student. He continued by stating that as a leader, the principal must consider all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, the administrative team, and the community, concluding that leadership is a difficult position because they cannot make everyone happy. However, he believes clear and concise communication increases buy-in.

High Expectations, Visibility, and Goal Setting

Regarding the professional learning community (PLC) process, their team agreed that their leadership is present in their meetings to discuss data, strategies, and problem-solving. Jeff reflected on leadership support and goal setting,

Well, you got to be realistic in our goals...as teachers, we just want to see growth in our kids. And, you know, our admin team shows up to our data meetings and PLCs and helps guide us through that. 'Well, what is remediation going to look like?'

They acknowledged that the principal creates opportunities to celebrate success, such as intramural games and other activities, to support high expectations in the classroom, both academically and behaviorally. The team referred to realistic goal setting for students and described the importance of meeting them where they are for growth and supporting them, identifying growth areas from common formative assessments (CFA).

During their PLC meetings, Jeff emphasized,

We obviously take a look at their projection data. Then, what we do with our CFAs is we have each kid have their folder with all the standards in it, and we have them set their own goals for what they want to get on a CFA. Then, they have to write their score on that actual CFA. And they describe or explain why they either were able to reach their goal or weren't.

The PLC reflected on the importance of their learning community. In the book *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*, DuFour et al. (2016) explained that teachers utilize formative assessments as a minute-by-minute check. Moreover, they stated when teams reflect on data from the CFAs, it informs the teachers of students that need intervention acceleration, identifies strengths and areas of growth for teachers' instruction, and informs areas of most significant concern for student growth.

Feedback from Leadership and Colleagues

Rebecca praised her leader for being available and accessible, especially since she is a new teacher. She added that she feels supported by her administration because she frequently asks them what they are doing, follows up with conversations, and backs the teachers. She bragged about her teammates for their support during her first year of teaching by recounting when she needed to call them multiple times daily for support,

One day, I must have had to call them...three different periods...two, three days in a row... 'I'm so sorry,' they allowed me to call, 'Don't be,' they're like, 'No, you're new.'

Furthermore, Rebecca recognized the importance of first impressions as a leader. She added that she feels supported as a first-year teacher, and her leadership has set the bar high for future leaders. She explained her conversation with the principal and took away valuable feedback, concluding that the principal would do pop-in visits to check in on her teachers.

Professional Environment and Growth

Jeff expressed the professional environment and said their leadership does not micromanage them. When he described the professional support he received from his

principal, he affirmed the push for professional growth, identifying opportunities for him to grow as a leader. He also mentioned that the school lost four educators last year due to career advancements and stated that the principal constantly encourages them to grow professionally.

Courtney compared the leadership styles of previous leaders and identified the principal as understanding, expressing concern, and helping teachers advance their careers. She added that the principal is the biggest cheerleader, supporting her advancement as PLC lead for the next year, pushing her to grow, and providing resources to enhance her teaching craft.

The team concluded by reflecting on the family aspect of their school. They described it as a family environment and explained that the principal's child attends school out of the zone. The team also stated that she knows everyone by name and their families, making it a welcoming environment. To sum up the connectivity, Coyle (2018) remarked, "Safety is not mere emotional weather but rather the foundation on which strong culture is built, (p. 6)".

Reflective Journaling

The researcher used a reflective journal to record personal experiences, biases, thoughts, and feelings about the data (Creswell, 2013). The journal assisted the researcher in expanding on the reflective practice and gaining a proper understanding of the case (Stake, 1995). It also served as a compass for the researcher, identifying thoughts, feelings, and actions. The researcher reflected on the interview with the principal, Brandy. In the notes, the researcher considered the principal's positive intent,

transparency, and visibility. Furthermore, the researcher jotted down the word “impact.” The researcher noted the word encompasses the themes of the case study. More importantly, the researcher self-reflected, “What impact do educators have on students?” In connection with the previous question, the researcher asked, “What impact does the administrator have on educators?” The reflection concluded with the researcher feeling connected to the conversation about the impact on everyone in the building.

The researcher also reflected on the artifacts, their significance to the study, and implementations to collective teacher efficacy. The artifacts were well-organized, lending an insight into the overall connectivity of the school. The master schedule orchestrated the flow of the school day, providing strategic opportunities for collaboration and student-centered instruction. The book study program shed light on the leadership team and examined the team’s wants and collective vision.

