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by

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A CASE STUDY ON ADMINISTRATIVE PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENT  
RELATIONSHIPS ON A RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL CAMPUS

A Dissertation Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Education  
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirement for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

by

Michelle R. Parker

Houston, Texas

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## Abstract

**Background:** Relationships forged at school can aid or hinder development in regards to learning and behaviors. These relationships are critical at the middle school level when adolescents are beginning to form their own personal identities, personalities, values, and behaviors. Much of the prevailing research indicates there is a strong correlation between student relationships with teachers and student success related to school work and state assessments. However, limited research is found regarding the impact of student relationships with administrators. There is, also, a lack of literature that provides a discussion of how student relationships relate or tie into the behaviors observed on middle school campuses. **Purpose:** The aim of this research was to identify connections between student-administrator relationships and student behavior. **Methods:** This was a qualitative case study within one rural middle school, servicing grades 6-8. Three campus administrators directly involved with students were interviewed. Interviews were conducted to determine themes concerning administrator perspectives on student behaviors in connection to their relationships with students. A second round of interviews followed to dissect the prevalent themes and determine if positive relationships with administrators equate to positive behaviors in students. **Results:** Administrators identified time was a prevalent factor. With adequate time to build relationships throughout the year, administrators also felt their efforts to build strong positive relationships with students did promote and encourage more positive behaviors. Additionally, one administrator felt it depended more on the individual student, rather than relationships. **Conclusion:** The results of this study indicated there were several areas to investigate and

determine a connection between student administrator relationships and student behaviors. Further research could examine these relationships in a larger district.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

The word leader, as defined by Mishra and Mahapatra (2018) in the article *Servant Leadership: A Necessity For Competitive Advantage* is “the one who guides, motivates and supports his/her followers for attainment of desired goals in the work organization” (Mishra & Mahapatra, 2018, abstract). Schools are served by a number of educational leaders, regardless of the area in which the school is located, the demographic of the school or the availability of funds. The educational leaders then have a vast number of followers and stakeholders they are entrusted to serve. Mishra and Mahapatra (2018) explained “A servant leader is the one who focuses on the growth and the well-being of his/her followers” (p. 40). Thus, a leader, or servant leader in education, builds relationships, empowers followers to succeed and grow, and models desired behaviors.

In this study, student relationships with campus administrators and the impact of those relationships on student behavior was investigated through interviews and observation. The middle school years are critical for boys and girls because students at this age begin to disengage from learning, which, in return, increases the chance of becoming a drop out before they reach high school graduation. According to the Middle School Matters Initiative:

Research indicates that students at risk of dropping out of school can be identified as early as sixth grade.

In fact, sixth graders who display just one of the following off-track indicators have only a 15% - 25% chance of graduating on time:

- A failing grade in mathematics or English/language arts; or
- An attendance rate of less than 85%, or
- One unsatisfactory behavior mark in a core course. (The Importance of Middle School, 2007, p. 5)

With these few years engendering such an impact on students, it is imperative to discern how behaviors can be affected by relationships in grades 6-8. Sarkova, Sleskova, Geckova, Katreniakova, Heuvel and van Dijk (2014) mentioned that the relationships children build in middle school are foundational and critical to their success and well-being. Negative relationships can harm a child's ability to progress through life and their educational career in a positive fashion, thus creating the possibility of problem behaviors at school. As such, relationships are a major driving force within education. In conjunction with this very idea, Olive (2005) found that:

a healthy school climate is studied and characterized by positive relationships between students, teachers, and administrators. These student-student, teacher-student, administrator-student, and administrator-teacher relationships are necessary components in helping to create an environment of academic excellence" (pg. 1).

In order to learn how to better serve middle school students within 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grades, there must be a determination of what causes appropriate and inappropriate behaviors within a school setting. Teachers and administrators are charged with the task of empowering

students to succeed academically and behaviorally, enabling them to be and do their best (Dutta & Khatri, 2017, p. 61).

A qualitative research approach was employed to examine the research questions. A descriptive case study was implemented as interviews were conducted with all three members of administration on the Hargrave Middle School campus, including one principal and two assistant principals. The interviews were conducted in order to determine what relationships are built with students on the campus and the connections between student behavior and the relationship middle school students form with administrators. The interviews will determine links between student behaviors and the relationships built with administrators.

### **Need for the Study**

The impetus for this study came from a rural middle school principal's declaration of student apathy as the most prevalent issue faced on his sixth through eighth grade campus, as well as the statement that "schools should be run like a business" (Samuel Anderson, personal conversation, 2017). Because the researcher witnessed first-hand the student behaviors and student/staff interactions over four years on the Hargrave Middle School campus, the question then became whether there was a connection in the two. After pondering this question, the researcher requested permission from the district to conduct a case study on administrator to student relationships through interviews of the three campus administrators, in order to attempt to determine if there are connections between student behaviors and the relationships students make with administrators on the sixth through eighth grade campus in this small rural Texas town.

Through 20 years in the field of education, the researcher saw many aspects of relationships and interactions on various campuses. The researcher had witnessed the profanity used towards and focused personally at students, the negative attitudes from teachers directed at staff and students. The researcher heard the outcry from students affected by the negative teacher relationships, witnessed, first hand, the unprofessional and often hurtful words and actions of a colleague and supervisor. The researcher observed students swimming alone in a sea of peers, those students often hiding in the shadows, never feeling as if they fit in. In many instances, the behaviors were neither acknowledged nor corrected by administration. In other instances, the behaviors originated within administration.

On the other end of the spectrum, the researcher perceived positive and enduring relationships built between groups of students, and between students and teachers. The researcher saw students metaphorically adopt a teacher as parent and emotional-psychological provider due to the relationship created between the two. Fewer admirable connections between students and principals were forged. Again, these relationships were never acknowledged nor recognized.

Kim, Schwartz, Cappella and Seidman (2014) explained, “Social-emotional struggles ensue during this period, including decreases in students’ sense of belonging in school and self-esteem, as well as increases in anxiety, depression and behavioral difficulties” (pg.1). Could there be a connection between those relationships constructed from mutual respect and concern and those behaviors that are most agreeable to a positive middle school climate? If so, what are those connections?

## **Statement of the Problem**

Student apathy and problem behavior on the middle school campus is a growing concern. Research shows there may be a correlation between student relationships and student behavior. For instance, Kaplan (2011) remarked about “how vital relationship is to the ways we hold ourselves accountable to and with others” (pg. 212). This case study examined the connections between student behavior and student relationships with administrators. Interviews and personal observations were used to examine student to administrator relationships. Creswell (2007) defined a case study as, “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p. 73). The major objectives of the data collection effort were (a) to identify if links exist between student behaviors and student-administrator relationships through respondents' comments; and (b) what those links might be. The questions were designed to stimulate respondents' remarks and observations focused on these two objectives.

## **Research Questions**

In order to address the problem of this study, the researcher developed the following questions:

- 1) What kind of relationships are built between students and administrators on the middle school campus?



2) How are student behaviors impacted by these relationships?

### **Definition of Terms**

*Administrator*, in this study, is defined as anyone, outside the role of teacher/athletic coach, paraprofessional, instructional coach or counselor, whose base salary is elevated above the base salary of a teacher and has day to day contact with students on the middle school campus or has an extended contract and stipend that extends salary above the classroom teacher salary.

*At risk students* are those students who are seen as at risk for failing or dropping out of school.

*Confidante relationship*, for the purposes of this study, are those relationships forged between administrators and students for the sheer purpose (on the part of the student) of friendship, support and the need for a non-judgmental confidante.

*Economically disadvantaged students* are those students who are a member of a household that meets the income eligibility guidelines for free or reduced-price school meals (less than or equal to 185% of Federal Poverty Guidelines).

*Extrinsic motivators* are defined as external rewards such as money, prizes, food or fame.

*Heavy hitters* are those students seen regularly – at least once a week – for behavioral issues by an administrator.

*PBIS* is defined as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and is used to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schools and other agencies (PBIS, 2018, p.1).

*Positive relationships* are “friendships, kinships, or other social associates that provide productivity within a person’s life” (*Positive Relationships*, 2015, p. 1).

*Sonic runs* are defined as administrative practices in which staff members write down and pay for a drink from Sonic which is then delivered by the office staff.

*Student apathy*, according to a study done by De Lay and Swan (2014), can be defined as “a conscious choice often occurring when students perceive teachers as creating an inhospitable learning environment that communicates a lack of caring and fails to make student learning a high priority” (p. 114).

*Teacher apathy* can be defined as a “total lack of concern for students as individuals and for their learning and performance as a whole” (p. 20). As Mitchell commented (2013), “The demeanor of the teacher matters” (p. 19).

*504 students* are those students with a learning disability that do not qualify for special education services.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This review of literature focused on the types of relationships that are built between students and administrators and the impact those relationships have on student behavior on a rural middle school campus in south-east Texas. The conceptual framework offered in the literature represents the student-administrator relationship and how certain characteristics can be found in various types of school settings that can impact student behavior. In recent publications, researchers have been interested in understanding how behavior affects student academic achievement in correlation to the relationship of school leadership and the student body. This review of literature focused on the types of relationships that are built between students and administrators, and the connections between student-administrator relationships and student behavior.

#### **Criteria for Literature Review**

According to Olive (2005), “Compared to earlier generations, today’s students are emotionally and behaviorally troubled, more stressed, more depressed, and uninterested in in-depth learning” (p. 1). For students in their middle years, these new “modern” changes can be even more detrimental to their growth and development. The goal of this literature review was to provide an overview of the significant themes relevant to the study. Although the importance of building strong, positive student-teacher relationships has been heavily researched, the connections of student relationships to student behavior on a middle school campus is an area in need of further examination. As a search for relevant material was conducted, preference was given to peer-reviewed journal articles and research studies. Several key terms were used to find relevant material including, but not limited to: student relationships, student relationships in middle school, student

behaviors in middle school, student teacher relationships in middle school, middle school administration and rural middle schools. In this study, the researcher was interested in determining if there was a connection between student relationships with administrators and student behaviors on a middle school campus in a rural south-east United States school district. Based on a review of the current literature, a scarcity of information exists regarding this topic of study. A variety of reference resources were utilized to identify academic journals, reports and research studies related to student relationships and behaviors in middle school.

### **Leadership and Management**

Leadership and management, though often used synonymously, have conflicting definitions. Comstock (2014) explained:

Leadership is the ability to guide, persuade or motivate others as head of a group or organization...Managers can accomplish necessary tasks, such as planning and coordinating projects, hiring help, and solving problems, but leaders also use social influence to inspire others to achieve a common goal.

Hunter (1998) stated it more simply by saying, "Management is not something you *do* to other people. You manage your investments, your checkbook, your resources. You can even manage yourself. But you do not manage other human beings. You manage *things*, you *lead* people" (p. 28).

There are an abundance of leadership styles in the available research. Leadership styles, according to current literature, include but are not limited to autocratic, bureaucratic, charismatic, democratic/participative, laissez-faire or "let it be" and transformational styles. Each has specific characteristics:

- Autocratic leadership style - The leader acts on his or her own without consultation and believes that consultation would result in no benefit. Unfortunately, an autocratic leadership style often leads to discontent among followers.
- Bureaucratic leadership style – This leadership style is most commonly displayed as a traditional top-down, hierarchal leadership communication and philosophy like that used in the military. Often applied in stressful situations, educational leaders find themselves leaning toward this style of leadership because it is traditional and allows the leader to possess a vast amount of power and control.
- Charismatic leadership style – These leaders fuse each member’s personal goals with the team or organizational mission.
- Democratic/participatory leadership style - The democratic leader considers all constituencies or participants in decision making.
- Laissez-faire or “let it be” leadership style – This type of leader lets others make decisions, often not involving himself or herself in the process.
- Transformational leadership style - The goal in a transformational leadership style is to implement literal and lasting changes in individuals and organizations in the following categories: mind, heart, vision, insights, understanding, purpose, beliefs, principles, and values. (Gonzalez, 2016; Smith, Minor, Brashen & Remaly, 2017).

Peretomode (1991) believed “Leaders in education inspire the whole system by effectively influencing the behaviors, thoughts and feelings of those working within it, and ensure their vision by creating a strategic alignment across the whole system”,

regardless of their leadership style (p. 142). The leadership style a person possesses is simply the ways in which followers were motivated (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015). Katz (1955) suggested there were three types of leaderships skills – technical, human and conceptual. He believed that “human relations skills are central to the functions of leadership” at all times (p. 37).

When taking these styles into account it is important to recognize and consider the attitude of Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008) who said, “School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning” (p. 28). This indicates the impact leaders or managers have on the learning process. Nedelcu (2015) confirmed this idea by stating, “A wide range of international studies have confirmed that leaders clearly facilitate major and concrete in-school differences to student achievement or organizational culture and relations, teacher motivation, etc.” (p. 240). The primary leaders on public school campuses are principals and assistant principals.

Villareal (2001) stated:

Principals are charged with the task of establishing and nurturing relationships that collectively can have an impact on the quality of a transitional bilingual education program in a school. The issue of relationships cannot be underestimated as a potent factor in creating an environment conducive to learning. (p. 12)

With this in mind, it seems imperative that educational leaders possess excellent communication skills while exhibiting the power and effort of building relationships with stakeholders. Peretomode (1991) echoed this sentiment by saying, “Communication is

key. A leader must be able to communicate effectively. Leaders should spend most of their engaged in communication” (p. 123).

### **Perceptions**

Declines in motivation and achievement, as sometimes seen in the middle years, often lead to negatively influencing “their academic trajectories, high school course selections and, ultimately, career choices” (Smart, 2014, p. 4). Though research proves that the middle years are critical to the social growth and development of pre-teens and teens, studies have also revealed “that middle level teachers tend to exhibit less nurturing behaviors than elementary teachers” (Smart, 2014, p. 4). Walter, Lambie and Ngazimbi (2008) noted that “Middle schools are challenged to implement effective methods of addressing behavioral problems of students” (p. 2).

