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A qualitative study of the student culture in a selected comprehensive high school in the United States

by

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For the Major Program

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For the Graduate College
DEDICATION

This
dissertation
is dedicated
to the memory of my parents:
Reverend Freddie Green Sr. and Mattie C. Green
to my children:
Carmen Melissa, Caren Marie, and Cydney Michelle Green
to my mom:
Pearl Davidson

and to my wife:
Cynthia Cross-Green.
Each in his or her way has been an inspiration to me.
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ABSTRACT

Schools today, especially large comprehensive high schools, are besieged with studies, critiques, and proposals for reform. Many critics have exposed factors that contribute to putting our nation at risk because of its schools. Despite reports targeted on the weaknesses of high school education, constructive attempts are being made to study root causes and implement changes that work to improve and make lasting changes in the schools.

As early as 1945, a body of research has focused on improving high schools by fully understanding student culture and promoting ideas and structures which facilitate improvements in student culture. It is believed that significant changes can be made by addressing factors that improve school culture, particularly student culture.

The purpose of this study was to describe the student culture and the organizational factors or school-related factors that influence the student culture. Qualitative methodology was employed, and the study was conducted in two phases during 10 days at Crosstown High School.

During phase 1, data were collected using individual and small group interviews, examining artifacts, and observing students in their daily activities. The interviews were used to gain an "emic" perspective of the shared beliefs, values, and basic assumptions held by students that reflect the students’ culture. Three hundred and twenty-one students in grades 9-12 participated in the research study. The observation of several events and the examination of artifacts supplied valuable information about the student culture of Crosstown High School.
During phase II, data were collected using individual and small group interviews. Interview questions for all interviews were designed to glean information about each of the factors of this study from the experiences of those interviewed. Phase II was also designed to verify the accuracy of the data collected during phase I.

The data were analyzed by the researcher to identify the commonly shared and unique beliefs held by the students. Interview data revealed eight common beliefs among students at Crosstown High School. The essence of the Crosstown High School student culture is stable, strong, and positive. Student engagement factors of school membership and authentic work are present in the students’ beliefs. Six organization systems factors were found to impact the students’ culture at Crosstown High School.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

More than a decade has passed since the United States was branded a nation at risk because of its schools. During that time, we have said goodbye to two presidents who were purportedly concerned about the matter, along with their commissions, promises, and pronouncements. The current President continues to argue the case for reform that he had presented during his tenure as Governor of Arkansas. America’s high schools have been besieged with studies, critiques, and proposals for reform, with large comprehensive high schools experiencing the most severe criticism. Critics have exposed academically weak curricula, neglect of problem solving and high-order thinking, inequitable effects of curriculum tracking, professionally demeaning working conditions for teachers, and in many schools, drop-out rates that exceed 50 percent for minority students. Reports of national test scores and international comparisons continually announce low levels of high school student achievement.


Despite a decade of dialogue and numerous attempts at reform, the complaints remain essentially the same. Our educational system is still at risk. The schools are failing.
(Donahoe, 1993; Maehr & Parker, 1993; Thurow, 1992). Students, their parents, and the communities in which they live are ill-served. The nation remains at risk (Thurow, 1992).


By 1992, despite Sizer's attempts to improve high schools through the Coalition of Essential Schools, little had changed in America's high schools. *The Kappan* (1993) provided a report from the Coalition of Essential Schools that indicated member schools had experienced little significant change because their culture was highly resistant to change. Improving high schools may be contingent upon fully understanding student culture and promoting ideas and structures which facilitate improvements in student culture.

As early as 1945, Allison Davis examined the influence of culture on learning. Davis' research suggested that greater attention must be paid to how culture influences the learning process. He noted in his book, *Social-class influences upon learning* (1948):

All human problem-solving, include cultural learning. Culture, we recall, may be defined as all behavior learned by the individual in conformity with a group. Culture "teaches" the individual not only to recognize certain phenomena, but also certain symbols of phenomena, and the logical relationships among them. Culture also sets the goals of human problems, and teaches the inferences (logic) which people in a particular culture regard as profitable. (p. 59-60)
Contemporary education scholars such as Gay (1981) and Shade (1989) have expanded upon Davis' early assertions by examining the influence of culture on learning with an emphasis on the school and classroom culture. Gay suggested that it is not only important to understanding culture in terms of background (i.e., how it affects the child away from school) but also in terms of the effect on learning of the culture of the educational climate, which she defines as the interpersonal interactions among students and teachers from different cultural backgrounds. The consequence of this attention to culture is a realization that not all environments will be conducive to all students. As many scholars since Davis have suggested, if classrooms and schools are alien to the students then educators will be faced with a much more difficult task than might be the case (Moore, 1993). It is for this reason they advocate that schools must not only change the curriculum of the school but also alter the culture. According to Moore (1993), schools that are restructured engage the curriculum. Staff members talk about how to improve student learning and faculty teaching. Finally, they rarely talk about restructuring, because they know that shifting the components of the institution without transforming beliefs will not result in any significant improvement.

The nature of cultures in organizations such as schools recently received increased interest as a means to understand what characteristics cause certain groups to be more productive. Because culture typically represents those strongly held beliefs, values, and assumptions, some of the needs and desires of culture members are readily visible in the form of "normal" daily behaviors and decisions. Yet, beneath the surface of day-to-day operations lies a history of experience and tradition the strength of which may ever be surprising to culture members. It is this emerging value of the study of cultures, in which the linkages
between beliefs and practices are called into question. Studies that look into the nature of educational organization have led researchers to believe that students have unique quality or culture that is definitely their own.

**Need for the Study**

Schools in urban settings face unique challenges. Often, they are part of a large, centralized bureaucracy that may be slow to respond to the needs of the students. Resources are scarce, and many buildings are in disrepair. The breakdown of the local community structures, gang activity, and widespread availability and use of drugs are some of the external factors that may affect student culture. Students come to school carrying the burdens of poverty, hunger and poor housing. These conditions are the reality of urban classrooms. Nonetheless, research and experience show that it is possible to nurture successful urban students in schools in which collaboration, engagement and improvement can occur (Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Peterson & Brietyke, 1994).

Acquiring new skills and abandoning outdated practices are the prerequisites for schools in the United States to keep pace internationally. Since American students are not keeping pace (Maehr & Parker, 1993; Shanks, 1990; Sullivan, 1990; Thurow, 1992), the logical scenario is that school organizations themselves are not keeping pace. For maximum learning to occur, educational leaders must understand the student culture. Students have a culture that is definitively their own. Encompassed within schools are complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of folkways, mores, and irrational sanctions, and a moral code based upon them. Schools also encompass games, teams and an elaborate set of ceremonies
concerning the games and teams. Traditions and traditionalists wage their world-old battle against innovations in schools.

In order to make positive changes in student behavior, there is a need for studies of the fundamental forces that drive the behaviors that exist within schools. Examining the effectiveness of an organization requires an understanding of the values, beliefs, and meanings that underlie its organizational culture, and the primary source of the motivated and coordinated activities of its members (Denison, 1990). A study of the student culture, the composite of student norms, beliefs and values, can illuminate students’ shared assumptions, what they believe to be important, and, how and why students react emotionally, academically, and physically as they do. A study such as this could provide information needed to fulfill an important need as it relates to enhancing student performance in high schools. Information learned from a study like this could lead to the conscious development of strategies designed to accelerate the rate of student success and the accompanying reform efforts. Consequently, the ability for American high school graduates to compete on an international basis can be enhanced.

Statement of the Problem

There is significant pressure for high schools to restructure to better address the dramatic changes that influence today’s students. When the struggle between traditionalists and innovators becomes evident, the dichotomous nature of student culture begins to emerge. Deal (1993) perceived that student culture is a social invention that gives meaning, stability, certainty, and predictability to its members. Deal wrote that change introduces
disequilibrium, uncertainty, and unpredictability, such that members of the culture develop a sense of being out-of-control. Due to destabilizing influences, the resulting consequences of educational change have often proved to be disastrous to student cultures. According to Deal, symptoms of dysfunctional culture include the loss of faith perception by outsiders as well as a decrease in performance and morale.

In most educational newspapers or magazines, one can find articles criticizing American public high schools for failing to provide a quality education. Indeed, students graduating from United States high schools are perceived to be less prepared to successfully contribute to a rapidly changing world culture than are their German or Japanese counterparts (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Maehr & Parker, 1993; Thurow, 1992; Womack, Jones & Ross, 1990). Knowledge of student culture enables educators to rethink what they are doing to promote student learning in our high schools.

A great deal of school reform aimed at improving public education has not produced significant change, particularly in high schools. Most of these efforts have not looked inside the true culture of schools, student culture, for help in solving public education problems. Even fewer have turned to students, schools’ primary reason for being, as a source of data (Maehr & Parker, 1993). According to Maehr and Parker, the problem with the nation’s schools lies not in the lack of technology, technique, or resourcefulness. Neither does it reside in bad teachers or in irredeemable governance structure. They believe that the problem rests in something more fundamental: in the culture of the students, especially in the definition of the purposes and goals of schooling and the needs and beliefs of students.
The quality of the school environment in which leaders and staff members work is a starting point for improvement, but it cannot be the end point according to Maehr and Parker, (1993). They expressed the belief that students are the ultimate clients and products of schooling, and it is their experience in school that makes the difference. Seeing high school through the eyes of students necessitates understanding the context within which they live.

Despite the fact that increasing student engagement and achievement is the goal of all school reform, attempts to reform high schools generally have ignored the changes in student culture and involved students minimally, if at all. Furthermore, none of the reform efforts considers the problem of introducing new ways into existing social systems (Deal, 1993). Reform efforts that focus through the lens of culture do consider how best to introduce change.

By studying the world of students who are directly involved in the daily mission of public education, educators can begin to learn how to focus change efforts. An audit of the student culture of a large comprehensive high school can reveal what its culture is, the effective practices to continue and the ineffective practices to replace or discard. The vigor to improve culture, once reserved primarily for business, is becoming more and more evident in educational arena (Kilmann, 1989; Stolp, 1994). Knowledge of the student culture of the school is necessary for school improvement efforts to succeed.

**Purpose of the Study**

Understanding student culture is a key to improving education in school organizations. Organizational culture is important because it is vitally connected to
organizational behavior. Although in many respects the culture of each organization is unique, "common ingredients" in student culture have been identified (Lightfoot, 1983; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Sarason, 1990). Schein, (1992) noted that "Culture as a set of basic (shared) assumptions defines for us what to pay attention to, what things mean, how to react emotionally to what is going on, and what actions to take in various kinds of situations" (p. 22).

A significant element in the high school environment is student culture. Researchers have found that healthy and sound student cultures correlate strongly with increased student achievement and motivation and with teacher productivity and satisfaction (Deal, 1993; Furthwengler, 1991; Fyars & Maehr 1990; Stolp, 1994; Thacker & McInesney, 1992). If educators understand student culture—students’ shared assumptions, what they believe to be important, how and why they react emotionally and physically as they do, educators will make better decisions about the educational process. The primary purpose of this study was to describe student culture in a comprehensive high school and to determine the specific elements of the student culture and the organizational factors or school related factors that influence the student culture.

Background of the Study

Studies of organizational productivity and quality in business have revealed the importance of culture. Dr. James Sweeney, former professor of Educational Administration at Iowa State University and now the Superintendent of the Sacramento, California, Unified School District, has been studying culture for more than ten years. Dr. Sweeney’s primary
focus has been on culture in K-12 schools. The current researcher's interest lies particularly with secondary schools because they seem least open to change.

When Dr. Sweeney's work brought him in contact with school district level administrators and school principals across North America, he shared with them information about school culture and its implications for school improvement. He also shared his plans to study student culture, more specifically, the norms, beliefs and values of students and the factors that influence the development of culture. Consequently, educators at six high schools in Des Moines, Iowa (East, Central, Hoover, Lincoln, North and Roosevelt), and five others (Bryant High School in Bryant, Texas; Garfield High School in Akron, Ohio; Crosstown High School in New Orleans, Louisiana; Lake Elsinore High School in Lake Elsinore, California; and Medicine Hat High School in Medicine Hat, Canada) indicated their interest in participating in the culture study. Each of these schools serves a diverse population ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 students.

**Delimitations of the Study**

The current research endeavor involved a case study of the student culture of one high school in urban Louisiana. It was conducted during the 1993-94 school year. Participation of the students was voluntary, with an attempt to recruit an accurate cross section of the student population. This sample was neither purported nor intended to be a true random sample. The students who participated in the study were in ninth through twelfth grade. A limited amount of time was available for the interview and observation process due to this researcher's limitations as well as the limitations imposed by the school schedule.
Students were asked to respond to a series of questions which gave them a chance to talk about the things they value. No direct questions about curriculum, facilities or equipment were asked.

**Research Questions**

The research questions provided the study with boundaries for investigating the school culture of this inner-city high school. More specifically, the research questions provided the theoretical and practical foundation for the interview process. The research questions are related to the fundamental questions of what students believe to be important, and why they react emotionally and physically as they do. The research questions were:

1. What are the common beliefs within the student culture of a large comprehensive high school?
2. What is the relative strength of specific beliefs within the student culture of a large comprehensive high school?
3. To what extent are school membership and authentic work present in the student culture of a large comprehensive high school?
4. What is the student culture of a comprehensive high school?
5. To what extent do organizational systems factors influence the student culture of a comprehensive high school?

**Assumptions**

Assumptions related to the methods and procedures of the study include the following:
1. Students candidly and honestly respond to interview questions.

2. The student engagement questions accurately measure engagement in the educational process.

3. Observed behavior is purposive and expressive of deeper values and beliefs.

4. Interviews of students and observation in classrooms can give valid information to be used to determine student engagement.

**Definition of Terms**

*Authentic work* - The extent to which students consider tasks meaningful, valuable, significant, and worthy of one's effort; work that includes extrinsic rewards, meets intrinsic interests, offer students a sense of ownership, is connected to the "real world", and involves some fun (Newmann et al., 1992)

*Culture* - A set of rules and regulations that establishes or defines boundaries and tells individuals how to behave inside the boundaries to be successful. A set of shared orientations that holds a unit together and gives it a distinctive identity.

*School membership* - The extent to which students see the activities of school as legitimate, deserving of their committed efforts, and honoring them as respected members (Newmann et al., 1992).

*Student culture* - Composite of student norms, beliefs and values influencing the academic engagement of students.

*Student culture elements* - Specific set of norms, beliefs, and values comprising the student culture.
Student engagement - "A student's psychological investment in an effort directed towards learning, understanding, or mastering knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote" (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 12).
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Much discussion has taken place about culture. From ethnographic and cross-culture research, both anthropology and sociology have identified the culture of societies and communities as an important factor in determining individual and group behavior. The current study investigated student culture and the organizational factors that influence the student culture in a large comprehensive high school.

Culture is rapidly becoming a widely used term in education. There are culture surveys, culture audits, corporate culture conferences and consultants. In almost every administrative preparation program and in organizational theory texts there is a complete chapter on culture. Although "culture" is in vogue in educational circles and has virtually launched an industry, there are conceptual problems including semantics, proper modes of research, and the relationship among culture, leadership, and educational practice (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Frost, Moore, Lewis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1985; Sergiovanni, 1991).

The theoretical framework for this study involves the relationship between two concepts: (1) student culture, and (2) student engagement in the educational process. The framework for this study of high school student culture includes culture; Newmann, Wehlage, and Lamborn's (1992) model of student engagement; and an adaptation of Sweeney's model of organizational systems (1993). The student engagement model selected to guide this study includes two major factors: school membership and authentic work. The organizational systems model includes six organizational factors: (1) purpose/strategy; (2) structures; (3) environment; (4) ecology; (5) culture; and (6) processes. The systems and
factors which comprise the model interact with each other and ultimately affect the student culture. The high school organizational systems factors interact with each other and influence student engagement factors and beliefs, including, norms, and values within the student culture. The beliefs within the student culture and the student engagement factors influence each other and the student culture, which in turn influences the organizational system’s factors.

The review of the literature related to this study addresses each of the concepts and explores the theoretical and philosophical similarities and differences among them. The review begins with literature on culture. Then student culture is discussed, and finally student culture and student engagement in the educational process are discussed. Following the review of the literature related to each of the theoretical constructs, the methodology for this study is explained.

The complexity of the relationship between the major theoretical concepts of this study indicates a need for a research design that moves beyond the “what” to the “how” and “why” questions. Merriam (1988) maintains that case study is “particularly suitable methodology for dealing with critical problems or practice and extending the knowledge base of various aspects of education” (p. xiii). This review of the literature examines case study research to determine appropriate and “best practice” for the application of research methodology as it relates to the specific research questions being examined in this study.
Culture

Culture is a set of rules and regulations that does two things: (1) establishes or defines boundaries; and (2) tells individuals how to behave inside the boundaries to be successful (Barker, 1992). Culture has also been defined as the set of shared orientations that holds a unit together and gives it a distinctive identity. Stolp (1994) defined culture as the historically transmitted patterns of meaning that include the norms, values, beliefs, and myths understood by members of the community.

While no one definition of culture is universally accepted. Schein’s (1992) definition of the culture of a group or organization melds concepts and emphasizes the significance of shared basic assumptions held by group members: “A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 12). Schein suggests that “the most useful way to think about culture is to view it as the accumulated shared learning of a specific group, including behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of group members’ total psychological functioning” (p. 10).

Schein (1992) posits that a critical aspect of culture is the idea that groups or organizations hold certain things in common. These things include: (1) observed behavioral regularities when people interact; (2) group norms; (3) espoused values; (4) formal philosophy; (5) rules of the game; (6) climate; (7) embedded skills; (8) habits of thinking, mental models, and/or linguistic paradigms; (9) shared meanings; (10) “root metaphors” or integrating symbols (pp. 8-10). He also identifies two critical elements of the concept of
sharing: (1) culture implies some level of "structural stability"; and (2) patterning or integration lends stability. Schein sees culture as a complex, holistic pattern: “Culture somehow implies that rituals, climate, values, and behaviors bind together into a coherent whole. This patterning or integration is the essence of what we mean by culture” (p. 10).

Reichers and Schneider (1990) note that culture researchers distinguish between Smircich’s concepts of culture as something an organization is and Schein’s idea that culture is something an organization has. The first definition is exploratory and descriptive. The second promotes the investigation of causes and effects. Reicher and Schneider also observe that “running through all definitions of culture is a common set of shared meanings or understanding about the group/organization and its problems, goals, and practices” (p. 23).

Kilmann, Saxton, and Serpa (1985) define culture as “the shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and norms that knit a community together” (p. 5). They note that these closely connected concepts give evidence of a group’s agreement, implicit or explicit, about how to make decisions and how to do things within the organization.

Denison (1990) defines organizational culture as the underlying values, beliefs and principles that serve as a foundation for an organization’s management system and practices, and the behaviors that typify and reinforce those basic principles. This, states Denison, is true of student culture.

Characteristics of culture can be described in many different ways. Six major characteristics, which are of particular importance for this study, are briefly outlined as
follows. These characteristics are grounded in research and provide a deeper insight into the nature of culture.

1. Culture is a complex whole comprised of many mutually interdependent parts. To understand culture one must look at the entire whole and not attempt to explain individual parts until their relationship to the whole has been made clear (Schusky & Culbert, 1967).

2. Culture is learned. Cultural learning takes place as group members interact socially and engage in a complex learning process that allows the group to solve its problems as it learns (Schein, 1992).

3. Culture is shared. Culture is shared basic assumptions and therefore is attributed to groups of people rather than individuals (Schein, 1992).

4. Culture is cumulative. All of the habits and ideas are successively passed on to newcomers (Schein, 1992).

5. Culture is diverse. A pluralistic view of culture implies members of the larger group can also belong to a smaller group(s) within the organization. Any social unit will produce subunits, which in turn lead to the establishment of subcultures (Sackmann, 1991; Schein, 1992).

6. Cultures do change, sometimes slowly. Cultures are not static but are dynamic complexities with the capacity for change (Schneider, 1990).

   Culture includes such factors as our philosophies, ideologies, values and norms which lie just below the surface of experience. They are unwritten rules of the game. Norms describe the behavior and attitudes that members of a group or organization pressure one
another to follow. Norms by definition, are not written, but are transmitted from one
generation to another by stories, rites, rituals, and particularly sanctions that are applied
when anyone violates a norm. (Kilmann, Saxton, Serpa, & Associates, 1985).

Levels

Once culture is defined, it can be analyzed at several different levels, a level being the
degree to which the cultural phenomenon is visible to an observer. Schein (1992), describes
three levels of culture: (1) artifacts; (2) espoused values; and (3) basic underlying
assumptions. Artifacts which include the visible products and behavior of the group as well
as the organizational processes which routinize behavior exist at the surface level of culture
and include everything an observer can see, hear and feel when encountering members of the
culture. What is most important about this level of culture is that it is very easy to observe
and very challenging to decipher. Attempting to infer deep assumptions solely from artifacts
is dangerous because the analyst’s own interpretations become projections of personal
feelings and reactions.

The second level of culture is espoused values. Espoused values consist of a group’s
stated strategies, goals and philosophies. At this conscious level, values predict a great deal
of the behavior that can be observed at the artifact level. However, if these values are not
based on prior learning, they may predict only what people will say in various situations and
not align with what people will do. Espoused values that are congruent with the group’s
underlying assumptions can, when articulated, help bring a group together as well as provide
group identity and a sense of mission. However, even espoused values that are congruent
with underlying assumptions may be only rationalizations or future aspirations. Parts of the culture are still not explained until basic assumptions are uncovered (Schein, 1992).

The third and deepest level of culture, basic assumptions, holds the key to deciphering the culture’s pattern and predicting future behavior correctly. Basic assumptions are the unconscious, “taken-for-granted” beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of a group. They are the ultimate source of values and action for group members. The strength and power of a culture develops when these assumptions are shared and reinforced. Deciphering the pattern of basic assumptions that operates within a group unlocks the essence of its culture and is necessary to interpret artifacts correctly and to decide how much confidence to place in espoused values.

Source

Culture within an organization consists of many perspectives derived from the combined knowledge and experiences of the members of the organization. These perspectives are stored as an imaginary pool within the bounded social group. The group draws upon this collective pool to form group beliefs, group values and group norms and ultimately to respond and react to given situations. Within the group routine ways of acting and making sense repeat the major patterns again and again (Erickson, 1987).

Culture is shared

The concept of “shared orientations” as found in the definition of culture, is complex in nature and represents a variety of perceptions among authorities in the field. Ouchi (1981) claims shared orientations in organizational culture are the underlying values and beliefs of
an organization. The underlying values and beliefs are communicated through symbols, ceremonies, and myths. Kilmann et al. (1985) views shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and norms as the fabric that knits a community together. Schein, (1992) posits that shared orientations (beliefs and assumptions) in the culture operate subconsciously in a basic “taken-for-granted”, manner, and they define the organization’s view of itself and its environment.

**Culture is a complex whole**

Any study of culture must consider the whole and not attempt to explain individual parts until their relationship to the whole has been made clear (Schein, 1992; Schusky, 1967). Schein (1992) pointed out that culture is so pervasive that it ultimately embraces everything that a group is concerned about and must deal with. In explaining the whole of culture, Dobbert (1982) asserted that culture is the historically patterned ways of life made up of ideologies, formally and informally established interrelationships between persons and groups, and material goods and technologies that are all systematically related to form an integrated whole. Since everything is related in a cultural system, nothing exists apart from the social organization or from ideas and beliefs (White, 1973). Thus, changes in one aspect of the cultural system generally lead to changes in other segments due to the interconnectedness of the system (Barnes, 1995; Pelto, 1965; Senge, 1990).

Following an extensive literature review of culture definitions, Moore (1980) concluded that links between categories, and the overlapping of definitions, strengthen the case for the understanding of relationship. The links are considered the glue which holds the
parts together and keeps the constantly changing dimensions cohesive. Moore stated, "parts do not cause a whole, but comprise it" (p. 53).

Functions

Human society and culture are intimately intertwined aspects of a complex phenomena that regularly occur only in association. One dependent on the other (Kroeber, 1948). Culture is a social process where members learn and share world views, assumptions, values, behavioral norms, patterns of activities and material artifacts (Schneider, 1990), all of which combine to constitute the social heritage of a society which is passed on through generations (Pelto, 1966).

A knowledge of the culture allows individuals and groups to adapt quickly to an environment. Schein (1992), asserts, culture provides stability, meaning and predictability to members of a group based on past decisions which have been proven effective. It also acts as a mechanism of social control and can be the basis for directing members of a given culture into perceiving, thinking, and feeling in certain ways (Van Moanen & Kunda, 1989).

Culture is useful to society because it acts as a normative glue that holds groups together based on shared values and beliefs and serves four purposes: (1) it establishes a sense of identity; (2) it facilitates commitment to an entity; (3) it enhances the stability of a group's social system; and (4) it is a sense-making device that guides and shapes behavior. No human social system exists without culture (Pascale & Alhos, 1981; Smircich, 1983).