Finally, the researcher reflected on the interviews and focus groups. The researcher focused on thoughts, feelings, and actions in her findings. In multiple groups, the participants stated that the principal treats them like professionals. Additionally, they mentioned the teachers and students trust Brandy. The researcher also observed a tight working relationship conveyed by the PLC teams, including a shared vision for student learning. The researcher’s thoughts evolved throughout the process. As the researcher reflected, key words and phrases repeated: visibility, transparency, and positive intent.

Looking Across the Data

The researcher identified five initial codes to drive the research on teacher perceptions of leadership supports that foster collective teacher efficacy in the context of

a high-poverty middle school. The researcher used descriptive coding to identify supports that were valued by teachers within the deductive, thematic categories. The initial codes guided the researcher, while the transcripts, artifacts, and reflective journaling helped reveal connections to the research question. The researcher created a table identifying the connections throughout the study by connecting them to the theoretical framework and research question. The researcher began looking at the quotes from the teachers. Then, the researcher narrowed the quotes into categories. After looking at the categories, the researcher grouped the findings to match the initial code provided by the theoretical framework. The characteristics of collective teacher efficacy include goal consensus, empowering teachers, cohesive teacher knowledge, and embedded reflective practices, with supportive leadership as the driving force (Donohoo, O'Leary & Hite, 2020). Table 16 provides a detailed summary of the codes, data, and the researcher's interpretive summary.

Table 16

<i>Initial Code</i>	<i>Data Supporting the Code</i>	<i>Researcher's Interpretive Summary</i>
Supportive Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear Communication • Assume Positive Intent • Interpersonal Communication • Positive Relationships • Encouragement • Transparency • Feedback • Visibility • High Expectations Listener • Approachable 	Participants found supportive leadership effective when positive intentions and relationships are present, communication is transparent and clear, and the principal leads as an approachable listener, holding high expectations of all learners.
Embedded Reflective Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Growth • Professional Environment 	Participants recognized that professional growth within a professional environment enhances collective teacher efficacy.
Empowered Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowering Teachers • Teacher Leadership • Buy-in 	Empowering teachers was a powerful tool utilized in the school, and the participants noted that teacher leadership creates teacher buy-in.

Collective Teacher Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Professional Learning Communities • Student Knowledge • RTI-A+B 	Collaboration, PLCs, student knowledge, and understanding of the RTI-A+B model promote collective teacher knowledge.
Goal Consensus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistic Goals • Celebrate 	Participants identified realistic goals and celebrations as an intricate component of collective teacher efficacy.

Summary

Participants answered the questions openly and honestly during the data collection. Each participant's perceived support was transparent in the study; therefore, the data told the story of leadership and collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school. Five initial codes led the research by connecting the data to patterns and overarching themes. The interviews, focus groups, artifacts, and reflective journaling guided the researcher through the experience and provided in-depth information regarding supportive leadership, teacher perceptions, and collective teacher efficacy. The next chapter will synthesize and make meaning from the data related to practice, policy, and future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative instrumental case study was conducted during the 2024 spring semester of the school year. This study focused on administrative supports that foster collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school. The researcher connected with the principal, collected data from the interview, requested artifacts to examine, and asked the best time to interview and conduct focus groups with the teachers.