In the studies by Englehart (2013) and by Martinez, McMahon, Coker and Keys (2016), the issue of student behaviors in regards to teacher attitudes and actions are examined. In the articles, the authors show the implications of teacher actions on student behavior. Englehart (2013) and Martinez, et.al. (2016), demonstrate an awareness that student behaviors are connected to teacher attitudes and actions.

In the study, Englehart (2013) explained “Too often, teachers encountering difficulties with classroom management focus only on the students rather than critically examining the influence of their own approaches on student behavior” (p. 103). He outlined five approaches to handling disruptive behavior. Englehart (2013) stated, “A frequent mistake is for teachers to view student behavior solely in terms of what the kids are doing (or not doing) without consideration to the importance of what they themselves

are doing" (p. 103). He pointed out "It's not always the kids" (Englehart, 2013, p. 103). Englehart (2013) cautioned that it may be the teacher's own actions, behaviors, beliefs and expectations "setting him or her up for classroom failure" (p. 103).

Martinez, et.al. (2016) described research completed in a large urban school district. He and fellow researchers surveyed 171 teachers across 29 high schools to examine "the relations among teacher and school-level constructs and student-related outcomes" (2016, p. 817). The study was divided into multiple sections. Teacher collaboration, supervision and discipline, and instructional management were categorized under the heading *Teacher Practices*, while high risk problem behaviors, barriers to student learning, and student social-behavioral climate felt under the heading *Student Outcomes*. (Martinez, et.al., 2016, p. 818).

Both articles provided information in regard to student behaviors and the correlation to teacher behavior and actions. Englehart (2013) offered suggestions for teachers who face opposition from students within five behavioral and counters within middle school (p. 103-108). Martinez, et. al. (2016) identified areas in which teacher behaviors had positive impacts on student outcomes and behaviors. The researchers also discovered a contradiction to predicted expectations in that "teacher collaboration was associated with higher levels of student high-risk behavior" (Martinez, et.al., 2016, 817-830).

Martinez, et.al. (2016) stated, "teachers may play a particularly important role in addressing behavioral issues, reducing the barriers to learning and shaping the behavioral climate of schools and classrooms, given their extensive interactions with students" (p. 818). The study determined this to be the case. After analyzing the data, Martinez, et.al.



(2016) stated “These findings have implications for school interventions and suggest some of the ways schools can address these outcomes” (p. 824). The article went on to explain the implications for research and practice. Martinez, et.al. (2016) suggested further research “by examining an array of school-classroom and teacher-level influences in relation to behavioral outcomes to better understand specific linkages” (p. 825-826). The data also led the researchers to determine “future research may benefit from examining school-level processes using multi-level modeling strategies and SEM (Structural Equation Modeling)” (Martinez, et.al., 2016, p. 826).

Englehart (2013) declared “the teacher must be focused on his or her own behavior to be an optimally effective manager” (p. 107). From his view, teachers should take the responsibilities upon themselves to correct their own behaviors before attempting to correct student behavior. He emphasized this by saying “they may be focusing only on the actions that they believe should positively contribute to successful management at the exclusion of the ones that at the same time could be undercutting those positive contributions” (Englehart, 2013, p. 107). Englehart stressed the importance of changing the behaviors and approaches of teachers before a difference in student behavior can be expected.

It is obvious from the studies, Englehart and Martinez, et.al. found reason to believe teacher actions and behaviors have a clear impact on student behaviors. Focusing attention on teacher approaches on campus could greatly impact students in positive ways and alleviate issues with problem behaviors.

Peer relationships in middle school can be a deciding factor in how a child moves through middle school. As students struggle to discover and develop their identities in

middle school, it becomes increasingly harder for them to build meaningful relationships (Wentzel, 1998). One small benefit small rural schools have is that they seldom have to break up peer groups. Students travel as a group from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school, keeping these peer groups intact (Thomas, 2005, p. 12). Wentzel (1998) mentioned the concern for students who fail or grapple to make “positive, supportive” relationships with adults and peers. She suggested those same students are often at risk for academic deficiencies. According to Hetherington and Parke (2003), the peers of our students tend to exert more influence during the preadolescent and adolescent stages (p. 25). This makes the relationships students build with peers at this age critical. Sarkova, Bacikova-Sleskova, Geckova, Katreniakov, Heuvel and Dijk mused, “The relationships and experiences that pupils have at school have been found to influence their development, psychological well-being, self-esteem and social adjustment” (Sarkova, et. al., 2014, p. 367). Middle school is often an entirely new world for children. It is typically a transitional period between elementary school and high school where students face new challenges and struggles. Kim, Schwartz, Cappella and Seidman (2014) stated “Early adolescence is a vulnerable period for both academic and social-emotional development” (p. 28). This is a common reflection amongst researchers as Olive (2005) remarked similarly when she declared, “Compared to earlier generations, today’s students are emotionally and behaviorally troubled, more stressed, more depressed, and uninterested in in-depth learning” (p. 1). Through the study of adolescent engagement and behavior, Forster, Gloppen, Gower, Oliphant, Sieving and McMorris (2017) found emotional engagement was a determining factor in student delinquency (p. S31).

Teacher relationships at this age are critical to a student's ability to acclimate to their new surroundings. Middle school is often an entirely new world for children. It is typically a transitional period between elementary school and high school. It is a time of new challenges and struggles. Students spend more waking hours with their teachers than they typically do with their parents or guardians on any given school day. The American Psychological Association remarked, "that adolescents, despite occasional or numerous protests, need adults and want them to be part of their lives, recognizing that they can nurture, teach, guide, and protect them on the journey to adulthood" (American Psychological Association, 2002). According to Smart (2014), "research indicates that many students display a downward motivational shift in the middle grades" (p. 3). Student-teacher connections have the capacity to affect the pupil on many levels, including enthusiasm, accomplishment and adaptation to school (Smart, 2014, p. 1).

Parr and Townsend (2005) reported "children in classrooms with engaged and nondisruptive classmates exhibit higher levels of academic competence than children in classrooms with low levels of student engagement and high levels of off-task behaviors" (p. 411). Ellis (1988) explained that "a negative school climate had characteristics that included isolated students, as well as teachers who had a relationship with students based on hostility and a lack of care". Ellis suggested the importance of working on improving relationships between teachers and students in the process of changing a school's climate. According to Twemlow and Fonagy (2005), rather than working towards strong, meaningful interactions, "some teachers may drift toward—or even contribute to—the violent culture of problem schools rather than simply being made more violent by them" (p. 238).

Administrators play a pivotal role in middle school. Sparks (2005) declared, “The quality of teaching, learning, and relationships...depends on the quality of leadership provided by the principals” (p. 56). The principal is said to be the most influential person on campus, thus being a deciding factor in student academic success and behavior (U.S. Congress, 1970). Harris stated, in *Bravo Principals... Care About People* (n.d.), “Caring means connecting, and when we connect we make people feel important” (Education world, p. 2). Harris went on to say, “Students really don’t care what we know. But when they feel our care for them, they will be much more likely to care whether they learn from us or not” (*Bravo Principals*, n.d., p. 12). The nature of an administrator’s initiative relies on the ilk of his or her associations with the whole school network. Principals must model the behavioral practices they anticipate from staff and students (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Bass (1990) explained Habegger (2008) asserted that “principals need to create a positive school culture that promotes learning and engagement for students and adults” (p. 42). All members on a campus participate in social interactions, including administrators. Each and every person has a different role, interest and perspective as well as a contribution to the climate of the school (Kim, et. al., 2014, p. 30). Literature has predominantly focused on student perspectives while neglecting to take into account the perspectives of administrators (Kim, et. al., 2014, p. 30). This has created a gap in literature in regard to the impact of administrators on middle school campuses. According to Ellis (1988), “the principal holds the key to creating the kind of climate that will raise the morale, commitment, and achievement of teachers and students alike” (p. 3). Thomas (2005) mentioned the importance of recognition by teachers and administrators of

positive interactions, especially in the critical years of preadolescence and adolescence (p. 12).

Gettemeier (2012) stated “It is important for the building leader to know that he or she has influence over the staff and teachers. Building administration can also influence the student climate in the building through their actions or inactions” (p. 11).

The experience of middle school aged students is an important perspective to understand in regard to student-administrator relationships. Researchers Qi Zhao and Weidong Li, examined responses of a group of middle schoolers, grades 6-8, in order to determine student perceptions of teachers’ caring behavior and how those behaviors related to the attitude students carried in regard to physical education. The investigators used an exploratory factor analysis to collect one hundred seventy-eight self-reported surveys. The purposes of their study were to “develop and validate a content-specific measurement of perceptions of teachers’ caring behaviors in PE and examine how middle school students’ perceptions of teachers’ caring behaviors relate to their attitudes, effort, and enjoyment in PE” (Zhao & Li, 2016, p. 514).

Participants for the study consisted of “56 boys and 122 girls; 118 European Americans, 12 African Americans, seven Asian Americans, four Hispanic Americans and 37 others” between the ages of 11 and 14 (Zhao & Li, 2016, p. 514). Students completed Likert-scale surveys during their assigned physical education class time. The schools had previously been sites for field experience for Li’s physical education teacher education students. PE teachers in the two schools all had 8 to 12 years teaching experience at the time the research was completed.

Students completed a survey of 42 questions, using a 7-point Likert-type scale to gauge their perceptions of teachers' caring behaviors in PE. The points ranged from 1 – very strongly disagree – to 7 – very strongly agree. Another 20 questions were completed using a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, to ascertain students' attitude toward PE. Two subscales were also given. Both were four-item sub-scales used to determine students' perceived enjoyment (subscale one) and perceived effort (subscale two) using a 6-point Likert-type scale. The surveys in total took around 30 minutes. Answers to surveys were anonymous.

Zhao and Li reported that the “aggregate scores were calculated by summing all responses for each subscale and dividing by the relevant number of items per subscale, including perceptions of teachers' caring behaviors, perceived effort, perceived enjoyment, attitude-usefulness, and attitude-enjoyment” (Zhao & Li, 2016, p. 517). The researchers completed an exploratory factor analysis to “validate the measurement of perceptions of teacher's caring behaviors” (Zhao & Li, 2016, p. 517). Zhao Cronbach's coefficient alpha analyses, MANOVA and ANOVAs were conducted for data analysis purposes. The researchers also reported examining the relationship between perceptions of teachers' caring behaviors in PE and perceived enjoyment/perceived effort through two multiple regressions with perceived enjoyment or perceived effort as a dependent variable by accounting for gender, ethnicity, and grade effects.

Overall, the researchers determined there was a strong correlation between teachers' caring behaviors and the attitudes, enjoyment, and efforts seen in students in physical education. Zhao and Li found “evidence supporting a single-factor model and the internal consistency Cronbach's alpha of .98 showed a high degree of correlation

among all items from the three domains: differentiated instruction and feedback, interpersonal rapport, and a positive motivated learning climate” (Zhao & Li, 2016, p. 523). Researchers also recognized that their data and study advanced previous research from 2013, “by providing initial evidence that the construct of perceptions of teachers’ caring behaviors is unitary with a multidimensional given the high correlations between” the three previously mentioned domains. The researchers went on to say that their findings illustrated a strong correlation between those students who reported “high levels of perceptions of teachers’ caring behaviors” and a “higher degree of positive attitudes toward PE” being displayed (Zhao & Li, 2016, p. 523-524).

In a similar study, Sarkova, Bacikova-Sleskova, Geckova, Katreniakova, van den Heuvel and van Dijk examined students’ responses to gauge adolescents’ well-being and self-esteem in the context of relationships at school. The focus of the study was basically to determine how positive relationships with peers and teachers impact well-being, self-esteem and social adjustment. Sarkova, et. al., (2014) stated in the study that “The school environment has shown itself to be an important factor in explaining adolescent behavior. The relationships and experiences that pupils have at school have been found to influence their development, psychological well-being, self-esteem and social adjustment” (p. 367). The researchers also referred to previous studies by Hughes and Kwok (2007) as well as Hawkins and Catalano (1992) and stated, “When students feel that they belong and have supportive relationships with their teachers and classmates, they are motivated to participate more actively in classes and school life. They are also less likely to be involved in problematic behavior such as bullying” (p. 368). The aim of the study was to discover whether:

- (1) there is a relationship between pupil-peer relationships and psychological well-being and self-esteem,
- (2) there is a relationship between pupil-teacher relationships and psychological well-being and self-esteem, and whether
- (3) this relationship varies according to pupils' experience of bullying or being bullied (Sarkova, et. al, 2014, p. 369)

The researchers used a qualitative study to examine student questionnaire responses. They used previous qualitative studies as a framework for their particular study, referring to studies completed by Athanasiades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis (2010) and Thornberg (2010). A sample of 3725 students was taken from eighth and ninth graders from major cities across the country of Slovakia, representing different regions, such as Western, Northern and Eastern Slovakia as well as smaller cities scattered throughout Eastern Slovakia. The student sample consisted of 51% females and 49% males, ranging from ages 11 to 17. The sample was later restricted to 13 to 16-year-olds in order to limit age extremes, which dropped the sample size to 3694 students. Random selection was used to choose schools and classes to survey. After approval was granted for the study, "research assistants administered questionnaires during two 45-minute lessons in a complete 90-minute time period on a voluntary and anonymous basis in the absence of teachers" (Sarkova, 2014, p. 370). They reported a response rate of 93.5% with the absences of responses coming from illness or some other type of school absence the days the questionnaires were administered.

Five areas were measured: psychological well-being, self-esteem, student-peer relationship, student-teacher relationship and bullying behavior. Sarkova, et. al.,



measured psychological well-being using two factors: social dysfunction and depression-anxiety. These two areas were measured using “the 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)” (Sarkova, et.al., 2014, p. 370). The two categories were measured using 6 questions each and “compared how the respondents’ present state differed from their usual state” using a 4-point Likert scale (Sarkova, et.al., 2014, p. 370). Researchers used two factors to measure self-esteem - positive self-esteem and negative self-esteem – with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE). The researchers used four response options for both factors, with answer choices being 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree and 4 = strongly disagree. The score for each ranged from 5 to 20.