Culture establishes beliefs and values which form the perspectives from which decisions are made, reactions are defined, and actions are taken. Florence Kluckhohn (1961)
points out that a most important facet of all cultures is how they perceive value and purpose: What is worth doing and Why? This observation is no less true of student culture. Perceived purpose is at the heart of a student’s life, work, and ultimate effectiveness. It is that on which we must concentrate in attempting to enhance the learning and growth of students.

Impact

Culture impacts an organization in a number of ways. The writings of Denison (1990), Kilmann (1984), and Fullan and Stregelbaver (1991) illustrate the impact. Denison contends that the underlying beliefs, values and principles found in the organization form its management system, management practices, and behaviors. These principles and practices endure because they have meaning for the members of the organization. Organizational effectiveness can best be understood by examining the underlying beliefs and values which are linked to desired motivation and behaviors among its members.

According to Kilmann (1984), culture is the energy that moves an organization into action by providing meaning and direction. Shared commitments and mutual influence among group members are the sources of energy. The energy created by culture can promote behaviors which cause an organization to flourish or promote dysfunctional behaviors which cause an organization to be ineffective.

Cultures change

Researchers agree that cultures are not static but are dynamic complexities with the capacity for change (Schein, 1992; Schneider, 1990; Sweeney, 1993). Since culture is deeply
held, changes in culture only occur with significant and long-lasting intervention (Deal & Peterson, 1990). Donahoe reported in the December 1993, *Phi Delta Kappan* that in recent years, many organizations have been convinced that they needed to change their culture. But, said Donahoe, Culture—the values, beliefs, behaviors, rules, products, signs, and symbols that bind us together—is not something we can change like a flat tire. Culture, according to Donahoe, is organic to its community, and if culture changes then everything changes. For schools to become organically different, there must be more than simply assuring that every child can learn.

Cultures do change, and learning something new may mean that group members have to dredge up, examine, and change some of their most ingrained ways of thinking. This process is very difficult because it destabilizes group members’ worlds and creates great anxiety and because group members do not confront or examine their beliefs and feelings (Schein, 1992).

According to Schein (1992), organizational learning, development, and planned change cannot be understood without considering culture a primary source of resistance. Mitchell and Willower (1992) noted that research on organizational culture in schools must include student culture if improvement is to be made.

Even if all members of an organization support major cultural revisions, members of the organization view the culture of the organization from many different viewpoints, using a different set of filters, which makes a common language essential (Barker, 1992). Developing trust and teamwork requires facilitation of the various viewpoints and the
development of tolerance among members towards those differing viewpoints (Womack et al., 1990). Cultural revisions require a common language, trust and teamwork.

**School culture**

Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schwertzer, and Wesenbaker (1979) expressed a belief that a school's culture explain much of the difference between schools which were improving schools and schools which were declining schools.

**Student performance**

Deal (1985) made a critical link between school culture and student performance when he interpreted many of the school effectiveness characteristics related to performance in culture terms: “by influencing behavior, culture affects productivity, how well teachers teach and how much students learn” (p. 611).

Understanding student and school culture then, could assist practitioners in helping students learn more and better. According to Deal (1985), a strong and cohesive student culture whose members share commitment to learning and school involvement provides the basis for improving high schools’ productivity and effectiveness.

According to Deal (1993), the connection of culture and performance that is accepted in the business arena can also be accepted in other organizations such as schools. He stated that a strong, cohesive culture may be even more important to students than to persons in business, because the product (student learning) is much more complicated and less concrete (Deal, 1993). Deal (1992) illustrated the effect of culture on student performance by looking beyond the research into the patterns of a typical school and asking, “Why should students
attend class, come on time, or stay in school if they do not identify with its values? How can we expect students to commit themselves to school work when the student subculture rewards popularity, deviance, or athletic prowess” (p. 20)?

**Student culture**

The beliefs, values, and ways of thinking within the student culture of a high school works towards stability. Understanding what constitutes the student culture of a high school enables educators to construct reform plans that include students and build upon the culture’s stabilizing influences.

The importance of culture in schools and its impact on students emerged from the early school effectiveness research. Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, and Smith (1979) and Brookover et al. (1979) conducted two landmark studies. In the longitudinal study of 12 urban secondary schools, Rutter et al. (1979) found that “ethos” positively contributes to students’ performance in the more successful schools. Ethos was defined as “the set of values, attitudes and behaviors which will become characteristic of the school as a whole” (p. 179). Rutter et al. (1979) also commented that the tendency for organizations to develop their own culture applies to secondary schools and concluded that variations in outcomes around schools studied “were systematically and strongly associated with the characteristics of schools as social institutions” (p. 295).

A positive student culture has been linked to improvements in students’ productivity in terms of student test scores, public confidence and support and teacher morale, turnover, motivation and collegiality (Deal & Peterson, 1990). The research findings of studies such as
Fifteen Thousand Hours (Rutter et al., 1979) and the team of Brookover et al. (1979) indicated that student culture can have deep and profound affect on the productivity of a school. They wrote that the social systems of schools, their norms and expectations of the students and staff concerning the educational process, explain the difference in achievement better than does family background.

Student culture helps to explain why classrooms and schools exhibit common and stable patterns across variable conditions (Meyer & Rowan, 1983). Student culture gives meaning to instructional activities and provides a symbolic link between action and results. It provides the symbolic facade that evokes faith and confidence among outsiders with a stake in education (Meyer & Rowan).

According to Maehr and Parker (1993), it is through the management of school and student culture that those in leadership roles can and do affect the lives and learning of students. Thus, the nature and impact of student culture must be of major concern to school leaders. Conscientious attention to scheduling, accounting, or routinizing, while necessary, is not sufficient if a school is to become a place where student learning and personal growth are the objectives. Attention must be given to students' beliefs, to beliefs about students, to beliefs about teaching and learning and beliefs about how these beliefs are embodied in the events and routines of the students' behaviors.

**Elements of productive student culture**

According to Hargreaves and Fullan (1992), a common language, trust, and teamwork are essential elements of a productive student culture. Another important element of
productive student culture is risk-taking. In organizations in which new ideas, innovations, and risk-taking are nurtured, members are eager to consider new and innovative approaches, whereas when risk-taking is restricted and criticized, new approaches are viewed with suspicion and distrust (Allen & Pilnick, 1983). Furthermore, to put oneself on the line to risk failure and humiliation is a difficult decision for students if the culture of the organization does not nurture risk-taking.

The literature on productive student culture addresses the issue that a positive physical setting, common language, common purpose, management of learning environment, student creativity, cooperative disagreement, leadership, change orientation, positive modeling, empowerment and growth orientation are all important elements of a strong enabling student culture. None of these elements alone is enough to provide a strong productive and enabling student culture. The elements must be present in combination to enhance productivity. One of the most powerful elements of a productive student culture is a common purpose.

Student culture norms exert powerful pressure, causing individual members to behave in a manner which is common to the majority of members. When schools have a strong and positive common purpose, that purpose can exert powerful positive pressure on students to accomplish that purpose (Allen & Pilnick, 1983; Barker, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1984; Womack et al., 1990).
Student culture and school reform

For decades, anthropologists and sociologists have studied the cultures of ethnic and other groups. Their ethnographic research has contributed many definitions of culture and has identified the culture of societies and communities as important factors in determining group member’s behavior. Recently, researchers have applied the methods of anthropologists and sociologists to the culture of organizations, including schools, with important and intriguing results. Many researchers agree that organizations have cultures and have documented the importance and/or influence of culture on the organizations’ effectiveness and productivity (Beatty, 1995; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Denison, 1990; Kilmann et al., 1985; Ouchi, 1981; Sackmann, 1990; Schneider, 1990; Schein, 1992; Sweeney, 1991).

Schein (1992), offers several reasons for studying culture. Two of the reasons are especially relevant to the study of student culture: (1) cultural analysis reveals subcultural dynamics within organizations; and (2) organizational learning, development, and planned change cannot be understood without considering culture as a primary source of resistance.

Student engagement

Student engagement in academic work is “the student’s psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote” (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 12).

Engagement is a construct used to describe an inner quality of concentration and effort to learn. The student’s investment in any given type of mastery should be viewed on a continuum from less to more, not as a dichotomous state of being either engaged or
Levels of engagement must be estimated or inferred from indirect indicators such as the amount of participation in academic work (attendance, portion of tasks completed, amount of time spent on academic work), the intensity of student concentration, the enthusiasm and interest expressed, and the degree of care shown in completing the work. All of these, however, can be misleading indicators of engagement, for at times they may represent a student's willingness to comply with school routines, rather than an actual investment in mastering, comprehending, or learning knowledge, skills, and crafts (Newmann et al., 1992).

The concept of student engagement addresses Deal's questions: "Why should students attend class, come on time, or stay in school if they do not identify with its values? How can we expect students to commit themselves to school work when the student culture rewards popularity, deviance, or athletic prowess" (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 12)?

According to Newmann et al. (1992), a student's engagement in specific tasks may either precede or presume general motivation to succeed. By focusing on the extent to which concentration in the specific work that teachers design, engagement calls special attention to the social contents that help activate underlying motivation, and also to conditions that may generate new motivation. The two factors of student engagement, school membership and authentic work, exert influence and are influenced by the student culture in a school.

**School membership**

From a student's point of view, a sense of school membership is a fundamental cultural need. All students want to be included, so educators must listen, try to understand
students' meanings, and tailor responses that incorporate students' viewpoint, interests, and concerns (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). Students need to be included in the entire school community; a communal culture that includes both students and teachers is very powerful (Bryk & Driscoll).

Sense of school membership as it relates to academic work is influenced by organizational conditions that impact students' motivation to succeed in school. These include the school's clarity of purpose, a sense of fairness, personal support, success, and caring. If students are to invest themselves in the forms of mastery required by schools, they must perceive the general enterprise of schooling as legitimate, deserving of their committed efforts, and honoring them as respected members.

Large numbers of students are said to be so alienated from schools that most activities that fall under school sponsorship are suspect. For many students, schooling signifies institutional hypocrisy and aimlessness, rather than consistency and clarity of purpose; arbitrariness and inequity, rather than fairness; ridicule and humiliation, rather than personal support and respect; and worst of all, failure, rather than success.

For other students, the disaffection can seem less personally damaging. School is seen as a theater of meaningless ritual, unrelated to students' serious concerns. Before considering the problem of designing specific forms of academic work that engage students, we should first ask what institutional conditions are necessary to get students to buy into the general enterprise of trying to succeed in school? The key is school membership (Newmann et al., 1992; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989; Wheelock, 1986).
Bonding, or a sense of membership, develops when students establish affective, cognitive, and behavioral connections to the institution. It has been suggested that schools are most likely to cultivate a sense of membership in students if they demonstrated clarity of purpose, equity, and personal support, provide frequent occasions for all students to experience educational success, and integrate all of these features into a climate of caring (Newmann et al., 1992).

The Claremont report contends that students who were interviewed identified the need to have someone at school that care about them, particularly teachers. The students also expressed the need to see their friends at school (Institute for Education, 1992, p. 19).

Students' morale, worth, and dignity must be affirmed through avenues other than academics, such as nonacademic contract between staff and students—in athletics, music, outings, and personal advising. In short, to build membership, the separate features (purpose, fairness, support, success) must be integrated within a more general culture of caring. Such a culture communicates that all students are worthy, important members of the school, that the school is serious about helping all to build new forms of competence, and that activities in pursuit of this mission will be discharged with fairness, personal support, and ample opportunity for success (Newmann et al., 1992).

**Authentic and academic work**

Academic work consists of the tasks, usually specified by teachers, that students are asked to undertake in order to master the knowledge, skills, and crafts that serve as the instructional objectives of schooling. The work can occur as part of classroom instruction,
homework, or exams and it may include different types of reading, writing, computing, participating in discussions, and individual and group projects. A more adequate conception would recognize as academic work, attempts to master any field of expertise that is based on a tradition of accumulated public knowledge and that, through activities of practitioners and/or researchers, continually strive to create advanced levels of understanding or performance in the field (Newmann et al., 1992).

The Claremont report (1992) indicates that students are concerned with the teaching process. The report denotes that students feel they are sometimes asked to learn irrelevant things that are not connected to their lives. Those circumstances in which students learn best are described as “fun, relevant, student chosen, and thought provoking” (Institute for Education, 1992, p. 32).

For teachers, the challenge is how to get students to do academic work and to take it seriously enough to learn. For students, the challenge is how to cope with teachers’ demands so as to avoid boredom, to maintain self-respect and, at the same time, to succeed in school. Lasting learning develops largely through the labor of the student, who must be enticed to participate in a continuous cycle of studying, producing, correcting mistakes, and starting over again. Students cannot be expected to achieve unless they concentrate, work, and invest themselves in the mastery of school tasks. This is the sense in which student engagement is critical to educational success. To enhance achievement, one must first learn how to engage students. (Newmann et al., 1992).

Authentic work, an important component of student engagement is defined as “meaningful, valuable, significant, and worthy of one’s effort” (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 23).
Characteristics of authentic work include extrinsic rewards, intrinsic interests, a sense of ownership, connection to the "real world", and fun. Many at-risk students perceive little reason to work hard in school because they see little or no relationship between academic achievement and subsequent employment (Wehlage et al., 1989).

**Importance of engagement**

The Newmann et al. (1992) theory posits a basic need to develop competence as the foundation of student engagement in academic work. Newman et al. pointed out that if the school is to nurture a sense of membership, its most important task is to ensure that students experience success in the development of competence. It is self-destructive to affiliate with an organization that offers experiences of repeated failure. However, when the organization is seen as a site of opportunities for meaningful success, this invites membership. Sense of success will not be achieved by grade inflation or reducing the rigor of academic demands. Students know the difference between meaningful achievement and merely completing busy work to earn points. The task for educators is to design schoolwork that presents significant challenges and meet criteria for authenticity. Educators must also design schoolwork that offers the kind of personal support just described, and provide institutional recognition for the success of all students.

Newmann et al. (1992) stated that research literature and conversations with teachers, suggest that effective schools' literature and most rhetoric about school improvement, has neglected the most salient issue for both teachers and students: engagement. An engaged
learner is necessary for the "meaningful cognitive demands of education" to be attained (Newmann et al.).

Engagement implies more than motivation. Academic motivation usually refers to a general desire or disposition to succeed in academic work and in the more specific tasks of school. Academic success, as currently promoted in American schools, is closely aligned to college entrance, a goal toward which few at-risk students strive. Extrinsic rewards are an element of authentic work which promotes engagement (Newmann et al., 1992). These rewards may take the form of grades, admission to higher education, acquisition of jobs, increased income, and increased social status. Some of these rewards are long term or delayed which mitigates their effectiveness for some students and increases the difficulty for the school in offering extrinsic rewards to promote engagement (Lamborn, 1992; Newmann et al., 1992).

Intrinsic interest is found in those things that the student finds more "stimulating, fascinating, or enjoyable" than other topics of study (Newmann et al., 1992). Tasks which allow students to express diverse forms of talent provide opportunities to meet intrinsic interests. In addition, learning as a socially shared process in which cooperation produces socially valued outcomes enhances intrinsic interests (Wehlage et al., 1989).

Learning activities which are characterized by intrinsic interest are also likely to foster a sense of ownership (Wehlage et al., 1989). Students need some control and influence over their work in school from its conception, through execution, and ending with evaluation of the performance (Newmann et al., 1992). While there are limits to the amount of control
students may have over the content of academic work, it is possible for schools to provide autonomy in both the way the work is accomplished and the way the learning is applied.

The final characteristic of authentic work is that it is fun (Newmann et al., 1992). In order to break the stress of pressure to succeed or the boredom from unchallenged, but necessary, routines; humor, play, and imaginative achievement activities can be incorporated into the school day for students. When the learning requires a more serious approach, the play can be provided during a break or another part of the school day (Newmann et al.). The results of meeting a need for competence, developing authentic work, and promoting school membership is student engagement in the educational process.

Engagement in specific tasks may either precede or presume general motivation to succeed. By focusing on the extent to which students demonstrate active interest, effort, and concentration in the specific work that teachers design, engagement calls special attention to the social contexts that help activate underlying motivation. Engagement also calls attention to conditions that may generate new motivation (Newmann et al., 1992). The problem of disengaged students can be viewed as an instance of the more general challenge of reducing alienation in modern culture.

Relations with other individuals, with objects, with the physical environment, with social institutions, with one’s own labor, and even with the supernatural or divine can be construed on a scale or continuum. At one extreme, the person’s relations with others can be characterized by detachment, isolation, fragmentation, disconnection, estrangement, or powerlessness. These bespeak alienation. At the other extreme, relations represent more of a quality of attachment, inclusion, integration, unity, connection, or empowerment.
Literature about alienation does not identify a single term to characterize its opposite, but if one term were chosen, engagement seems to capture many of these missing qualities in relation to people, work, or the physical environment. In this sense, the promotion of student engagement should bring benefits to quality of life that are more fundamental than increases in school achievement (Newmann et al., 1992). Student engagement in academic work is fundamental to student success. Student engagement involves a student’s commitment to both the institution’s perceived goals and the means it prescribes for members to pursue the goals (Cornell 1990; Merton et al., 1990).

Newmann et al. (1992) describe three high school students who convey a sense of engagement and involvement in their schools. These students say that they are challenging themselves in school, they work hard, they are happy and that they are involved in school activities. Their attitudes and behaviors contrast sharply with those of many of their classmates, who are more like the apathetic students Sizer and Goodlad described a decade before. Sizer (1984) characterized American high school students as “all too often docile, compliant, and without initiative” (p. 54). Goodlad (1983) portrayed students in the same way, saying they present “a general picture of considerable passivity” (p. 113). Apathetic, compliant, passive students, however, can become engaged and involved in school.

Newmann et al. (1992), pointed out that the most immediate and persisting issue for students and teachers is student disengagement. According to Newmann et al., the most obviously disengaged students disrupt classes, skip them, or fail to complete assignments. More typically, disengaged students behave well in school. They attend class and complete their work, but with little indication of excitement, commitment, or pride in mastery of the
curriculum. On the other hand, engaged students make a psychological investment in learning. They try hard to learn what the school offers. They take pride not simply in earning the formal indicators of success (grades), but in understanding the material and incorporating or internalizing it in their lives.

According to Moore (1993), an engagement orientation focuses students on learning goals and encourages students to explore, initiate, and pursue tasks that promote intellectual growth. Engaging students in the educational process is necessary to ensure their success in learning the knowledge and skills necessary for successful life experiences.

Engaged students learn for power, not speed. They learn because it is important to know. Engaged students practice to comprehend, rather than comprehend to answer quickly. For engaged students comprehension is valued more than recitation (Moore 1993).

Sources of engagement

We construe engagement in academic work to result largely from three broad factors: students' underlying need for competence, the extent to which students experience membership in the school, and the authenticity of the work they are asked to complete. The broad challenge for the school is how to generate membership and authentic work that channels the need for competence into academic success.

Factors affecting engagement

What affects student engagement and achievement is not simply a list of what is in the curriculum, what happens in class or gets tested. “Instead, the effects of any specific school activity are best understood as cultural phenomena, that is, as outcomes that evolve through
complex verbs of institutionally sanctioned meanings, values, and incentives or disincentives for particular kinds of behavior" (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 182).

Teachers have the most direct opportunities to affect student engagement. Student engagement and achievement are influenced by the family, peer group, extracurricular activity and part-time work.

**Qualitative Research Methodology**

During the last decade a new language of research methodology has emerged. Conferences and, increasingly, journals contain papers and articles on topics such as naturalistic research, qualitative methods, and ethnographic and field research. Earlier research focused on simple associations between single variables in isolation from their environment. A more recent and promising approach is the discovery and study of patterns. New methods have been generated to address this research goal of examining patterns. Currently, considerable confusion exists concerning exactly what these new research methods are, how they may be used, and what they can contribute to the study of human behavior, including the study of the development of students (Crowson, 1987; Marshall, 1989; Patton, 1990; Scott, 1991; Whitt, 1991).

The division between qualitative and quantitative research methods has had a long histor. (Bryman, 1988; Cook & Reichartt, 1978; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research has produced a growing body of literature, and it has developed a significant group of methods by which to study organizations.
For years social science research has been directed towards the task of testing formal theories. An alternative to formal theories, and a strategy that reduces ethnocentrism, is to develop theories grounded in empirical data of cultural description. (Spradley, 1979). Qualitative studies yield empirical data about the lives of people in specific situations (Spradley, 1979). Fetterman (1989) contends that people act on perceptions, and those actions have real consequences, thus, the subjective reality is no less real than an objectively defined and measured reality.

**Definition**

Qualitative research is, at best, an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world (Bradley, 1993; Sutton, 1993; Tierney & Lincoln, 1994; Whitt, 1991).

There is some general agreement on the principles that undergird qualitative research, and the research methods that such inquiry encompasses. Fundamental principles of qualitative research include: (a) a search for understanding; (b) insider perspectives; (c) investigator proximity and natural settings; (d) holistic perspectives; (e) context sensitivity; (f) inductive analysis; (g) human instruments for data collection and analysis; and (h) an appreciation of the value-laden nature of inquiry (Bradley, 1993; Crowson, 1987; Fetterman, 1989; Jacob, 1987; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; Sutton, 1993; Tierney & Lincoln, 1994; Whitt, 1991).
Qualitative research seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit those settings. The research is conducted in a natural setting. The data are words rather than numbers. The researcher is concerned with process and outcomes. The data is analyzed inductively and meaning is an essential concern of the researcher. According to Whitt (1991), a precise and generally agreed definition of qualitative research is at this time, perhaps for all times, elusive.

The development of a common definition for qualitative research is complicated by the fact that it has roots in many disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, history, and feminist studies (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). These qualitative research traditions vary to some extent in the focus of research, role ascribed to the researcher and participants in data collection, and data analysis methods (Bradley, 1993; Dolbert, 1982; Marshall & Rosman, 1989; Tierrey & Lincoln, 1994; Whitt, 1991). For example, research in anthropology according to Whitt (1991), has tended to focus on culture or societies as wholes and emphasized immersion of the researcher in the culture to be studied, whereas historical research has sought to understand something that happened in the past, and the researcher has relied primarily on documents, records, and artifacts as data sources.

The paramount objective of qualitative research is understanding, rather than the ability to generalize or the identification of causes and effects. Thus, the qualitative researcher seeks to understand the ways in which participants in the setting under study make meaning of and so understand their experiences. In addition, the researcher’s findings and interpretations must be presented in a way that helps both insiders (participants in the setting) and outsiders achieve greater understanding of the phenomena being studied (Bradley, 1993;
Schein, 1985; Sutton, 1993; Tierney & Lincoln, 1994; Whitt, 1991). When insiders read the researcher’s description of their place, it should be recognizable to them.

In order to understand, the researcher must also study behaviors where and as they occur and hear the thoughts and words of participants firsthand (Crowson, 1987). Most qualitative researchers describe what they do as fieldwork (Fetterman, 1989). This means that they go to the setting or persons under study and immerse themselves in what is happening. Fieldwork is said to be one answer to the question of how the understanding of others is achieved. In this way, researchers can obtain numerous insider perspectives, observe many and varied events and behaviors, and, as a consequence, hope to obtain an accurate picture of what is going on in the setting.

**Emic perspective**

Part of the process of seeking and achieving understanding is discovering insiders’ perspectives of reality, what has been referred to by some researchers as emic perspectives (in contrast to epic, or external, views) (Bradley, 1993; Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990; Sutton, 1993; Tierney & Whitt, 1991). To achieve an emic perspective, the qualitative researcher strives to look at and appreciate the setting from the perspective of persons within it and to consider what is seen in light of the insiders frames of reference (Fetterman, 1989). For example, to understand student experiences in a particular high school, many and varied student perspectives must be obtained and information from others in the school must be interpreted from students point of view.
Interviewing

Culture, the knowledge members of a group have learned, cannot be observed directly (Spradley, 1979). However, authorities on culture indicated that methods of investigations such as in-depth interviews provide empirical data upon which conclusions about culture can be reached (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Fetterman, 1989; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Patton, 1980; Schein, 1992; Schneider, 1990). Interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry. The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions nor to test hypotheses, and not to be evaluated as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. Interviewing is designed to aid in understanding in great detail how people think and how they come to develop the prospective they hold.

Use of open-ended questions allows participants to answer from their frame of reference (emic perspective), and gives meaning to the cultural scene. This type of questioning is preferred to having ideas structured by prearranged questions which tend to influence participants perceptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Finally, during analysis of data, the perspective of the researcher (etic perspective) is combined with the participants’ point of view (emic perspective) to determine meaning.

