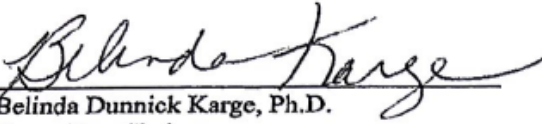

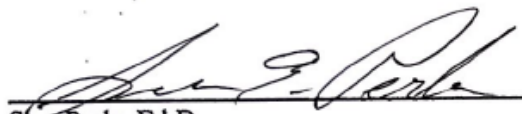


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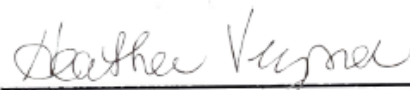
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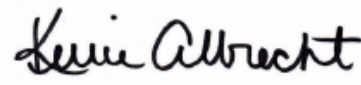
  
Belinda Dunnick Karge, Ph.D.  
Committee Chair

  
Reyes Ganna, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

  
Sam Perla, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

The Dissertation Committee, the Dean, and Senior Director of the Doctor of Education Program of the School of Education, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

  
Heather Vezner, Ed.D., Dean  
School of Education

  
Kellie Albrecht, Ph.D., Senior Director

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## VITA

Humberto Franco Garcia

### ADDRESS

1530 Concordia West  
Irvine, CA 92612  
humberto.garcia@eagles.cui.edu

### EDUCATION

EdD	2023	Concordia University Irvine Educational Leadership
MA	2016	Concordia University Irvine Educational Administration
BA	2004	California State University Fullerton Business Administration

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2023-present	Assistant Principal McMath Middle School Denton Independent School District
2019-2022	Assistant Principal Warren High School Downey Unified School District
2017-2019	Vice Principal Doty Middle School Downey Unified School District
2016-2017	Dean of Students Griffiths Middle School Downey Unified School District
2010-2016	Education Specialist Doty Middle School Downey Unified School District

EMERGING FROM A GLOBAL PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY OF HOW SCHOOL  
LEADERS MOTIVATED AND RE-ENGAGED MINORITY STUDENT POPULATIONS AT  
THE SECONDARY LEVEL

by

Humberto Franco Garcia

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## ABSTRACT

This study looked at multiple factors that have contributed to the achievement gap between Hispanic students and other peers, as well as the impact that the global pandemic, school closures, and the return to school had on learners at the secondary level. The study also drew extensively on self-determination and expectancy-value theories as a contemporary view of what motivates and engages students in their learning process (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Wigfield et al., 2000). This case study combined both qualitative and quantitative measures to provide more comprehensive data to better understand educational leaders' beliefs on students' motivation and engagement and how educational leaders are fostering these environments to motivate and engage Hispanic students and improve students' outcomes.

Ten school leaders, individuals who have significant influence over school-wide programs and policies, were selected from a large urban, comprehensive high school with a Hispanic student population approaching 95%. The following themes emerged from data and interviews with school leaders: connection/relatedness; relevance; aspirations/future; adaptability/flexibility; and shared responsibility. School leaders are driven by the beliefs that Hispanic students are capable learners when content is highly relevant. They also believe in building authentic relationships as critical gateways to improved outcomes and that students' motivation is malleable and responds to change. School leaders also expressed the need to embrace change, act upon it, and equip others to share in the leadership and responsibility of the tasks at hand. Lastly, school leaders reinforce that student choice and flexibility, intentional connections, paired with relevance, and a focus on the future are the catalyst for creating environments that support students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Hispanic population reached nearly 61 million in 2019, up from 51 million in 2010. Over this period, Hispanics accounted for just over half (52%) of all U.S. population growth and now comprise the second largest racial or ethnic group behind White non-Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Hispanic children now account for approximately 25% of all U.S. school-age children. Although the Hispanic population has grown in number and influence across the U.S., achievement gaps persist between Hispanics and other racial and ethnic groups. Hispanics consistently lag behind peers in reading and mathematics achievement, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate course participation, and high school completion and college participation (Madrid, 2011). Researchers have focused on factors that affect Hispanic students' achievements, such as teacher quality, teachers' perceptions of Hispanic students and parents, parents' participation, English learner programs, and the nature of schools that serve Hispanic populations (Madrid, 2011). Researchers have also focused on early childhood education, greater access to intervention supports, college-going programs, and dual-language immersion programs as ways to improve students' achievement (Gandara, 2010).