The “pupil-peer relationship” was measured using one question but incorporating eight statements. Answers to each statement ranged from 1 to 5, 1 being “strongly agree” and 5 being “strongly disagree”. Fifteen statements were then used to measure student opinions of their teachers for “pupil-teacher relationships”. A 7-point scale was implemented with answer choices ranging from 1 to 5, 1 being “strongly agree” and 5 being “strongly disagree” in regard to questions such as “they like me a lot; they usually praise me; they help me a lot” (Sarkova, et. al., 2014, p. 371). The sum of all questions in regard to “pupil-teacher relationship” ranged from 15 to 105. “Bullying behavior” was the final category measured. Two questions addressed this content within six categories: (1) physical assault, (2) unpermitted borrowing of things, (3) enforcement of senseless orders, (4) ridicule or cruel nicknames, (5) threats, verbal insults, and (6) intimidation.

The researchers reported they first used linear regression in the whole sample “to explore the association between pupil-peer and pupil-teacher relationships and psychological well-being and self-esteem” (Sarkova, et. al., 2014, p. 371). Dependent

variables consisted of “psychological well-being (the depression/anxiety and social dysfunction subscales of GHQ-12) and self-esteem (positive and negative self-esteem subscales of RSE)” (Sarkova, et. al., 2014, p. 371). Sarkova, et. al., (2014) then divided the whole sample into four groups made up of normative contrasts, passive victims, aggressive non-victims and aggressive victims. They reported the use of linear regression in order to “explore the associations between pupil-peer and pupil-teacher relationships with the two factors of psychological well-being and two factors of self-esteem in these four groups. Analysis was carried out using the statistical software package SPSS version 12.1” (p. 372).

The researchers found that the better the relationships with peers and teachers, the better their self-esteem and psychological well-being. They felt found a direct correlation and explained that both the pupil-peer and pupil-teacher relationships “had a strong relationship with all dependent variables ( $p < 0.001$ )” (Sarkova, et. al., 2014, p. 372). In the bullying behavior section, “normative contrasts”, it was found that all pupil-peer and pupil-teacher relationships and the dependent variables were statistically significant, with similar results for grouping of “passive victims”. For “aggressive non-victims”, the same categories were again found to be significant, though the “positive self-esteem factor of the RSE was not significantly related to the pupil-teacher relationships in this group” (Sarkova, et.al., 2014, p. 373). Within the “aggressive victims” section, it was determined that there was a significant relation between pupil-teacher relationships and “social dysfunction” and “positive well-being” but there was not a significant relation to “depression/anxiety” and “negative self-esteem”. It was also discovered that “the

independent variables (pupil-peer and pupil-teacher relationships) explained between 3% and 16% of the variance of the dependent variables” (Sarkova, et. al., 2014, p. 373).

The researchers found that their determinations supported findings within other studies. It was determined that students “who are satisfied with their relationships at school report higher levels of emotional well-being. Those who reported better relationships had better psychological well-being, higher positive self-esteem and lower negative self-esteem” (Sarkova, et. al., 2014, p. 373). The researchers stated, “It could be assumed that the quality of pupils’ relationships with their teachers has important implications for their behavioral adjustment in the school environment and consequently on their well-being and self-esteem” (Sarkova, et. al., 2014, p. 373).

It was also determined that:

The results of the present study show that in the group of the aggressive non-victims and aggressive victims, peer relationships seem to play an important role. Peer relationships can have an important influence with regard to bullying behavior, because they can influence the occurrences of bullying” (Sarkova, et. al., 2014, p. 375).

The researchers also reported that “this study suggests that the school context may have a notable influence on pupils’ general subjective well-being” (Sarkova, et. al., 2014, p. 375). Sarkova, et. al., also felt that changes may be taking place based on the data their study revealed.

The study also described strengths and limitations the researchers encountered. They felt an important strength was that the research sample included students across a wide expanse of the country. The researchers felt this displayed “important information

about the prevalence of bullying in the school environment” (Sarkova, et.al., 2014, p. 375). There were several limitations discussed for the study. One such implication was that, because they had not used a longitudinal study, they were unable to measure causal mechanisms. Additionally, clinical scoring was not used as the focus of the study was not clinical sample. This was mentioned as an area that could be further researched in the future. Another aspect that was pointed out as a limitation is the use of linear regression rather than multiple regressions “which would allow for more precise analysis” (Sarkova, et.al., 2014, p. 375). Finally, it was found that “social desirability should be controlled for in the further analysis. Unfortunately, the current study did not include such a measure” (Sarkova, et.al., 2014, p. 375). Further implications were discussed in regard to prevention. The researchers felt enhancing relationships between students and teachers and positive classroom climates are areas worth pursuing.

In another study, Dr. Julie B. Smart, of Presbyterian College, examined responses of 223 sixth grade science students (quantitative phase) in metropolitan suburban school district in southeastern United States. Her aim was to determine the relationship between student perceptions of teacher-student interactions and motivation in middle level science. Smart’s study was completed using a sequential explanatory model in two phases, the first being quantitative data which informed the qualitative data of phase two. Phase two consisted of 24 student interviews. Smart felt there was a gap in research as students led into higher grades, as much of the previous studies focused solely on elementary grades.

Smart (2014) endeavored to answer two research questions with her mixed methods study:

- 1) What is the relationship between middle level science students' perceptions of teacher-student interactions and their motivation for learning? (quantitative phase)
- 2) How do middle level science students construct perceptions of teacher-student interactions, and how do these perceptions affect their science motivation? (qualitative phase) (p. 4)

In this type of study, “the second qualitative phase helps to clarify and explain results from the first quantitative phase...data mixing occurs between phase and phase two (participant selection) and at the interpretation level (explanatory) after quantitative and qualitative data are analyzed separately” (Smart, 2014, p. 4).

During the quantitative phase of the study, Smart selected 223 sixth grade students from three science teachers within twelve sixth-grade science classes. The demographic background for the 223 students was:

- a) 112 females
- b) 111 males
- c) 64 African American
- d) 126 Caucasian
- e) 14 Hispanic
- f) 12 Asian American
- g) 7 from other ethnicities (Smart, 2014, p. 5)

Smart used the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI), based on a theoretical model of proximity and influence, to assess students' perceptions of student-teacher interactions. She also reported, “The 48 items of the QTI are organized into the following

eight scales: Leadership, Helpful/Friendly, Understanding, Student Freedom, Uncertain, Dissatisfied, Admonishing, and Strict” (Smart, 2014, p. 5). Smart also incorporated the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS) into her study, which “is based on goal orientation theory and was designed to measure relationships between the learning environment and dimensions of student motivation and affect” (Smart, 2014, p. 5). PALS utilizes both student and teacher scales. Students completed QTI, PALS and a task-value scale in the quantitative phase of the study during science classes in the absence of students’ science teachers during the last quarter of the academic school year. Dependent variables in phase one were two goal orientation scales and the Academic Efficacy Scale from PALS, and the students’ reported task value. Independent variables for phase one consisted of the QTI scales for cooperative student-teacher interactions and oppositional interactions.

Smart (2014) utilized multiple regression analyses “to evaluate how well student perceptions of cooperative and oppositional teacher behaviors predicted each of the four dependent variables (mastery orientation, performance orientation, efficacy for learning science, and value for learning science)” (p. 6-7). Smart (2014) also explained that “multiple regression analyses revealed that students’ perceptions of teacher cooperative behaviors were significant predictors of students’ efficacy for learning science, value for learning science, and mastery orientation” (p. 7).

For the next stage of the study, Smart incorporated data mixing for participant selection. Smart (2014) selected students who “reported specified composites of motivation and perceptions of teacher behaviors. The decision to examine high and low extremes of these variables stemmed from a focus on understanding students’ perceptions

relating to higher and lower motivational profiles” (Smart, 2014, p. 8). Student motivation calculation of summative scores were then analyzed to create a sampling for phase two, qualitative data. This phase of the study involved of 24 student interviews “conducted in the school media center at a time that did not compromise the students’ instructional time in the classroom” (Smart, 2014, p. 8). Interviews ranged in length from 15 to 35 minutes.

Continual comparison of data, or the constant comparative method, was incorporated to analyze phase two data as they were collected “and then compared to emergent themes” which were then “compared to successive interview data as categories and subcategories were refined” (Smart, 2014, p. 8-9). Smart then used micro-analysis, open coding after each interview, and axial coding to analyze qualitative data derived from student interviews. It was reported that “159 open codes were identified [which] represented a wide range of dimensions related to students’ construction of their perceptions of teacher interactions as well as their science motivation” (Smart, 2014, p. 9). Open codes were later arranged to create a set of categories and subcategories, then “axial coding delineated the relationship between student motivation and teacher interactions” (Smart, 2014, p. 9). Smart (2014) determined the following during the two (quantitative then qualitative) phases of the study:

- Significant positive correlations were identified between students’ mastery orientation and their perceptions of their teachers’ leadership and friendly/helpful behaviors;

- Significant positive correlations were identified between students' value for learning science and their teachers' leadership and friendly/helpful behaviors;
- Positive correlations were found between students' efficacy for learning science and their perception of the following cooperative teacher behaviors:
  - Leadership
  - Helping/friendly
  - Understanding;
- A negative correlation existed between the oppositional teacher behavior of dissatisfaction and student efficacy for learning science; and,
- Students who reported high motivation and high perception of teacher cooperative interactions described the most instances of teacher cooperative behaviors, such as teacher helpfulness and understanding (Smart, 2014, p. 12).

The study, Smart (2014) reported, that students who “reported low motivation and low perceptions of teacher cooperative interactions described the most instances of teacher oppositional behavior, such as harsh/dissatisfied and impatient behaviors” (p. 14). Additionally, Smart found the students with low motivation also deemed making good grades in science a “means to an end” and they lacked self confidence in regard to their science skills.

Theoretical implications of Smart's (2014) study included:



- Positive correlations between students' perceptions of teacher interpersonal behavior and their science motivation;
- Many students who reported low efficacy for science also reported negative interactions with their teachers, often noting teacher dissatisfaction when students did not understand concepts;
- Students who reported high efficacy for learning science also discussed positive interactions with their teachers, such as verbal encouragement and specific support in understanding science concepts;
- Student value for learning science was positively correlated with cooperative teacher interactions;
- Students who reported positive interactions with their teachers also reported high task value for science;
- Students who reported negative interactions reported low task value for science; and,
- Students who saw the value of science in their daily lives or for the future also enjoyed science (Smart, 2014, p. 14-15).

Additionally, Smart (2014) discovered specific implications for educational practice which included “the potential teachers have to affect elements of student motivation for learning science (p. 15). Prior elementary science experiences created an unexpected implication for the study in that “upon entering the middle grades, some students [had] developed strong problem-solving skills that [allowed] them to be more independent and less reliant on teacher assistance in confronting difficult tasks (Smart, 2014, p. 15). Additionally, all student interviews indicated an increase in difficulty and

higher expectations in sixth grade science. Smart determined that future research endeavors should focus on the impact of other factors on student performance and perceptions of middle level science including student factors, peer factors, family factors, school factors, and cultural factors.

### **Inclusivity**

In a study conducted by Brooks, Adams and Morita-Mullaney, the researchers targeted the link on relationships of school leaders and ELLs (English Language Learners) and how isonomy and fairness can alter the fundamental discriminations these students face. The research completed by Brooks, Adams, and Morita-Mullaney (2010) was strengthened by previous studies that targeted the teacher and administrator roles on the academic success of ELLs. Previous studies that additionally substantiated the work of Brooks, Adams and Morita-Mullaney (2010) also focused on school relationships between ELLs and their teachers and administrators, as well as inadequacies uncovered in regard to resources and support provided to ESL teachers. The information presented in the study conducted by Brooks, Adams and Morita-Mullaney was useful in that it presented insight and varying perspectives on communication and inclusivity of ELL families, both being key elements in successful educational practices. The study found that many administrators rely heavily on ESL teachers to carry the sole responsibility of communicating with and educating this population. Brooks, et.al (2010) noted “In many schools in which we have worked, the ESL teacher becomes a social worker and de facto administrator in addition to being a language and culture broker between students and adults” (p. 2). Many districts in the United States face this dilemma, though the study focused specifically on states in the Midwest. The authors state, “Because of the

achievement gap between ELL and NES (Native English Speakers) students, as well as a shortage of licensed ESL teachers it is clear that the needs of the ELLs cannot be met by licensed ESL teachers alone” (Brooks, Adams & Morita-Mullaney, 2010, p.1).

The researchers conducted interviews with administrators which initially focused on “surface level issues like translating documents, grading policies, and a perceived Latino gang problem...the integration of culture into the curriculum, the development of heritage language classes, and ELL student engagement...contributing factors for ELL students’ marginalization in the school community” (Brooks, et.al., 2010, p. 6). This study could be used to argue that collaboration between school leaders and content teachers is vital to ensure ELLs are well supported in order to demonstrate academic growth while removing social injustice and guaranteeing equity in learning and academic opportunities. Discovering strategies to disrupt the academic obstacles typically faced by ELLs was the proposed outcome of the interviews.

Zollers, Ramanathan and Yu (1999) conducted a qualitative research study “attempting to identify specific educational practices that contributed to the success of a model inclusion program in an urban elementary school” (p. 157). Observations, interviews and document review were conducted within a year-long study to classify the features of an “inclusive school culture” For the purpose of the study, the researchers defined inclusion as “...an educational program wherein students with disabilities learn alongside their age-appropriate aids and services...” (Zollers, Ramanathan and Yu, 1999, p. 157). The authors were also cognizant of the overall school values and beliefs, and its elements in high performance schools. The researchers included 19 research studies that

substantiated the dynamics of successful classrooms, school values and inclusive programs.