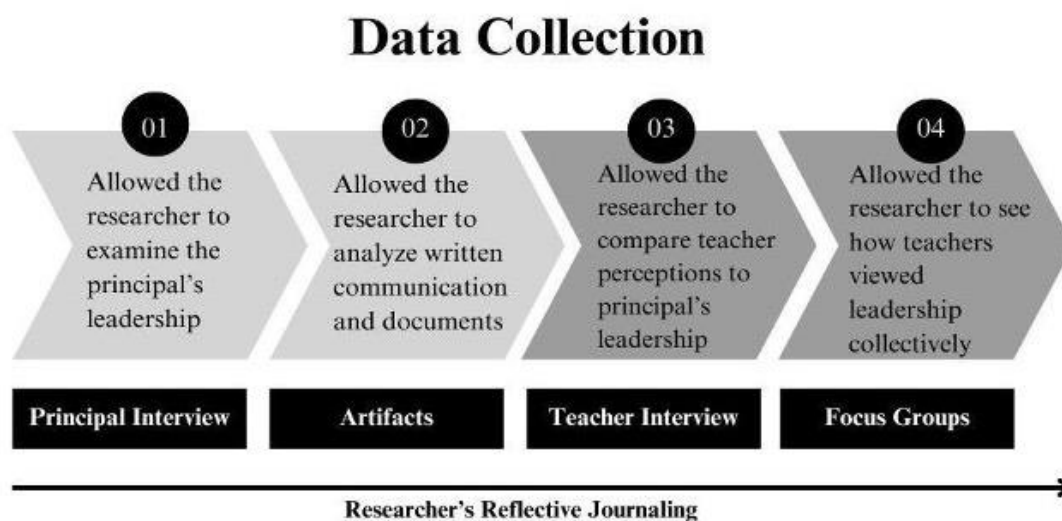
Summary of Results

The principal and teacher participants answered the researcher's questions openly. The artifacts provided by the principal allowed the researcher to gain insight into the written communication presented to the leadership team, the master schedule, book study notes, and the charge from the principal. The purpose of the study was to examine administrative supports that foster collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school. The principal's efforts in leading collective efficacy are presented in various ways. First, the principal welcomes teacher feedback and continues to build positive relationships throughout the building. Brandy encourages teachers to show empathy when working with students, allowing their perspectives to drive conversations. She understands the importance of open communication and transparency in the school and emphasizes building trust with teachers to increase collective teacher efficacy. The principal's supportive leadership style is leading with positive intent while holding high expectations for everyone in the school.

The participants welcomed the researcher into their PLC process through interviews and focus groups. The data collection process gave the researcher a wide variety of data to examine. Additionally, the researcher reflected on thoughts, feelings, and actions in a reflective journal. The process allowed the researcher to focus on the principal's leadership, communication, teacher perceptions, and focus groups. Figure 7 explains the data collection process.

Figure 7

Data Collection Process



The participants willingly participated in the data collection. The participant responses and artifacts assisted the researcher in answering the research question: What administrative supports are most conducive when fostering collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school?

The researcher formed the principal interview questions to understand better her leadership style, what high expectations look like at the school, and how she encourages teachers to grow professionally. The researcher also asked how she welcomes feedback

and teacher input and how clear communication, visibility, and transparency support collective teacher efficacy.

The collection of artifacts allowed the researcher to investigate the overall communication in the school. The researcher gained insight by examining the leadership team's communication and their thoughts and experiences surrounding the book study. The team also revealed their wants and significant concerns regarding their school and brainstormed ways to implement them.

Finally, the researcher met with teachers during their PLC time. The participants were open and willing to participate, and the researcher formed the questions to gain their perspective on the principal's leadership related to collective teacher efficacy. The researcher interviewed one teacher and held two focus groups. The same questions guided the inquiry. The teacher interview allowed for one-on-one conversations, while the focus group permitted the teams to reflect collectively. Table 17 presents the research question and the summary of the findings, utilizing descriptive coding.

Table 17*Research Question Summary*

Research Question: What administrative supports are most conducive to fostering collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school?
<p>Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principal felt leading with positive intent increases collective teacher efficacy. • The participants identified professional relationships, visibility, transparency, consistency, structure, and an open-door environment contributing to collective teacher efficacy. • The participants discussed high expectations as a critical factor in motivating students. • The participants described collaboration, coaching, feedback, trust, and professional growth as foundations of a positive teaching environment. • The participants noted challenges to collective teacher efficacy, such as managing different personalities, communicating with a large staff, and balancing stakeholder relationships and different points of view. • The book study participants identified wants for the school, focusing on a positive reputation, high expectations, and collective teacher efficacy.

Discussion of Findings

The researcher sought to answer what administrative supports are most conducive to fostering collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school. The researcher found the principal leads the staff in a coaching role, providing feedback and consistency for the school. Moreover, the principal leads with a “walk-along beside” attitude, encouraging teachers to lead similarly. Brandy creates structure through the master schedule, taking into consideration all learners. Her team shares the same vision and high expectations for the school, and they regularly reflect on their craft. Participants responded to questions that guided the research, and data collected from the participants allowed for further investigation of the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework

demonstrated the importance of supportive leadership, with four categories: empowered teachers, goal census, embedded reflective practices, and cohesive teacher knowledge, funneling to collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school.

Supportive Leadership

Teacher's perceptions of collective teacher efficacy start with supportive leadership. Supportive leadership is the foundation of all collective efforts, and the participants identified influential characteristics. Table 18 revisits the themes of supportive leadership.