The intent of this case study was to analyze educational leaders' beliefs on student motivation and engagement in Hispanic communities. In addition, the case study examined the role leaders play in fostering motivating and engaging environments and the processes and programs used to improve students' outcomes. Ten school leaders, individuals who have significant influence over school-wide programs and policies, were selected to participate in surveys and interviews. From these data, themes emerged regarding how school leaders are fostering positive and effective learning environments for students most in need.

### **Background of the Problem**

The disruption to learning caused by the pandemic profoundly impacted all learners. Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2022) show an average decline of five points in math and three points in reading for the nation's fourth-grade students from 2019-2022. The assessment also revealed that eighth-grade students experienced an eight-point drop in math scores and a three-point drop in reading from 2019-2022. Even more concerning was the achievement gap between high-need and low-need populations grew by roughly 20% in math and 15% in reading (Lewis et al., 2022).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Hispanic students are not making sufficient academic gains and continue falling behind their peers of various ethnic and racial groups. The persistent achievement gap negatively impacts Hispanic students' ability to participate and complete post-secondary education, thus diminishing opportunities for career advancement and higher career earnings and even affecting areas such as health, wellness, and civic engagement (Trostel, 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Researchers have examined the external factors that affect Hispanic students' achievements; however, little is known about the internal factors that often serve as barriers to learning. The purpose of the study is to examine the factors that have led to the achievement gap among Hispanic students. In light of the global pandemic, the purpose of this study is to examine the connection between motivation, engagement, and its impact on academic achievement among Hispanic youth at the secondary level. Further, the study explores how leaders have provided programs and resources for improving motivation and engagement, allowing students to narrow the learning gap through greater autonomy, mastery, and relatedness.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the study:

1. What are secondary school leaders' beliefs about student motivation and engagement within a Hispanic community?
2. Considering the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic, how are secondary school leaders engaging and motivating Hispanic student groups since the return from school closures?
3. How do school leaders foster learning environments that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Multiple realities shape the experiences of people and their environmental influences. As such, the theoretical framework for this research is based on the importance of competency beliefs, task value, interest, self-determination, and goal orientation. These concepts are crucial to understanding motivation and engagement and are rooted in an individual's perception of reality (Alkaabi et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Multiple realities, or shifting realities, are evident when looking at different reactions of "behavioral activism and passivism within a person on different occasions or between people reacting to the same environmental event" (Alkaabi et al., 2017, p. 198). Motivation shapes behavior changes over time and vacillates based on people's shifting experiences and context (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

This study adopts the universalist approach to inquiry, believing there are some fundamental truths, but truths impact a person's experiences and context (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017). For example, self-determination theory sheds light on how social and cultural factors facilitate or undermine people's sense of desire and initiative. In addition, social context



can support or impede the natural tendencies toward active engagement and psychological growth. Social context can also cause a lack of integration, defense, and fulfillment of need substitutes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). An inquiry aims to attempt to understand issues within the context and apply practical problem-solving methods. Transformative and pragmatic worldviews inform this approach. Being open to various research methods leads to research questions being answered to find sensible solutions (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017).

### **Substantive Content Theories**

The following theories guide this research:

- Social-cognitive theory: a structure in which self-efficacy beliefs operate together with goals, outcome expectations, and environmental factors regulating human motivation (Bandura, 1986).
- Self-determination theory: enhanced motivation and mental health are achieved when innate needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are met (Ryan & Deci, 2000)
- Expectancy-value theory: motivation is impacted by expectations for success and task value. These factors are shaped by personal characteristics (abilities, previous experiences, goals, self-concepts, beliefs, expectations, and interpretations) and environmental influences (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Combined with perceptions of self-determination, there is a relationship between students' perceptions of ability beliefs, expectancies for success, and the values they place on tasks (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), which thrives in an environment that supports three innate needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When leaders provide the arena where these beliefs and needs are nurtured, students can narrow the learning gap through greater motivation and persistence, which becomes even more critical amid the adverse effects of

the global pandemic on students' achievement and social-emotional well-being.

Motivation is the force that provides the impetus for human behavior, causing individuals to initiate and sustain goal-directed actions (Atkinson, 1957; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Motivation is related to individuals' will to embrace or get involved in a task or a process of action and explains why individuals pursue some courses of action but avoid others (Alkaabi et al., 2017). Further research is needed to understand Hispanic students' perceptions of ability beliefs, expectancies for success, and the components of subjective values they place on tasks (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) as a vehicle for producing greater motivation to engage and persist in learning. Connected to this are Hispanic students' perceptions of self-determination and its relationship with intrinsic motivation, which thrives in an environment that supports three innate needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). By understanding the relationship between motivation and improved academic achievement for Hispanic students, we can move beyond the external factors contributing to lower educational outcomes and focus on the internal factors that can help overcome the achievement gap.