Over the course of a full school year, the researchers completed data collection and analysis through the use of descriptive anthropology. Eighteen formal interviews were conducted with the school principal, staff members and parents, though informal interviews generated the most information. The authors used this information to classify occurrences, assess for comparisons and for associations among the groupings. Zollers, Ramanathan and Yu (1999) deduced that though there were effective inclusion systems from school culture, further research needed to be performed to investigate the sources of "...inclusive culture and identity the boundary where the influence of the principal ended, and the other cultural influences began," (p. 165).

### **The Impact of School Wide Behavior**

Waasdorp, Bradshaw and Leaf (2012) addressed the concern of school bullying and peer rejection. The study focused on the use of SWPBIS (School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) and the impact on peer rejection and bullying. The study aimed "to build on prior research documenting the impact of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on school climate and discipline problems to examine the extent to which it affects bullying and peer rejection during the transition into early adolescence (Waasdorp, Bradshaw & Leaf, 2012, p. 149).

Waasdorp, Bradshaw and Leaf (2012) utilized a randomized controlled trial (RCT) within 37 Maryland elementary schools. The study consisted of data derived from 12,344 students and was examined over four longitudinal years. The researchers

implemented a Teacher Observation of Classroom Adaptation Checklist designed to enable participating teachers to make note of differences in student behavior from day to day. Student behavior was observed in grades kindergarten to second grade. Researchers found positive effects from the implementation of SWPBIS across the 37 participating campuses. According to the study, campuses that incorporated a zero-tolerance model experienced more occurrences of bullying and peer rejections than those campuses that implemented SWPBIS (Waasdorp, Bradshaw & Leaf, 2012).

### **Communication**

Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair and Nix (2012) conducted a study in which the purpose was “to explore the effects of one home visit on teacher-parent relationships, teacher-student relationships, student behavior, work habits and academic achievement in the classroom” (p. 24). The researchers also documented the procedure used and outcomes achieved by 60 teachers, PreK – 6<sup>th</sup> grade, who “used home visits as an outreach program for positively impacting the educational lives of problematic students and improving relationships with parents and students” (Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair and Nix, 2012, p. 25).

Each teacher participant selected a student from their own classroom who was especially challenging and whom they felt would benefit most from home visits. Children selected exhibited unfavorable behaviors such as “a negative attitude, poor motivation, or academic problems that might include inadequate work/study habits”. There were seven parts to the study:

- (1) thorough description of the student,
- (2) an academic profile,

- (3) summary of the presenting problem,
- (4) report of the home visit,
- (5) goals established by the parent(s) and teacher,
- (6) a journal of interventions used by the teacher with this student, and
- (7) final reflections (Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair & Nix, 2012, p. 26)

One home visit was arranged for each student with three goals created: (a) build rapport; (b) develop common goals for the student, and; (c) establish a communication system. (Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair & Nix, 2012, p. 27-28).

After one home visit, the findings of the study concluded that classroom interventions and open communication between parent(s) and teacher showed significant positive effects. The researchers found 84% of teachers involved felt there was a “moderately” to “extremely positive” effect overall. Only 13% felt there was little to no effect. Negative outcomes were reported by two of the 60 teachers of the study. Additionally, when reporting the effects of home visits on student-teacher relationships, no one reported a negative outcome, “12% felt the experience had minimal to no positive outcome” and 88% of participating teachers reported a moderately to extremely positive effect on their relationship with the participating student (Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair & Nix, 2012, p. 29-30). Of participating teachers, 75% reported moderately positive to extremely positive changes to classroom behavior, 76% reported the same positive changes to work habits and 78% to academic achievement. (Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair & Nix, 2012). This study reinforces the idea that communication is a key element of student success and building relationships.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

The research questions for this study focused on the types of relationships formed between students and administrators and what part those relationships play in student behaviors most commonly displayed on a specific rural middle school campus, servicing sixth through eighth grades. The role administrators play in this middle school setting was of particular focus in this study.

#### **Research Questions**

Two research questions guided this descriptive case study: (a) What types of relationships are formed between students and administrators? and (b) How are student behaviors impacted by these relationships?

#### **Research Design**

This descriptive case study pursued the understanding of relationships between administrators and students on a rural Texas middle school campus. Creswell and Poth (2018) defined a case study as “the study of a case within a real-life contemporary context or setting” (p. 97). Yin (1994) explained, “The case study .... adds two sources of evidence not usually included in the historian's repertoire: direct observation and systematic interviewing” (p. 8). According to Yin (1994), researchers involved with a case study “rely on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (p.13). As Baxter and Jack (2008) explained, “rigorous qualitative case studies afford researchers opportunities to explore or describe a phenomenon in

context using a variety of data sources” (p. 544). Baxter and Jack (2008) proceeded to illustrate the circumstances in which a case study should be used:

A case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (p. 545).

According to Yin (2003) a descriptive case “is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred” (p. 74). The real-life context in this study aligns with student behaviors on a rural south-east Texas middle school campus and how administrator relationships impact those behaviors.

Studies pertaining to live participants tend to be difficult and relatively unpredictable. A qualitative study is most suitable in this instance because “events are the result of multiple factors coming together and interacting in complex and often unanticipated ways. Therefore, any methodology that attempts to understand experience and explain situations will have to be complex” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 8). As there is little to no previous research examining relationships between students and administrators, a descriptive case study is the best approach as the researcher sought to examine and explain a type of phenomenon, witnessed on middle school campuses. The researcher also sought to explore and describe connections between student-administrator relationships and student behaviors rather than test and confirm a process or episode that was already in place (Sands, 2011, p. 86).



The researcher observed the development and formation of relationships between middle school campus administrators and the prevalent behaviors students present on campus in hopes of determining any connections between them. Interviews of campus administrators guided the inquiry process. Many questions were based on those found within similar research studies examining student relationships with teachers and were used to “stimulate thinking about relationships” (Sands, 2011, p. 87). Much in the way that Sands (2011) used the questions, some of the questions were applied to interviews while others were answered by the researcher to help guide the research. The researcher used questions one through three to guide observations and the development of interview questions. Observations were organic and strictly based on the researcher’s history on campus with the participants. Questions were revised and included in individual interviews. See Appendix B.

1. What is happening on campus in regard to student behaviors and relationships?
2. Who are the involved parties?
3. How do the participants define the situation in regard to behaviors and relationships and what does it mean to them?
4. Do the participants feel it is linked to student apathy, as previously mentioned by the principal?
5. What actions are taking place among the administrators?
6. Are their definitions and meanings the same or different?

These questions were used to guide inquiry and the development of interview questions in the first and repeating cycles.

## **Participant Selection**

Yin (1994) explained that case study research should be comprised of no more than four or five case studies (p. 15). Hargrave Independent School District is a small rural district with a total of four campuses. The researcher has been a member of the middle school staff for four years. The middle school is lead by three administrators. Each administrator was selected to participate in the study. All three administrators have been in education for at least ten years and have held an administrative on the Hargrave Middle School campus for at least two years.

All three administrators were approached individually and personally for recruiting purposes in order to determine their interest in participating in the study. After verbal consent was granted by each administrator, a letter of consent was presented for documentation purposes. Consent forms were signed and then personally retrieved within one week by the researcher.

Administrative participants for this study consisted of one campus principal and two assistant principals. The principal is a white male in his thirties. He has been the campus principal for three years. He served as a high school assistant principal for approximately four years prior to becoming the principal at the participating campus. The two assistant principals have both held their positions for the past two years. They are both Caucasian, one male and one female. Their primary duties on campus pertain to student discipline. The male participant is in his thirties and previously served as an assistant principal on a middle school campus for one year in a neighboring district. The female participant served as a social studies curriculum coordinator for four years in the same district as the participating campus.

## Site Selection

The three administrators participating in the study as well as the school and district were assigned pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of each participant. Approximately two months were spent collecting data through personal, on-site observations and interviews.

**District profile.** Hargrave Independent School District is a small, rural district in the south-east area of the United States. The district consists of four campuses, with a new elementary school set to open for the 2018-2019 academic school year – the early childhood campus, elementary campus, middle school campus and high school campus. The two current primary school campuses are the early childhood center that serves pre-kindergarten through second grade and the elementary campus that serves third through fifth grade students. The early childhood campus is supervised by one principal and one assistant principal. The elementary campus is managed by one principal and two assistant principals. The middle school campus is comprised of sixth through eighth grade students and is overseen by a principal and two assistant principals. The fourth campus in the district, the high school, is operated by one principal and two assistant principals.

According to The Texas Tribune's 2016-2017 demographic report, Hargrave ISD served 3,427 students with an average of 15.5 students per teacher employed by the district. At-risk students comprised 39.9% of the entire student population with a 0.2% drop out rate for the district. Economically disadvantaged students make up 35.7% of the total student population, with 5.7% with limited English proficiency.

Table 3.1 displays student demographics. Of the district's student population of 3,427, the demographic breakdown was as follows:

*Table 3.1 Hargrave Independent School District Student Demographics*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Student Population Percentage</b>
African American	2.5%
American Indian	0.2%
Asian	05%
Hispanic	21%
Pacific Islander	<1%
White	74.5%
Two or More Races	1.3%

Of 221 employed teachers, 0.5% have no degree, 83.6% hold a Bachelor's degree and 15.9% hold a Master's degree. None of the district's classroom teachers hold a doctorate. Table 3.2 illustrates the demographics for the district's employed teachers:

*Table 3.2 Hargrave Independent School Teacher Demographics*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Teacher Population Percentage</b>
African American	2.3%
American Indian	0.5%
Asian	0.5%
Hispanic	5.4%
Pacific Islander	0.5%
White	90.5%
Two or More Races	0.5%

**School demographics.** As of the 2016-2017 demographic report by The Texas Tribune, Hargrave Middle School served 796 students with a ratio of 16.5 students per teacher. At-risk students comprised 51.3% of the entire student population of the middle school campus with. Economically disadvantaged students make up 33.2% of the campus' student population, with 5% with limited English proficiency. Student demographics for Hargrave Middle School closely mirror those of the district, as seen in Table 3.3. The demographic breakdown for the middle school is illustrated in Table 3.3:

*Table 3.3 Hargrave Middle School Student Demographics*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Middle School Student Population Percentage</b>
African American	2.6%
American Indian	0.1%
Asian	0.3%
Hispanic	22.2%
White	73.1%
Two or More Races	1.6%

Of 48.1 employed teachers at Hargrave Middle School, 39.4 hold a Bachelor's degree and 8.7 hold a Master's degree. None of the campus' classroom teachers hold a doctorate. The average teacher experience for HMS was 9.9 years. Table 3.4 displays teacher demographics for Hargrave Middle School for the 2016-2017 academic school year. The teacher demographics were as follows:

*Table 3.4 Hargrave Middle School Teacher Demographics*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Middle School Teacher Population Percentage</b>
African American	6.2%
Hispanic	6.2%
Pacific Islander	2.1%
White	85.5%

Hargrave Middle School employs two counselors, 5 office personnel, 1 librarian and 5 paraprofessionals. Courses offered include, English Language Arts, Mathematics,

Science, Social Studies, Speech, Art, Theater, Choir, Band/Orchestra, Falcon 101, Dance, STEM, Robotics, PE, Athletics, Spanish, Health, Ag, Learning Lab and Creative Explorations. Extracurriculars include Student Council, Guitar Club, Chess Club, Christian Student Union and National Junior Honor Society.

### **Data collection**

Data was collected through personal interviews during the spring semester of the 2017-2018 academic school year. District approval was granted during the spring semester of the 2017-2018 school year, as well, enlisting three administrators as participants for the research study. Procedures for collecting the data were followed using the rules and regulations designed by the University of Houston Internal Review Board (IRB).

Audio of administrator interviews was recorded. Extensive notes were taken throughout the interview process. The researcher completed a Daily Interpretive Analysis (DIA) in which to assemble and interpret the information that was collected. As the information being collected was of a fragile nature in that it could become increasingly difficult to reconstruct information as time passed, it was imperative to complete a DIA after each interview. These DIA positively informed subsequent interviews. The DIA acted as a working hypothesis. Each DIA, as well as notes taken during interviews, were coded with basic identification information including the date, time, location and of the respondent. This identification information was also recorded at the onset of each interview in order to link interviews with researcher notes and DIA. Notes, DIA and interview tapes were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

**Procedures.** The data for this study was collected through interviews – two rounds with each participant. The time period for interview completion was approximately one month. The first round interviews were completed the last week of the academic school year. Second round interviews stretched over a period of two weeks following the close of the academic school year. The initial round of interviews served to gain a basis of ideas, definitions and ideas regarding student-administrator relationships. Individual interviews were conducted in each administrator’s office. First round interviews lasted around twenty minutes each. The responses acquired during the preliminary interviews were compared to locate similarities and differences between the participants. Questions were taken from the list presented in Appendix C. Second round interviews were conducted in various locations, due to the varying availability of the administrators. Locations for second round interviews included the B-Pod hallway of the high school, an administrator’s office and the middle school campus conference room. Each interview lasted approximately thirty-five minutes. The second round of interviews was used to focus on student behaviors and how they might be connected to student relationships with administrators. Questions for the second round interviews were taken from the list presented in Appendix D.

### **Data Analysis**

Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) described qualitative data analysis as a creative endeavor that requires discipline and a systematic approach with no one single best way to manage it. They did, however, define five key components of which researchers should be mindful:



- 1) Get to know your data.
- 2) Focus the analysis.
- 3) Categorize information.
- 4) Identify patterns and connections within and between categories.
- 5) Interpretation – Bringing it all together. (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003, p. 2-5)

The “crux” of qualitative data analysis, according to Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003), includes two elements: (1) identifying themes or patterns in the data, and (2) organizing the data into coherent categories (p. 2). By identifying themes, the researcher is then able to code or label data with short words or phrases in order to sort and categorize the data. Saldaña (2009) explained “Just as a title represents and captures a book or film or poem’s primary content and essence, so does a code represent and capture a datum’s primary content and essence” (p. 3). Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) noted the importance of “read[ing] through the text and find[ing] the themes or issues that recur in data” (p. 3). As the researcher analyzed individual administrator interviews, open coding - the cataloguing of data concepts, and identifying and creating specific groupings based on the data’s properties - was the appropriate choice as a first cycle coding method (Saldana, 2009). Following the open coding of first round interviews, the researcher implemented a second cycle coding method of pattern coding, which searches for the most recurrent or substantial codes, for second round interviews (Saldaña, 2009, p. 48). Daily Interpretive Analysis was completed with each interview to record and highlight ideas, make note of nuances and body language and systematically ensure all relative material was recorded for the purposes of the study. Upon completion of the DIA, personal transcription of the

interview began, enabling the researcher to log details and comments made within the conference.