Table 18

Supportive Leadership Findings

Initial Code	Data Supporting the Code or Theme
Supportive Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear Communication • Assume Positive Intent • Interpersonal Communication • Positive Relationships • Encouragement • Transparency • Feedback • Visibility • High Expectations • Behavioral Support • Listener • Approachable • Family Environment

As discussed in Chapter 4, supportive leadership starts with the principal and their leadership style. Brandy discussed framing conversations with colleagues, assuming positive intent, and upholding high expectations for all learners. She uses a conversational tone when speaking with students and teachers and emphasizes building

relationships and trust with teachers, which increases collective teacher efficacy. Brandy described her conversational tone as

This is me. Get to know a little bit about me. So that, you know, this is how I'm processing things. This is how I see things and having those conversations, so when I have to come to you, you know, 'This is where she's coming from.'

Brandy utilizes a coaching approach to address challenges with individual teachers while having open conversations to find solutions. She emphasizes the importance of being honest, transparent, and upfront with staff and students. She also provides examples of how she handles difficult situations and offers support, which helps create a safe and motivating learning environment. She reflected on her coaching approach, adding, "And then, you know, you put a hand on the shoulder and bring them along."

The teachers from the high-poverty middle school discussed the significance of collective teacher efficacy, emphasizing the need for effective leadership and high expectations to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. They added that the principal supports and listens to the teachers, and the teachers feel that she has their backs. The teachers also discussed the principal's role in creating a supportive and motivating environment for teachers, including the importance of a personal approach, listening, and building a teacher community. Nikki reflected on the principal and the leadership team, affirming,

They've got your back, and they're going to support and listen to you in whatever way they can. And the students see that. And the students put a little more respect in what you say, and what you ask them to do. When they know that...it's most likely not going to get undermined.

Courtney and Rebecca praised the principal for being understanding and supportive, providing resources, and listening to teachers' needs. Additionally, Rebecca described Brandy as a compassionate leader who makes tough decisions, always considering the best interests of her students and staff. Courtney felt supported by her leadership, expressing, "I feel listened to here. I feel heard as a teacher. I definitely feel very supportive as a teacher here."

Embedded Reflective Practices

Fostering collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty school requires teachers to reflect on their individual and collective practices. Brandy leads by example and prioritizes her staff's growth and development, supporting her team's goals and helping them progress in their careers. She highlighted the importance of focusing on teachers and celebrating their achievements, recognizing and supporting teachers' growth mindsets, and continuing to share experiences of others, such as teacher of the year awards and district promotions. Moreover, she reflected on her growth, identifying how to network and build professional relationships as an administrator. Table 19 revisits the themes from embedded reflective practices.

Table 19

Embedded Reflective Practices Findings

Initial Code	Data Supporting the Code or Theme
Embedded Reflective Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Growth • Professional Environment • Professional Relationships

Courtney described Brandy as “her biggest cheerleader.” She also mentioned that she would be the new PLC lead for her team next year, and the principal pushed her to pursue the role. Jeff echoed Courtney’s remarks: “She’s always supportive in everything we do. I’ve been constantly telling her that I’m going back to get my administrative license.” He said Brandy responded, “Well then, you better go sign up because I’m putting you on the leadership team next year.” He concluded, “She is constantly trying to help us progress and grow as teachers and develop...to really do anything we want.”

Empowered Teachers

Promoting teacher leadership within a school fosters collective teacher efficacy. In the high-poverty school, department leaders worked together to identify their shared vision for student success, including creating a more appealing and supportive school environment. During the book study, the group recognized the importance of open and honest communication and accountability in achieving their shared vision as a critical influence in fostering collective teacher efficacy. Empowering teachers and promoting teacher leadership helps foster collective teacher efficacy (Hite & Donohoo, 2021). Additionally, they noted that when the hierarchy is flattened, it increases collective teacher efficacy. Moreover, Bruce and Flynn (2013) found that teachers reflecting in a collaborative inquiry positively impact their beliefs about themselves and student learners.

Brandy discussed the importance of communication and collaboration in managing a large school and emphasized open communication and feedback, encouraging team members to share their thoughts and concerns in meetings and other

channels. Elizabeth noted collective teacher efficacy as a “shared responsibility among teachers to lead students to success.” Additionally, she stressed the importance of having teacher buy-in to successfully lead collective teacher efficacy. Table 20 demonstrates the themes collected by empowered teachers during the research.

Table 20

Empowered Teachers Findings

Initial Code	Data Supporting the Code or Theme
Empowered Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowering Teachers • Teacher Leadership • Buy-in

Rebecca reflected on her teaching career thus far, acknowledging her principal’s leadership as approachable and supportive,

As someone who just started, it’s one of those things like, ‘I love that she is my first principal,’ but man, it does suck at the same time. Because, like, here is the bar...that comparison for the rest of my career of this is what it’s supposed to look like...and how it is supposed to be.