Being interested in others is the key to some basic assumptions underlying interviewing technique. It requires that interviewers realize they are not the center of the world. It demands that the actions of interviewers indicate that others stories are important (King, 1994; Seidman, 1991; Spradley, 1979).
At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are of worth. Interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience. Interviewing allows the researcher to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their actions (King, 1994; Seidman, 1991; Spradley, 1979).

If the researcher’s goal is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry. If the researcher is interested in what it is like for students to be in the classroom, what their experience is, and what meaning they make out of that experience, if the interest is in the students’ “subjective understanding” then it seems that interviewing, in most cases, may be the best avenue of inquiry. Interviewing is a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of individuals whose lives constitute education. As a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language. It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration.

According to King (1994), in-depth interviewers can respond to the question, “Are the participant’s comments valid?” Participants, over the course of 1 to 3 weeks, can account for idiosyncratic days and check for the internal consistency in what interviewees say. Furthermore, by interviewing a number of participants, the interviewer connects their experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others. Finally,
interviewing is deeply satisfying to the researchers who are interested in others' stories (King, 1994; Seidman, 1991; Spradley, 1979).

**Advantages**

The strengths of any research design are inherently related to its purpose and the rationale for selecting that design for the research questions being studied. A primary strength of qualitative research is the rich and holistic description of the educational phenomenon. When description and understanding of the characteristics of a population are desired, qualitative research is the best method to answer those questions (Merriam, 1989).

Qualitative methods are considered to be superior to other research methods for achieving in-depth understanding of complex organizations, and complex processes, such as student learning or change (Goetz & La Compte, 1984; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Patton (1990) identified two types of studies for which qualitative research methods are especially appropriate and that may be particularly relevant to student affairs research: (a) studies of processes, such as change or development over time; and (B) studies of quality. The use of qualitative methodology should result in a deeper understanding of the experiences of the students being studied because the researcher studies behaviors as they occur and hears the thoughts and words of participants (Whitt, 1990).

Analysis of qualitative data is intended to build understanding inductively, from the data, rather than deductively, from a *priority* hypotheses or categories (Patton, 1990), because at the outset of the study the researcher is not aware of all that is to be known, the use of preconceived hypotheses or explanations of what is happening is likely to inhibit
consideration of all possible meaningful events and behavior. An inductive approach enables
the phenomena and the research’s growing knowledge to direct data collection, analysis, and
interpretation (Lincoln & Guba; 1985; Patton, 1990).

Qualitative research offers insights and expands the reader’s understanding of and
experience with the phenomenon. Theory which is grounded in case study provides
important knowledge to the field of study.

A variety of practical problems can be encountered by researchers using qualitative
methodology. However, the use of qualitative methods should result in a deeper
understanding of the experiences of the students being studied. To gain understanding,
investigators must study behaviors as they occur and hear the thoughts and words of
participants (Whitt, 1991).

The tapestry of a student culture portrayed by the qualitative researcher should be as
complicated and intricate as the culture itself, reflecting as many and as diverse viewpoints,
experiences, and meanings as possible. Unlike quantitative research, which assumes that
phenomena must be broken into their component parts (variables) in order to be studied and
understood, qualitative research seeks to understand the ways in which the parts come
together to form a whole, a whole that is greater than the sum of those parts (Merriam, 1988;

In addition, qualitative research seeks to control the effects of “extraneous unable”
(Borg & Gall, 1989), the elements of a research situation that are deemed irrelevant to the
study, but can “confound” its results. In qualitative research, nothing about the phenomena
being studied is, at least at the outset, viewed as irrelevant, extraneous, or confounding. A
qualitative study of student life should focus not only on students’ activities outside of class but also on in-class experiences; on roles of faculty members, students, and administrators; and on the nature and influence of instructional mission, policies, and cultures as well (Bradley, 1993; Kuh et al., 1991; Scott, 1991; Sutton, 1993; Whitt, 1991).

Disadvantages

As with many research methods, the strengths of qualitative research also contribute to its limitations. A variety of practical problems can be encountered by researchers using qualitative methodology. Qualitative research is labor intensive and time-consuming. It can also require a great deal of money. The nature of the final product of a qualitative study may result in dismissal by the potential reader as either “too lengthy, too detailed, or too involved for busy policy makers and educators” (Merriam, 1989, p.33).

Additionally, Guba and Lincoln (1981) warn that qualitative research may appear to be the whole picture of the phenomenon when it is actually only a piece of the picture. There is also the danger of either oversimplifying or exaggerating a situation, leading to false conclusions by the reader (Guba & Lincoln). Sensitivity and integrity on the part of the researcher are essential to qualitative research and are a limitation if the researcher is unaware or not insensitive to this issue.

The issue of reliability, validity, and generalizability are considered by some to be limitations of qualitative research. Merriam (1989) suggests that those concepts are as vital to qualitative research as to quantitative research, as it is to the validity and reliability which allow the reader to trust the results of the research. However, the application of these
concepts in qualitative research requires a shift in paradigm to one which is congruent with qualitative methodology.

It is also important to point out that qualitative research is not the dominant one in the history of educational research. (Seidman, 1991; Shaffir, 1991; Spradley, 1979). Qualitative research requires a human instrument, the researcher, to collect and analyze data. Only a human instrument is consistent with the principles of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Patton, 1990). In such research with humans, Dobbert (1982) and Fetterman (1989) identified confidentiality, honesty, responsibility, fair return, trust and rigor as the ethical criteria that are appropriate to consider before and during a qualitative study.

Limitations

Certain purposes, questions, and situations are more consonant with qualitative research methods than others. The decision to use qualitative research methods should be based on the desired outcomes of the research, the nature of the phenomena being studied, the conditions under which the research will be conducted, and the skills and interests of the researcher. For example, research questions that ask “why” or “how” rather than “how many” are particularly suited to qualitative methods. Qualitative research is also most appropriate in situations, such as daily life in a residence hall, in which little control of events, people, or processes is possible (Goetz & La Compte, 1984; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1989; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1984).
Interviewing for qualitative research takes a great deal of time and sometimes money. Qualitative research is especially labor intensive. The researcher has to conceptualize the project, establish access and make contact with participants, interview them, transcribe the data, and then work with the material and share what he or she has learned.

Schein (1992) offers several reasons for studying culture. Two of them are especially relevant to the study of student culture: (1) cultural analysis reveals subcultural dynamics within organizations; and (2) organizational learning, development, and planned change cannot be understood without considering culture as a primary source of resistance. The beliefs, values, and ways of thinking within the student culture of a high school work toward stability. Understanding what constitutes the student culture of a high school enables educators to construct reform plans that include students and account for the culture's stabilizing influences. In the study of an exemplary high school, Mitchill and Willower, (1992) stress the need to value the contribution of student culture:

If research on organizational culture in schools is to be tied to school improvement, it is clear that it has to include students. Student motivation and identification with the organization and its educational aims are critical problems in schools, as virtually all educators are acutely aware. (p.7)

Several studies of the student culture in secondary schools have produced important and useful findings. One such study is Cusick’s research of a single high school in the early 1970’s from the perspective of some of its students. Cusick (1973) worked from the assumption that “students develop perspective in relation to their environment” (p. 3) and found that their activities and involvement revolved around their “friendship patterns” which grew out of neighborhood associations. Students who were studied spent most of their time
in school "hanging out" with their friends in small groups. Also, "the students' pattern of activities had little or nothing to do with the academic or productive sector of school and were only minimally related to the school's maintenance sector (rules and regulations)" (Cusick, p. 205).

Finally, Cusick demonstrated that students' small group affiliations "can and do strongly effect other aspects of the school organization, such as the students' classroom behavior, the vice-principal's actions, and the behavior of other students" (pp. 204-205). Cusick suggests that the importance of friends and groups to students in school is attributable to the friends and groups providing "so much of what the organization denies" (p. 206), and also notes that the small group activities do not interfere with the formal school process.

Willower and Smith (1987) examined two Northeastern secondary (7-12) schools to find indicators of culture unique to each school. They asked if an organizational culture existed that extended beyond the shared meanings within the student and teacher groups. Students at both schools reported that "what meant most to them (students) at school was being with friends" (p. 92). Athletics also were of great importance to students. The researchers assert that "a special organizational culture tied to academic goals is not likely to be found in normal circumstances. It has to be a deliberate creation" (pp. 93-94). They also caution not to assume that "a strong organizational culture will serve multiple educational purposes unambiguously. School culture that stresses academics could stint critical thinking or social skills. Further, strong cultures have a tendency to stress conformity and limit individual initiative" (p. 94). The best course of action is for schools to develop cultures that are "open and educative" (p. 94).
In the same study of the exemplary high school, Mitchell and Willower (1992) also sought to determine whether a “genuine organizational culture that cut across (student and teacher) groups might be found in schools” (p. 7). They found “there was a shared culture that cut across groups [students and teachers],” highlighted throughout by academics and the prevalence of “school spirit associated with pride in both a good school and in the school’s athletic teams” (p. 8). However, the researchers noted that what was meant by academics was not clear. Students emphasized grades, and teachers emphasized learning and effort.

Both groups believed that students’ academic performance affected their future. Students were involved only partially in the whole organizational culture of the school. While they made a commitment to academics and school spirit, friendships with peers were a center part of their school lives. Mitchell and Willower (1992) offered a preliminary theory of reinforcing elements in school culture that are necessary to overcoming separate and conflicting student teacher subcultures. They argued that students must be included in the organization if school improvement is to occur, and that if students are to share a significant part of the school culture, they must “internalize certain adult expectations regarding school work. This is more likely to occur when they face similar expectations from other sources, and when there are elements in the student subculture that reinforce those expectations” (p. 15).

The chance that a school can develop a school culture shared by both students and teachers seems positive when the research of Eve (1975) is considered. He found that adolescents do appear to maintain a value system separate from that of their teacher, but that
their system is derived mainly from that of the prevalent adult system and different primarily in the degree to which adolescents approve certain adult values.

The Institute for Education in Transformation at Claremont Graduate School (1992) reported in *Voices From the Inside* the findings of a team of researchers who visited four representative urban/suburban California public schools over 18 months. The team interviewed representatives of every group of school stakeholders, including K-12 students, to allow them to talk about their school experiences in an effort to identify the deep and basic problems of schooling. Several major issues were identified from the data: (1) relationships; (2) race, culture and class; (3) values; (4) teaching and learning; (5) safety; (6) physical environment; and (7) despair, hope and the process of change.

Students who were interviewed identified the need to have someone care about them at school, particularly teachers. They also need to see their friends at school (Institute for Education, 1992). Many students are angered by expressions of prejudice at school and feel they can be less racist than adults. Students need opportunities to discuss values, especially across ethnic cultures. Students are concerned with the teaching process. They feel that they are asked to learn irrelevant things that are not connected to their lives. Those circumstances in which they learn best are described as fun, relevant, student-chosen, and thought-provoking. Schools are seen as unsafe places, where students specifically fear violence. When the physical environment is unsatisfactory, students complained. All of these problems contribute to students’ feelings of despair and, in some cases, to their poor performance. The students interviewed feel a dramatic change in schooling is needed.
The Claremont report contends that people interested in transforming schools must do three things: (1) change the focus of the national dialogue about the problems of public education to spotlight the preceding seven issues; (2) re-examine policies, practices and proposed solutions from the viewpoint of those seven issues; and (3) develop effective participatory processes to include all school members at each school site so they can discuss their own problems and solutions (Institute, 1992).

Tye (1985) studied the 13 rural, suburban, and urban high schools included in Goodlad’s 38-school project, A Study of Schooling. She reported on each school in depth and then answered several overarching questions. One was, “How do schools shape students’ behavior?” Tye first described the physical uniformity of the American high school. Then Tye noted that high schools have a control orientation. The physical arrangement of most buildings, the schedule, and the school program are all designed to keep students under control. A third observation is that most American high schools separate students into tracks. Students seem to accept the system that divides them as “right and proper” despite the problems both “high” and “low” track students can experience. The tracking system encourages students to think of their peers “in terms of categories” which may keep them separated (p. 355).

Students in Tye’s study identified going to school to get a good job to be the most important function of school. Tye explained the danger of students’ belief that the reason to go to school is to get a good job and earn money as a adult:

The belief that the reason a person goes to school is to be able to get a good job and earn more money as a adult has robbed our society of two important values. First of all, it deprives young people of the feeling that
what they are doing now is important. All the rewards are seen to be somewhere in the future. Secondly, it deprives society of the understanding that learning has value in itself and not just as a salable commodity. This greatly reduces the range of knowledge that is considered worth having, and creates a population of narrowly-educated citizens. (pp. 337-338)

Understanding the culture of students and linking it to achievement can help educators reform high schools in which students' efforts are focused on getting a good job rather than on learning, in which students feel they learn irrelevant things, and where they feel disconnected and even in despair. The connection of culture and performance that is accepted in the business arena must also be accepted in schools (Deal, 1993).

Summary

Culture and human society are intrinsically linked. Culture definitions emphasize that this concept is holistic, involves shared values and beliefs, that it gives meaning, and a sense of mission, causes action, and creates a pattern. Culture can be analyzed at three levels: artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions.

Organizations, including schools, have unique cultures or personalities that cause their members, including students, to behave in certain ways. Research in schools has shown that the culture appears to be the major determinant of school effectiveness and productivity. Studies of high school students and student culture have shown the following: (1) Having friends at school is a primary importance to students; (2) Activities and involvement center on friends; (3) Students' peer relationships do affect the organization; (4) Athletics are of great importance to students; (5) It is not usual to find a student culture strongly tied to academic goals; (6) Strong cultures stress uniformity and limit individuality; (7) Schools
need to develop student cultures that are open and educative; (8) Students participate only in part of the entire student culture; (9) Even at a “good” high school, friends are still a larger part of students’ lives than academics and school spirit; (10) Students’ must be included in the organization if school improvement efforts are to succeed; (11) Students and teachers value systems within a school differ, but primarily in the degree to which students approve certain values; (12) Students helped identify several major problem areas: relationships, race, culture, class, values, teaching and learning, safety, physical environment, despair, hope, and the process of change; (13) Three things must be done if schools are to be transformed: (a) the public education must be changed to spotlight the preceding seven issues; (b) policies, practices and proposed solutions must be re-examined from the viewpoint of these seven issues; and (c) effective participatory processes to include all school members at each school site must be developed so they can discuss their own problems and solutions; (14) High schools have a control orientation; and (15) Students harbor a dangerous belief that the reason to go to school is to get a good job and earn money as an adult (Beatty, 1995).

Student engagement is defined as “the student’s psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote” (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 12). Two factors influencing student engagement are school membership and authentic work. Student culture impacts student engagement. Which elements of student culture have the most influence on engagement depends upon the specific school culture.
Organizations, including schools, have been determined to have cultures that affect members performance, including students. Schools have unique cultures or personalities that cause their members, including students, to act in certain ways.

Qualitative methods are especially appropriate for student culture research because they enable the researcher to discover, understand, and describe everyday, as well as unique events, processes, activities, and behaviors, in depth, as they occur, and from the perspectives of the persons involved (Whitt, 1991). Qualitative research seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit those settings. "Qualitative research is both a science and an art" (Patton, 1990, p. 433). The researcher who contemplates using qualitative methods needs to be prepared to deal with practical problems. Qualitative research is labor intensive and time-consuming. There is no question, however, that this methodology can yield rich data resulting in an understanding of the student's culture and cultural factors and conditions that encourage high quality out of class and in class experiences for students and a much deeper understanding of the experiences of students.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive discussion of the procedures used to gather and analyze the data. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) Description of the Case Study; (b) Research Method; (c) Description of the Data Sources; (d) Data Collection Procedures; (e) Triangulation of Data Sources; (f) Data Analysis; and (g) Summary.

Description of the Case Study

This case study was designed to describe the student culture within a large comprehensive high school, describe the extent to which school membership and authentic work are present in the student culture, and determine the organizational systems factors that influence the student culture. The investigation was coordinated by Dr. James Sweeney when he was a professor at Iowa State University. Dr. Sweeney and his students focused their research on culture in secondary schools because it appears most impervious to change.

During contacts with selected school principals and other school district administrators across the county, Dr. Sweeney shared with them information pertaining to school culture and its implications for school improvement. He also shared with the administrators plans to examine culture; more specifically, the values and beliefs of the students and staff in the schools and the factors that influence the development of culture. Dr. Sweeney offered the administrators the opportunity to participate in the culture study.

As a result of these contacts, 12 high schools indicated an interest in participating in the culture study. The 12 schools participating in this study were large comprehensive public
high schools that served a population of 1,200 to 2,500 students. Located in four different states and in one province of Canada, the schools represented a diverse population and varied geographical locations. Seven of the 12 schools were urban high schools. One high school is considered "inner city", another is rural, and another is a small city school.

This Crosstown High School culture study was designed to explore two major factors of the culture of a high school in New Orleans:

1. Staff work culture, conducted by Mrs. Sandra Barnes, research associate and Iowa State University doctoral student; and

2. Student culture, conducted by Mr. Charles M. Green, Iowa State University doctoral student. The findings and conclusions presented in the present investigation are the information collected during an investigation of a large comprehensive high school in New Orleans, Louisiana, hereafter called Crosstown High School.

Crosstown High School, which served a population of 1266 students in 1993-94, was one of the schools that expressed interest in participating in the study. The Crosstown High School study was designed to explore the major facets of the culture of a high school. What follows is a description of the process used to secure participation in the study followed by a description of the sample, the study procedures, data collection, data analysis and conclusions.

The researcher conducted an on-site investigation of the student culture at Crosstown High School, a large comprehensive high school in New Orleans, Louisiana, from November 29, 1993 through December 3, 1993, and from February 28, 1994 through March 4, 1994.
Research Method

According to Yin (1989), the type of research questions asked, the investigator's control over events, and the focus on contemporary or historical phenomena should drive the design of a study's research methods. The questions assist the researcher in determining whether to conduct an experiment, conduct a survey, analyze archives, compose a history, or write a case study.

This study of the student culture in a large comprehensive high school meets the criteria seen by Yin (1989) as a case study, an investigation into "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context where boundaries between phenomenon and context are unclear and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). Patton, (1990) asserts that case studies "become particularly useful where one needs to understand some special people, particular problem, or unique situation in great depth, and where one can identify cases in information - rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomena in question" (p. 54).

This study was designed to accomplish several purposes: (a) describe the student culture within a large comprehensive high school; (b) identify the beliefs within the student culture; (c) describe the extent to which school membership and authentic work are present in the student culture; and (d) determine the organizational systems factors that influence the student culture.

Qualitative methodologies were used to conduct the case study. The specific qualitative data collection techniques employed in this study were small group interviews,
individual interviews, observation of students and review of artifacts. Such methods offer the researcher the advantage of investigating an issue in depth in order to increase understanding (Patton, 1990). The researcher becomes the instrument for the study, since the primary tool used is the interview.

Description of the Data Sources

Because much of the success of field research lies with the researcher's acceptance into the field and the participants' willingness to cooperate, Dr. Sweeney first secured the participation of Crosstown High School at a meeting with the Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education, for the New Orleans Public School System. This meeting occurred after the meeting that Dr. Sweeney had with superintendents which was discussed earlier. During the meeting, a written summary about the culture study was provided and specific questions about the purpose of the culture study, the benefits to the school and the procedures for conducting the study were answered.

At the conclusion of the meeting the principal, Mr. Victor Gordon, requested an additional presentation be given to a group of teachers from the high school. The purpose of the presentation would be to help the teachers better understand the culture study so that they could make recommendations to their colleagues regarding whether or not their school should participate.

An explanation of the culture study was sent to those teachers prior to the meeting that Mr. Gordon requested. That meeting occurred on March 3rd, 1993, at Crosstown High School. Teachers from the school attended the two hour informational meeting. Dr.
Sweeney discussed the purpose of the study, how it would benefit the school, and how it would be conducted. Dr. Sweeney maintained contact with the high school via telephone calls or through personal visits.

On March 12th, 1993, a letter was sent to the Crosstown High School principal, Mr. Victor Gordon, requesting that he respond by March 22, 1993, with his decision of whether or not to participate in the study (see Appendix A). By April 1, 1993, he had decided that the school would participate. Mr. Gordon submitted a confirmation in writing and by telephone. Students were not involved in the decision to proceed with the study.

On May 10th, 1993, a letter was sent to Mr. Gordon by this researcher acknowledging his intent to participate in the study and outlining for him specific preliminary activities that needed to occur in preparation for the case study. The researcher requested that the principal: (a) designate a school contact person to assist with various tasks related to the study; and (b) provide help in scheduling interviews, and send artifacts (for example school policy handbook) to the researcher for examination prior to the school site visit (see Appendix A). Ms. Hattie Sam, the Family and Consumer Science teacher, was selected to be the contact person. Follow-up telephone calls were made to the contact person as a reminder to send the requested materials. Specific questions Ms. Sam had about the materials were answered at the time of the follow-up telephone calls.

To establish dates for this student culture case study, this researcher contacted Ms. Sam. Then Mr. Gordon and Ms. Sam provided the information requested. Ms. Sam telephoned this researcher confirming the dates for the student interviews, and the
arrangement for distributing and collecting student/parent permission letters, scheduling of student interviews, and location of a conference room.

The principal gave approval for 10 days: 5 days each in November/December and in February/March for interviewing and observation. He also submitted a letter to the Iowa State University Graduate Office approving the study (see Appendix A). Permission letters were delivered to Crosstown High School during the first week of November, 1993. During follow-up telephone conversations, Ms. Sam indicated that a sufficient number of students had returned permission letters for small group and individual interviews to be conducted. Ms. Sam also informed this researcher that interviews had been scheduled for the times that had previously been confirmed.

The researcher began the study at Crosstown High School on November 29, 1993. Following is a description of the school followed by a description of the students, the community where Crosstown High School is located, and the staff of Crosstown High School.

The school

Crosstown High School is one of 22 regular high schools in an urban Southern public school district. The high school building reflects the period in which it was built and the years of continuous use. Crosstown High school opened January 29, 1940. The school has been in continuous use since that time. It includes approximately 75 permanent classrooms, 10 portable classrooms, a gymnasium, an auditorium, a cafeteria, a kitchen and office spaces. The gymnasium, which is located just across the street from the main building, was
constructed in 1945. The school physical plant also consists of 6 portable buildings which were added in 1958. Set just a few feet from the streets, the 1940 building is fronted with stately oak trees which line the sidewalk along the side of a major north south street. The building is in need of major repairs and renovations to replace peeling paint and damage to walls, doors and windows.

The community

The community of Crosstown High School is basically a working class community with predominantly African-American families. There is a small percentage of Hispanic, Caucasian and Asian families whose children attend Crosstown High School. There is a large number of families in the community with no children attending Crosstown High School.

Crosstown High School serves students from four different New Orleans’ neighborhoods: the California Housing Development; the Cold water area; the IX ward area, and students who live in other parts of the city but have a permit to attend Crosstown High School.

The staff members

The administrative team at Crosstown High School is made up of the principal, three assistant principals and four school security officers. They have worked together for the past several years. The administrative team is supported by 5.5 secretaries. The administrative team and secretaries are all African-American.
At Crosstown High School there are 62 full-time teachers and 3 itinerant teachers. The teaching staff is supported by 2 librarians, 3 counselors, 7 para-professionals and a school nurse. The cafeteria is staffed by 14 full-time employees including a manager and assistant manager. Of the 62 full-time teachers, 48 (78%) are African American, 12 (19%) Caucasian, and 2 (3%) are Hispanic. The 3 itinerant teachers are Caucasian, and the 2 librarians are African American. Two of the counselors are African American and 1 is Caucasian. The 7 para-professionals and the school nurse are African American. Ten of the 14 cafeteria staff members are African American and 4 are Caucasian.

The custodial staff is made up of 16 full-time employees. The custodians are assigned to three different work shifts so that custodians are available at the beginning of the school day, during lunch hour and in the evening when the majority of the cleaning is done. All of the 16 custodial staff members are African American.

The students

Crosstown High School serves a diverse population of students, as indicated in data from the district’s senior high profile report (1993-94). The High School Profile report is an official document developed at the school as a requirement from the school district and state department of Education. Of the 1266 students enrolled in grades 9 through 12 during the 1992-93 school year, 1215, (96%) are African American, 25 (2%) are Hispanics, 13 (1%) Caucasian, and 13 (1%) percent are Asian or Pacific Islanders. Students of color make up 99 percent of the school’s total enrollment.
In 1993-94, students attended Crosstown High School for seven periods per day. The school day was from 8:00 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Typically, students spend four to six periods every day in classes, so they earn credits in four to six classes each semester.