The researcher coded and categorized data into prevalent themes by hand without the use of a computer data analysis program. Saldaña (2009) defined a theme as “an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded” (p. 13). Using the available literature and the coded data from administrator interviews, the researcher was able to construct interpretations of the data. Many of the themes that emerged from the case study were then used to define implications for future research and practice.

### **Methodological Approach**

Through the process of investigation of observations and interviews, questions derived from observations and interview responses were studied by gathering substantial data (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorenson, 2006). There was a repeated cycle of individual interviews in order to retrieve authentic insight from administrators, beginning with preliminary interviews then progressing with follow up interviews based on the findings and themes from each round of interviews.

Utilizing the constant comparative approach to analyze study data, where each interpretation and result is associated with standing conclusions as it arises, the researcher compared interview responses concerning relationships and student behaviors, looking for connections between the two on the middle school campus. Ultimately, the researcher generated themes that captured the kinds of connections or interactions grounded in the views of the participants: given adequate time, positive relationships typically promote

and encourage positive student behaviors. The following factors were taken into account to ensure the study's trustworthiness:

- The study did not allow for a true random sampling of participants as the study was conducted on one specific rural middle school campus. This campus served around 820 students and was the only middle school in the district. In a larger district, the sampling of participants could be eight to ten times that of this study, allowing for further perspectives to be explored. It would also allow for a larger participant group. With only three participants, results were limited to only three perspectives. A larger number of participants would aid the research by providing a larger number of perspectives, giving a broader, more substantial base to the research study.
- As the researcher was a fellow faculty member, it is possible some responses to interview questions were slightly skewed. Having a non-staff member complete the interviews could open the door to greater insight and open responses. It could also alleviate any stress or concern participants might have had concerning the relation of the researcher to the participants as a fellow staff member. One comment made during interviews was, "Do I give the cliché answer or an honest answer?"
- Additionally, it should be mentioned, responses did not seem to fully align with the researcher's experiences on campus. This was a concern as a researcher who had the opportunity to form organic observations over a period of three years with one administrator and two years with two campus administrators.

**Credibility.** To ensure credibility, the researcher has “prolonged engagement” in education as a teacher with seven years experience in the classroom and four years as a staff member for the participating campus (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Because of this experience, the researcher is also a persistent observer, often observing phenomena and identifying situations that are relevant to any problems seen. Audio recordings were created to ensure accuracy in responses and transcription. Conducting two interviews with each participant permitted the researcher to marshal dissimilar physiognomies from each and reference observations from individual interviews to reinforce the credibility of the study.

**Transferability.** Merriam defined transferability as “the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (as mentioned in Shenton, 2004, p. 69). The researcher provided a detailed description of the research setting and process to help readers recreate the entire research method. Through the descriptive method of this study, researchers should be able to apply their individual positions and situations to devise conclusions and determine to what extent they can apply the findings of the current study to their own preferred field of study.

**Dependability.** The researcher took detailed notes of participant responses and reactions as well as their actions on the participating campus to ensure the study could be replicated by other researchers in the future. Audio recordings were also acquired to ensure accuracy of participant responses.

**Confirmability.** Shenton (2004) explained confirmability to be “the qualitative investigator’s comparable concern to objectivity” (p. 72). With this in mind, the researcher compiled raw data in the form of audio recordings, transcriptions and coding

to ensure confirmability and verify results. Materials submitted with the study include the study proposal, instrumentation materials and research questions as tools to establish confirmability.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

The purpose of this research study was to determine the types of relationships garnered between students and administrators on a rural middle school campus and the impact those relationships have on student behavior. As stated in Chapter III of this study, the preliminary interviews were designed to ascertain administrator perspectives on the topic. Secondary or follow up interviews were then used to focus responses on personal relationships, impressions and reactions to student behaviors. This was accomplished by reviewing each participant's responses and comparing those to the other participants' responses.

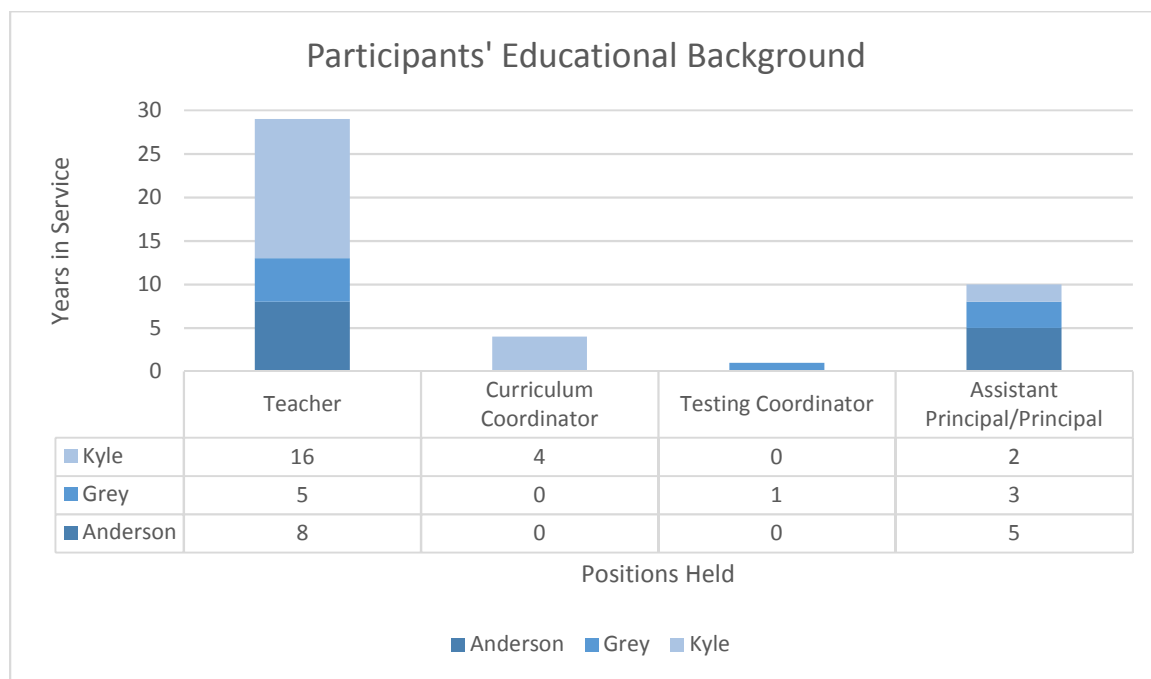
#### **Preliminary Interviews**

Preliminary interviews were conducted on the Hargrave Middle School campus during the last weeks of May 2018. The school's principal and two assistant principals, as previously stated, were each interviewed twice in order to gain significant insight from each. All participants were interviewed individually. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. The preliminary interview of Samuel Anderson was performed in his office, while the follow-up interview was conducted by phone in the campus conference room. The two interviews conducted with Thomas Grey took place in Grey's office. Brandy Kyle's interviews took place in two different areas. The first interview was conducted in Kyle's office, while the second interview was administered in the B-Pod hallway of the high school during the second week of summer school.

## **Findings from First Round Interviews**

**Participants' educational background.** During preliminary interviews, a number of questions were asked of the administrators to gauge their background and experience in education. The education and experience of Samuel Anderson spanned 14 years – 8 as an agriculture teacher, 4 as a high school assistant principal and 3 as an administrator for Hargrave Middle School. Thomas Grey's career in education has spanned 9 years with five of those years being within social studies education. Grey also served as a campus testing coordinator for one year, one year as an assistant principal at a neighboring district and two years as an administrator for Hargrave Middle School. For the past 22 years, Brandy Kyle has worked in education, first as a Family and Consumer Science teacher for a year, the next 15 years as a Special Education teacher, four years as a Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator and two years as an administrator for Hargrave Middle School. Chart 4.1 illustrates Hargrave Middle School's administrator experience in education.

Chart 4.1 Participants' Educational Background



**Participants' perceptions of the importance of administration.** Participants were asked what they felt was the most important aspect of administration in public school. The three principals' answers varied. Anderson stated that it was important to remember what your job is as an administrator, that "you have the ability to positively or negatively affect a lot of lives...always put yourself where they are and make decisions that's best for that person in that given moment". Grey felt consistency and respect – both given and received - were the most important aspects of being an administrator in public school. Building relationships with students, staff and parents ranked at the top of Kyle's list of most important aspects.

When asked if those key aspects changed for specifically middle school, each administrator felt their answer was more prevalent and important at this level. They each



felt, respectively, that lives and paths can and are shaped more at the middle school level, that respect should be more prevalent and evident, and relationships are significant, though often times the “parent piece” is lost.

Good schools are comprised of a multitude of elements the three principals of Hargrave Middle School agreed. When asked what makes a good school the three participants again had a variety of answers. To preface his response, Anderson asserted his viewpoint changed when he transitioned from assistant principal to principal. As principal, Anderson felt organization was an essential element. He explained that without organization there was no flow. He mused that the number of awesome teachers and amazing students did not matter if there was no “organized madness”.

Grey took a different perspective on the topic by explaining that a good rapport with students, staff, parents, and community was essential. He also felt open communication was an essential element of a good school. Open communication was imperative between administration and staff, between individual staff members, and between students and staff, claimed Grey, in order to be classified as a good school. Grey also felt it was important to have a friendly inviting place where people feel comfortable.

Kyle had similar ideas to declaring that teachers need to work well together and support each other. School spirit and school pride were also listed as prominent aspects of a good school. Additionally, Kyle felt a good school meant that students should know the campus expectations, and boundaries should be set for students at this crucial age.

Within the halls of a good school, there must be good administrators. This begs the question *what is a good administrator?* As is common in interviews, the responses from Hargrave Middle School's principals were varied. Each participant had multiple

responses and ideas. Kyle believed a good administrator can read the situation as they enter the school. For instance, if a school is a mess as the principal is brought in and changes need to be made, the school may need an administrator with a strong hand. Kyle also explained the other side of that. If a principal is brought in to run a school that is running smoothly, an administrator needs to know how to sit back and observe rather than rock the boat. Kyle added that an administrator should be flexible, a good listener and communicator and should not take things too personally. Most importantly, Kyle felt a good administrator should love what they do.

Anderson explained two things he felt made him a good administrator and that he felt were important to keep in mind. First, Anderson felt an administrator should always put themselves in the shoes of the other person in an issue. He said he always wanted to keep in mind how the other person might feel and move forward with that in mind. Second, Anderson said it was important to remain as consistent and fair as the situation allowed. He mentioned a mentor who remarked that staff should know the answer before they come in to ask in regard to consistency.

Grey remarked that he often questioned whether he himself was a good administrator admitting that he appreciates feedback and questions his administrative abilities. He also suggested that when he stops questioning his abilities, he needs to leave education for good. Grey believed a good administrator was a good communicator. He believed a good administrator left the decision-making in the hands of the teachers. Grey also believed good administrators made changes in the best interest of the campus and

ensured buy-in from staff before changes took place. Table 4.2 illustrates responses administrator responses in regard to good schools and good administrators.

*Table 4.2 Administrator Perspectives of Good Schools and Good Administrators*

						Loving What you do
	People Feel Comfortable	Expectations and Boundaries for Kids			Personal Reflection On Leadership	Good Listener
	Friendly and Inviting	School Spirit			Should Be Buy-In For Changes	Not Taking Things Personally
	Open Communication	School Pride		Fairness and Consistency	Decision Making Should Be in Teachers' Hands	Good Communication
Organization	Good rapport	Supportive Teachers That Work Well Together		Put Yourself in Their Perspective	Good Communication	Flexibility
Anderson	Grey	Kyle		Anderson	Grey	Kyle
Good School				Good Administrator		

**Relationships.** The available literature discussed the impact of relationships on a middle school campus. Those relationships are essential for the well-being of adults and children alike. According to Russell (2009) the definition of a relationship is trust (p. 676). Precey (2012) believe that “trust is indeed the magic glue that binds school communities together. Trust is a firm belief in the reliability of a person and is exhibited by interpersonal regard” (p. 15). Brewster (2003) extended that description by expressing “Openness is crucial to the development of trust between supervisors and subordinates, particularly in times of increased vulnerability for staff” (p. 5). When discussing relationships built with adults on campus, however, Anderson used intrinsic measures

like popcorn and “Sonic runs” to build connections with teachers. He did mention that those types of things had basically fallen to the wayside during the 2017-2018 school year, due to the rough start to the year. Anderson regarded the administrative role as more of “a leader role, a coach role”, explaining that schools must have the best players on the field. He stated “sometimes you have to cut some of those players” which he felt made relationships with adults good and bad. He regarded the school as a professional business with decisions being made for the betterment of the campus. Anderson stated that sometimes those decisions aren't always viewed positively which, he felt, had an impact on relationships.

In opposition to Anderson’s responses, Grey and Kyle took a differing perspective on their relationships with adults. Grey and Kyle felt their relationships with adults were good as they tried to remain pleasant and approachable. Kyle mentioned, however, the complications of transitioning from a teaching position to an administrative position. She believed a line was drawn, distancing her from the teachers with which she had initially created positive connections as a teacher. Kyle felt this caused difficulties in that a leader in this situation had to, in a sense, cut ties with coworkers they had become close to. Grey felt it was important to have an open-door policy and to make himself available when staff members needed to talk. An aspect he tried to keep in mind is “sometimes people just need to vent”. Grey admitted to working hard to make sure the entire campus is working toward the same goal. In regard to promoting or building relationships with adults, Kyle’s and Grey’s responses incorporated relational aspects such as small talk, keeping an open-door policy and asking people about themselves.