Rebecca added that Brandy values teacher input and conversations surrounding their development, welcoming open-door discussions about plans for the future. Courtney compared her leadership style to other leaders, “She is the most understanding and most involved in what I want to do in my career.”

Cohesive Teacher Knowledge

Cohesive teacher knowledge accounts for the teaching practices of others and collective inquiry to best support student learning. Most of the study focused on interviewing PLC teams and their collaborative experiences. Brandy discussed how the

school's PLCs have evolved to include more teachers and cover more topics, with instructional coaches helping to facilitate the conversations and new initiatives. The school is experimenting with different scheduling options to accommodate PLCs, including swapping days and giving teachers more time to plan. Brandy emphasized the importance of a growth mindset, focusing on growth and achievement. Table 20 highlights the themes of collective teacher knowledge.

Table 21

Collective Teacher Knowledge Findings

Initial Code	Data Supporting the Code or Theme
Collective Teacher Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Professional Learning Communities • Student Knowledge • RTI-A+B

Rebecca discussed the importance of setting high expectations and providing individualized instruction to help students reach their full potential. She also discussed how the school addresses academic struggles, including remediation and intervention strategies. Courtney agreed with these statements, adding that the administration provides support and guidance by providing clear information and rubrics to help teachers meet expectations.

Elizabeth and Jeff reflected on the PLC process, emphasizing data meetings after every assessment and communicating with team members about teaching strategies and opportunities to reteach the students. Elizabeth explained, "We'll see what they missed and how they missed it. And why they missed it or why we think they missed it." She

also mentioned the importance of administration in PLC and data meetings, “She’ll be like, ‘Oh, they should have had that one.’ You know, she knows they can succeed.”

Another characteristic of Brandy’s leadership style is she emphasizes a growth mindset and data-driven decision-making.

Goal Consensus

The school succeeds when goal consensus drives the learning. School goals play a pivotal role in guiding a school’s success, and understanding the why and how of student success and building positive relationships with teachers and students are vital to creating a safe and supportive learning environment. A shared vision and commitment to student success, promoting learning expectations, focusing on middle school students, and celebrating their achievements foster collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school. Table 22 displays themes of goal consensus.

Table 22

Goal Consensus

Initial Code	Data Supporting the Code or Theme
Goal Consensus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same Vision • Realistic Goals • Celebrate

Elizabeth expressed Brandy motivates teachers and students with high expectations, frequent feedback, and celebration of success. She also noted students need goals that are just out of reach to see growth. She spoke about setting goals with her students and celebrating with them when they hit their goals.

The teachers agree that Brandy leads by example, supports her team's goals, and helps them grow. The teachers utilize projection data and individual folders with standards and goals to track their progress and set realistic targets. Courtney discussed the importance of setting high expectations for students in the classroom and said that all students can achieve at high levels, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Jeff proclaimed, "We should always have high expectations because if we have low expectations, then that's where they'll settle in and achieve. I'd rather aim for the moon and fall short than aim at the ground and stay there."

Brandy spoke about celebrating success: "We celebrate our teachers, and they're celebrating our students, too. We shout out our teachers. We shout from the mountain for those things, recognizing that your kids are working for you."

Challenges

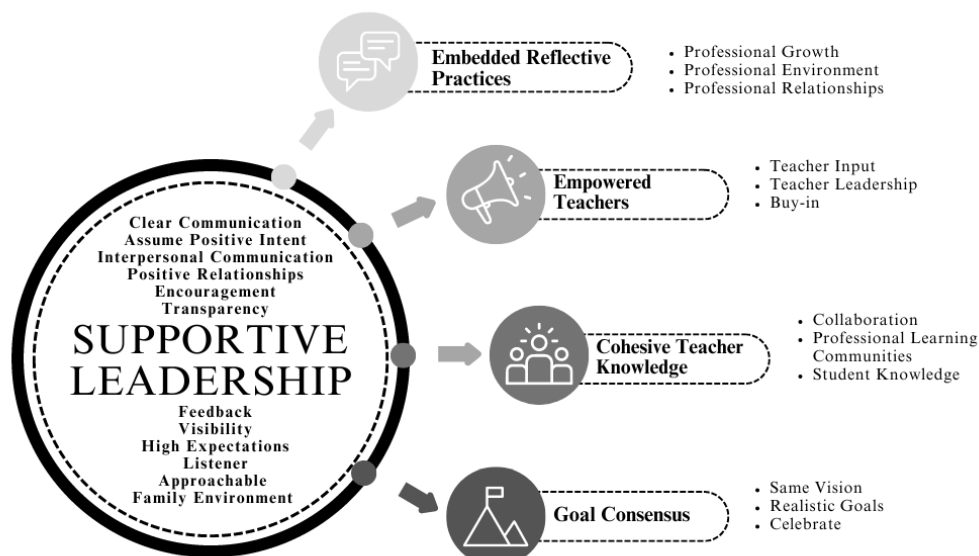
Leading collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty school comes with challenges. Adults' mindsets in the building might hinder collaboration in motivating students, as may teacher perceptions of the principal. Relationships with teachers and students are vital to building collective teacher efficacy. Brandy reflected, "There's not a lot we can do about county policy, state policy, anything like that, but we can do something about the relationships we have." In a later statement, she declared, "There's not some trick to motivating anyone; it's just building great relationships."