According to the 1993-94 High School Profile report, less than 15% of the Crosstown High School students had withdrawn from school before graduation. According to the information presented in the 1993-94 High School Profile report, Crosstown High School students had a variety of plans for their lives after high school. Four-year colleges were the intended destination of 28.4% of the students; 18.7% reported they would attend two-year area junior or community colleges. Another 21.3% of the students planned to attend business schools or trade schools, study nursing, cosmetology, or other specializations. More than three percent (3.6) of the students intended to enter the military. Twenty-two percent of the students intended to enter the work force directly in jobs ranging from unskilled labor to service occupations to clerical positions. The remaining six percent of the students stated they had made no specific plans or were unsure what they would do with their lives after high school.

In addition to representing diverse ethnicities and holding diverse plans for the future, the Crosstown High School student body also has a diverse socioeconomic status (SES). A significant percentage of students fall at the low end of the range with most students coming from low to middle SES, blue-collar homes. Statistics from the senior high profile explain students' backgrounds. Nine hundred fifty-three students (75 percent) received free or reduced price school lunch. Sixty-five percent of the students’ families lived below the
poverty level. In addition to coping with a lack of material wealth, many students also dealt with home situations in which one or both biological parents was/were not present.

A significant number of Crosstown High School students come to school each day from less than ideal home situations. Nevertheless, the school has long held a reputation for strong tradition and alumni loyalty.

Data Collection

Use of human subjects

The Iowa State University Committee on the use of Human Subjects in Research examined the proposed methodology to be used in this research project to ensure that the rights of the human subjects were preserved, that the benefits associated with the project outweighed the possible risks, that the confidentiality of the human subjects and the data they provided were ensured, and that informed consent was acquired through appropriate procedures. The committee approved the plan (see Appendix B). A statement of informed consent combined with a parent/guardian informed consent letter was distributed (see Appendix C for the student and parental consent forms).

Procedures

The design of this study incorporated the concept of simultaneous data collection and analysis in planning for data collection in two rounds. Individual interviews and small group interviews were the primary methods of data collection used. The initial data collection
focused on gathering information about the student culture at Crosstown High School in order to allow the investigator to probe, add, refine and validate it in subsequent interviews.

The investigator used small group (typically three to five students) and individual interviews. Both types of interviews are important because participants respond in their own words and express their own perspectives, which are keys to enabling the researcher to adopt an emic perspective that is so critical to case studies. The results of the interview are reported in narrative form with illustrative responses to questions from the participants.

The research plan specified 10 days on-site at Crosstown High school, 5 days during each semester of the 1993-94 school year. The researcher planned to conduct small group and individual interviews in two rounds of five days each, to make observations of a variety of events and to collect artifacts in one round of five days. Round One data were used to develop additional interview questions for Round Two. Observations were scheduled when interviews were not being conducted.

The collection of data is described below for each of the two rounds of field work. Details about small group interviews, individual interviews, and observation are included in the description of the round during which they were used.

Round one of the study was planned for November and December 1993. Round One data collection included small group interviews, individual interviews and observations. Small group interviews designed to provide data about student’s beliefs would serve as the foundation for other research techniques and are described first in the following section.
Round One

**Small group interviews.** Students who participated in Round One small group interviews were selected from among those who returned signed parent consent letters. A typical Round One small group interview was conducted with three to five students. The students within these groups were from one or perhaps two grade levels. Most students were from one grade level. For example, a group consisted of all tenth-graders. Some groups included students from two grade levels, such as ninth and tenth or eleventh and twelfth. No groups included students from three or more grade levels, such as ninth, tenth, and twelfth grades. Most Round one groups were made up of an even mixture of males and females.

Prior to conducting Round One small group interviews, the researcher developed an interview guide (see Appendix D-1). The small group interview guide ensured that the researcher obtained basically the same information from each group of student interviews. The researcher developed key prompts, questions and topics that were developed to elicit data that would address the research questions. The investigator remained free to expand discussion of a specific subject when necessary, to word questions spontaneously and to establish rapport with the students while maintaining the focus of the study.

For each small group interviewed during round one, the purposes of the study were explained. A description of what students could expect their participation to be like was also given. In addition, culture was defined for the students as “the way we do things or what we believe around here.”
Students' questions about their participation in the study were answered. Students were then asked to respond to the following prompt designed to elicit opinions about their culture: “Around here, students . . .” Each student had an opportunity to respond to the prompt. Students’ responses were recorded on newsprint. Once each student who wanted to offer an idea had done so, the discussion of cultural aspects was opened to anyone who wanted to participate, and these responses were added to the newsprint list. When the students had listed everything they felt was important, the students were asked to provide reasons why each of the cultural aspects listed was important. These reasons were listed on a separate sheet of newsprint. At this point, groups frequently clarified or added information about the cultural aspects they had listed.

After cultural aspects and reasons for their importance were recorded, students were asked to indicate whether each cultural aspect was positive or negative. Each group came to informal conclusions about this topic. Typically, one or two students would suggest a response and brief discussion would occur. Before either a positive or negative response was recorded, the group’s discussion was summarized and they were asked if the information and decision were understood. Some groups asked that both a positive and negative response with a brief explanation of each be recorded for one or two cultural aspects. For example, the students identified the cultural aspect, “Students here think getting a good education is important,” several times as positive because some students held this value and also as a negative because more students should value this idea. The investigator recorded the positive or negative response on the original newsprint next to each cultural aspect.
Next, students in small groups provided the investigator with an estimate of the percentage of Crosstown High School students who engaged in each of the cultural aspects listed. The same procedure used to determine the positive or negative character of each cultural aspect was employed to generate percentages. The investigator also recorded this information on the newsprint next to each cultural aspect. Students then were asked to indicate individually the relative importance of each cultural aspects by thinking about a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 representing very strong and 1 representing weak. Students' responses were recorded on the newsprint next to the cultural aspect they measured.

Students' responses were recorded on newsprint, with reasons placed on a separate sheet. The newsprint for each group was numbered. The grade level and gender of each participant also was recorded. A small group summary form was completed at the end of each interview after the students being interviewed were dismissed from the interview session (see Appendix D-2). The completion of this form enabled the researcher to capture immediate impressions and note the salient points of each small group interview. At the end of each day, the researcher prepared a daily summary report (see Appendix D-3).

Following the completion of the Round One small group interviews of 121 students, the researcher transcribed the newsprint to computer data files, with one file per small group, and then printed the results. By reading these data and the small group summary sheets, the researcher identified major cultural aspects and noted other ideas that would be important to explore in Round Two interviews. This was done after all the Round One small group interviews had been completed and before returning to conduct the Round Two interviews.
To gain the perspective of the participants and to help focus the interviews and small group sessions, questions related to elements of student culture were developed for use by the researcher during the individual interview process.

**Individual interviews.** Students interviewed individually in Round One were selected from English classes in the same way as students were selected to be interviewed in the Round One small group interviews.

During Round One, 22 students were interviewed individually. The researcher used an interview guide during the Round One individual interviews (see Appendix D-4). This guide ensured that relatively consistent information was obtained from each student interviewed. The researcher developed key questions and topics to elicit data that would address the research questions and both probe and validate information reported by students during small group interviews. Within such a framework, the researcher was free to expand discussion of a specific subject, to word questions spontaneously if there was a need to explore a particular statement made by the student, and to establish rapport with the student while maintaining the focus of the study.

During the Round One individual interviews, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, described what students could expect their participation to be like, and defined culture as “the way we do things” or “what we believe around here.” This was done for each student interviewed. The researcher also asked each student for permission to audiotape the interview. No students withdrew or declined to be taped, or requested that the tape be stopped. Each participant was informed of these options. Students’ questions about their
participation in the study were answered, and all signed consent forms before the interviews began.

Students interviewed individually during round one were asked to respond to the same prompt as the small groups: “Around here, students . . .” Initially, individuals were asked to label each cultural aspect as positive or negative, to suggest the percentage of students who participated in each cultural aspect, and to determine the strength of each cultural aspect. After reviewing the tapes from the first day of individual interviews, the researcher observed that individual interviews were producing essentially the same information as the small group interviews. After this observation, the researcher started to focus more on eliciting information to the “Around here, students . . .” prompt, and to ask probing questions concerning what students in small groups had reported.

Students were asked to respond to the prompt by listing cultural aspects. The researcher summarized these when the student indicated that he or she felt the important ideas had been discussed. Frequently, cultural aspects were clarified or additional information was added at this point. The students were then asked to discuss reasons why each cultural aspect was important in the school.

Finally, the researcher said, “Here are some things students in small groups have been saying are important to students at Crosstown High School. As I list each one, tell me if you agree or disagree that it is important to students at Crosstown High School.” The researcher then listed cultural aspects that had emerged from the small group data and also listened to
the responses of those interviewed to probe for reasons students agreed or disagreed or if this information was not volunteered.

In addition to audio taping these interviews, the researcher also took notes on special forms during each interview (see Appendix D-5). After each interview, the researcher completed an individual interview summary form (see Appendix D-6). Each student's grade level and gender was placed on the note sheets.

**Determination of observation sites.** During the Round One of data collection, the researcher observed events at Crosstown High School to determine if there were physical or behavioral indications that either verified or clarified cultural aspects or conflicted with them. The researcher observed student activity in the halls while students were changing classes, in the cafeteria while students were having lunch, and in the main office while they were waiting to see a counselor or administrator. Students were also observed at the "sweet shop" across the street from the school, and at a recognition assembly. The researcher recorded a description of the event or activity on an observation form (see Appendix D-7). What happen, who participated and the main themes or issues were included in the description. The researcher made notes of any verbal exchanges or behaviors that the researcher believed may have help to determine themes. The researcher also recorded an explanation or clarification of themes or issues and questions raised by the observation.

**Examination of artifacts.** The researcher collected a variety of printed material to examine. Included were a 1992-93 yearbook, weekly and daily announcements, handbooks,
school improvement plans, building objectives for the current year, a curriculum guide and the current Senior high profile report. A form was used to record notes about each artifact (see Appendix D-8). During artifact analysis, the researcher recorded a summary of document content, themes or issues the document communicated, and questions the documents raised. The researcher also recorded the significance of the themes, issues, or questions derived from artifact analysis.

**Round Two**

Data collected during round two came from small group and individual interviews conducted by this researcher in February and March, 1994. The purpose of this round of data collection was to probe and validate important cultural aspects emerging from round one small group and individual interviews; to further this researcher’s understanding of their cultural aspects; and to determine who adheres to which cultural beliefs. The researcher performed no observations or examined any artifacts during round two.

**Small group interviews.** Students interviewed in Round Two were different from those interviewed in Round One. All students who returned signed parent consent letters and were not interviewed during Round One were eligible to be interviewed during Round Two.

Round Two small group interviews included three to five students per group. A total of 155 students participated in the Round Two small group interviews.

The interview guide for these small groups was developed by the researcher after studying responses of the small groups and individuals interviewed in Round One (see
Appendix E-1). During the Round Two small group interviews, students were asked to identify specific cultural aspects of Crosstown High School which indicate that it is a place to learn. Students were also asked to respond to the finding from the Round One small group data concerning students' perceived reputation of being a “bad” and unsafe school, and the effect of this perceived reputation on school spirit. During the Round One small groups and individual interviews, students continued to make statements that the school is perceived as an unsafe school where no learning takes place. However, no students ever presented any evidence or examples of situations to support this perception during the Round One interviews. Students were asked to talk about why these things were the way they were.

For each small group interviewed during Round Two, the researcher explained the purposes of the study, described what students could expect their participation to be like, and defined culture as “the way we do things or what we believe around here.” Students’ questions about participation in the study were answered. They all signed consent forms, and the interviews began.

The question was asked: “What makes a good day at Crosstown High School?” Each student in the group was asked for a response before the question was opened to discussion. Students’ responses were recorded on newsprint. The process of using “in-turn” responses before open discussion was followed with each question. Students were asked if they wished to add any information about each question before the investigator moved on to the next question. When students had discussed all questions, the investigator gave them time to look
at their responses and clarify or add information. Most groups were satisfied with the responses already listed.

The students' responses to all questions were recorded on newsprint. The newsprint for each group was numbered, and the grade level and gender of each participant was also recorded. At the end of each small group interview, the researcher again completed a small group summary form. Following the completion of the Round Two small group interviews, the researcher transcribed the newsprint to computer data files, one file per small group.

**Individual interviews.** Students individually interviewed in Round Two were randomly selected from students enrolled in English classes who had returned signed consent forms. The principal’s clerical staff scheduled the interviews.

During Round Two, the researcher interviewed 23 students. As before, he developed an interview guide for use during the Round Two individual interviews. He also developed a “phase two strategy plan” (see Appendix E-2). This guide enabled the investigator to maintain consistent procedures. He developed questions after examining the small group data obtained in round one interviews.

For each student interviewed during Round Two, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, described what the student could expect participation to be like, and defined culture as “the way we do things or what we believe around here.” Each student was asked for permission to audio tape the interview. Each student was informed of the option not to be audio taped and the option not to participate in the interview. No student withdrew, asked not to be taped, or requested that the tape be stopped. The students’ questions about their
participation in the study were answered. After all the participants signed consent forms, the interviews began.

Students interviewed individually during Round Two were asked to respond to questions designed to explore and confirm information that emerged during round one small group interviews and individual interviews. For each of the questions, the interviewer stated the questions and asked the student to respond, probing for more information or asking for clarification when appropriate. The interviewer briefly summarized the student’s response to each question and gave the student an opportunity to add information before going on to the next question. Whenever time permitted, the interviewer summarized the student’s responses and asked if he or she would like to add anything before closing the interview.

The researcher took notes on “interview note forms” (see Appendix D-5). Each interview was audio taped as well. The researcher completed an individual interview summary form after each interview (see Appendix D-6). He completed this form after the student being interviewed had left the interview room but before the next student arrived. The student’s grade and gender were recorded on the note sheets.

Summary

Data about the student culture were collected from several sources during the 10 days at Crosstown High School. Students provided information through participation in small group or individual interviews. A total of 321 students, approximately 25 percent of the Crosstown High School student population, participated in the research study. Two hundred seventy-six students participated in small group interviews and 45 students were interviewed
individually. Observations of several events and the examination of artifacts supplied valuable information about the student culture of Crosstown High School.

**Triangulation of Data Sources**

Triangulation, the focusing of several research methods on one point, was employed to strengthen the study’s design. Triangulation, the use of multiple-data-collection methods, contributes to the trustworthiness of the data. Triangulation of this study’s different data sources assisted with validation and ensured that all research questions were addressed. This process may involve the incorporation of multiple data sources, investigators, and theoretical perspectives in order to increase the confidence in research findings (Denzin, 1988; Patton, 1990). This process guards against the accusation that the findings of a study are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source or biases of a single investigator (Merriam, 1988).

In the conduct of this particular study, two types of triangulation are employed. The first, type of analytical triangulation is to have those who were studied review the findings. Qualitative researchers can learn a great deal about the accuracy, fairness, and validity of their data analysis by having the people described in the data analysis react to what is described (Patton, 1990). Second, the incorporation of multiple data sources and multiple data collecting methods as opposed to a single source of data and a single method of collecting data helps to reduce the potential bias that comes from a single data source for collecting all the data. The three sources of data used in the triangulation were interviews, researcher’s observations, and data derived from the examination of artifacts.
The researcher examined the emergent patterns of each source of data to determine where there were commonalities across the data sources, to ascertain the reasons for the importance of cultural aspects, and to identify divergent ideas. Data from the artifacts did not prove to be of key importance but contributed to the rich detail needed to form the most valid, reliable, and complete picture of the student culture of Crosstown High School.

The categories identified in the analysis of round one small group data were important and were used to categorize round one individual interview data. The triangulation of all sources also was used to identify other emergent cultural aspects and reasons the cultural aspects are important. Data from each source were examined for the way in which they were congruent or not congruent with that from the small group interviews. The researcher used the different data sources to check for common themes and for new information that did not fit previously established categories. By focusing these different data sources on the student culture of Crosstown High School, the researcher was able to produce a rich description of the student's ways of thinking, and the extent to which school membership and authentic work were present in the student culture. Findings are presented in Chapter 4.

Data Analysis

The data for this study included the student interview data summaries from small group interviews, and summaries from student individual interviews. Notes from observations, and notes about artifacts also served as data sources for this study. Small group interview reports, newsprint data, and individual interview transcriptions were recorded in computer files on the micro computer program Paradox for analysis and coding.
Data from the small group and individual interviews were analyzed to identify common themes. The information which shared common themes were grouped and organized into categories. These categories were then labeled with words, phrases or sentences that explained the connection shared by the information within each group. This process was first used with the small group data and then with the individual interview data from observations, and artifact information.

The addition of each source of data provided a check to see if the new generalizations supported those from data previously analyzed. The procedure for analyzing the data began when each data source became available and continued until all data had been analyzed.

**Round One**

**Small group interviews**

The researcher intended the Round One small group data to provide information about the common beliefs among Crosstown High School students. The researcher analyzed the data by sorting individual concepts reported on the transcripts. Data had been recorded on newsprint in phrases or single words volunteered by student participants. These words and phrases were recorded in a separate computer file for each group as a separate line followed by a “carriage return” for the word processing software to recognize as a paragraph, or individual piece of information.

A transcript for each small group's responses was printed. When all small group data had been transcribed and printed, the researcher read all of the printed transcripts and made a
list of descriptive labels that the data suggested. Labels such as "caring", "fun", "peers" and "success" emerged. A number was placed at the beginning of each piece of data to indicate the prompt question asked to generate the data. Letters indicating the type of interview group, gender, and grade level(s) of each group tagged each piece of data with demographic information. When all pieces of data had been marked for question, gender, grade levels, and group information, the researcher sorted the data using paradox computer program commands.

The researcher read the first piece of data and selected a category. A label, such as "Safety", which described the essence of this first piece of data, was inserted after the answer to the question. The researcher then read the rest of the data and tagged similar data with the same label. The next piece of unmarked data was then read and labeled. This process continued until all data from the Round One small group interview had been labeled. Data that fit more than one category were duplicated and labeled with all applicable descriptions.

A hard copy of the small group interview data sorted by category was printed. The researcher then reviewed those categories to determine whether categories need to be expanded or collapsed in order to best describe the data. As a result, 52 categories emerged (see Appendix F).

The investigator coded and categorized the Round One student small group interview data in the analysis of data. Those categories influenced the process of determining descriptive labels for data during analysis.
**Individual interviews**

The employee of a secretarial firm transcribed the audio tapes of each Round One interview into a word processing file. The secretary printed each interview for the researcher to categorize and code during analysis.

The computer transcripts of the Round One individual interview audiotapes were analyzed by coding and sorting data, using sentences or small paragraphs within each transcript. These data were coded using the category labels that emerged from the small group data analysis. Several small bits of data were coded with more than one meaning category.

Data from the individual interviews of students were used to validate student small group data. Transcripts of these interviews were analyzed using the categories that emerged from the Round One small group interview analysis. Data incongruent with categories developed from the small group data analysis were to be assigned to new groups, but nothing incongruent emerged.

**Observations**

Observation data were used in conjunction with small group interview data. Notes about each event were made on observation sheets and then analyzed separately. The categories that emerged from small group data analysis were used to analyze observation data. Those categories were noted on the observation sheets and checked against the Round One small group interview data categories. The researcher looked for matches with the small group data categories and watched for observation categories that did not fit with the small
group categories. Data incongruent with the categories derived from small group interviews were to be assigned new categories, but none emerged, so no new categories had to be added. As an example, the data from one lunch room observation were categorized as fun, family like, and communication. This was consistent with the small group interview categories.

Artifacts

Artifacts were analyzed by looking for words and content that fit the identified small group and individual interview data categories and also revealed themes and patterns of the students’ culture. As each artifact was examined, salient data were recorded on a document analysis form (see Appendix D-8). Notes were taken and coded by sources and assigned categories identified in the small group interview analysis. Data different from the categories derived from small group and individual interviews were to be given new categories, but none emerged, so no new categories were needed. As an example, an article in the school newspaper discussed the importance of feeling safe at school. It also discussed the role that students can play in keeping the school safe.

Round Two

Small group interviews

The Round Two small group interview data were intended to provide the researcher with insight into students’ thinking about school and their culture. Questions in Round Two were asked to probe or clarify data gathered in Round One. The transcripts of the Round Two small group interviews were analyzed in much the same way as the transcripts of Round
One data. Data had been recorded on newsprint in phrases or single words as it was volunteered by the student participants. These words and phrases were recorded in a separate computer file for each group. The researcher read the transcript of each interview and coded the data in it by using a key word or phrase from the question or probe. The researcher followed the same procedures for coding and sorting the Round Two small group interview data that was used for the Round One small group data.

**Individual interviews**

A secretary transcribed audio tapes of the Round Two individual interviews into an individual computer file. Each computer file contained the number of the student interview and the grade level and gender of the student interviewed. The interviews were saved and copies of the data were printed for the researcher to code during analysis. The researcher used the same procedure for coding the Round Two computer transcripts that had been used to code Round One individual interview transcripts.

**Data analysis related to the research questions**

The research questions were addressed by using the data gathered during the study of Crosstown High School. Table 1 shows the research questions and the research techniques used to examine each question. A discussion of each research question and the research techniques follows.

The first two questions addressed beliefs and strength of beliefs. Data were gathered through small group and individual interviews of students during Round One and through
Table 1. Research questions, theoretical factors, and research techniques used to examine each research question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Factors examined</th>
<th>Research techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the common beliefs within the student culture of a large comprehensive high school?</td>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Small group interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is the relative strength of specific beliefs within the student culture of a large comprehensive high school?</td>
<td>Strength of beliefs</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To what extent are school membership and authentic work present in the student culture of a large comprehensive high school?</td>
<td>School membership &amp; Authentic work</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What is the student culture of a comprehensive high school?</td>
<td>Student culture</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To what extent do organizational systems factors influence the student culture of a comprehensive high school?</td>
<td>Influence of organizational systems factors</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

observations of students in corridors, the cafeteria, the administrators' offices, meetings, and assemblies. Students were also observed in the area around the gym, and at the "sweet shop" across the street from the school to collect data to address these two questions. These two questions were also addressed through examination of artifacts, such as handbooks, the course offering guide, student newspapers, and a yearbook. Analysis of these data established students' most persuasive and strongest ways of thinking in Crosstown High School.
Cultural elements emerged from data gathered by interviewing students in small groups and individually. Students were asked to respond to the prompt, “Around here, students . . .” These responses were coded (teachers, caring, cutting, academic, friends, education, groups, safety, pride, school spirit, etc.) and sorted so that frequencies could be determined and supporting quotes could be easily located. Like terms were grouped and given a code reflecting their meaning. The resulting list of 52 cultural elements (see Appendix F) then was checked against notes from observations and artifact analysis. This comparison revealed that the observations and artifact analysis supported the cultural elements identified by students. No new cultural elements emerged from the observations or artifact analysis.

The common beliefs and the relative strength of each were determined by focusing the open-ended interview data and the survey data on each element. Using data from small group and individual transcripts, statements reflecting students' beliefs about the most frequently identified cultural elements were written. The frequency with which small group and individual students mentioned each belief was recorded in a table. Percentages indicating the strength of each way of thinking were added to the table. These percentages were computed from students' small group ratings of the strength of cultural elements on a 1-5 scale. The percentages represent students giving the cultural elements of a score of 3 (somewhat strong), 4 (strong), or 5 (very strong). Eight common beliefs emerged.

The third research question addressed school membership and authentic work. These factors influence student engagement in academic work, a component of school culture. Data
concerning the type of schoolwork students called interesting were examined and included when found to be supported by the definition of authentic work presented in the literature. Quotations illustrating the thinking of students who reported they are disconnected or connected and who report that their work is contrived or that they engage in real world work were selected and presented in the research findings.

The fourth research addressed student culture. The student culture of Crosstown High School was identified by examining the eight common ways of thinking to develop a picture of the student culture and to determine the corrections among the ways of thinking. The student culture is conceptualized as a web comprised chiefly of threads representing the five common ways of thinking. Quotations from student interviews were selected to support and explain students thinking about the culture.

The influence of organizational systems factors was addressed by the fifth research question. The extent to which organizational factors influence the Crosstown High School student culture was established by analyzing data from the Round One and Round Two small group and individual interviews. The analysis was guided by the organizational systems model described for each organizational influence identified. Quotations from student interviews were selected to support and explain students thinking about the influences on their culture.
CHAPTER 4. REPORT OF FINDINGS

This chapter contains the report of the findings from the research study of the student culture of a comprehensive urban high school. Findings are presented according to the response to the research questions.

Findings Based on the Research Questions

Five research questions were developed to investigate factors in the school culture of a comprehensive inner-city high school: (a) common beliefs; (b) strength of beliefs; (c) school membership and authentic work; (d) student culture; and influence of organizational systems factors.

Common beliefs

Research Question 1: What are the common beliefs within the student culture of a large comprehensive urban high school?
Research Question 2: What is the relative strength of specific beliefs within the student culture of a large comprehensive urban high school?