As the conversations moved into the issue of relationships with students, the views of all three principals were relatively similar. All administrators felt they had connected with students and had built positive relationships with the children on campus. Kyle equated good student connections to her ability to “adjust to the quiriness” of students at this age. She felt she was able to see beyond students’ bad days and hormones, caring only that they had someone they could talk to, a place to calm down or just someone who cared enough to let them be themselves. Grey explained that approachability was a key to building relationships with students. He also felt an evident line should be maintained between student and administrator. Anderson expressed pleasure in maintaining a positive role with students without the need to issue discipline. He felt this added to the positive role he maintained with students on campus.

To promote and build relationships with students, Anderson said he made himself visible to students in the morning, greeting them with as “Good morning, I’m glad you’re here” or by offering a high five or a hand shake. He stated that being visible and conversing with students in the hall is “the best way to let students know you care, that you are taking their best interests to heart and that you really do care about them”. Anderson also mentioned that he mentored a couple of students each year.

Grey felt it was important to ensure the students were aware of campus expectations, while also celebrating the positives with them. Listening and communicating were also important factors in building and promoting relationships with students, Grey believed. Kyle had similar responses, focused on the whole child. She mentioned how important it was to get to know the students as individuals and seeing those differences in them. She also mentioned the importance of determining student

triggers in regard to behavior. According to Kyle, important elements of building relationships with students was asking them things about themselves and following through on conversations and information provided. She said it was imperative to understand their middle school quirks and differences. Kyle also stressed the importance of treating each day as a new day with a clean slate. Additionally, Kyle reported that it was important to remain non-judgmental when relating to students.

Interview responses from all three participants indicated that Kyle and Grey spent much more time with students than Anderson. Anderson felt this could be attributed to the roles played by the administrators – assistant principal versus principal. Anderson commented that in past years he held monthly meetings with the student council to “hear their voice” – to discuss their concerns, ideas and opinions. He reported that finding time and a purpose to meet with students was an issue. He also stated that it was different when he was an assistant principal and even his first year on campus, during which he handled eighth grade discipline. This allowed him more time to get to know students. According to Anderson, during the 2017-2018 school year, when he was on campus and was not already meeting with someone, he made a point to be in the hallways during passing periods. This permitted him time to compliment students, check on how they were doing, check for IDs and be visible to students on campus. His conversations with students tended to vary between discipline, life, grades, family, even sports.

When meeting with students, which happened quite often every day, Grey felt it imperative for students to know his expectations of behavior, honesty and respect. He explained to that he would never call a student out in front of their peers, demean or embarrass a student and he expected the same treatment in return. He tried to get to know

students personally by checking on their well-being, asking about their family, checking their grades and joking around when it was appropriate. He often made himself available for student conversations throughout the day in the halls and in the cafeteria at breakfast and lunch.

Kyle carried much the same attitude. She made herself available to students throughout the day, conversing with them in the mornings, between classes and at lunch. Kyle remarked that students would often pop in to her office to talk about home, about concerns with teachers or other students, to vent about personal issues. She felt that students liked to talk to someone who is not judgmental, and they could be open with.

The effect of these student meetings and conversations were viewed by administration as mostly positive. Kyle interjected that some kids feel like they have too many things against them at this critical age and that they do not have a chance to be successful. Kyle felt it was important to work them through this and help them progress more positively. She felt strongly that middle school has a huge impact on kids, more so than high school and elementary. Anderson felt that with “the few [he built] relationships with, the results were long lasting. He stated that sometimes with some students “it was hit or miss” as kids this age tended to be “so volatile”. He commented that with some it is good, some bad and some, “it’s just another day”. He was proud to say that he did still have positive relationships with some of his former students. Anderson mentioned these students would sometimes give him a hug and send him thank you notes for the impact he made on their lives. Grey felt students knew that he cared 100% and that he was completely “bought in” to their success, but they also knew there were some things he simply would not put up with.

### **Findings from Second Round Interviews**

During secondary interviews, more focus was given to individualized ideas on students' relationships. It was the purpose of the researcher to learn what impact, if any, these relationships with students had on student behavior within the school.

It was stated by all three administrators that the most prevalent behavior witnessed by students was apathy - a strong lack of disinterest in school and learning. This apathy lead to other behaviors such as sleeping and acting out in class, and refusal to complete tasks. Grey went so far as to say, not only is apathy an issue on campus but across the district. He felt one cause of the district-wide apathy centered upon the lack of a middle class in the community. Grey stated there existed a large group of extremely poor families in the area, and a large group of extremely wealthy families, but a very small group of middle class. He felt this exacerbated the issue of apathy because it created two extremes: (1) a group of overly involved parents who took over for the students by controlling their activities and academics, or (2) a group on uninvolved parents who simply did not have the time to be involved with their child's academic progress, behavior and growth. Kyle agreed apathy was a significant problem for the middle school campus but was far more concerned with the root cause of that apathy than the actual behavior. She felt it was important to determine why students were apathetic rather than simply focusing on the behaviors students were exhibiting due to indifference.

**Student - administrator interactions.** Conclusions drawn from interview responses pointed to limited student-administrator interaction within classroom settings. Anderson and Grey reported spending three to five hours a week in classrooms with



students, however, of those three to five hours, little time if any was spent focused on the students. If the activity in the classroom permitted, questions might be asked of the students, according to the administrators. Questions might include:

- (1) What are you working on?
- (2) What is the objective for the lesson?
- (3) What have you learned from the activity?

All three administrators admitted they did not want to be a distraction in class, so interactions with students were limited. The majority of classroom visits were conducted as “walkthroughs”. Each walkthrough typically lasted three to five minutes, leaving little to no time to converse with students.

Administrator responses indicated very little time was utilized getting to know students and checking on student well-being. Kyle and Grey made the use of lunch periods, about an hour and a half each day, to focus on student well-being and informal conversations as they monitored students in the cafeteria. Anderson stated that as principal he spent very little time, “maybe an hour a week”, conversing with students where getting to know them and their well-being was the primary focus. When students were brought into the office for whatever reason, Grey and Kyle both stated they asked students how they were, how things were at home, and so forth, when time was not an issue.

The researcher attempted to dig deeper and inquire about “volatile” students and the bad days. Anderson said his focus was first on determining why a student was upset. Oftentimes, Anderson stated, the behavior or attitude stemmed from home. He explained

the need to help volatile students make appropriate choices “as far as how we deal with these challenges”. Grey also said, in circumstances with volatile students, the focus was determining what had the student upset and the escalating the situation. Kyle recognized that every child was different. She asserted that some students need time to calm down alone in a quiet space before they will discuss the situation, while other students will open up immediately.

Follow up varied student-to-student and among the three administrators. Kyle remarked that she continued to follow up with students throughout the year. It was important to her to hold those conversations outside the four walls of her office. Sometimes follow-ups were quick check-ins while others were longer conversations. Grey also reported following up with certain students throughout the year, but that it “really depended on the student”. Anderson felt his response would have been different for the 2016-2017 school year. This year (2017-2018) however he stated, as principal, it was typically “a one-time deal”. Anderson's follow-up, he said, usually consisted of a high-five in the hall the next day or telling the student to have a good day, “it really just depends on the student and the situation”.

**Student Behavior.** Hargrave Middle School administrators were asked what they personally do to promote positive relationships and improve student behavior. Responses varied with a focus on celebrating the positives to promote relationships. Anderson felt it was important to acknowledge and “praise the good things”. He reported sending donuts out to students who “had good days” that typically struggled or rewarding students with slushies from the cafeteria. Anderson stated that it was “a celebration of making those positive choices so it's not always about consequences”. Grey asserted that PBIS would

be implemented next year stating, “We don't [currently] do enough. Grey reiterated the importance of building relationships as well as showing “that we are bought in and that we care”. Kyle's focus pertained to modeling behaviors that she expected to see and others.

In regard to improving student behavior, administrators were asked what they personally did to improve those behaviors. Responses were much like those offered previously. Kyle again responded that it was important to model the behaviors expected of students and the importance of explicitly teaching those expectations. She mentioned again the intent of implementing PBIS for the 2018-2019 school year in order to create some consistency across campus. Her responses, though, had little to do with her own personal actions. When asked to be more specific in regard to her own personal actions in regard to promoting positive student behaviors, she stated she wanted to see how the implementation of PBIS affected the campus.

Anderson made the claim that administrator presence in classrooms helped promote and encourage more positive student behaviors. Anderson admitted to struggling with this himself during the 2017-2018 school year and stated that it was a goal for himself next year to be in the classrooms more. He said, “The kids have to see that you care.” Anderson mentioned that can often be shown by congratulating them on a win at the game or asking how they did on a test they had recently completed. He said, “It is all about showing that you care, you care about their well-being.”

Grey felt his support of teachers significantly promoted positive student behaviors. He also stated, “You want to make sure there's no fanfare when you correct a student and when you applaud [a student], make sure everyone sees it!” Grey said he

knows [visibility] is important and tries to be more visible and to sit and work with kids. Grey believed it was important to “get in and get involved”.

Interactions with teachers and students are critical in middle school. Research shows positive relationships and interactions between administrators and teachers greatly contribute to teacher-student relationships, student success, school climate and student behavior. With this in mind, it was the intent of the researcher to determine how often all three administrators met with students, how much of that was centered around behavior and what progress the administrators felt they made towards encouraging positive behavior through those interactions. The researcher felt it important to reiterate that Grey and Kyle each work with specific students. Grey manages students with the last name A through L, while Kyle works with students with the last name M through Z. When discussing percentages, these elements should be considered.

Grey responded that he met with 20 – 30 students a week. Approximately 50% of those visits Grey attributed to behavior issues. He, however, felt he had a strong, positive connection with 85 to 90% of the students he met with each week.

Kyle jokingly asked if meetings were in reference to students they worked with in September or May. She explained there was a vast difference in the number of students she and Grey worked with at the beginning of the year in comparison to the end of the year. During the first nine weeks of school Kyle felt she met with 10 to 20 students a week. By May, however, Kyle said those numbers could be closer to 30 to 50 students a day. Kyle determined of the vast majority of students she met with, 90 to 95% were due to some sort of behavior issue. Kyle also stated that of those challenging students, she had formed strong, positive relationships with 90 to 95% of them, which equated to 70-

75% of students within her alphabet. Kyle noted there were very few [students] that wouldn't open up to her or that had responded negatively to her.

Anderson felt his position as principal drastically limited the number of students he had the opportunity to work with stating he typically met with 5 to 10 students a week. For the 2017 - 2018 school year, most of those encounters were due to behavior issues. He mentioned the number of students he met with for behavior issues was dependent upon the availability of the assistant principals, as they are in charge of student discipline. Anderson stated that for the 2017-2018 school year he had a personal connection with about a third of the students he saw for behavior issues. Some of the challenging students he worked with for the named school year were students who had never exhibited negative behaviors in the past.

All three administrators admitted to seeing improvement in student behavior. Anderson stated he still follows up with former students who are now at the high school. He felt unfortunately some of them were “in the same rut” and had shown no improvement in behavior, regardless of the relationships forged with administration in middle school. Anderson felt strongly that students who get involved in clubs and extracurricular activities in middle school typically improved behaviorally. He said follow up exists with those students and ultimately most students want to report improvement. Those who don't show improvement in behavior, according to Anderson, are those students who “ultimately don't want to change”. Anderson felt most of the students who failed to exhibit improved behaviors were so worried about their image, they did not get involved. He said they send out the message that they simply do not care about school.

Grey attributed improvements in behavior to accountability. He felt the students became more accountable due to mutual respect and evident expectations. Grey also felt that building positive relationships with students contributed significantly to improved student behavior. He felt the lack of improvement in behavior could have any number of causes, including issues faced at home. Grey stated, “You just keep building relationships.”

Kyle agreed she had witnessed behavioral improvement in some students but had also seen “the flip” as well. Kyle said children with no previous behavior issues had suddenly begun to exhibit problematic behaviors. Kyle felt maturity had a lot to do with improvements in behavior. She had similar thoughts to Anderson's in that students who became involved in extracurricular activities tended to improve behaviorally. She said students typically formed relationships with other students who were also involved in those activities. Kyle felt those peer bonds helped problem students correct and improve their behavior. She had no speculation for why some students had not shown improvement and jokingly mentioned that if she could figure that out she would be a millionaire. Kyle did mention that plans for the 2018-2019 school year included a focus on PBIS with mentor groups with “heavy hitters”. Kyle also referred to a plan to “flip-flop” some of those heavy hitters with Grey so that they both had the opportunity to work on forging strong positive relationships with some of their more challenging students.

Finally, administrators were asked about those students with which they had a negative or no relationship. Anderson replied that as a principal there were fewer opportunities to work with students. The majority of a principal's time is spent on “more

of the adult side and all the PR (public relations) stuff”, according to Anderson.

Regretfully Anderson admitted:

I hate to say this because it is a terrible excuse, but there are 820 of them and only one of me. I had a lot more opportunity as assistant principal or even my first year [here] when I was doing eighth grade discipline. Unfortunately, we always say the number one important thing is the kids and that is the thing as the principal that you lose sight of so quickly because of all the other demands of the job.

Grey felt the 10-15% of students he had not formed a connection with were simply students he had not had the opportunity to get to know or that he is still working to break down barriers. Kyle felt she had not bonded with all the students because “some kids are just not going to connect”. She felt it could be because administrators are those responsible for assigning consequences for problematic behavior. Other factors play into the lack of bonds formed, Kyle stated, though he did not elaborate on what those other factors may be.

### **Findings Delineated by Research Question**

**Research question one.** *What kind of relationships are built between students and administrators on the middle school campus?*

The responses from administrators in regard to relationships between students and administrators on the Hargrave Middle School campus varied. Table 4.3 illustrates the type of relationships described by administrator’s.