Practical and transformational leadership is a crucial component to improving students' outcomes. Successful and sustainable change drivers focus on direction, cultivate collaborative cultures, deepen learning, and secure accountability (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). Moreover, whole system reform is a process that continually seeks to refine shared goals and understanding while simultaneously building the capacity and ownership of those within that system. System reform, coupled with clarity and authentic collaboration, leads to effective and sustainable practice throughout the system. At the root of whole system, reform is strong leadership with a focus on people and the need to build social capital to develop strong individuals, but more importantly, the coherence and synergy of solid groups (Fullan & Quinn, 2015; Northouse, 2019).

Effective and authentic leadership is transparent, grounded in core values, and open to the needs and values of others (Northouse, 2019). Adaptive leadership, at its core, is about helping others change and adjust to new situations while listening intently to barriers that may obstruct adaptability to unique circumstances (Northouse, 2019). With this is the need for visionary and transformational leadership that establishes a clear view of what the future can be, based on a leader's ability to learn, challenge, interpret, align, anticipate, and decide (Schoemaker et al., 2013). Such leadership is needed in challenging times to inspire change in priorities, values, and beliefs that will move the needle forward for students in need. Further, this type of leadership is rooted in the study's theoretical framework as it helps to shape environments where educators and learners are motivated, goal-driven, feel competent, and believe they can be successful.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

The researcher is the proud son of Hispanic parents. Our household was full of love and expectations but often lacked the support and resources needed. The researcher's parents had little formal education: the researcher's father is an orphan who came to the U.S. as a teenager and completed elementary school while the researcher's mother dropped out of high school. Although the importance of education was preached at home, the researcher often felt unequipped and ill-prepared to confront the challenges faced at school. The researcher often felt unmotivated, disconnected from school life, and unsure of how to navigate post-secondary education's choppy waters. However, through constant encouragement, sheer determination, and perseverance, he was the first in the family to graduate college. The road was not easy. It is an all-too-common experience within minority groups, particularly the Hispanic/Latino community. Where the researcher was able to succeed, many like him were not. Unfortunately, the well-documented and often discussed achievement gap continues to be a headwind for many in the

community (Gandara, 2010; Madrid, 2011). The researcher has often wondered, “What will it take to overcome that hurdle?”

### **Significance of the Study**

Unfortunately, the achievement gap between Hispanic students and other students has widened as a result of COVID-19. The COVID pandemic affected virtually every aspect of children’s lives, including their families, social lives, mental health, schooling experiences, and learning opportunities. The pandemic resulted in many COVID-related deaths, adverse effects on the worldwide economy, and significantly impacted student academic performance and social-emotional well-being (Lewis et al., 2022). March 2020 ushered in a new era within the field of education, school closures, high levels of absenteeism even upon return, staff shortages, increased rates of misbehavior, mental health challenges, and learning loss (Lewis et al., 2022).

As a school administrator during the pandemic, the researcher witnessed first-hand the challenges we all faced because of the disruptions to learning and the school community. The researcher witnessed skyrocketing absenteeism, a decline in academic performance, and increased mental health and social-emotional needs. Student motivation, engagement, and a sense of purpose dropped for many students; the researcher also witnessed it in his children. All felt the impacts of the pandemic, but its adverse effects had a more significant impact on communities of color (NAEP, 2022; Lewis et al., 2022). In particular, the achievement gap among Hispanic youth in the United States, which has persisted for many years despite much research and resources to address the problem, was only exacerbated by the pandemic (NAEP, 2022; Lewis et al., 2022).