The first two research questions were designed to identify the common beliefs and indicate how these beliefs influence student culture. The organizational culture reflects the extent to which certain assumptions (beliefs) are shared across all units of the culture, even though subgroups (subcultures) may hold variations of these assumptions (Schein, 1992, p. 12). Crosstown High School has a student culture. Data gathered in small group and individual interviews with students representing all grade levels and both genders, indicate that students at Crosstown High School share some common beliefs.
These common beliefs within the Crosstown High School student culture emerged from the student interview data collected by this researcher. The most pervasive beliefs were those derived from comments and sentiments noted with sufficient frequency to be categorized as common beliefs. The relative strength of each belief was determined by the percentage of students who rated the strength of each belief a 3 (somewhat strong), 4 (strong), or 5 (very strong) in small group and individual interviews. When the most pervasive and strongest beliefs among the students were identified, they were matched with the observation data.

Students at Crosstown High School identified eight common beliefs, with the most pervasive listed first: (1) Having friends at school is important; (2) It is important to students that teachers care about them; (3) Supporting each other makes a difference; (4) It is important to be actively involved in school activities; (5) School is preparing students for the future; (6) It is important to feel safe at school; (7) Attending school at Crosstown High School is fun; and (8) School spirit and tradition make Crosstown High School unique. Each of the common beliefs are described below. The evidence for each belief identified in the interview responses, an explanation of concepts, when appropriate, and individual quotations that represent the beliefs of students and support the way of thinking are also presented below.

1. Having friends at school is important. The importance of having friends at school was the most pervasive and strongest belief among students at Crosstown High School. Students who observed "friends are the main thing" expressed this powerful belief best. Interview responses dramatically exhibited student's need to have friends. One interviewee noted that "Everybody wants friends, you know, everyone feels better when they see someone they
know. I mean, school wouldn’t work if there’s no friends, you know, it would just be boring.” Students have a compelling need to belong that cuts across everything they do at school.

Several students described how having friends contributes to the school experience. In one student’s view, “friends help with peer pressure and overlook mistakes and help you not to make them next time.” Students also believe friends draw them to school and help them connect: “They make classes easier and help you get through the day.” The overriding sentiment about having friends at school is that “school wouldn’t be fun if you didn’t have any friends.” Some students, however, observed that the need to have friends sometimes competed with school work for students’ time and attention or put them at odds with school rules: “Some people come to school to see friends and don’t learn, and if you get in a bad crowd, you can get in trouble.”

A significant aspect of the Crosstown High School students’ belief about the importance of having friends is related to cliques. Students in interviews noted the existence of many cliques, or social groups of students at Crosstown High School. They talked about the power of cliques to include or exclude and to confront or to hurt.

Several students in small groups noted that cliques make it easier to fit in, but pointed out that when you are new, it is hard to fit in. The students explained that no one will talk to you or sit with you. It is up to the new person to make the first move. Students said that cliques are based on established friendships, interests, particularly if extracurricular activities and popularity are involved.
One student reported that the cliques have a historical origin: "People have always been friends, back in junior high." Interests are another reason students listed for the existence of cliques: "People in sports tend to hang together." Popular students, including student leaders and athletes, tend to find each other. One student noted, "Popularity is important. People want to fit in, and they care what others think."

Some of the cliques at Crosstown High School are the result of neighborhood grouping. One student commented on the difference between cliques at Crosstown High School: "Most students are friends with all groups, but sometimes there's jealousy between groups." Another student said, "There are cliques, but they don't hate each other and fight," supporting the idea that the existence of cliques does not create conflict at Crosstown High School.

In summary, the most pervasive and strongest sentiment among students at Crosstown High School is, "Having friends at school is important." The need for friends supports or hinders students. Students at Crosstown High School are keenly aware of the cliques in their school and their power to make school engaging or unpleasant.

2. It is important to students that teachers care about them. Students at Crosstown High school perceive that having teachers care about them is beneficial to students. Students in small groups and individual interviews rated this mind-set "very strong", "strong", or "somewhat strong." One student said, "Students are going to find enough failure and headache in their life. They don't need to add to it by having teachers who don't care for them. All students need a positive and nurturing environment including teachers who care about the students." Another student stated, "Any student taught in a positive and caring
environment by teachers who care about students, is successful when the student is determined to learn."

Several students expressed their concerns about the importance of caring teachers by saying: "Teachers not getting to know the students is a problem for students. We get too little personal attention from many of our teachers. They don't care if they get to know you or not, and our teachers are like machines they just put out information. This does not make students happy. This don't make students feel good about school."

When discussing teachers caring about students a student said, "There are teachers at Crosstown High School who lack interest in teaching and students. The teachers come to class unprepared, they don't seem to care if we learn and they aren't even interested in what they are teaching. This is unfair to the students and to the school." Students reported that they think it is important that teachers give students respect. They also said it is important for teachers to be patient and easy to get along with.

Another student said, "Teachers who care about students make the subject interesting and fun by involving students in activities and demonstrations. Caring teachers get to know the students and are able to tell jokes and smile a lot: has a good sense of humor. Teachers who care, listens to student questions and make changes in class to help students learn."

The students in one group said, "About 30 percent of our teachers, and particular those teachers who steer clear of taking part in co-curricular activities seem not to be interested in or care about students. Those teachers are making school boring, and at times, stressful for students." The students viewed these teachers as lacking respect for adolescents,
unwilling to try to establish rapport with them, lacking a sense of humor, and not caring very much about teaching. These teachers are also usually guilty of "playing favorites".

In summary, the second most pervasive and second strongest sentiment among students at Crosstown High School is "caring teachers are important." Students perceived that having teachers care about them is beneficial to them. Students expressed the belief that all students need a positive and nurturing environment including teachers who care about students. Students believe that teachers who care about students make the subject they teach interesting.

3. Supporting each other makes a difference. The perception that Crosstown High School provides a supportive and caring environment for students was expressed often. This belief was rated "somewhat strong" or "very strong" by a majority of the students participating in small group and individual interviews. Students described teacher caring, a family or team feeling, respect for and from teachers, freedom with responsibility, and openness with each other as factors contributing to a supportive environment. One student noted: "You get the feeling that you are supported no matter what here. Friends care."

Other students describe teachers and the administrators as really caring about students. An example they provided was that teachers and administrators talk with them outside school. One student offered another example of caring teachers: "Ninth grade teachers ask seniors if they are keeping their grades up and if they are going on to college."

Several students spoke about a special feeling of belonging and support that is important. One student reported that the feeling is about everyone helping everyone, about
caring for the “family” at Crosstown High School, and about lots of students feeling close to the teachers.

Another student described being comfortable and knowing everyone at Crosstown High School cares. A feeling that she experienced when a staff member was killed during the school year. She noted, “Because of that feeling there's no place I would rather be.” Students also feel supported because they are treated with respect.

One student said it well when he said, “Teachers treat us like adults. There's a big difference from middle school. Teachers expect students to act mature. Teachers expect to be treated with respect and then they'll respect us.” Another student reported, “Everyone gets listened to here.”

Students also appreciate other students being open and honest and see that as a sign of respect. One student noted that many students are open about themselves. Another student indicated that being friendly is important: “You need to respect other people here. Think before you tell people what you think of them.”

Perceptions about the importance of Crosstown High School having a supportive environment are supported by students’ responses to several questions during interviews. Most of the students who participated in the interviews agreed that “teachers and other adults in the school will help you deal with home or personal problems.” A majority of the students interviewed agreed that they help each other succeed in school.

In summary, students who expressed the belief that “supporting each other makes a difference at Crosstown High School” were emphatic in the expression of their belief. This belief is strong and is an important part of the student culture although not as pervasive as the
other two ways of thinking previously discussed. Students believe that teachers’ caring, a family or team feeling, respect for and from teachers, freedom with responsibility, and an openness with each other help create a supportive environment at Crosstown High School.

4. **It is important to be actively involved in school.** Students at Crosstown High School perceive that getting involved in school activities benefits both students and the school. This belief is strong. Most of the students interviewed in small groups and individually rated the importance of involvement “strong” or “very strong”.

Even those students who did not rate this way of thinking strong, provided comments supporting its importance. Participating in athletics, fine and performing arts activities, clubs, and student government, and attending activities to show support are ways that students get involved at Crosstown High School.

Crosstown High School students reported several benefits of getting involved in school. One student pointed out, “You make friends that way.” Another student noted the importance of participating in activities and feeling positive about school: “Students need to get involved so that they like school.” A third student explained that “participating in school activities teaches you how to get along with other people, and you need that when you get older.”

Students also reported that there are personal rewards to be derived from involvement. In one interviewee’s words: “Getting involved is important, so you can be recognized and have fun. Join clubs. Involvement help you open up. It’s a reason to come to school.” Another student felt that involvement in school activities means that “you show your abilities to your peers and are more confident.”
Students expressed an awareness of the reciprocal nature of student involvement in school activities, pointing out that student participation is good for the school. One student pointed out an observation about the school’s public image: “Students like for the school to have a good reputation. Sports, debate, parades, talent shows are ways to do this.”

Another student recognized the power of student involvement in promoting understanding among students. A senior who was actively involved in several school activities, connected student involvement with the school’s image and with forming friendships: “Well, if you want to make your school great, you need to be involved. Student government is a big part. We do fund raisers where you get the school involved. We do a canned food drive . . . The more you get involved the easier it is for you to make friends.”

In summary, many Crosstown High School students strongly believe that being actively involved in school activities makes a difference. The students note that involvement helps them and benefits the school as well. They say that they like school more, earn recognition, and make friends while helping to create a positive public image for the school.

5. School is preparing students for the future. Students at Crosstown High School talked frequently about the importance of having a purpose for coming to school, and about the importance of accomplishing something while they are at school. Students in small groups and students interviewed individually rated this belief “strong” or “somewhat strong”. Students at Crosstown High School have a sense that there is an end in sight to their education, but that reason or purpose varies. Some students are concerned with the importance of getting an education and others report the importance of graduating. Some students are preparing for college while others express a need to earn a diploma to get a job.
Many students connected the preparation at school with the ability to earn money, with high school graduation, with winning college scholarships, and with having a good life. One student reported that “every student cares about grades, some more than others.” A different student noted, “Some students don’t realize how important academics are till they are juniors or seniors, but they really are important to the future of all students.”

Another student indicated that many students care about academics. “Crosstown High School has a good share of smart students. We worry about the future, about college, especially seniors.” Yet another student noted, “Rewards are a reason to come to Crosstown High School. Everyone wants a good education to go to college. Grades are important. We want good jobs, a good life, money.”

Some students’ reasons for coming to Crosstown High School are complex, involving more than one reason. One student’s words communicate these students’ thinking about attending Crosstown High School: “Trying for good grades is important so you can get a good job, get into college, stay on sports teams . . . to prove to yourself and others that you can make it.”

Students’ interview statements indicate that they come to Crosstown High School to get an education, graduate, (earn a diploma) prepare for college, get a job, or even to get grades. The students feel that school is preparing them in all these ways, but their statements do not focus on learning or engagement in academic work.

In summary, many Crosstown High School students believe there is a reason for attending school, and that school is preparing students for the future. Their reasons for attending school vary by students but include getting an education, graduating, preparing for
college, and needing a diploma to get a job. The students believe that school is preparing them for the future.

6. **It is important to feel safe at school.** Students at Crosstown High School perceived that there are safety issues that must be addressed at the school. Students in small groups and individual interviewees rated this belief “somewhat strong”.

One student said: *"We are going to find enough danger in the outside world. We don’t need to worry about safety at school, too."

Several students expressed their concerns about the job that the security officers do at Crosstown High school. Several students expressed their concern by saying, *"The officers play favorites. They will only say something to certain students. Other students can come and go as they please. They even let people come in the building who are not suppose to be here."

Students expressed concerns about the students who are in the halls during class time. During interviews, students talked often about the way students disrupt the teachers by just knocking on the door and asking to speak with a student. One student stated, *"Some of the students are not interested in learning, they just come here to walk up and down the halls so they can be seen."

When students were asked by this researcher for specific things that have happened which cause them to be concerned about their safety at school, no acts of physical violence or threats of violence were mentioned. Students did talk about the large number of students and community people who “hang out” at the sweet shop directly across the street from the school. The students saw this as a source of potential problems. Students also expressed the
concern, "You don't know when one of the students who interrupts the teachers' classes will get 'mad' because the teacher refused to allow them to talk to a student during class time."

Crosstown High School "is still a safe place for students and staff," said the overwhelming majority who identified the importance of feeling safe at school as a belief. One student expressed the concerns of students by saying: "Students and staff may be physically safe, but the potential for school violence adversely affects student and staff morale." Another student stated, "The administrators need to be more strict about people coming in the building. They need to keep students from turning over the coke machines. I think we can help if we don't act like it is cool for students to act like that instead of coming to school to get an education and just act like we have learned how to act you know."

A student in one of the small groups stated, "Our school has very few incidents of violence, more like fist fights or scuffles. Once they are over you don't have to worry about it continuing or someone else wanting to fight you because of the fight you had with someone else. We really are like family here, and families have scuffles sometimes."

In summary, "It is important to feel safe at school" is one of the beliefs at Crosstown High School. While it was not as pervasive and strong as the first five beliefs, it was common enough to be included. Students at Crosstown High School are aware that students and staff must feel safe in order to do their best work.

7. Attending school at Crosstown High School is fun. This belief at Crosstown High School seem to be a part of nearly every interview though not stated specifically. During interviews, students frequently mentioned the importance of classes being fun, students having fun with each other, having fun at school activities, and the fun of being actively
involved in school activities. One student said, "Football, being on the teams, majorette, basketball, soccer, volleyball, a lot of activities, they are all fun, students think our dances are fun."

This researcher asked students to tell him some of the things students at Crosstown High School do to have fun. Students' responses were as follows: "Some students just walk the halls, that's all they come to school for, they think it's fun. Some students like to clown, they act playful. Some of them act like elementary school students, I mean, you know, they can't be serious and that's about all they do. They just joke around. If I had to leave this school I would miss the fun that we have here. It's fun here because the teachers are very nice."

When the students were asked what television programs they enjoy watching, they responded with a list of programs all of which were comedy programs. This reinforces the students comments about the importance of fun in their lives.

In summary, another very pervasive and very strong sentiment among students at Crosstown High School is "Attending school at Crosstown High School is fun." Fun is very important to the students at Crosstown High School. The students believe that everything should be fun and enjoyable.

8. School spirit and traditions make Crosstown High School unique. Students believe that school spirit and tradition are important at Crosstown High School. These things set the school apart from other schools in the community. While this way of thinking is not as pervasive as the previous seven, it is strong among those students who held it. One senior described a sentiment held by many about importance and uniqueness of school pride at
Crosstown High: "Kind of gives our school character. Our school is like known for our pride and how we support each other in almost everything we do. It's really, I think it's really important to show it, cause I have friends from different schools, and they sit there and talk about how bad their school is and how they don't like it, and I just sit there, I just love my school!"

Students listed several important and unique Crosstown High School traditions that “have always been that way.” A specific point of pride and a major source of tradition is the Crosstown High School Alumni Association. As one student said, “We have a lot of Crosstown High pride, a lot. Cause like our Alumni Association is the biggest in this area and I mean, once you graduate from Crosstown High, you're like, I don’t know, you take pride in it.” Other specific traditions mentioned repeatedly in interviews were participating in homecoming week dress-up days, holding “awesome” prep rallies for athletic events, wearing school colors on Fridays, and sitting in the senior section of the auditorium during assemblies.

Students also see school spirit as an important part of their culture. One student’s insight explains the relationship among students’ pride, athletic success, and the perceived negative public perception of Crosstown High School: “Pride in our school is important. We're proud to go to Crosstown High School. We want to see the teams be good and we support them so we can give Crosstown High School a good name, because people think Crosstown High school is bad and this side of town is bad.”

The negative school image seems to become a motivation for students. Students see school spirit and athletics as intertwined. A sophomore commented: “There's just a lot of
school spirit. You know, like football and basketball games—you will see a crowd, you know. Pep rallies are always fired up. That's school spirit, you know. People always have Crosstown High School sweaters on or Crosstown High School sweatshirt or something that has Crosstown High School on it everyday."

To summarize, students at Crosstown High School believe their pride, tradition, and school spirit make the school unique. The belief is very strong. The sentiment that the public perceives Crosstown High School negatively may have resulted in an underdog mentality and pride in their school. Involvement in activities offers students the opportunity to show pride and school spirit in order to combat the negative public image. Students interviewed said they are proud of their school and believe there is enough school spirit.

The findings of the first two research questions identified and described eight common beliefs within the student culture of Crosstown High School. The pervasiveness of each belief was indicated in interviews by the number of students who rated the belief a 3 (somewhat strong), 4 (strong), or 5 (very strong). These beliefs indicate the Crosstown High School student culture is strong and positive.

School membership and authentic work

Research Question 3: To what extent are school membership and authentic work present in the student culture of a large comprehensive high school?

The third research question was designed to examine factors in school culture. The extent to which school membership and authentic work are present in the student culture of Crosstown High School was determined by examining the extent to which students agreed or disagreed with the statements in the Partners in Education Study Survey (PESS), measuring
the dimensions of school membership and authentic work. Survey data were used to address this research question because the PESS is designed to address the concept of school membership and authentic work as defined by Newmann, Wehlage, and Lamborn (1992).

All students responded to survey statements presented during round two of the small group and individual interviews. All students responded to the same set of statements, which describe various aspects of each concept. Small group and individual interviews provided data that support the concepts of school membership and authentic work rather than determine their extent in the student culture.

School membership reflects students’ sense of belonging to their school. School membership is influenced by clarity of purpose, fairness, personal support, success, and a caring environment. Students’ responses to school membership dimension statements on the PESS were placed on a continuum having one end point as “disconnected” (a score of 1 on the answer to the survey statements) and the other end point as “connected” (a score of 6 on the answer to the survey statements). Scores of 4, 5, or 6 are considered connected. Scores of 1, 2, or 3 are considered disconnected.

The extent to which students report a sense of school membership at Crosstown High School is spread across the continuum. There are students at Crosstown High School who are connected and others who report they are disconnected from their school.

Interview data provide quotations from students which support the survey statement data and explain students’ thinking about school membership. Several students who were interviewed expressed a strong sense of school membership. One student connected a feeling of belonging with getting involved, having fun, having opportunities, and meeting friends:
"It's important to get involved so you can have fun, be with more people. There are lots of opportunities—sports, student government, clubs, choir, band, National Honor Society. It goes hand-in-hand with having friends. You meet most of them in activities, the true ones."

Teachers' caring is an element of school membership that students feel connects them to school. One student described the teachers' treatment of students: "I think they're very understanding. Our teachers care a lot about you, even if you don't think they do. Deep down, people do know that they do care about you. The teachers are always there for you. Teachers will help you even if you are not in their class."

Several students reported feeling a sense of "family" at Crosstown High School. One student expressed the ideas well: "Well, what makes us unique is, as a group we are one. It's, I mean they'll back you up and everything. That's one thing Crosstown High School is. I've attended other schools and it's not like that. It's, it's people off in their own little things, you know, it's just different. Crosstown High School is a whole. I mean, they back you up. They give you encouragement. We've had three deaths this year. Enemies became friends again. I mean, everybody just came together, and that just shows, in my opinion, that just showed unity here."

Another student described a feeling of satisfaction and "fitting in": "It's a good school. I mean, I wouldn't want to go anywhere else, just because I've been here for four years and I'm used to everything."

Some students who were interviewed did not feel a sense of school membership. They reported feeling disconnected. One student described the difficulty of being new and trying to find a group of friends at Crosstown High School. "I've been here since the
beginning of school, and I don't know, people just don't, they're not friendly. They don't really try to get to know you. They already have their own group, their own friends and stuff, you know, so they don't really make much of an effort to try to get to know new people.”

Another student also identified the “group” as a factor that separates students: “There are certain groups here. Not everybody gets along. It's positive if you're in a 'clique' (group), but negative if you are left out or there is cultural bias.”

Some students identify school procedures that get in the way of feeling like a part of the school. One student went so far as to say students drop out because school is boring.

“It's [Crosstown High School] no fun. We just get down to business. People don't make it fun to be here. All the students in the halls during class time, disrupt classes, and scare students and teachers. That's why students drop out of school.”

A few students feel excluded from decision making. One student who felt excluded from leadership believed that the staff members in charge of student organizations had favorites: “Sometimes I don't feel like I have any say in anything because it's basically the class officers that are making everything up, you know.” The student went on to say that class officers had a great deal of influence.

Authentic work influences student engagement and is a function of extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, sense of ownership, connection to the “real world,” and fun. When this researcher asked students about their involvement in authentic work, the extent to which students reported being involved in authentic work was spread across a range from “contrived” to “real-world”. There are students at Crosstown High School who are involved in contrived work and others who report they are very involved in real-world work. Interview
data provide quotations from students which support and explain the students’ response to the question about their involvement in authentic work.

Some students who were interviewed felt that the work they do in school is connected to the real world. One student described communications skills he learned at school as useful in his job: "Because I work in customer service in a big store and when I am at school I have to talk to people, you know, for working on a group assignment or presenting the assignment to the class, we have to communicate, and at work I have to communicate with people to help them with their problems or answer their questions."

Another student described group skills learned at school as good preparation for work: "Getting ready for the work force is important. Bosses want to know if you can work with people. Students are individually accountable when they work in groups."

Other students talk about having fun in the classroom, a factor that influences student engagement: "My algebra teacher calls a test a party. We come into class on Fridays and she has the music going and a big sign up and balloons and stuff."

Students in interviews who reported that the work they do was less than authentic, describe a variety of reasons that they feel their work is contrived. One student described the difference between students who care about school and those who don't: "Most students don't learn much here. You learn on your own. There's a difference between educating and graduating. Some students don't care about getting an education. Some students only pass the courses they like."

Another student commented on not feeling rewarded for good work: "If you get it done you do feel rewarded, if you don't, nothing is going to happen to you. I've seen half the
people in my class that don't do their work, and I do my work and try, and they get basically the same grades as I get. I don't understand how that works."

Other students also report a lack of fun. One student who was asked if there was fun at school reported, "No I don't think so. All you do is go to classes and participate in sports."

Finally, some students reported that school work, rather than being important at the present, might be useful later: "Well, for me, I see it basically just that what I learn here at school in most of my classes will be useful towards college, but then after that, I really don't connect it too much with the real world. I don't use much of what I am learning right now."

To summarize, the extent of school membership and authentic work in the Crosstown High School student culture was measured through student responses to statements from those two dimensions on the Partners in Education Student Survey (PESS). Disconnected students who responded to the PESS statements, associated the absence of a sense of belonging with being new and not being able to find a group, with not having fun, and with not feeling popular. Connected students described getting involved, having fun meeting friends, and feeling a sense of family at Crosstown High School.

Students' responses to the statements about authentic work were considered on a continuum having one endpoint at contrived and the other endpoint at real world. Students who felt they do work that is contrived describe not caring, feeling unrewarded for what they perceive to be good work, and having no fun in class. Those students who believe they are doing real world work reported that things they learn in class helps them on the job and that teachers make class and class work fun.
Interview responses show that the student engagement factors of school membership and authentic work are distributed through all points on the continuum. Most of the students interviewed felt that they were connected to their school. Nearly the same number of students interviewed feel that they are engaged in real world work at Crosstown High School. Quotes from student interviews support and explain interview responses that were categorized as disconnected and connected. Also, quotes from student interviews support and explain interview responses that were categorized as reflecting involvement in contrived and real world work.

Student culture

Research Question 4: What is the student culture of a comprehensive high school?

The fourth research question examined student culture. The student culture of Crosstown High School was derived by integrating previous findings into a “coherent whole”, the overarching pattern or beliefs common to students at Crosstown High School. According to Schein (1994) the whole reflects the “essence” of the student culture in the school. The eight common beliefs are: (1) Having friends at school is important; (2) It is important to students that teachers care about them; (3) Supporting each other makes a difference; (4) It is important to be actively involved in school activities; (5) School is preparing students for the future; (6) It is important to feel safe at school; (7) Attending school at Crosstown High School is fun; and (8) School spirit and tradition make Crosstown High a unique school.
The student culture at Crosstown High School is positive in nature, strong, and stable. The student culture is also supportive, involving, and purposeful. It promotes pride and loyalty, and is rooted in tradition. The strength is reflected in students’ agreement about the importance of common beliefs. The positive aspect of the student culture is evident in the nature of the students’ beliefs. The supportive environment created by caring teachers and friends at school makes students feel comfortable and contributes to a sense of unity.

Students feel that having friends makes school interesting and helps them fit in. They believe that getting involved in school activities rewards them and promotes a positive image for the school. Students also feel that going to school is worthwhile. Some students attend to earn diplomas to get good jobs. Other students want to excel academically and win college scholarships. Still others attend because of the activities they are involved in. The sense of uniqueness students attribute to their pride, traditions, and school spirit centers on overcoming the negative public image of the school. What all these beliefs create is a meaningful pattern of thinking that draws students to Crosstown High School for positive reasons.