Table 4.3 Student-Administrator Relationships

Administrator	Relationship	Response
Anderson	<p><b>No Relationship</b> – Anderson had no relationship with 66% of the students on campus. He felt his role as principal prevented this.</p> <p><b>Positive Relationship</b> - Anderson felt he had positive connections with 33% of the students on campus.</p>	<p><i>“I hate to say this because it’s a terrible excuse, but there are 820 of them and only one of me.”</i></p> <p><i>“I personally knew less than what I didn’t. Maybe a third of them I knew and kind of had a relationship with.”</i></p>
Grey	<p><b>No Relationship</b> – Grey felt he had not the opportunity to bond with 5-10% of the students in his alphabet. He felt there were still barriers to work through.</p> <p><b>Positive Relationship</b> – Grey felt he had developed positive relationships with 85-90% of the students in his alphabet. (85-90% of approximately 410 students).</p>	<p><i>“The remaining 10-15% is simply kids I haven’t had the opportunity to get to know.”</i></p> <p><i>“I knew 85-90% of the students I had in my office...the positive relationships have been built...respect is shown to each other.”</i></p>
Kyle	<p><b>No Relationship</b> - Kyle did not have a relationship with approximately 3% of her students simply because there are some kids who will not open up or she does not have the opportunity to meet with.</p> <p><b>Negative Relationship</b> – Kyle felt she had been unable to form bonds with a very small number of students, approximately 2% of her alphabet. She felt it was likely because she assigned discipline consequences for those students.</p> <p><b>Positive Relationship</b> – Kyle felt she had developed positive relationships with 70-75% of the students in her alphabet. (70-75% of approximately 410 students).</p> <p><b>Confidante Relationship</b> – Kyle said there were 20-30 kids who would confide in her, talk to her like they were friends or when they really needed help and support.</p>	<p><i>“There are very few who won’t open up to me.”</i></p> <p><i>“There are very few who...respond negatively.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would say I have a strong, positive relationship with most of my kids.”</i></p> <p><i>“I have 20-30 kids I have more of a confidante relationship with.”</i></p>

The responses from administrators that signified positive relationships, or an awareness of building positive relationships included the following:

*“You have to get to know your kids because they are all so very different.” - Kyle*

*“When I am talking to kids [in the hallway or cafeteria], it is more of a laid-back joking manner.” - Grey*



*“The number one most important thing is the kids.” - Anderson*

*“You will never be embarrassed by me. I will never call you out in front of your peers. I will never do anything that demeans you.” - Grey*

*“There are very few that will not open up to me or that have a negative response.” - Kyle*

*“Giving them a high five and telling them ‘Good morning’ is the best way to just let them know you care.” - Anderson*

*“Because I love them! You know, put your own child in your classroom. Would you want your own child in your office and when you look at it from that approach, I talk to them the way I would want my children to be talked to and treated.” - Kyle*

### **Findings Delineated by Research Question Two**

**Research question two.** *How are student behaviors impacted by these relationships?*

For the most part, from the relationships forged between students and administrators, there seems to be a significant impact on student behavior. Anderson spoke of students who found him to say thank you. He found the affect of positive relationships to be long lasting. Kyle and Grey also reported improvements in student

behavior and explained the need to continue to push forward with students. Kyle spoke fondly of students who come in to chat, to discuss issues they were dealing with at home and to talk through difficulties they were having with teachers or other students. The responses from administrators that signified an impact student-administrator relationships made on behavior included the following:

*“It is nothing for me to walk over to the high school and have kids run over and some give me a hug.” - Anderson*

*“During Teacher Appreciation Week, I got several letters from kids.” - Anderson*

*“The few that I really get to build a relationship with, I think it is long lasting.” - Anderson*

*“I have 20-30 kids that I have more of a confidante relationship with, that will come talk to me about anything.” - Kyle*

*“I feel like positive relationships promote positive behaviors in students.” – Grey*

*“I would say positive relationships do promote good behavior, but it does not always mean you will see good behavior in every student.” - Kyle*

### Emergent Themes of the Research

After collecting and analyzing responses, a few items became apparent. These items appeared again in again in responses from the first round and/or the second round of interviews. As the researcher revisited each element of the study, a series of themes became evident. One of the most significant themes within responses was that of *time*, though others included *school as a business*, *communication*, *inclusivity*, and *human contact*.

**Element of time.** Each administrator brought up the element of time at least once during interviews. This seemed to be the most significant theme overall. All administrators made comments to the effect that student relationships fell to the wayside occasionally due to other demands they faced during their work day. Anderson felt, for one, the natural disaster that struck the area in August 2017 impacted the things they were each able to get to over the course of the school year. The district lost approximately two weeks of school, limiting the period for which the administrators had to complete specific requirements. Along with the researcher's own observations, Anderson also added comments that led the researcher to believe he is off campus regularly. As response to various questions, Anderson mentioned:

Almost like every passing period that I'm on campus...not counting this past year (laughing), this past year was a little different...I did not do that this year. We never even got around to it. I would love to have kids in my office more than what I do. The problem is finding the time...Every time the bell rings like passing

period, that I'm here and not meeting with someone...During a week? How much [time is spent conversing with students]? As principal, very little, so maybe an hour.

Anderson's responses continually followed this pattern. Kyle also suggested it may be a rural school issue. Rural districts often do not have the funds of larger schools in suburban areas, limiting the personnel they have available. This puts a significant strain on the personnel that have to take on more than one roll. Kyle explained her view of the time constraints by saying:

You attend all the 504 and special education meetings for your alphabet. I don't think teachers realize how many times parents just show up in the middle of the day and want to speak with someone and we try to honor that, if possible. You can have one issue and spend four hours on it, especially if you're having to investigate or you're having to go back and watch video. That takes a lot of time. Typing up T-TESS is very time consuming. That takes a couple of hours per teacher once you get everything together, but it's just all the other little things. PTO wants to have a meeting to plan something or you're on a committee for something else. Then there are things from the district.

Counselors, for instance, at Hargrave Middle School manage all 504, Special Education and testing requirements while also meeting with students and parents, attending various district and campus required meetings, and creating schedules for teachers and students. In larger districts, as Kyle explained, there may be one staff

member who coordinates all testing and another who manages 504 requirements. In Hargrave Independent School District, administrators are often called off campus for various meetings and training, frequently missing most of the school day on campus. Additionally, assistant principals wear many hats at one time.

Grey described some of his many roles as behavior specialist, LPAC (Language Proficiency Assessment Committee) administrator, ESL administrator, appraiser for Special Education, some electives courses and Social Studies, ARD (Admission, Review and Dismissal) administrator. According to Kyle and Grey, this seriously limits the amount of time they have to sit down and work with staff and students. Anderson also felt his role as principal drastically limited the amount of time he had to focus on getting to know students and focusing on their well-being. He felt the many obligations he had to adults in the district, as well as public relation aspects and “putting out fires” demanded much of his time and placed major constraints on his opportunities to work with students and be as visible and available to them as he would like to be. Anderson explained:

As principal, you’re dealing with more of the adult side and all the PR stuff... you’re putting out fires, unfortunately...we always say that the number one most important thing is the kids and that’s the things as the principal that you lose sight of so quickly because of all the demands of the job.

**Importance of communication.** Another common aspect of the interviews was communication. Two of the administrators pointed out that communication is an important factor of a good administrator and a good school. Grey noted that communication skills are essential when building connections with students and staff. He explained his own actions in this area by saying:

I try on a daily basis to work on communication and I also try to be approachable...there are days that you have to be serious and you have to make decisions, but there are other days you should be walking around joking, communicating and enjoying the relationships you do have with teachers.

He also discussed the need for open communication between administrators and staff, between individual staff members and between staff and students. Kyle similarly mentioned the need for a good administrator to possess strong communication skills while remembering to be a good listener. She stated that communicating your own wants and needs are important but having the ability to be a good listener without placing judgement is essential to building strong, positive, lasting relationships with others. Grey mentioned approachability and visibility as vital components to communication, as well.

**The importance of inclusivity.** Though inclusivity did not play as large a part in the research as time and communication, it was repeatedly a part of the conversation. Kyle felt it was important to include parents in relationships. Kyle felt including parents in conversations and decisions with students was important in enabling the students to be successful and mature. She also commented that sometimes when you have the parents

on your side, and you have built those relationships, it is easier to reach the student which in turn promotes more positive behaviors Kyle's words were:

I would say [the most important aspect of public school] is probably building relationships, not with just your staff but with your students and the parents because it is all one big circle that works together.... Parent communication and contact is key, too. If you can get parents on your side, then that helps, too.

Grey spoke of the importance of teacher and student buy-in. He also commented multiple times on the vital aspect of showing students that administrators are bought in to their - students' – success. Grey also mentioned the importance of including teachers in the decision-making processes on campus. He explained that this enables buy-in from the stakeholders who will ultimately be constructing changes. Grey stated:

You've got to...make sure the decision-making is in the hands of the teachers.

You don't want to go around managing. You want to lead change and you want to make sure that the change that is happening is in the best interest of everyone on campus and that they are bought into it, as well.

Once students see administrators and teachers care about their well-being, relationships can form, barriers can be broken down and student success can progress.

**Human connections.** The fourth theme uncovered is relatively basic, however, through administrator interviews, it was the missing piece in some aspects. Schools are comprised of people, many people – community members, school board members,

district staff, campus staff, parents and students. In several administrator responses, it was not apparent where people fit into the equation. It was mentioned that to build relationships with staff members, popcorn and Sonic runs were offered. It was also noted that, if the district allowed such a thing, jeans week would be offered for teachers. During another section of the interview process it was mentioned that donuts and slushies are offered to students in order to promote positive relationships. Anderson explained:

With teachers, it is often the small things like we try to do popcorn, and before, we did like Sonic runs and typically it's the small things. I would love to give jeans week and jeans passes, but that's not something that in our district that we do...typically it's celebrating...middle school kids love those slushies in the cafeteria. We've had some times when we've had extra donuts and we had a few kids who had been doing really good, hadn't had some discipline issues so we send a donut out for them, something like that.

Relationships, however, are built through interaction rather than material elements. Interactions depend on people. Connections and relationships were often based around extrinsic motivators and what material items could be provided to students and staff. Conversation and human interaction seemed to be a missing element in this leadership position.

**School as a business affair.** The final theme that emerged through the interview process was the vision of the school as a business. The researcher was told by administration "School should be run like a business" and it is. It was also mentioned



during the interview process that “it is all business...it is professional”. In many aspects, business is sans people. In business, people are put in charge of certain things. Those people then observe others to watch for mistakes. There is rarely interaction between the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the consumer of the product being offered. In this case, education of the student is the product being offered. There is limited interaction between the administrator in charge and the consumer, the students. Administrators on the Hargrave Middle School campus felt strongly that leaders should model the behavior they expect to see in others. While analyzing the data, it was apparent Anderson spent much less time with students than Kyle or Grey. It was indicated that Anderson dealt more with the adults on campus than students. Anderson commented:

I think my relationship [with adults on campus] would be that it’s just a leader role...with the demands that the state gives us and my bosses give us and that society gives us, I kind of look at it as more of a coach role. We have to have the best players on the field and unfortunately that means (laughs) you have to cut some of those players. It’s just part of the game. It’s all business and that’s the thing you have to remember. It’s professional, you know. It’s all business.

This was the modeled behavior. As observed from the quote above, there was also a strong indication that Anderson felt school was a business with a focus on consequences rather than acknowledgement, appreciation and relationships.

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusions**

The final chapter of this study will provide a summary of the various parts of the case study including a summary of the findings and their relation to the available literature. This chapters begins with an overview of the purpose and methodology of the study. The next section will discuss implications for future research and practice.

### **Overview of the Study**

The impetus for this study came from a rural middle school principal's declaration of student apathy as the most prevalent issue faced on his sixth through eighth grade campus, as well as his belief that schools should be run like a business. Because the researcher witnessed first-hand the student behaviors and student/staff interactions over four years on the Hargrave Middle School campus, the question then became whether there was a connection in student behavior and student-administrator relationships. The researcher was approved to conduct a case study on administrator to student relationships through interviews of the three campus administrators in order to attempt to determine the impact on student behavior of 89i08uuuuuuuuuuui the relationships students made with administrators on the sixth through eighth grade campus in this small rural Texas town.

Student apathy and problem behavior on the middle school campus are growing concerns. Research shows there may be a connection between student relationships and student conduct. This case study examined the student relationships with administrators

and the impact of those relationships on student behavior. Interviews were used to examine student to administrator relationships. The major objectives of the data collection effort were (a) to identify if links exist between student behaviors and student-administrator relationships through respondents' comments, and (b) what those links might be.

Two private interviews were conducted with each of the three Hargrave Middle School administrators for a total of six interviews. Preliminary interviews discussed the administrators' background in education and how they came to be administrators. Questions also gauged perspectives on relationships with adults and students on campus and how those relationships are built and promoted. The second series of interviews examined the various ways that administrators interact with students as well as administrator perspectives on the impact of those interactions.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Based on the review of literature and the research conducted for this study, future investigations around school administrators' relationships with students and the impact they have on student behavior could be expanded. The current study focused on one rural middle school campus. Future studies could focus on multiple campuses, urban areas, and on suburban areas. Many studies already indicate positive student behavior outcomes when relationships are developed with school teachers. There is potential for research to find the long-term effect on student behavior. This could be expanded more to focus on students that move from one school district or campus to another or when students transition from middle school to high school. These suggestions are consistent with Kim's, et.al. (2014) findings which indicated, "These struggles may be magnified when

students are undergoing a transition to a new school during the early adolescent period” (p. 28).