She also mentioned the challenges of leading collective teacher efficacy with a large staff, especially when teachers have differences of opinion. She reflected on a previous conversation with a teacher about professionalism and student treatment. She

acknowledged that having difficult conversations allows for reflection and opportunities for growth. The leadership team identified ways to remove barriers to collective teacher efficacy from the book study. They found an absence of trust, fear of conflict, and a lack of commitment as areas to focus on—their solution: a leader who is not afraid of conflict.

Implications of Practice

Collective teacher efficacy is crucial for student success and requires all teachers to believe in all students' potential. It is a shared responsibility among teachers to lead student success. Collective teacher efficacy starts with supportive leadership. For a school to succeed through collective teacher efficacy, a leader must lead by assuming positive intentions. Collaboration, coaching, feedback, trust, and professional growth are the foundation of a positive teaching environment. When fostering collective efficacy, it is essential to provide genuine, positive intentions (France, 2021). Professional relationships, visibility, transparency, consistency, structure, and an open-door environment contribute to collective teacher efficacy, and high expectations are critical factors in motivating teachers and students. Staff with high collective teacher efficacy are characterized by high expectations, effort, and persistence in overcoming the most difficult challenges (Donohoo, 2017). Figure 8 shows the recommendation for administrative supports that foster collective teacher efficacy in the context of a high-poverty middle school.

Figure 8*Collective Teacher Efficacy in High-Poverty Middle Schools*

Supportive leadership consists of clear communication, assuming positive intentions, and interpersonal communication. Positive relationships, encouragement, and transparency are vital to fostering collective teacher efficacy. Feedback, visibility, and setting high expectations all play a role in supportive leadership. Finally, a supportive leader must be an effective listener and be approachable while building a family environment. Leaders promote power and development while becoming integral to the team (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Embedded reflective practices are one component of fostering collective teacher efficacy. A supportive leader shows interest in professional growth for all teachers, cultivates a professional environment that encourages teachers to face challenges and

encompasses professional relationships. According to Hite and Donohoo (2021), to combat the inequalities in education, teachers must perceive themselves as individuals and as a part of a collective. Additionally, they must be confident in delivering effective instruction to impoverished students, resulting in better performance and academic achievement. Professional learning communities provide structures for teams to tackle challenges effectively (DuFour et al., 2016). The PLC process poses four questions for teachers:

1. What do we want our students to know and be able to do?
2. How will we know if each student has learned it?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn it?
4. How will we extend the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?

Collaborating through the PLC process empowers teachers to make data-driven decisions, learn from their colleagues, and reflect on previous teaching and future planning. PLCs are pivotal to building collective teacher efficacy due to collaboration versus isolation. In PLCs, teachers reflect on their teaching craft while encouraging others to do the same. Additionally, cohesive teacher knowledge enables teachers to focus on student learning and building collective teaching knowledge. The staff focuses on collaboration, with professional learning communities at the center of the community. All adults in the building have a strong understanding of students and their learning.

Empowering teachers is another way to foster collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty school. Considering teacher input makes teachers feel valued. Additionally,

schools with solid teacher leadership promote a positive learning environment. Manna (2015) concluded, “Principals who are strong, effective, responsive leaders help to inspire and enhance the abilities of their teachers and other school staff to do excellent work...principals can be powerful multipliers of effective teaching and leadership practices in schools” (p. 7). Supportive leadership and collaborative teams understand the importance of buy-in and valuing everyone in the building to foster collective teacher efficacy effectively.