The overarching meaning that the Crosstown High School student culture provides for many students very much reflects the meaning embodied in the concept of family. The most pervasive characteristics of the student culture, stability, strength, positive nature, supportive, involvement, purposefulness, pride, loyalty, and tradition, also are those of an effective family.

Many students feel connected to the school through the Crosstown High School “family”. As noted previously, students are encouraged to develop lifelong loyalty to
Crosstown High School through the Alumni Association. Several interviewees recently had been recognized by the Alumni Association at the annual Alumni Dinner.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the family like student culture at Crosstown High School is the sense of unity students feel. One student expressed this feeling well:

Well, what makes us unique is, as a group, we are one. I mean they'll back you up and everything. That's the one thing that Crosstown High School is. I've attended other schools and it's not like that. It's, it's people off in their little things, you know, it's just different here. I have friends from other schools that I have talked to about it, and that's one thing about Crosstown High School. I mean, they will back-you-up. They give you encouragement.

When the researcher asked, "Why do you think this school has it together so well?"

One student responded:

I think it's just the tradition of Crosstown High School. It's something that the teachers have pounded in, you know. Pounded in our heads as freshmen, and when you look at when I was a ninth grader and tenth grader, I looked up to the upperclassmen, and they always seemed to be involved in activities. They always went to pep-rallies. They were always into school. You know buying school sweat-shirts and other school spirit stuff, you know, to support the school. Then, just doing little things to support the school, I mean, that just brings you together, you know, you can count on somebody here. Like I say, we've had death. This is something else I just thought of. We had a teacher killed this school year. That didn't affect the students as much, but the students were there for the teachers. The teachers were really upset about the death, and I noticed it in all my classes. Some of the teachers were hugging the students, and that just shows unity here. Enemies become friends again. I mean just every body come together, and that, that just shows the unity around here.

The Crosstown High School student culture has close connections among the threads representing students' belief that "having friends at school is important, that caring teachers are important, that getting involved makes a difference, and that students have a reason for being at school or school is preparing students for the future."
For the students at Crosstown High School, friends and caring teachers seem to provide the primary reason to be in school. In turn, school offers students opportunities to make new friends and be with established friends and caring teachers. By getting involved in school activities, students find another reason to go to school and develop a strong sense of school membership. The culture thread representing students’ belief, “school pride, tradition, and school spirit makes the school unique,” connects the threads already discussed. Students at Crosstown High School believe that involvement opportunities generate, and support, pride and school spirit, and nurture tradition.

Another thread representing students’ belief that “Supporting each other makes a difference” also connects with the strong section of the culture formed by the previously discussed threads. Friends and staff members provide support for students, especially students on teams, in clubs, and performing groups, and demonstrate pride and school spirit. This supporting atmosphere reinforces students’ way of thinking that they have a reason for being at school.

The powerful need to belong seems to pervade every aspect of students’ school life at Crosstown High School. The students see friends as a very positive aspect of their school experience. Some students expressed the belief that friends help them with classes and help them cope with peer pressure. One student explained the connection between having friends and feeling supported at school. The student said, “Friends make it easier at school when you need someone to talk to. They are there when the stress builds up.”

Many students feel that getting involved in school activities provide them with a way of having friends and gives them an opportunity to belong, to fit in with a group or “clique”.
A student athlete noted, "We support each other. Athletic teams get supported. Students who are involved in school stick up for each other. We're like one, we need to be together."

The opportunity to be with friends also increases the likelihood that students will participate in school activities. One student commented, "If your friends are involved, you will be too." Having friends at school seems to make many students feel supported, cared for, and important.

The cultural thread of getting involved in school is closely connected to the threads representing the ways of thinking: "Having friends at school is important;" "Attending school at Crosstown High School is fun;" and "It is important to be actively involved in school." In addition, the involvement thread ties to the thread representing the belief: "School pride, tradition, and school spirit makes the school unique."

As noted earlier, Crosstown High School students see getting involved in school activities as a way to make friends and as an opportunity to be with friends. Students expressed the belief that participating in or attending school activities help some students feel good about themselves and find a purpose for being in school.

The involvement thread also connects with the threads: "School pride, tradition, and school spirit make the school unique," and "It is important to feel safe at school." Students who get involved in school activities feel they show school spirit and create an identity for themselves. Several students explained, "It's how we show school spirit. So many students go to school here, you're just a number if you don't get involved." Students also explained that receiving recognition and rewards for their involvement also makes a difference to them.
One student pointed out, "People participate to be known, to be popular." Other students commented that participating in activities keep students out of trouble and gives them something to do. Still other students commented, "When you get to know the students who are involved in school you feel safer around them because you know they just want to have fun. You know they will play and joke a lot but they will not hurt each other." One students’ words expressed the strong link to school that student’s involvement creates: "Students need to get involved so that they will like school."

Another major thread in the Crosstown High School culture represents students’ belief, "Attending school at Crosstown High School is fun." This thread contributes to students’ feeling of connection to the school. For nearly all students, this thread is strongly connected to having friends at school is important. As noted previously, students who participate in school activities see extracurricular activities as a reason for coming to school. The students also see these activities as fun. Meetings, practices, performances, and competitions offer students opportunities to make new friends and to be with established friends. This adds to the “fun” of school for most students. Friends can encourage achievement in academic activities as well as in extracurricular ones.

Caring teachers can also encourage participation and achievement in academic activities as well as in extracurricular ones. One student commented, "Friends help with tough assignments. Different people can help with different things." Many students talked about the thread of "School is preparing students for the future," as another reason for going to school.
For many students, the reasons for coming to school go beyond fun and other social needs. Those students talked about academic purposes, such as earning good grades and scoring well on college entrance exams as what school is doing for them. One student noted: "Making good grades is important to most students here. You have to study hard because college is not far away." A student said that most students who stay in school to the eleventh grade feel that school is preparing them for the future. He said: "They are concerned about earning enough credits to graduate. Nobody wants to be a bum." Students also talked about the shortage of jobs for students who do not have a high school diploma: "Staying in high school to that point will help students be ready for a much better future, they may even want to go on to college."

Whether Crosstown High School students want to see friends, be around caring teachers, participate in extracurricular activities and have fun, or pursue academics, they say they feel school is preparing students for the future.

Another major thread representing students' belief is that "School pride, tradition, and school spirit makes the school unique." This thread is closely tied to the "It is important to be actively involved in school" thread.

The emotion that surrounds this belief and makes it so effective in creating stability and a sense of belonging is evident in the words of one student who said, "Crosstown High School is different from the other high schools in this area. Where the other schools have enthusiasm and excitement for being there, Crosstown High School has pride as well as a long standing tradition of involvement with the community. Crosstown High School is definitely one of a kind."
In terms of the importance of being actively involved in school, one student explained, “People like to get involved. It's a tradition from the old days, when the school first got started. Sports made it what it is. Crosstown High School has a bad name, and sports is our way of getting rid of it.”

Several students commented on what they perceived to be Crosstown High School’s undeserved “bad reputation”, and linked it to the reputation of the immediate community which is referred to as a “bad place”. The students went on to say, as did this student, that they consider their participation in school activities to be a way to improve the school’s public image: “Pride in our school is important. We’re proud to go to Crosstown High School. We want to see the teams be good. We support them so we can give our school a good name because people think Crosstown High School is bad and they think that the community is bad.”

The negative public image often serves as a motivator and unifier, as one student explained: “The underdog image gets you up. It brings us together to fight for our school. We don’t have as good a school spirit as we could have because lots of students are not involved in anything. The Alumni Association is strong and active. If we’re so bad, why do they come back!”

The underdog image seems to give students a reason to be involved in activities, and a focus for their academic and extracurricular efforts. They seem to have learned loyalty to their school in the process. The cultural thread representing students’ way of thinking that “School pride, tradition, and school spirit makes the school unique,” also connects with the “Attending school at Crosstown High School is fun” thread.
Another major thread in the Crosstown High School culture represents the students' beliefs that "Supporting each other makes a difference, and caring teachers are important." These threads also connect closely with the "Having friends at school is important" thread and to the "It is important to be actively involved in school" and "School pride, tradition, and school spirit makes the school unique" threads.

Many students expressed a sense of being supported by friends at Crosstown High School. The connection between the need to have friends in school and the importance of supporting each other has been discussed previously.

An important aspect of the: "It is important to be actively involved in school" thread is the support students feel from teachers to participate in school activities. One student said, "Extracurricular participation is highly recommended by counselors and activity sponsors and other teachers." Another student commented, "Teachers and administrators like to encourage the students to be involved in activities, like after school activities and clubs."

Another source of support students feel is fellow students' attendance at performances, competitions, and pep rallies. Pep Rallies were usually described as "bad" (meaning good, exciting), and were mentioned often as a way for students to show support for school teams. Students describe their great participation in homecoming week dress-up days as evidence of their support for school pride and school teams.

Students also pointed out that many teachers show their support of students' involvement by wearing school colors on Fridays. Pep rallies, dress-up days, and teachers' wearing of school colors also link the "Supporting each other makes a difference" thread to the "School pride, tradition, and school spirit makes the school unique" thread. In summary,
the presentation of this finding has described the essence of the Crosstown High School student culture, which is conceptualized as the connecting of a series of threads made up of the connections among students’ eight common beliefs.

The overarching meaning that the Crosstown High School student culture provides for many students very much reflects that of a family. The best characteristics of the student culture: stability, strength, positive nature, supportiveness, involvement, purposefulness, pride, loyalty, and tradition parallel those of a nurturing and supportive family.

**Influence of organizational systems factors**

*Research Question 5: To what extent do organizational systems factors influence the student culture of a comprehensive urban high school?*

Research question five focused on the influence of organizational systems factors on the student culture of Crosstown High School. Examination of the small group and individual student interview data indicates that six organizational systems factors influence the Crosstown High School student culture: (1) peer influence; (2) teacher influence; (3) involvement opportunities; (4) student leadership; (5) the school’s negative public image; and (6) the goal of reducing the number of students in the halls during class time. Findings are presented for each of the six organizational systems factor’s influence on the Crosstown High School student culture. Quotations from student interviews to support and explain the factors are also presented.
Peer influence

A study of the interview data by this researcher reveals that peer influence has a powerful effect on the Crosstown High School student culture. Students in nearly all of the small groups reported that peer relationships are important in their culture. The students mentioned the positive influence of having friends at school. They say that friends make school fun, stand by them, and help them with schoolwork. Students in a few of the small groups acknowledged that friends sometimes exert a negative influence. Friends compete with schoolwork for their attention and may sometimes get them in trouble.

Another important element of peer influence is role models. At Crosstown High School, upperclassmen (juniors and seniors) serve as role models and "cultural transmitters" for younger students or students who are new to the school. Students in several small groups, all composed of freshmen and sophomores, indicated they had been treated surprisingly well by upperclassmen.

Students in one small group interview session noted that upperclassmen had been very helpful to them in "learning the ropes" at Crosstown High School when they were new. A junior in one individual interview session commented on the role of upperclassmen in influencing the student culture: "When we were freshmen, we all looked up to the seniors. I think they were real involved, the senior class, when we were freshmen, real involved."

Upperclassmen, from their perspective as "guardians of the school culture," hold a less positive view of the underclassmen. One small group of students and two individual interviewees expressed the sentiment that freshmen and sophomores did not give upperclassmen the respect they deserved and displayed undesirable behaviors.
A junior who was interviewed individually, went on to express concerns, echoed by another individual and those in a small group: "I think that this year's freshmen class doesn't seem to be involved even as we were."

A senior observed: "The students coming up are a lot worse... like most of the ninth graders smoke and it's, I think it has a little bit to do with it, their upbringing. They don't give anybody respect, you know. It's like when I was a ninth grader, the upperclassmen, you worshipped the upperclassmen, you know. Now, these students, they don't have any respect for anybody, not even themselves."

Upperclassmen believe they once were positively influenced by older students to become involved in school activities but see themselves now as exerting less positive influence on younger students, with the result being weaker or nonexistent school connections for some younger students.

**Teacher influence**

The interview data gathered by this researcher suggest that teacher influence is an important organizational systems factor affecting the student culture at Crosstown High School. When this researcher asked students in small groups, "What makes a good day at Crosstown High School?" the responses with the greatest frequency were related to the teacher. Students in more than half of the small groups reported the teacher made a difference. The students said such things as, "The teacher is in a good mood when the teacher makes class fun, or the teacher praises me."
Interestingly, when students in the small groups were asked, "What gets in the way of a good day?" the greatest frequency of responses again centered on the teacher. Students in most of the small groups said such things as, "Nagging teachers, when they have a bad day, everyone else does too! And teachers, when they're grumpy and complain about things you have no control over, like they can't find the work-sheets." These responses suggest that students believe teachers' attitudes and behavior directly affect their own attitudes and behavior, positively or negatively.

Further evidence of teachers' influence on the student culture comes from students' responses to a later question, "What makes interesting schoolwork?" Students most frequently reported things that are teacher-controlled: group work; hands-on-activities; learning about interesting things or things they could use; doing something fun; interesting discussions; and changing the routine. Teachers make the decisions to include or exclude student-centered activities like those listed above. The decision can help students connect with each other and their work or disconnect them.

Involvement opportunities

The interview data suggest that involvement opportunities have a strong, positive influence on the Crosstown High School student culture. All the students in small groups who talked about the importance of being involved in extracurricular activities were positive about the effects of participation for themselves and for the school. They see getting involved as a way to make friends, to establish a positive reputation, to earn recognition, to contribute to their school, and to promote a positive image for Crosstown High School.
Students pointed with pride to their district football championship and to their other winning athletic teams. They talked with pride about their well known school choir, and the positive and exciting feeling generated by the Homecoming Pep Rally as outstanding results of student involvement at Crosstown High School.

Involvement opportunities seem to offer students positive experiences. The organizational factor, involvement in extracurricular opportunities, appears to strengthen Crosstown High School students’ sense of belonging to their school and their sense of connectedness with each other to a greater extent than it appears to promote winning.

The influence of student decision making and problem solving involvement opportunities on the student culture, varies with the students’ own participation, and their perceptions of the students involved in decision making groups. Students who are involved in decision making groups, generally believed that they make a difference at Crosstown High School.

Students interviewed individually by this researcher were asked, “How much of a voice do you think you have in what happens at Crosstown High School?” Many of the students interviewed believe that students who are involved in decision making groups or are popular have more “say” than most of the other students. One student observed: “I have a lot of friends, but I’m not, you know, real popular, not in their clique, kind of, I think they listen to the, more of the athletes and stuff more than anything else, you know.”
Several students interviewed believed that students need the support of a group to be heard. One student noted:

*I am in a quote, unquote more popular crowd, so you know. Sometimes I think I have more influence on other people, but sometimes, like when I get in a group like senior board or like student government, I think I have no voice. Even if I voice my opinion, I think I would have no effect at all unless I have 30 other people backing me up. I don't really like that, because sometimes they won't even listen to you unless you have a small majority following you. It's, like, it's tough for one certain person to have a voice. You can always voice your opinion whether or not it makes an effect, you know, it just depends on how many people agree with you.*

Students, in general, are perceived to lack a voice in the school when they are not involved. One student explained:

*I don't think a lot of students think they have a lot of voice in what happens here. And, I think that has to do with how much the students get involved. A lot of students aren't involved, and they sit there and complain about 'I don't like this, I don't like that.' Well, if you don't like it, then get involved. I don't think a lot of them have a lot of voice in what they do. They just like to complain.*

Decision-making and problem-solving opportunities seem to positively influence those students who actively participate in them.

**Student leadership**

The organizational systems factor, "student leadership", also influences the Crosstown High School student culture. A number of students interviewed in small groups and during individual interviews perceived that leaders or leadership groups, such as student government, junior and senior councils, and other clubs and organizations make a positive difference for students at Crosstown High School.
One student said, "Everyone knows who the leaders are. Everyone wants to be one."

Several students expressed the opinion that Crosstown High School needs more leadership groups so that more students can be involved. There were students interviewed who held negative opinions about the "voice" they have in their school. Two of those students expressed the opinion that gaining leadership positions amounted to a popularity contest. One student said, "To get on the senior council, you have to be elected and that's all basically a popularity contest right there. So I don't think it's who's qualified or not, because our class president promised to do so many things and he's never shown up to a meeting. He just has not done anything for the school or the students." Another student felt, "People complain about leaders but do not run for elected office."

While students expressed generally positive feeling about their student leaders and leadership organizations, they did not communicate a strong sense of solid, positive student leadership that makes a difference for Crosstown High School students.

The school's efforts to reduce the number of students in halls during class time

Another organizational system factor influencing Crosstown High School students culture is "the school's efforts to reduce the number of students in the halls during class time." Interview data showed that students have a clear perception of what the Crosstown High School teachers and administrators expect of them. Students who were interviewed by this researcher, were asked, "What is the school's rule about being in the halls during class time?" They responded, "The school rule is that all students must be in class when the tardy
bell rings. If students are out of school for the day, or have no class, they should not be on campus."

One student’s sentiments are representative of others:

I think that the teachers and administrators, what they want is the students to have good grades, be safe at school. I think they want to make Crosstown High School, you know, like the top school, you know, one of the best schools you can go to, and also probably like, they like to encourage the students to be in activities, like after school activities and stuff. If you are involved in most of those activities you have to keep your grades up and you have to attend school during the day to be able to be a part of the after school activities. Like with sports you have to keep your grades up or you can’t participate. It’s like you have to be in class, if you are caught in the halls you may get suspended. If you get suspended too many times they can put you out of school for the rest of the school year. So, they want everybody in class when the tardy bell ring.

Several of the students interviewed volunteered that their purpose in coming to school is to earn credits, try for good grades, win scholarships, get into college, and/or get a good job.

The influence of the school’s efforts to reduce the number of students in the halls during class time was strong enough that students in a number of small groups expressed the opinion that more students should participate actively in the school’s efforts to keep students out of the halls and not talk to students who are interrupting teachers' classes.

One student’s thoughts illustrate their point:

More students would pass if they cared about school and attended classes, get to class on time, and stayed in class the whole class period. Ultimately, students’ sense of the school’s efforts to reduce the number of students in the halls during class time is reflected in their common ways of thinking. School is preparing students for the future, and it is important to be actively involved in school.

Another student explained:
Teachers want you to graduate from high school then come back a few years later, after graduating from college, with a nice job, you know, something like that, so they can just sit back and say, I helped that man or woman succeed. They don't want to read your name in the paper a few years later seeing a certain person on a list accused of robbing a bank or something.

The school's negative public image

The school's negative public image impacts the student culture of Crosstown High School in interesting ways. As discussed previously, students perceive that the school and surrounding community has a "bad reputation" in the city. The impact of this negative public image is seen most clearly in the students' common belief, "School pride, tradition, and school spirit makes the school unique."

The underdog philosophy that supports this belief has been discussed previously. What is important to note here is that students hear from their relatives and friends that the school and the surrounding community share a "bad" reputation to which students and community members respond, "It's Crosstown High School and the surrounding community against the city and indeed against the world!"

When this researcher asked students in small groups and individual interviewees about the effect of this underdog philosophy, students replied that they disagreed with the reputation, hated it, and found it to be a motivator and unifier. Students said they participate in activities and give their best effort so that the school looks good.

The Alumni Association brings together the school, and community pride, tradition, and spirit to battle the negative public image. As discussed previously, students proudly mentioned the Alumni Association as one of the largest and most active of its kind in the
area. Students relish the loyal support of the alumni as they learn what will be expected of them as graduates. Through serving dinners at the annual reunion and seeing the contributions of Association members to the school’s booster clubs and scholarships, students learn about their future roles. The negative public image of Crosstown High School influences students to defend their school with words and actions and especially promotes participation in school activities to improve the public image.

To summarize, examination of the interview data revealed that six organization system factors influence the Crosstown High School student culture: (1) peer influence; (2) teacher influence; (3) involvement opportunities; (4) student leadership; (5) the school’s negative public image; and (6) the goal of reducing the number of students in the halls during class time.

Peer influence is strong and appears to positively impact students when friends at school support students, especially academically, but negatively impacts students when friends compete with schoolwork. Peer influence also seems to encourage involvement through the role modeling of older students. Involvement opportunities focused on extracurricular activities appear to have a strong, positive influence on students’ connection with school and with friends.

Decision-making and problem-solving opportunities appear to positively influence students who participate; they feel they make a difference. Student leadership is perceived as a desirable goal but falls short of having the strong, positive influence on students’ thinking that moves a school forward.
The school’s goal of reducing the number of students in the halls during class time seems to positively influence students’ belief that school is preparing students for the future, and that it is important to be actively involved in school. The school’s negative public image appears to positively influence students to get involved in activities so they can contribute to improving this image.

**Summary of Findings**

In Research Questions 1 and 2, eight common beliefs within the student culture of Crosstown High School were identified by summarizing the data from small group and individual interviews, researcher’s observations, and a review of artifacts. The pervasiveness of each way of thinking was indicated by the frequencies of occurrence of each way of thinking taken from student small group and individual interviews.

The relative strength of each way of thinking was determined by the percent of students who rated the strength of each way of thinking a 3, 4, or 5 during interviews conducted by this researcher. Most pervasive first, these ways of thinking include: (1) Having friends at school is important; (2) Caring teachers are important; (3) Supporting each other makes a difference; (4) It is important to be actively involved in school; (5) School is preparing students for the future; (6) It is important to feel safe at school; (7) Attending school at Crosstown High school is fun; and (8) School pride, tradition, and school spirit makes the school unique.

In Research Question 3, the extent of school membership and authentic work in the Crosstown High School student culture was measured through students' responses to
statements from those two dimensions from the PESS. A large majority of the students interviewed felt that they were connected to their school. Not quite as many students interviewed felt that they were engaged in real world work at Crosstown High School. Quotes from interviews with students support and explain the interview responses of students who felt connected or disconnected, and who believe they do contrived or real world work.

In Research Question 4, the student culture at Crosstown High School was described by conceptualizing the student culture as a network of threads and describing the essence of the network as well as the connections among students’ eight common ways of thinking, or major threads in the student culture network. The essence of the Crosstown High School student culture is stable, strong and positive in nature. The student culture is familial; it is supportive, involving, purposeful, proud, rooted in tradition, and supportive.

The eight major threads connect to each other to weave the familial pattern described above. (1) Having friends at school is important; and (2) Caring teachers are important. Students’ most powerful ways of thinking, are linked to each of the other six ways of thinking: (3) It is important to be actively involved in school; (4) School is preparing students for the future; (5) School pride, tradition, and school spirit makes the school unique; and (6) Supporting each other makes a difference.

“It is important to be actively involved in school” is strongly connected to “Having friends at school is important,” and also to “School is preparing students for the future.” “School pride, tradition, and school spirit makes the school unique” is connected to
“Supporting each other makes a difference,” and also to “It is important to feel safe at school.”

“School is preparing students for the future” is closely connected to “It is important to feel safe at school” and to “Having friends at school is important,” and to “It is important to be actively involved in school.”

“School spirit, tradition, and school spirit makes the school unique” is solidly connected to “It is important to feel safe at school,” “It is important to be actively involved in school,” but it also ties to “Having friends at school is important” and “Caring teachers are important.”

“Supporting each other makes a difference” connects with “Having friends at school is important” and “Caring teachers are important.” “Attending school at Crosstown High School is fun” is connected to the other seven ways of thinking.

In Research Question 5, six organizational system factors influence the Crosstown High School student culture: (1) peer influence; (2) teacher influence; (3) involvement opportunities; (4) student leadership; (5) the school’s negative public image; and (6) the goal of reducing the number of students in the halls during class time. Peer influence is strong and appears to positively impact students when friends at school support students, especially academically. However, friends negatively impact students when friends compete with schoolwork. Peer influence also seems to encourage involvement through the role modeling of older students.

Involvement opportunities focused on extracurricular activities appear to have a strong, positive influence on students’ connection with school and with friends. Decision-
making and problem-solving opportunities appear to positively influence students who participate. The students who participate feel they make a difference. Student leadership is perceived as a desirable goal but falls short of having the strong, positive influence on students’ thinking that moves a school forward.

The school’s goal of reducing the number of students in the halls during class time seems to positively influence many students’ way of thinking that school can effectively prepare students for the future if they are actively involved in school. The school’s negative public image appears to positively influence students to get involved in activities so they can contribute to improving this image.
CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted at a comprehensive high school to describe the student culture and to determine the specific elements of the student culture and the organizational factors or school-related factors that influence the student culture. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, discusses the research findings and their implications for Crosstown High School staff and other practitioners, describes the limitations of the study, outlines recommendations based on findings, and provides suggestions for further research.