Much of the current literature included studies based around school-wide approaches including Waasdorp’s, et.al. (2012) study regarding SWPBIS (School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports) and Stetson’s, et.al. (2012) study on character education. Benefits could be shown to have concentrated efforts from school leaders on improving behavior with similar methods and interventions on teacher-identified students with troubling behavior, such as the home visits conducted in the Stetson (2012), et.al. study. This practice and subsequent study could show teacher perspectives on feelings of administrator support, while also enabling relationships to flourish and decrease disciplinary actions. Future research could emphasize the overall impact of behavior on student achievement. Additionally, future research could seek to indicate the connections between administrators developing relationships through character education and community engagement from students.

Student perspectives on administrator-students relationships could be studied. The current research study focused solely on administrator perspectives. It would be interesting to see the student point of view of the subject. It may be enlightening to hear how extrinsic motivators influence student relationships, academic success and behavior at the middle school level.

During the interview process of the current case study, the issue of tracking behavior was mentioned. Current literature shows a decrease in negative student behaviors, as indicated by the findings in a study conducted by Scott, Hirn and Barber (2012). A future study could examine the tracking process at Hargrave Middle School to

determine: (1) when behaviors occur most often, (2) what teachers report the most issues, (3) what those issues are, (4) what students are being referred most often, (5) are new teachers reporting behavior more often than seasoned teachers, and (6) does this impact teachers' relationships with students?

Additional research could also investigate the impact of extrinsic and intrinsic motivators for apathetic staff and students. Research shows relationships are essential to teacher satisfaction and retention as indicated by Maslow (1970), Bolman and Deal (2003) and Johnson, et. al. (2005). The use of extrinsic motivators is generally not effective in teacher retention, however, future research could examine the use of particular motivators, as mentioned in the current study, in regard to student success, student behavior and teacher satisfaction and retention.

### **Implications for Future Practice**

A number of implications for future practice were identified within the current case study. The following ideas were generated by administrator responses and researcher observations conducted on the Hargrave Middle School campus. These implications are based on research and can be used to improve educator and administrator practices across districts and campuses.

The first implication that emerged from the study of administrator perspectives on the impact of student-administrator relationships developed around extrinsic motivators that are sometimes provided to students and staff such as popcorn and "Sonic runs" for teachers and donuts and cafeteria slushies for students. According to researcher observations, items were seldom delivered by administration. Office staff or an

instructional coach typically delivered popcorn and Sonic drinks. It is suggested a more hands-on approach be used on campus to build relationships with teachers and students. Perhaps Hunter (1998) stated it best when he said, “The role of the leader is to serve” (p. 62). Serving others means getting your hands dirty and doing for others rather than having others do for you.

Another implication indicated from administrator responses was the staff-administrator relationship. Anderson commented that school is a business, it is professional, and that his role on campus is “just a leader role” indicating there is no real effort to build relationships with staff. Hunter (1998), explains that the key to leadership is “accomplishing the task at hand while building relationships” (Hunter, p. 41). Hunter (1998) also explains that truly excellent leaders are accomplished at developing healthy relationships. Bolman and Deal (2003) also indicated the need for relationships when stating “People and organizations need each other...When the fit between individuals and systems is poor, one or both suffer” (p. 76). With this in mind, the researcher would suggest all levels of administration consciously and deliberately find ways to connect with staff. Recognize the good in others and acknowledge those areas regularly. Katz (1974) noted that skilled administrators work “to create an atmosphere of approval and security in which subordinates feel free to express themselves without fear of censure or ridicule” (p.13). Wendel, Hoke and Joekel (1994) also noted, “Effective school administrators need to be able to create a feeling of belonging, involvement and a sense of personal control among the school community: students, staff and parents.” It is suggested that strong, positive relationships between staff and administrators would

strengthen the school climate at Hargrave Middle School, which in turn would improve student success and behavior.

Scheduled classroom visits are another implication for future practice for educational leaders. The Hargrave Independent School District Staff Handbook states, “In order to build relationships with students, we must exhibit behaviors that build those relationships”. It is suggested that campus administrators schedule regular classroom sessions to work with students and build stronger connections. As Grey noted during the current study, it is important to get in the classrooms and work with students to show that administrators view students as the priority.

Andrews and Soder (1987) defined the successful educational leader as a principal behaving at high levels in four areas, one of which was “as a visible presence” stating “the principal is out and around in the school, visiting classrooms...holding spontaneous conversations with staff and students” (p. 9-20). This would support Grey’s comments of the need to be more visible and work with students in classrooms.

An additional implication for leadership is focused on relationship building and student behavior. Capturing Kid’s Hearts (CKH) is currently implemented on all campuses of Hargrave Independent School District including the middle school campus. Each new hire for the district is sent to CKH training. According to the Flippen Group (2016):

CKH training is an immersive, participatory experience [in which participants] learn and practice skills they will use and model in their classrooms, schools, and district including:

- How to build meaningful, productive relationships with every student and every colleague
- How to use the EXCEL Model of teaching to create a safe, effective environment for learning
- How to develop self-managing, high-performing classrooms using team-building skills and a Social Contract
- High payoff techniques for dealing with conflict, negative behavior, and disrespect issues (p. 1).

The Flippen Group (2016) reports, upon proper use of the program, improvement in the “five key indicators for school performance: fewer discipline referrals, improved attendance, higher student achievement, lower dropout rates, and higher teacher satisfaction” (p.1). The program is also designed to be a “transformational, multi-year process” (The Flippen Group, 2016, p. 1). The researcher suggests a campus wide update training using the CKH techniques. If the focus of training is building relationships and improving student behavior, annual review of the CKH techniques would be beneficial to each staff member, including administration.

One final implication of the study relates to the leadership styles and types described in Chapter 2. As communication is a key element of every leadership style, a focus should be placed on this component. A school cannot run efficiently without communication. Bennis pointed out, as seen in Anyamela, a leader does the following:

- Creates a compelling vision
- Creates a climate of trust



- Creates meaning
- Creates success
- Creates a healthy and empowering environment
- Creates flat, adaptive, decentralized systems and organizations

None of these aspects of leadership are possible without communication and a focus on human connections. It is the researcher's suggestion that leaders on the Hargrave Middle School campus undergo training tied specifically to leadership styles, communication skills and human connections. With a focus on these skills, it is believed staff satisfaction, student behavior and student achievement would improve.

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Appendix A



APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

May 17, 2018

Michelle Parker

[mparker@huffmanisd.net](mailto:mparker@huffmanisd.net)

Dear Michelle Parker:

On May 16, 2018, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	A Descriptive Case Study on Administrator Perspectives of Student Relationships on a Rural Middle School Campus
Investigator:	Michelle Parker
IRB ID:	STUDY00000961
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded, Grant Office ID: NA, Funding Source ID: NA
Award ID:	NA;
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• District Approval, Category: Letters of Cooperation / Permission;</li><li>• Consent Form, Category: Consent Form;</li><li>• Preliminary Interview Questions, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);</li><li>• IRB Protocol HRP 503, Category: IRB Protocol;</li></ul>
Review Category:	Expedited
Committee Name:	Not Applicable
IRB Coordinator:	<a href="#">Danielle Griffin</a>

Appendix A continued

The IRB approved the study from May 16, 2018 to May 15, 2019, inclusive.

To ensure continuous approval for studies with a review category of “Committee Review” in the above table, you must submit a continuing review with required explanations by the deadline for the April 2019 meeting. These deadlines may be found on the compliance website (<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/>). You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking “Create Modification/CR.”

Appendix A continued



For expedited and exempt studies, a continuing review should be submitted no later than 30 days prior to study closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted on or before May 15, 2019, approval of this study expires and all research (including but not limited to recruitment, consent, study procedures, and analysis of identifiable data) must stop. If the study expires and you believe the welfare of the subjects to be at risk if research procedures are discontinued, please contact the IRB office immediately.

Unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB, use the stamped consent form approved by the IRB to document consent. The approved version may be downloaded from the documents tab. Attached are stamped approved consent documents. Use copies of these documents to document consent.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

Research Integrity and Oversight (RIO) Office

University of Houston, Division of Research

713 743 9204

[cphs@central.uh.edu](mailto:cphs@central.uh.edu)

<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/>

## Appendix B

### District Approval Letter

September 20, 2017

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
University of Houston  
4800 Calhoun Road  
Houston, TX 77004

Dear Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Huffman school district, I am writing to formally indicate our awareness of the research proposed by Mrs. Michelle Parker, a doctoral student in the Department of Ed. at the University of Houston main campus. We are aware that Mrs. Parker intends to conduct her research by administering six interviews - two each - with our three middle school administrators. Mrs. Parker will work with the Hargrave Middle School principal, Samuel Anderson, to arrange the proper time and location for each interview.

I am the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. I am responsible for decisions regarding research completed within the Hargrave School District. I therefore, grant Mrs. Michelle Parker permission to conduct her research at the Hargrave Middle School campus.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact my office at (555)555-5555.

Sincerely,

Dr. Nathan Johnson  
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction  
Hargrave Independent School District

Appendix C

Consent Form



**Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study**

Title of research study: **A Descriptive Case Study on Administrator Perspectives of Student Relationships on a Rural Middle School Campus**

Investigator: *Michelle Parker*

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?

We invite you to take part in a research study because **you are and administrator on a rural middle school campus.**

This research is being funded by **NA**

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide, and can ask questions at any time during the study.

Why is this research being done?

*There is a wide range of research that has examined teacher-student relationships and how they relate to the climate of a school and how these relationships connect to student behavior. This study will look at administrative perspectives in regard to building relationships with students.*

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for **a time period not to exceed 1 month. The study will consist of 2 one-hour interview sessions. Due to schedules of administrator and researcher, a window of 1 month will be permitted.**

How many people will be studied?

*I expect to enroll about **3** people in this research study.*

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

*One preliminary interview will be completed to gather perspectives on student relationships. A secondary interviewed will be conducted based on themes or patterns*

## Appendix C continued

*that emerged from preliminary interviews. Interviews will be conducted individually in the subject's own office.*

- *Each interview will take no longer than 1 hour.*
- *Interviews will be conducted in April or May, when permission is granted by the IRB committee.*

This research study includes the following component(s) where we plan to **audio record** you as the research subject:

- I agree to be **audio recorded** during the research study.
  - I agree that the **audio recording** can be used in publication/presentations.
  - I do not agree that the **audio recording** can be used in publication/presentations.
- I do not agree to be **audio recorded** during the research study.

***Recordings will be used primarily for transcription of interviews. You may still participate if you do not agree to be recorded.***

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You can choose not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you. Choosing not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time it will not be held against you.

If you stop being in the research, already collected data **may not be** removed from the study record.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

***There are no foreseeable risks related to the procedures conducted as part of this study. If you choose to take part and undergo a negative event you feel is related to the study, please inform your study team.***

***Will I get anything for being in this study?***

***You will receive a copy of the research at completion upon request.***

Will being in this study help me in any way?

There are no known benefits to you from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to others include insight into administrator perspectives on student relationships.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

## Appendix C continued

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and medical records, to people who have a need to review this information. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number, which will appear on all written study materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from these materials. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this organization, as well as collaborating institutions and federal agencies that oversee human subjects research. This research uses or discloses Protected Health Information as defined by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and you will be asked to sign an additional document to authorize the use of this information.

We may publish the results of this research. However, unless otherwise detailed in this document, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

### Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, you should talk to the research team at [mrparke3@uh.edu](mailto:mrparke3@uh.edu).

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or [cphs@central.uh.edu](mailto:cphs@central.uh.edu) if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.



Appendix C continued

**Signature Block for Capable Adult**

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

_____ Signature of subject	_____ Date
_____ Printed name of subject	
_____ Signature of person obtaining consent	_____ Date
_____ Printed name of person obtaining consent	
_____ Printed name of person witnessing consent process	

*In the future, our research team may be interested in contacting you for other research studies we undertake, or to conduct a follow-up study to this one. There is never any obligation to take part in additional research. Do we have permission to contact you to provide additional information?*

- Yes*
- No*

## Appendix D

### **First Round Research Interview Questions**

Please describe your role on campus.

How long have you served in this position?

What lead you to this position?

In what position did you serve before your current placement? How long did you serve in your previous position?

What is your background and/or past experience in education? For instance, I began my career as an inclusion aide for a fourth grade team. I then taught in a private preschool for two years, etc.

What do you feel is the most important aspect of being an administrator in public school? And specifically in middle school?

How would you describe your relationship with adults on campus?

How would you describe your relationship with the students on campus?

What would you say is the priority of administrators on campus?

What makes a good school?

What makes a good administrator?

What actions do you take to promote and /or build relationships with the adults on campus?

What actions do you take to promote and /or build relationships with the adults on campus?

What affects do these interactions have on students?

How often would you say you formally meet with students? What do your discussions consist of?

How often would you say you informally meet with students? What do those discussions consist of?

## Appendix E

### Second Round Research Interview Questions

- 1) What are the prevalent behaviors you see from students on campus?
- 2) In a given week, how much time would you say you spend in the students' classrooms?
- 3) And of that time, how much of it is spent conversing with students rather than observing teachers?
- 4) When conversing with students in the classroom, what do those conversations typically consist of?
- 5) Aside from passing periods and walkthroughs, how much time would you say you spend deliberately conversing with students where getting to know students and their well-being is your primary focus?
- 6) When a student comes to you on a bad day or you pull a student in to your office on a bad day (for them), what is the protocol for that meeting?
- 7) What type of follow-through exists for those students?
- 8) Do you continue to follow-up with them throughout the year?
- 9) What do you personally do to promote positive behaviors and/or curb negative behaviors?
- 10) Have you seen improvements in behavior in certain students?
- 11) If yes, what do you attribute to those positive changes?
- 12) If no, why do you feel there has been no improvement in behavior?
- 13) As an administrator, what do you feel are actions you can personally take to improve student behavior

Appendix E continued

- 14) Would you say positive relationships promote positive behaviors?
- 15) On average, how many students do you see in your office per week?
- 16) And of those visits, how many would you say are because of behavior issues?
- 17) Of those behavioral issues, how many students involved would you say you have a positive relationship with?
- 18) Why do you feel you do not have a positive relationship with the remaining students (negative or no relationship)?