Having a goal consensus allows all individuals to strive for the same outcomes. Clear communication of realistic goals provides a roadmap for teacher and student success. Both teachers and students benefit from celebrating successes and acknowledging when they meet goals. Hite and Donohoo (2021) provided an analogy for setting and obtaining goals. They compared goals to sand dunes. Far away, dunes look smooth; however, granulates vary in size and shape when examined closer. The analogy is similar to how school goals need to be considered. The far-away dunes symbolize long-term goals. The sand itself represents the mid-journey goals. The small-win goals are the grains of sand. The three components are vital in setting goals:

- Agreeing on beliefs and successes,
- understanding benchmarks and agreed-upon achievements, and
- celebrating small wins.

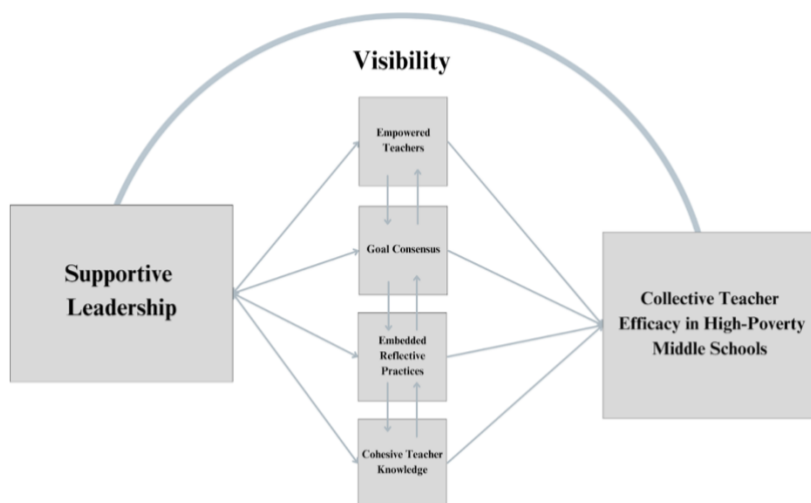
Celebrating success is a crucial component of collective teacher efficacy. When teams meet their goals, it is essential to celebrate the accomplishment. Supportive leadership creates conditions for teachers to experience progress, recognize their achievements, and celebrate their success (Amabile & Kramer, 2011).

Utilizing the instrumental case study design approach, the researcher concluded that the theoretical framework should be adjusted to show specific research on supportive leadership and collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools. Figure 8 depicts the changes in the framework.

The researcher found a significant impact on the visibility of the leadership in high-poverty middle schools. Additionally, the original theoretical framework illustrated the initial codes as working separately; however, the researcher discovered the codes work interdependently when examining the data. Collective teacher efficacy is more than how a group works collectively. It is about relationships, human connections, and being heard. Collective teacher efficacy is the belief that educators positively influence student achievement, regardless of socioeconomic factors (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Collective teacher efficacy is much more than something a group does. A group believes they can move students together, regardless of their circumstances. Figure 9 depicts the original framework with additional supports for high-poverty middle schools.

Figure 9

Theoretical Framework Revisited



Future Research

Future research needs to be conducted for an entire school year, documenting the successes and challenges of fostering collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school. From the findings, participants would reflect on the journey, have open conversations with their principal, and provide feedback, enhancing the future work of collective teacher efficacy.

Additional research, such as an entire school and its perceptions of collective teacher efficacy, must be conducted on a larger scale. This process will allow the researcher to see if the themes are throughout the building or in pockets of the school. Furthermore, the researcher could compare and analyze different departments and grade levels to see if they are consistent throughout the building.

Another future study needs to be conducted on supportive leadership and collective teacher efficacy, with the research focused on student achievement in a high-poverty school. This process will allow the researcher to identify schools with high collective teacher efficacy and the links to closing the achievement gaps in high-poverty middle schools.

Finally, further research needs to be conducted on high-poverty middle schools and the effectiveness of collective teacher efficacy. This research is a snapshot of a more extensive study on high-poverty middle schools.