Summary of the Study

As part of a case study of large comprehensive urban high schools, this study was designed to: (1) and (2) identify and describe the common beliefs and their relative strength within the student culture of a large comprehensive urban high school; (3) determine the extent to which school membership and authentic work are present within the student culture; (4) describe the student culture of a large comprehensive urban high school; and (5) determine the extent to which organizational systems factors influence the student culture. Qualitative research methods were used in the conduct of this study.

On-site data collection was conducted for ten days during November, December, February and March of the 1993-94 school year. Qualitative research was conducted through 59 small group and 45 individual student interviews. A total of 321 students were interviewed, 276 in small groups and 45 individually. Small group and individual student interviews consisting of open-ended questions which were designed to explore students' beliefs and to identify and explain the organizational systems factors that influence the
student culture. The interview questions for all interviews were designed to glean information about each of the factors of this study from the experiences of those interviewed. Observations were scheduled so that they were conducted while students were involved in their regular school day activities.

Raw interview data from the different sources were compared to determine the degree of agreement. The small group interview data from large sheets of newsprint paper, the individual interview data from audio tapes and the researcher's observation from observation summary forms were used in the comparisons.

Findings

As each source of data was analyzed separately, the results were compared to results from previously analyzed data sources. Each added set of results was examined to determine whether it confirmed, disputed, or added new information to the data that had already been analyzed.

Raw interview data were transcribed: the small group interview data from large sheets of newsprint, and the individual interview data from tape recordings. Findings were derived by coding, categorizing, analyzing, summarizing, and synthesizing all collected data concerning the student culture at Crosstown High School. A summary of the findings is presented, followed by a discussion and the conclusions reached.

1. Interview data revealed eight common beliefs among students at Crosstown High School.

   a. Having friends at school is important.
b. It is important to students that teachers care about them.

c. Supporting each other makes a difference.

d. It is important to be actively involved in school activities.

e. School is preparing students for the future.

f. It is important to feel safe at school.

g. Attending school at Crosstown High School is fun.

h. School spirit and tradition makes Crosstown High School unique.

2. The essence of the Crosstown High School culture is stable, strong and positive. The threads of the eight common beliefs feed into each other to create a student culture that is also supportive, involving, purposeful, proud, loyal, and rooted in tradition.

3. Student engagement factors of school membership and authentic work are present in the student’s beliefs. Students believe that they are engaged in real world work at Crosstown High School.

4. Six organizational systems factors impact the student culture at Crosstown High School:

   a. peer influence

   b. teacher influence

   c. involvement opportunities

   d. student leadership

   e. the goal of reducing the number of students in the halls during class time and

   f. the school’s negative public image.
Conclusions

The findings of this study led to the following conclusions:

1. Students at Crosstown High School like their school and enjoy being at school. School seems to be their favorite place to meet their friends and have fun.

2. Students at Crosstown High School believe that most of their teachers care about them and treat them with respect. The students enjoy the relationship they have with their peers and most of their teachers.

3. Students at Crosstown High School support extra curricular activities and believe that it is important for all students to be actively involved in extra curricular activities. The students feel that the involvement will help them feel like they are a part of the school.

4. Some students at Crosstown High school are being prepared to meet the challenges they will face in their life after high school. Many other students who leave high school will not be prepared for the challenges of their future.

5. After summarizing the data from this study, a conclusion of this research was that, at the time of this research, Crosstown High School was not a “good high school”. Some of the qualities of a “good school” are present, but many more are missing. Measurable indicators, such as attendance records, truancy rates, vandalism to property, and percentage of students with the opportunity to go to college, do not match the indicators of “good high schools”.

6. The Crosstown High School curriculum does not match the curriculum normally associated with effective schools. The school does not have a distinct reputation as a
fine institution with clearly articulated goals and outcomes. Too many students at Crosstown High School are not focused on academics. They are undisciplined and show no regard for the rights of others. The administration and the leadership of the school has not made academics and student decorum a priority.

**Limitations of the Study**

The following limitations should be considered by others if they are attempting to find application of these findings to other settings. Limitations related to this research include:

1. No questions were asked which specifically required students to talk about the importance of academic achievement in the student culture at Crosstown High School.
2. A limited amount of time was available for the site visits and data collection.
3. This study examined the beliefs of students at Crosstown High School at a specific point in time and does not show changes over time.
4. The perceptions of parents, teachers and community members were not examined in this study. All have an impact on the school, and thus, the student culture.
5. No questions were asked which required students to talk specifically about the curriculum at Crosstown High School.

**Discussion of the Findings**

The findings of this study reflect the common beliefs and the extent of school membership and authentic work within the student culture. The overarching beliefs within the student culture, and the organizational systems factors which influence the student culture
are also reflected. Suggestions and recommendations about what can work in making school a meaningful and engaging experience for high school students are being given on the basis of the data received from students at Crosstown High School.

Findings based on Research Questions 1 and 2 are related to common beliefs and their relative strength. Eight common beliefs emerged from small group and individual interview data, from observations and examination of artifacts: (1) Having friends at school is important; (2) It is important to students that teachers care about them; (3) Supporting each other makes a difference; (4) It is important to be actively involved in school activities; (5) School is preparing students for the future; (6) It is important to feel safe at school; (7) Attending school at Crosstown High School is fun; and (8) School spirit and tradition makes Crosstown High School unique.

It is not surprising that students share widely and strongly the belief, "Having friends at school is important." Downie (1996), Mitchell and Willower (1992), Parish (1993), Tarr (1977), and Westerman-Beatty (1995) studied student groups in a large high school. Their findings parallel those of this study. According to the researchers cited above, students in grades 9-12 reported that their most important activity at school was seeing friends.

For most students, friends did not usually interfere with adherence to school rules. Like the students at Crosstown High School who formed friendships on the bases of common interests, the students in other studies, seemed to group themselves on the basis of interests and beliefs also. The findings in the present study reveal that the real basis for the connections among group members was common values and beliefs.
It is encouraging that Crosstown High School students often credit having friends at school with positive influences: helping them fit in, making school seem more interesting, encouraging them to become involved in school activities, and assisting them with schoolwork. However, some Crosstown High School students acknowledged that friends sometimes interfere with studying or class work and could put them at odds with school rules.

The pervasiveness of the belief, “It is important to be actively involved in school activities,” is exciting. Studies have shown that participation rates are higher for students in small high schools than for students in large high schools (Downie, 1993; Floyd, 1995; Holland & Andre, 1987; Jacob, 1995). Crosstown High School students, however, report that many students participate in school activities and that involvement makes them feel good about themselves, helps them make friends, and rewards them in many other ways. Holland and Andre’s study also showed that participation in extracurricular activities positively correlates with desirable personality and social characteristics (p. 447).

Students’ feeling that getting involved in activities provides them with a way to do something positive for their school is promising. These students expressed a sense of community that can be refocused on student engagement and achievement. It is heartening that students report “School is preparing students for the future.”

Crosstown High School students pose a sharp contrast to the apathetic picture of most high school students drawn by Goodlad (1983) and Sizer (1994). Bishop (1989) presents the characterization of high school students as unmotivated (p. 6). Students’ perception that teachers have expectations that they graduate and go on to college or get good jobs is
particularly interesting. It is also encouraging that students see their schooling as having a bottom line, whether it is academic success, further education, or earning enough credits to graduate and get a good job.

What is noteworthy about Crosstown High School students' sense of purpose for coming to school is that students did not describe learning or being engaged in schoolwork as a reason to come to school. While students reported that they come to school to earn a diploma, get good grades, or win a college scholarship, they have not indicated that learning and academic engagement are reasons to come to school. The thread that represents the belief that promotes learning, engagement, and achievement is missing from the culture of Crosstown High School. While the threads of the culture creates meaning for students, and the meaning is strong and positive, without the learning and engagement thread, the student culture loses some of its value. The culture has positive elements but does not truly support excellence in student achievement. The course offerings nor the academic focus of the school improvement plan seems to be moving in a strongly academic direction. Of the students interviewed, not even the seniors placed much emphasis on taking high level courses or continuing their education beyond high school. The student culture is not focused on learning or academic success, and the student achievement or engagement thread is not as effective as it should be.

Students' belief that “Our pride, tradition, and school spirit make us unique” is very strong and positive. It provides great support for the “It is important to be actively involved in school activities” and “Attending school at Crosstown High School is fun” beliefs. These three beliefs are fertile ground to nurture student engagement and achievement. The Mitchell
and Willower (1992) study of a "good" high school (one with outstanding academic and
eextracurricular success) reported that students identified three main topics in interviews: (1)
friends and subgroups in the school; (2) school spirit and athletics; and (3) academic
performance as preparation for employment or college. The students at Crosstown High
School also presented these as a part of their belief system but seem not to be making efforts
to make academic success a part of the "way we do things around here."

Students' belief in "our pride, tradition, and school spirit make us unique," provides
the school a solid foundation upon which to build a school that offers all students
opportunities to express a sense of school membership and academic success.

It is promising that students at Crosstown High School believe that "Supporting each
other makes a difference." Steinberg (1990) found that teachers who use "relationship
building rituals" to make individual students feel special and worthy contribute to the "risk-
free" classroom environment so important to school success (p. 3). At Crosstown High
School, for example, several students describe one social studies teacher who always has a
good day. He greeted them at the door every day and made them feel so good that they
couldn't have a bad day. One student reported that he had never read an entire book before
taking this teacher's class. Crosstown High School students feel support from teachers that is
strong enough to provide a basis for becoming engaged in schoolwork. Similar findings were
present in much of the literature on student culture related to the importance of teachers who
demonstrate caring (Downie, 1993; Floyd, 1995; Strickney, 1996; Taylor-Dunlap, 1994;
Westerman-Beatty, 1995).
The supportive environment that is part of the Crosstown High School student culture is a strong element in building students' sense of school membership (Newmann et al., 1992, p. 23). Students should be ready to accept challenges in the classroom that will require them to develop new types of competence (p. 23).

Findings based on Research Question 3 related to the extent of school membership and authentic work. School membership and authentic work are factors of student engagement in academic work. Measuring these concepts provides an indication of the likelihood that students will experience engagement in academic work which is necessary for learning.

The extent of school membership in the Crosstown High School student culture as presented by the students during interviews and as seen during observations is very high. Many of the students interviewed are involved in clubs, or participate in choir, band, or athletics. Several students are also involved in school publication activities such as the yearbook and school newspaper.

It is encouraging that a solid majority of the students interviewed feel connected with Crosstown High School and experienced membership in their school. The size of the Crosstown High School student body might be expected to increase the possibility of a student feeling alienated. However, the students interviewed said that their school supports them and provides an environment that promotes bonding. They see the whole endeavor of the school as significant, feeling it is worthy of their efforts, and believe it respects them. These students are set up to be successful learners. This is a belief that is supported by
findings from research on student culture and academic success (Brisco, 1996; Flathmann, 1996; Jacob, 1995; Stickney, 1996; Taylor, 1995; Westerman-Beatty, 1995).

The extent of authentic work in the Crosstown High School student culture varies widely. When scores of 4 (somewhat agree), 5 (agree), and 6 (strongly agree) are combined to indicate the students' perceptions of the real world nature of work, 63 percent of Crosstown High School students interviewed fall in the real-world range. Authentic work parallels the distribution of school membership. Less than ten percent of students fall at the extremes of both measures, with a large majority of students falling somewhere between.

It is promising that so many of the students interviewed feel they are engaged in real world work in their Crosstown High School classrooms. With even more students agreeing that they feel a sense of school membership, the likelihood that Crosstown High School students will experience engagement in academic work is much better than might be expected in a large comprehensive high school.

Findings based on Research Question 4 provided a description of the student culture at Crosstown High School. The student culture at Crosstown High School is conceptualized as a network of strands created primarily by the connections among students' eight commonly held beliefs. The Crosstown High School culture is stable, strong, and positive in nature. The strands of the eight common ways of thinking feed into each other to create a student culture that is familial; it is supportive, involving, purposeful, proud, loyal and rooted in tradition.

What is intriguing about the Crosstown High School student culture network is that it is quite strong and positive, yet the academic success of the school is not strong or positive.
This finding is contrary to what is found in the literature. The findings in the literature say that if the elements that are present in the student culture at Crosstown High School are present, students will experience high levels of academic success. Perhaps the students are not being provided with the appropriate course offerings or the measures of student success are not aligned with what students are being taught.

Also, it seems that students’ beliefs about schooling have not been focused on learning, engagement, and academic achievement. While students clearly have good intentions and while individual students and an occasional group experience success, a need for achievement that would match positive aspects of the network did not emerge as a part of the student culture at Crosstown High School.

A key to this puzzle may lie in understanding the link between students' overarching beliefs and the culture of the teachers and community. Students at high achieving schools share teacher expectations about their schoolwork, have good relationships with teachers, and feel high expectations from parents and community members (Mitchell & Willower, 1992, p. 15). Some of these pieces are in place at Crosstown High School. The findings of this study show that students feel teachers care about them, and some students feel teachers expect them to graduate and do well. “Graduate” and “do well”, however, are not clearly defined.

It is encouraging that the Crosstown High School student culture seems to provide a foundation upon which to build a school community that focuses on achievement for every student. It is difficult to understand why a group of students who seem to feel so good about themselves and have the support they believe they have are not achieving more. The family-
like atmosphere that exists among athletes and coaches provides the support and direction students need to continue their academic growth.

Students listed goals of the athletic department as important to their culture. They listed learning to work in groups as an important goal which teaches a much needed skill. They also stated that job communication skills are developed while participating in athletics. Learning individual accountability in group work is another skill the students said they learn while participating in athletics.

Findings based on Research Question 5 related to how organizational systems factors influence student culture. Analysis of the interview data indicates that several organizational systems factors may be associated with the student culture. The following section presents a discussion of the findings related to organizational systems factors that may be associated with the Crosstown High School student culture. These organizational systems factors include: (1) peer influence; (2) teacher influence; (3) involvement opportunities; (4) student leadership; (5) the school's negative public image; and (6) the goal to reduce the number of students in the halls during class time.

The most pervasive and powerful factors appear to be peer influence, teacher influence, and involvement opportunities, which are closely connected. All of these factors provide useful and interesting information about reshaping the Crosstown High School student culture.

1. The strong effect of peer influence on the student culture is encouragingly positive in that Crosstown High School students generally accept attending school regularly and feel a purpose in doing so. These purposes are supportive of the school's student learning,
engagement, and achievement mission, although students are not sharply focused on learning and engagement. Again, nothing was said by students that pointed out why student achievement and academic success were not much higher at Crosstown High school.

Only a few students interviewed reported that peers interfere with school and schoolwork. It is encouraging that freshmen and sophomores report that upperclassmen are positive role models for them. Upperclassmen, however, believe that their influence as role models had diminished compared to that of older students when they had been freshmen.

2. The pervasiveness of teacher influence as a factor affecting student culture is not surprising. Crosstown High School students' perceptions of their teachers are very positive. Students focus on teachers' caring for them. Students at Crosstown High School believe this enables them to meet challenges in the classroom. Students continually talked about the amount of time and energy teachers put into helping them and just talking with them outside of their class time.

3. Analysis of the data reveals that involvement opportunities create strong, positive connections with school for Crosstown High School students. The students interviewed believe that getting involved makes them feel good, brings them rewards and promotes a positive public image for the school.

In the review of the literature related to extracurricular participation and adolescent development, Holland and Andre (1987) observed that “Participation may influence adolescent development positively” (p. 447).

4. Student leadership, a fourth organizational systems factor, has an intriguing influence on the student culture at Crosstown High School. Students interviewed reported that they
perceive leadership groups and student leadership positions as admirable and desirable. Yet, they noted that the decision making and problem solving groups and their leaders did not have a strong, positive influence on the student culture.

5. The school's negative public image had a strong influence on the Crosstown High School student culture. Students stated that their purpose in being involved in school related activities is to help improve the image that the public has of their school. Students' perceptions that other schools and communities perceive Crosstown High School to be a "bad school" in a "bad community" could be expected to exert a negative influence on the student culture. Quite the opposite occurs at Crosstown High School. Students have adopted the underdog philosophy. This philosophy motivates and unifies the students.

The school's mission of learning, engagement and achievement does not exactly match students' goal of improving the school's image. The students seem to be interested in surface attractiveness and want people to like them and believe that they are better than they are perceived to be. The students desire to improve the image of the school centers around doing positive things that people in the community can point to that say the students at Crosstown High School are good students and are involved in positive activities. Nevertheless, the students do not talk about being excellent academically. The students seem to be too focused on looking good. However, the students' desire to improve the school's image does not subvert the adults' mission of having students follow school rules and improve academic achievement. Enough common ground seems to exist that a shared vision of the school's mission can be agreed upon by students and adults. This is a critical step toward becoming a school community focused on student learning and engagement. When
the school focuses on improving student learning, and achievement at higher levels, this image could change.

6. Finally, it is not surprising that the goal to reduce the number of students in the halls during class time is pervasive, since the number of students in the halls during class time is so high that nearly all students interviewed said they were affected either directly or indirectly. Having large numbers of students in the halls during class time is a symptom of academic deficiency in a school. This behavior is an indication that students are not focused on learning nor obeying the school rules.

Students complained about the way students in the halls constantly disrupt classes by walking into classrooms and asking to speak to students who are in class. Students in the halls also knock on doors that are closed causing disruptions of classroom activities. Many students were concerned that this behavior not only interfered with the opportunity for students in the class to learn, but that it also added evidence to be used by those who think Crosstown High School is a bad school. The students who attend classes instead of walking the halls were concerned that the students walking the halls were getting away with something that they should not be allowed to do.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The discussion of the findings for the four research questions that guided this study leads to several suggestions to the staff of Crosstown High School and several recommendations to practitioners in general.
Staff members at Crosstown High School

First, the research findings suggest that Crosstown High School staff members need to recognize the importance of high school students’ culture. Understanding the common beliefs among students at Crosstown High School should enable administrators and teachers to consider these beliefs when changes are planned. These beliefs affect how students behave, and particularly how they learn. Taking these beliefs into consideration can be the first step toward creating a more effective learning environment at Crosstown High School.

Second, the research findings further suggest that the Crosstown High School staff members need to understand that the positive nature of the students’ eight beliefs about school might offer the staff the opportunity to build on existing strengths in planning for school improvement. While the students’ beliefs are positive, they could be more sharply focused on engagement, achievement, and learning. For example, when students reported, that “School is preparing students for the future” and “It is important to be actively involved in school activities,” they did not talk about learning and engagement in their schoolwork.

Additionally, the research findings suggest that teachers and administrators at Crosstown High School need to find ways to make resources available to support increased student involvement in school activities. Students who do not seek out involvement opportunities need to be targeted for inclusion. These students, as well as others, could be interviewed to determine which activities would interest them and what times would work best as meeting times.
New activities may need to be added and new sponsors found. Existing activities may need to be modified. Some students at Crosstown High School simply may need a sponsor or another student to extend an invitation to participate in a club or sport.

Because many students at Crosstown High School work, planning time for student activities during the school day may be necessary. A short activity period scheduled into the school day once a week could meet many students' needs.

Perhaps the most important implications for the staff at Crosstown High School relate to students' belief, "School is preparing students for the future." While this belief seems positive, teachers and administrators at Crosstown High School need to sharpen the focus of this positive belief.

Students at Crosstown High School and students discussed in related literature did not describe learning as a reason to come to school. The literature says that students often spend their time and energy performing rituals, procedures, and routines without developing substantive understanding (Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992, p. 12). This may be true in the present investigation as well.

Changing this focus requires further study of classroom activities to determine which strategies engage students and which strategies need to be modified; training for teachers in engaging teaching techniques; support for teachers as they learn and practice new techniques, and a new focus of teacher evaluation for administrators.

Again, opportunities to broaden and strengthen the students' belief that "our pride, tradition, and school spirit makes us unique" need to be provided at Crosstown High School. Students who feel disconnected, most need to feel this pride and school spirit. They need
opportunities to represent or contribute to the school in positive ways as they boost self esteem, perhaps by assisting with an alumni event or participating in a service project. Involvement in any of the suggested activities mentioned above could help create a sense of school pride and spirit that may make a difference for disconnected students.

Teachers at Crosstown High School can raise their expectations of students as long as they continue to offer students the assistance each need to move forward. Teachers also need to ensure that all students feel the support reported by students interviewed. Teachers must also raise their expectation for their students and support the students as they work to achieve at higher levels. This raising of expectations needs to be accompanied by a curriculum that will support the higher expectations. High expectations is a high correlate of effective schools.

A program such as TESA (Teacher Expectations Student Achievement) can raise teachers’ awareness of which students are involved in class and how to increase involvement for those students who might be disconnected. Supporting all students will provide the school with another solid piece with which to build a school community focused on student learning and engagement.

The expectation that students will graduate and do well needs to be clearly defined by the staff at Crosstown High School. Staff members need to know more specifically what teachers’ expectations are, as well as determine the parents’ and the community’s expectations.

The staff must find ways to attract positive press for the school via the media so others will know about the good happenings taking place at Crosstown High School. There
must be continuous staff development of new and returning teachers so they can stay abreast of new developments and changes taking place.

Involving the community and civic leaders would enable all stakeholders to be connected to activities taking place in the school. It would also provide support for students while connecting them to the community and vice versa.

Teachers at Crosstown High School need to avoid the danger of falling into behaviors or unwritten agreements with students that implicitly negotiate their cooperation as long as teachers do not demand challenging academic work of them.

Involvement opportunities may offer the staff members of Crosstown High School a way to connect the disconnected student. Student leaders need to find out what their constituents need and ensure that they represent everyone fairly.

A summary of the research data indicates that the staff members at Crosstown High School need to understand that, while other organizational systems factors currently may be more pervasive in their influence on the Crosstown High School student culture, the factor with the most potential to impact student learning is the school mission. Sharpening the focus of the school mission to spotlight student engagement and learning and including students in the process could really make a difference. The staff members must understand that the influence of teachers is critical.

Events taking place in classrooms at Crosstown High School need to be aligned with the school mission, the written curriculum, the taught curriculum and the tested curriculum. These must be all aligned with high standards as defined at state and national levels. Also, the staff members need to know that the organizational systems factors can interact and create
new influences on the students' culture. For example, peer influence and the implementation of a plan for reducing the number of students in the halls during class time may affect students' reasons for coming, or not coming, to school. A related implication is that the implementation of policies and procedures affect students' thinking as well as their behaviors.

**Staff members interested in including students in their school improvement efforts**

Recommendations for Crosstown High School staff who are interested in including students in their school improvement efforts are presented in this section. The recommendations are presented for each organizational systems factor found to influence the student culture at Crosstown High School. Each recommendation is followed by a brief discussion.

1. A key issue for the staff at Crosstown High School will be determining why so many students are in the halls during class time and whether reducing the number of students in the halls during class time positively impacts attendance, learning, engagement, and achievement at Crosstown High School. If reducing the number of students in the halls during class time will achieve the goals stated above, then the staff must shape peer influence on the student culture to support the school's goal of reducing the number of students in the halls during class time and improving student learning and engagement.

Students interviewed were not clear in their expressions about the reasons so many students were in the halls during class time. Some students thought they were in the halls because they only had one or two classes and when the students finished their assigned classes they stay at school and walk the halls instead of going home or going to work. Other
students thought the students were in the halls because no one was insisting that they either
go to class on or not come into the school building.

Still other students said that the students who were in the halls were there because they had finished their work and the teachers just let them go after they finished their work. None of the students interviewed admitted that they were involved in the hall walking during class time. However, some students did say that the only reason they would have for coming to school and walking the halls instead of going to class would be to “hang out with friends”.

The staff members need to provide students, especially freshmen and sophomores, with direct access to positive role models. The Crosstown High School staff can design a mentoring system that partners students who are effective role models with the disconnected students who most need their influence. Such a system might begin with freshman orientation and include informal small group meetings with student leaders throughout the year. Students who are role models also can serve as tutors for other students needing academic assistance.

2. Staff members should focus on student learning and engagement, especially for students who feel disconnected from their school and involved only in work they feel is contrived. Staff members at Crosstown High School are to be reminded that students’ perceptions of school membership and authentic work covers the entire continuum from real world nature of work to contrived work.

An effort to improve the positive influence of teachers on students can begin with sharing the findings of this study, to create an awareness of students’ perceptions. Administrators and teachers next can brainstorm a list of ways to increase or spread teachers’
positive influence so that it fosters learning and student engagement. Simple strategies can be targeted for inclusion in classroom practice immediately. However, this list is likely to include several complex teaching strategies designed to engage students in learning, such as cooperative learning, alternative assessment, portfolio assessment, and workforce preparation. The next step is to plan for teacher training and practice in complex strategies designed to engage students in learning.