Limitations to the Study

The time of the year was a limitation of the study. The researcher began collecting data later than expected, and the collection started close to spring break. While the

researcher conducted the principal interview during spring break, the teacher interviews and focus groups finished after state testing. Due to the limitations, a smaller sample size of teachers was available. Thus, timing elements constrained the study; however, the participants welcomed the opportunity to serve in the case study.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand administrative supports that foster collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school through teachers' perceptions. The researcher found that supportive leadership is the driving force in leading collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school. Supportive leadership drives the collective effort by assuming positive intent and leading with transparency. The leader encourages positive relationships, provides feedback, and promotes high expectations of everyone in the building. It takes everyone with the belief that they can move students from a high-poverty middle school. In the book *Districts that Succeed: Breaking the Correlation Between Race, Poverty, and Achievement*, Chenoweth (2021) declared educators have the power to change lives. Furthermore, she spoke about educators who take charge of student learning. She affirmed, "They don't wait for the calvary to teach the kids; they are the calvary" (p. 131). Chenoweth concluded that leaders in high-poverty schools do not think it is easy to educate children; however, they understand the importance of leading a school collectively.

Through embedded reflective practices, empowered teachers, cohesive teacher knowledge, and goal consensus, teachers obtain collective teacher efficacy. While many factors lead to collective teacher efficacy, it is essential to remember that the collective

moves students. Tschannen-Moran and Barr proclaimed teachers with high collective efficacy “do not accept low student achievement as an inevitable by-product of low socioeconomic status, lack of ability, or family background. They roll up their sleeves and get the job done” (p. 192). Moreover, educators hold the power to address inequalities in education (Hite & Donohoo, 2021). Collective teacher efficacy addresses educational inequities, and educators hold the power to move students through positive relationships, high expectations, and a unified effort by all adults.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Collective Efficacy and Leadership Supports in High-Poverty Middle Schools

Administrator Interview Protocol

This interview is part of a research study examining leadership supports that foster collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools. I am interviewing you, a school leader, about the administrative support most conducive to achieving this goal. As a reminder, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. During the interview, you can skip any questions and stop the interview at any time.

1. Tell me about your background in school leadership.
2. As mentioned earlier, this study is about teacher perceptions of leadership supports that are most conducive to fostering collective teacher efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy is the belief that all students can achieve at high levels regardless of socioeconomic status. Through this belief, school leaders must build collective teacher efficacy within their teachers to positively influence student achievement. Additionally, Hite and Donohoo (2021) referred to collective teacher efficacy as the shared belief from all staff that they can positively influence student outcomes. So, this leads me to our first question:
 - a. What are your general thoughts about collective teacher efficacy?
3. One key element of CTE is having high expectations for student success. Describe what it means to have high expectations for student success at this school.
4. Let's discuss student motivation. How do you, as the principal, help motivate teachers and students to meet these high expectations?
5. What challenges do you face as a leader related to CTE, and how do you face those challenges?
6. What challenges do your teachers face related to CTE, and how do you support them in meeting those challenges?
7. Let's talk about mindset. A growth mindset, which is the belief that individuals can grow through dedication and hard work, is critical to achieving high levels of CTE in a school. Describe the school's mindset.
8. Describe how you, as the leader, help support a growth mindset at this school.
9. Would you like us to know anything else about leadership supports fostering collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools?

Appendix B

Collective Efficacy and Leadership Supports in High-Poverty Middle Schools

Teacher Interview Protocol

This interview is part of a research study examining leadership supports that foster collective teacher efficacy in high-poverty middle schools. I am interviewing you, a school leader, about the administrative support most conducive to achieving this goal. As a reminder, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. During the interview, you can skip any questions and stop the interview at any time.

1. Tell me about your background in education.
2. As mentioned earlier, this study is about perceptions of leadership supports most conducive to fostering collective teacher efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy is the belief that all students can achieve at high levels regardless of socioeconomic status. Through this belief, school leaders must build collective teacher efficacy within their teachers to positively influence student achievement. Additionally, Hite and Donohoo (2021) referred to collective teacher efficacy as the shared belief from all staff that they can positively influence student outcomes. So, this leads me to our first question:
 - a. What are your general thoughts on collective teacher efficacy?
3. One key element of CTE is having high expectations for student success. Describe what it means to have high expectations for students at this school.
4. Let's talk about student motivation. How does your principal motivate teachers and students to meet these high expectations?
5. What challenges does your principal face related to CTE, and how do they face those challenges?
6. What challenges do you face as a teacher related to CTE, and how does your leader support you in meeting these challenges?
7. Let's talk about mindset. A growth mindset, which is the belief that individuals can grow through dedication and hard work, is critical to achieving high levels of CTE in a school. Describe the mindset at the school.
8. Describe how your leader helps support a growth mindset in this school.
9. Would you like us to know anything else about leadership supports fostering collective teacher efficacy in a high-poverty middle school?