3. An additional need that was revealed is that administrators need to find ways to provide teachers with time to learn and practice complex new strategies that will increase their effectiveness is showing that they care for and support the students. Providing teachers with this time as well as time to create a personal improvement plan targeted to increase student engagement and to share their ideas and questions is critical. When teachers have had sufficient training and practice to be able to apply strategies for engagement appropriately, they are making optimal use of their positive influence on students.

4. Staff members should broaden and strengthen student involvement opportunities. The impact of involvement opportunities on Crosstown High School students is generally positive. The faculty needs to find ways to involve the students who don't participate in school activities in those positive experiences. Students may need to be surveyed or interviewed to determine the activities that will interest them and the meeting times that will work for them. Probably, activities that appeal to a broader range of interests than those currently in existence need to be created. Service opportunities in particular hold great potential for involving all students. To solve the problems of faculty sponsorship and
teacher-student conflict with work and existing activities, a short activity period can be scheduled into the school day.

5. Staff members also need to refocus student decision-making and problem-solving groups to become more responsive to the entire range of their constituencies. Administrators and teachers can provide opportunities for student leaders to meet with students to discuss school issues. Informal lunch meetings can be scheduled to include any student who might want to meet with student leaders.

   Student leaders can visit classes or stop in study centers to discuss issues. The messages student leaders and administrators need to convey and act upon are that all students have a voice in what happens in their school and that everyone should participate in decision making and problem solving. A special effort to include the most disconnected students in decision making and problem solving needs to be made. The student mentors discussed above can provide they are mentoring a push toward involvement.

   Since students were positive about leadership groups and indicated that students like to be leaders, staff members need to extend leadership opportunities to more students, especially those who are disconnected. Broadening the range of involvement opportunities will address the need for more leadership opportunities. An even more powerful strategy is including leadership opportunities in class activities, particularly for group work and projects.

6. Involve students in building a shared mission for the school. The impact of the school’s mission on students is perhaps the most important organizational systems influence. It is the school’s mission that guides all of its educational improvement efforts and is the key to creating a community of leaders at school. All students and staff members need to share in
building the vision of the school's mission, which must focus on student learning, engagement, and achievement. Students must be included in this process if school improvement is to be effective. A strong, positive, stable, and familial student culture provide a solid foundation upon which to construct a school community. The process of building a community of leaders at Crosstown High School would include all of the previous recommendations for practitioners.

Sergiovanni (1994) advocates community building as “the heart of any school improvement effort” (p. xi). Schools first need to become purposeful communities, in which members have developed a community of mind. One effective way to begin is for school members to identify and commit to “core values”, or a shared vision of the school’s mission. Students must be part of the community building process. A true school community cannot be built apart from them.

According to Sergiovanni (1994), when school members have committed to “core values”, they then “design-out” from the core values to create school structures, develop policies, set goals, translate the goals into “core outcomes”, decide about how they will treat each other and work together, decide what to teach and how to teach (design curriculum), and plan for evaluation (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 72-73).

When a school has become a purposeful community, school members should next work to become a community of learners, an “adventure in shared leadership and authentic relationships” (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 155). Teachers and principals must inquire together to create the community. There is no blueprint to becoming a community of learners. The journey must, however, be directed by school members' core values.
When the school has become a community of learners, school members share responsibility for leadership. The shared ideas, "become the primary source of authority." Leadership becomes a power to accomplish shared goals. In a community of leaders, school members learn and lead together in a common quest.

7. Staff members should redirect the energy and motivation created by the school’s negative public image. The high school’s negative public image also influences the student culture. Practitioners at Crosstown High School should carefully anticipate the impact of a more positive public image on students. The motivation associated with a negative public image seems to be pervasive.

A school improvement effort designed to build a community of leaders may also build a positive image of the school as student engagement in learning intensifies. To specifically address the issue of a school’s “bad” reputation, the staff can work with students, parents and community members to create a plan that targets eradication of the negative public image. Everyone involved must be careful not to lose the motivational aspects of the school’s underdog philosophy in the process of building a more positive public image.

8. Staff members should monitor student attitudes toward school, learning and engagement; student achievement; and teaching strategies as the new policy of reducing the number of students in the halls during class time becomes a way of life. The large number of students in the halls during class time had an interesting effect on the student culture.

There is a need to study the students’, parents’ and teachers’ reactions and track them as attempts are made to change this behavior. Student attendance should improve if the change has the desired affect. Questions to be answered through survey, interview, or
discussion, deal with students' attitudes towards school and learning as well as a teacher's classroom practices if students go to class instead of walking the halls. With those students from the halls in classes, teachers will be challenged to engage them effectively in learning.

Other practitioners

Recognizing the importance students place on having friends at school, perhaps practitioners should provide more opportunities for students to interact with friends at school. The following suggestions assume that students will respect the opportunity and behave responsibly. Teachers might want to set up cooperative learning groups, for example, in which students can choose group members. Students can be allowed to select classes or homerooms to be with friends. Administrators can plan unstructured time for students to see friends during the school day or after school. Supervised areas can be designed for informal student contact in place of a study center, providing that students are not replacing work time with social time. Students can be allowed to use the cafeteria or an open gym, with supervision, to spend time with friends. These suggestions can accommodate groups as well as pairs of friends.

Educators should find ways to identify and then connect and engage those students at the low end of each continuum in school and in real world work. Practitioners will need to design structures and teaching strategies that appeal to disconnected students who feel their school work is contrived. Programs that can assist with this process already exist. These students might also benefit from mentoring with successful adults in jobs that they are interested in investigating.
The essence of the strong, positive, familial student culture sends several messages to staff. Teachers and administrators need to understand students' powerful need to make meaningful connections with their peers, with their teachers, and with their schoolwork. When all three connections are made, a student's chance of being a successful learner is enhanced. Practitioners also need to recognize that a strong, positive student culture is not necessarily aligned with the school's student learning, engagement and achievement goal.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study has, as frequently happens with qualitative research, resulted in more questions than answers and offers the following recommendations for further research.

1. The entire study should be replicated at another comprehensive high school to determine if similar information can be found. This study took place at a historically Black (African American) school and may not be generalizable to other environments.

2. A follow-up study in Crosstown High School should be conducted. A future study may reveal if there are significant changes in the pervasive values and beliefs of students as a result of this investigation.

3. Further studies conducted in comprehensive high schools of different sizes and geographical locations should determine if similar findings are present in those schools. A study could also seek to find what are the similarities and differences in school cultures of varying ratios of student population (i.e., Asian, Black (African American), Caucasian, Hispanic, etc.).
4. An examination of parent, teacher, and community beliefs, values, and assumptions should be conducted to determine the impact on the culture of the school chosen for further investigation.

5. The impact of various teaching strategies such as lecture, cooperative learning, or group investigation, on student engagement should be investigated.

6. A useful next step would be to investigate the culture of a high-achieving comprehensive high school using several team members and extending the on-site visit to determine if elements of the student and teacher support, student orientation, and success orientation, are consistent with the findings of this study.

7. The organizational factors identified in this study could become the focus of a separate study.

8. Finally, students' reasons for attending school and the relationship of those reasons to the school's mission should be studied.
APPENDIX A. CORRESPONDENCE WITH CROSSTOWN HIGH SCHOOL

Letter to Invite Crosstown High School to Participate in the Study

March 12, 1993

Dear:

Our meeting with your School Based Council at the District Staff Development Center on March 3, 1993 generated good discussion about our High School Culture Audit. There were many questions asked and we hope those questions were answered to your team’s satisfaction. However, we could not answer the questions that came up several times about follow through by the principal and implementation of suggestions that may occur as a result of the audit. Although you indicated to us your support for the audit, we did not feel comfortable speaking on your behalf and suggested that your council check with you to get an understanding of your level of commitment for the audit.

Enclosed you will find materials related to the audit. If you feel additional information is needed for your staff to make a decision whether or not to participate in the culture audit, I will make myself available to meet with faculty. It will help me immensely in planning my schedule if you notify me of your decision by Monday, March 22, 1993. You can reach me at (515) 294-4375 or (515) 294-4871. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jim Sweeney
Professor

cc: Dr.______, Assistant Superintendent, Area I Schools
/jkh
Acknowledgement Letter to Crosstown High Listing Specific Preparation Activities

May 10, 1993

Dear _____:

We are very pleased that your school is going to participate in the culture audit and are very excited about the work that we are going to do together. Enclosed in this communication is the tentative list of high schools that will be participating in the audit. We believe it is going to make a difference for your school and want to do every thing we can to make the audit successful. It will take considerable preliminary preparation to ensure that we do this well together. Below are three suggested activities for ensuring its success. Please review them and follow as closely as you can. If any of these cause a problem, please call so we can discuss how to go about it in another way.

I. Designate Contact Person and/or Group

We would like to work through a faculty member as a contact person. We are suggesting this for these reasons: (1) it will promote faculty ownership and receptivity; (2) faculty will be very helpful in helping us to be sure we ensure confidentiality, minimize disruption, and enable the audit to be conducted most effectively and efficiently; and (3) it will reduce strain on the principal and assistant principals. Would you please designate a faculty member to work with us or assign the task to an existing group. Provide us with the name of the contact person(s) or ask her or him to contact us. You may wish to have them deal with the other requests in this communication.

II. Provide Scheduling Information

We will be spending five consecutive days during each semester. We want to be sure to avoid times that are bad for students or that will not provide us an opportunity to observe school activities. Would you please use the enclosed calendar to indicate those times during which there are vacations/holidays, or other dates that you consider to be undesirable for the visitation. We will make a tentative schedule and return it to the contact person for final approval.

III. Collect Artifacts for Examination

One of the ways that the culture can be determined is by examining artifacts such as shool policy, procedures, etc. Enclosed is a list of the artifacts we would like to examine. Please understand that we do not want or expect you to provide any information that you do not now have in a form you cannot give us. We suspect that this information is available because it is typically required by central office or others. If you encounter a problem please contact us. We will return anything that you need returned or would prefer to keep.

Thank you so much for your help. If you have any questions please call Jim Sweeney at (515)294-4871 or Charles Green at (816)871-6050. We're looking forward to doing great things together.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Sweeney

Mr. Charles Green
[List of Specific Preparation Activities]

August 31, 1993

TO: Principal and Contact Person

FROM: Dr. Jim Sweeney, Iowa State University

RE: Culture Audit

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the Culture Audit. Charles Green and I are gearing up for our visit to your school this semester. We need your help. Below are requests and supplementary materials that you may wish to use in fulfilling these requests. Please examine them carefully, and call if you have questions (515)204-5450. We will be in touch at least one week prior to our visit to be sure that the necessary elements are in place. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Rooms
We would like two rooms in which to conduct interviews. These rooms need to be large enough to hold six people and need to be available all day. We would like these items in each room: a circular table, an outlet and an easel with newsprint.

Scheduling
We need your help in scheduling interviews. Please read the informed consent forms to be signed by the students, and the one to be signed by parents of students wishing to participate. Unless you have serious concerns with something on the form, please distribute them to the students at the appropriate time and in the most effective manner. The forms should be given to anyone who is a full-time student. We want to give any and all a chance to participate so that we can see the student culture from all sides.

We would like to interview 70 to 100 students in small groups, and about 40 or more students individually. Obviously, the interview times will have to be adjusted to fit your school schedule. We are giving you license to schedule as you see fit, then send the schedule to us when it is completed so we can make adjustments, if necessary. We would like the interviews to be about 40 minutes each. We would also like to have one free period per day scheduled so that we may visit areas of the school and campus where students are during the school day. If there is an assembly or other very significant events, we would like to be present.

We built in some time at the beginning of the first day to meet with the contact person and discuss details. We hope earlier conversations will put us in a position where this is sufficient. We will be happy to meet with you earlier should you think this is advisable. Please do contact me if you have questions.
March 2, 1994

Dr. Jim Sweeney, Professor
Iowa State University
Lagomarcino Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-3190

Dear Dr. Sweeney:

Charles Green, your graduate student, has my permission to come to Nicholls Senior High School to interview some of our students and collect information about the student culture at Nicholls. I understand that the information obtained during the interviews will be summarized and used in a dissertation. The information will also be shared with me for use in planning for change at Nicholls. The process he has outlined and the sample questions he shared with me do not violate students' privacy.

The information that he obtained will be beneficial to us as we continue to plan for change at Nicholls.

Sincerely,

Victor A. Gordon
Principal
## APPENDIX B. SIGNED HUMAN SUBJECTS CONSENT FORM

**Checklist for Attachments and Time Schedule**

The following are attached (please check):

12. ☐ Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
   a) purpose of the research
   b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see Item 17)
   c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research and the place
   d) if applicable, location of the research activity
   e) how you will ensure confidentiality
   f) if a longitudinal study, note when and how you will contact subjects later
   g) participation is voluntary; non-participation will not affect evaluations of the subject.

13. ☐ Consent form (if applicable)

14. ☐ Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)

15. ☐ Data-gathering instruments

16. **Anticipated dates for contact with subjects:**
   **First Contact**
   **Last Contact**
   December 13, 1993
   March 6, 1994

17. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or audio or visual tapes will be erased:

   Not applicable

18. **Signature of Departmental Executive Officer**
   **Date**
   □ Professional Studies

19. **Decision of the University Institutional Review Committee:**
   Project Approved  Project Not Approved  No Action Required

   Patricia H. Keith
   Name of Committee Chairperson
   73-95  PMKE
   Date  Signature of Committee Chairperson
APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Form Sent to the Student Participants

Student Culture Audit
Student information Form

The purpose of this study is to provide your school and you with information that will help everyone better understand the student culture and the things that influence the culture in your school. Culture is “the way we do things around here,” the way student groups behave and what they value and believe.

Using the ideas you share during these interviews and information from school documents, the researcher will write a detailed description of the student culture in your school. This is why I would like to talk with you for about thirty minutes concerning topics related to student culture.

I understand the following conditions:

1) The information gathered during this project will be summarized in a report for my high school and used in the researcher's doctoral dissertation.

2) Any tape recordings and notes made during the interview or any written responses will be reviewed only by the researcher and transcriber.

3) My participation in this project is voluntary. I may withdraw at any time by telling either the interviewer or high school administrator. If I choose to withdraw, any information I have volunteered will not be used in the study.

4) My name will not be attached to any of the data gathered, so complete confidentiality can be maintained.

I agree to participate in this research project according to the above terms. My parents have also granted their permission.

Signature ____________________ Address ____________________
____________________________ Telephone _____________

I agree to conduct this research according to the preceding terms.
Researcher ____________________ Date 11/4/93
Address 8806 Cambridge Ave., Kansas City, MO 64138
Telephone (816) 871-6053
Form Sent to the Parents of the Participants

Student Culture Audit
Parent Information Form

The purpose of the student culture audit being conducted by Iowa State University graduate research assistant Charles M. Green is to provide your high school with information that will help the staff better understand the student culture and the things that influence that culture in your school. Culture is "the way we do things around here," the way students behave and what they value and believe. Information about these things will help the staff to enhance the high school environment.

The researcher would like to interview your student for about thirty minutes concerning topics related to student culture. The interviews will take place either individually or in a small group (3-5 students) during the week of November 29-December 3, or February 28-March 4. Using the ideas students share during individual or small group interviews and in written responses, as well as school documents, the researcher will provide a written description of the student culture at your student's high school to the staff.

I understand the following conditions:
1) The information gathered during this project will be summarized in a report for the high school and used in the researcher's doctoral dissertation.
2) Any tape recordings and notes made during the interview, or any written responses will be reviewed only by the researcher and transcriber.
3) Your student's participation in the project is voluntary. Your son/daughter may withdraw at any time by telling either the interviewer or high school administrator. If he/she choose to withdraw, any information already volunteered will not be used in the study.
4) No names will be attached to any of the data gathered, so complete confidentiality can be maintained.

I agree that my son/daughter, ________________________, may participate in this research project according to the above terms.

Signature ___________________________ Address ___________________________
_________________________________________ Telephone ___________________________

I agree to conduct this research according to the preceding terms.

Researcher ___________________________ Date __/__/93 Address 8806
Cambridge Ave., Kansas City, MO 64138 Telephone (816) 871-6053
APPENDIX D. ROUND ONE MATERIALS

1. Small Group Interview Guide

**Purposes**
1) To identify the prevailing norms reflecting school membership (clarity of purpose, fairness, personal support, success, caring), authentic work (extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, sense of ownership, connection to the "real world", fun), and other factors (deep history, leadership);
2) To identify other prevailing norms influencing student culture;
3) To identify organizational factors influencing student culture;
4) To determine why organizational factors influence the student culture; and
5) To identify strategies and approaches for strengthening the student culture.

**Approach**

Three to five students will sit around a table as they provide important information about their culture. The interviewer will engage students in discussion in a setting that ensures privacy and freedom from interruption. Before the session begins, the interviewer will describe for students orally and in writing what culture is and the purposes of the study and the interview. The purposes of using newsprint to record responses will be explained. Students will be encouraged to ask questions about any of this information. They then will be asked to sign the Student Culture Audit Student Information Form.

When the interviewer is satisfied that the students are ready to begin, she will show them a paper presenting the student engagement elements and factors. Students will be asked to describe norms related to these elements and factors and to other norms they believe are important by responding to the prompt, "Around here students..." To sharpen the focus of the discussion, this prompt will be posted on a wall.

Students also will be asked to explain why they believe the things they list are important and why these things occur. Students then will be asked to clarify or expand their answers and to assess the strength of the norm and its level of importance. The interviewer will determine the number of group members who agree on the strength of the norm and ascertain the norm’s degree of importance. The plan for the process follows:

1) The interviewer asks the student to respond to the prompt, "Around here students..." Students provide in-turn responses until 10 norms and reasons for their importance are identified and recorded on newsprint.
2) Students then clarify responses in turn.
3) Students are asked to discuss the ideas after clarification: "Does anyone want to comment on these behaviors?" Does anyone want to comment on the reasons they are important?"
4) The interviewer asks, "How many students engage in the behavior?" and "How often?"
5) The interviewer asks students if they have ideas about these norms being positive or negative. Then, the interviewer asks students to hold up fingers to indicate the strength of the norm: 5= very strong; 4= strong; 3= somewhat strong; 2= not very strong; 1= not strong. The process is repeated until all the norms have been assessed and the results recorded on newsprint.
6) The interviewer asks students to further clarify why these norms have occurred and records responses on separate newsprint.
7) Time permitting, the interviewer will request suggestions for strengthening positive norms and eliminating or reducing negative norms.
8) The interviewer thanks the student.
2. Small Group Interview Summary Form

Interview # ______________

Date ______________

1. Key points identified in the session

2. Other salient, interesting illuminating, or important points in this contact.

3. Values that surfaced in the interview

4. Additional comments or thoughts

Date____

1. What are your thoughts about the student culture of this school?

2. What themes appear most prevalent or are there new themes?

3. What big questions will you ask tomorrow?

4. What do you need to do to strengthen the audit?
4. Individual Interview Guide

**Purposes**
1) To identify the prevailing norms of behavior reflecting school membership (clarity of purpose, fairness, personal support, success, caring), authentic work (extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, sense of ownership, connection to the "real world," fun), deep history, and leadership;
2) To identify other prevailing norms influencing student culture;
3) To identify organizational factors influencing the student culture;
4) To determine why specific organizational factors influence the student culture; and
5) To identify strategies or approaches for strengthening the student culture.

**Approach**
High school students will have an opportunity to provide important information about their culture. The interviewer will engage students in dialog in a setting that ensures privacy and freedom from interruption. Before the session begins, the interviewer will describe for students orally and in writing what culture is and the purposes of the study and the interview. The purposes of tape recording and note taking will also be explained. Students will be encouraged to ask questions about any of this information. They then will be asked to sign the Student Culture Audit Student Information Form.

When this form is signed and the interviewer is satisfied that the student is ready to begin, the interviewer will ask the student to describe the student culture by finishing the prompt, "Around here students ..."To sharpen the focus of the dialog, this prompt also will be presented in print.

Students will be asked to talk about "what happens around here that is important and why they think these things are important. Students also will be asked how frequently these things occur, how many students participate, why these behaviors occur, whether the behaviors are positive or negative, and what might be done to reduce or eliminate the negative norms identified. If student have not already addressed the student engagement factors of school membership (clarity of purpose, fairness, personal support, success, caring), authentic work (extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, sense of ownership, connection to the "real world," fun), and other factors (deep history, leadership), they will be asked appropriate questions. The plan for the process follows:

1) The interviewer asks the student to respond to the prompt, "Around here students..."While the student talks, the interviewer records key comments and probes to clarify responses and to ensure that she is accurately interpreting what the student says. The interviewer summarizes the norms to check for accurate recording.
2) The interviewer asks the student why this norm is important and records responses, again probing and summarizing.
3) The interviewer asks how frequently the behavior occurs and the number of students who participate.
4) The interviewer asks why this norm is important, probes for clarification, and summarizes to check perceptions.
5) The interviewer asks specific questions about school membership (clarity of purpose, fairness, personal support, success, caring), authentic work (extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, sense of ownership, connection to the "real world," fun), and other factors (deep history, leadership) not previously discussed. The process described above is used.
6) The interviewer probes concepts that have been developed in small group sessions.
7) The interviewer summarizes and thanks the student.
5. Note From for Individual Interviews

Interview #

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
6. Individual Interview Summary Form

Interview #

Date

1. Key points identified in the session

2. Other salient, interesting, illuminating, or important points in this contact.

3. Values that surfaced in the interview.

4. Additional comments or thoughts
7. Observation Event Report Form
(daily)

Date

Investigator

Description of event or activity: what happened, who participated, etc.

Main themes or issues

Explanation or clarification of themes, or issues

Importance of themes or issues

Questions raised by the observation
Observation Summary
(combined)

Date__________

Investigator_____________________

Insights gleaned about the strength of norms, beliefs, and values

Insights gleaned about the organizational factors influencing the student culture

Other insights
8. Artifact Report Form

Date________________________

Investigator___________________

Document_____________________

Summary of document content

Themes or issues the document communicates

Questions the document raises

Significance of the Themes, Issues, or Questions
APPENDIX E. ROUND TWO FORMS

Interview Guide

Purposes
1) To identify the prevailing norms of behavior reflecting school membership (clarity of purpose, fairness, personal support, success, caring), authentic work (extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, sense of ownership, connection to the "real world," fun), deep history, and leadership;
2) To identify other prevailing norms influencing student culture;
3) To identify organizational factors influencing the student culture;
4) To determine why specific organizational factors influence the student culture; and
5) To identify strategies or approaches for strengthening the student culture.

Approach
High school students will have an opportunity to provide important information about their culture. The interviewer will engage students in dialog in a setting that ensures privacy and freedom from interruption. Before the session begins, the interviewer will describe for students orally and in writing what culture is and the purposes of the study and the interview. The purposes of tape recording and note taking will also be explained. Students will be encouraged to ask questions about any of this information. They then will be asked to sign the Student Culture Audit Student Information Form.

When this form is signed and the interviewer is satisfied that the student is ready to begin, the interviewer will ask the student to describe the student culture by finishing the prompt, "Around here students..." To sharpen the focus of the dialog, this prompt also will be presented in print.

Students will be asked to talk about "what happens around here that is important and why they think these things are important. Students also will be asked how frequently these things occur, how many students participate, why these behaviors occur, whether the behaviors are positive or negative, and what might be done to reduce or eliminate the negative norms identified. If student have not already addressed the student engagement factors of school membership (clarity of purpose, fairness, personal support, success, caring), authentic work (extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, sense of ownership, connection to the "real world," fun), and other factors (deep history, leadership), they will be asked appropriate questions. The plan for the process follows:

1) The interviewer asks the student to respond to the prompt, "Around here students..." While the student talks, the interviewer records key comments and probes to clarify responses and to ensure that she is accurately interpreting what the student says. The interviewer summarizes the norms to check for accurate recording.

2) The interviewer asks the student why this norm is important and records responses, again probing and summarizing.

3) The interviewer asks how frequently the behavior occurs and the number of students who participate.

4) The interviewer asks why this norm is important, probes for clarification, and summarizes to check perceptions.

5) The interviewer asks specific questions about school membership (clarity of purpose, fairness, personal support, success, caring), authentic work (extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, sense of ownership, connection to the "real world," fun), and other factors (deep history, leadership) not previously discussed. The process described above is used.

6) The interviewer probes concepts that have been developed in small group sessions.

7) The interviewer summarizes and thanks the student.
Interview Strategy Plan

What issues or questions need clarification?

What needs further study? from whom and how will the information be collected?

Need to know  Who  How

What will be the plan for collecting this information?
APPENDIX F. FIFTY-TWO CATEGORIES OF CULTURAL ELEMENTS
EMERGING FROM SMALL GROUP INTERVIEW DATA

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<th>Code</th>
<th>Theme (cont.)</th>
<th>Code (cont.)</th>
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<td>3. Caring</td>
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Sweeney, J. Developing a strong culture—the key to school improvement. *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal, 3*, 134-143.


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