The study is significant as it will add to the body of knowledge about the factors and impact of motivation and engagement within Hispanic student populations at the secondary

level. In addition, the study will add to the body of knowledge on how educational leaders motivate and re-engage Hispanic students as we navigate the complexities and effects of the global pandemic on this group. Despite the growing body of information on student motivation and engagement, limited information on this topic has focused on minority groups at the secondary level (Gandara, 2010; Madrid, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Furthermore, as we continue to unravel the impact of the pandemic on minority student groups, it is essential to study how school leaders are fostering rich learning environments where autonomy, competence, and relatedness thrive, resulting in increased student motivation and engagement. This study is essential to understanding perceptions and factors of motivation and attention to provide learning communities that lead to improved students' outcomes within Hispanic student groups and close the achievement gap.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Achievement gap:* The achievement gap refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college completion, among other success measures. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African-American and Hispanic students at the lower end of the performance scale and their non-Hispanic White peers; similar academic disparity exists between low-income and upper-income families (Ansell, 2011).

*Adaptive leadership:* Adaptive leadership focuses on the adaptations required of people to respond to changing environments. Adaptive leaders prepare and encourage people to deal with change (Northouse, 2019, p. 257)

*Hispanic/Latino(a):* Refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.

*Learning community:* In a learning community, teachers “take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting approach toward the mysteries, problems, and perplexities of teaching and learning” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011, p. 12).

*Social cognitive theory:* A theory that suggests learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior (Bandura, 1986).

*Self-determination theory (SDT):* SDT represents a broad framework for studying human motivation and personality, focusing on how social and cultural factors impact initiative. SDT argues that engagement and motivation are fostered when conditions for experiencing autonomy, competence, and relatedness are provided (Center for Self-Determination Theory [CSDT], 2022)

*Student engagement:* Engagement is “a condition of emotional, social, and intellectual readiness to learn characterized by curiosity, participation, and the drive to learn more” (Abla & Fraumeni, 2019, p. 2).

*Student motivation:* Motivation is a psychological force that determines the direction of a person’s level of effort and persistence when faced with challenges. Motivation drives behavior and actions (Kanfer, 1990).

*Teacher leaders:* Teacher leaders are “teachers who influence their fellow teachers and other colleagues in ways that improve the teaching and learning environments within their schools” (Klar et al., 2016, p. 201).

*Transformational leadership:* Transformational leadership is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower. Transformational leaders are attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential (Northouse, 2014).

### **Summary**

The achievement gap continues to be an issue within Hispanic student populations and has been exacerbated by the negative impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic. School leaders must strive to understand the factors that lead to increased motivation and engagement within this minority student group. The study will examine school leaders' beliefs on motivation and engagement with Hispanic students. In addition, the study will look at programs and environments school leaders have created to increase motivation and engagement as school communities deal with the impact of the pandemic.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The achievement gap between Hispanic students and students from other racial or ethnic identities has persisted over time and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 global pandemic (Gandara, 2010; Garza, 2009; Lopez, 2009; Madrid, 2011; National Association for Educational Progress, 2022). As our nation continues to emerge from the pandemic, it is essential to examine how leaders are re-engaging and motivating students and fostering learning communities that meet the needs of at-risk groups. This section reviews the extant literature on the three constructs examined: the achievement gap, student motivation and engagement, and leadership.

### **The Achievement Gap**

In 1983, the report *A Nation at Risk* (U. S. Department of Education, 1983) was released to the American public by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. In the report, the authors described that “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” (U.S. Department of Education, 1983, p. 9). The report was an urgent call for improvement in America’s schools and the information ushered in a new era of rigorous standards, improved teacher quality, increased teacher accountability, efficient use of instructional time, and higher expectations for students’ performance and conduct.

After the report’s release, the American public demanded change, resulting in a burst of educational reforms to improve American public education (DuFour et al., 2008). Despite the reforms that followed *A Nation at Risk*, a troubling achievement gap, particularly between African American and Hispanic students and White students, continued to grow and persist (Kuhfield et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2022). The achievement gap was acknowledged with the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), which made closing achievement gaps



a focus of school accountability. Local Education Agencies (LEA) were required to disaggregate student data by student characteristics for better comparison between groups, leading to greater awareness of racial disparities. Although the passage of NCLB led to more targeted intervention for at-risk groups, most achievement gaps had not closed to a considerable degree (Ansell, 2011). In 2015, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) included language to increase accountability for key student subpopulations by providing states with various options for helping close learning opportunity gaps for struggling students (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019).

The COVID pandemic exacerbated achievement and opportunity gaps, negatively impacting minority groups and high-poverty areas. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2011) showed that Black and Hispanic students trailed White students by approximately 20 points on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment in reading and math in the fourth and fifth grades. White and Asian students are almost twice as likely to take academically rigorous classes than Hispanic students (NCES, 2011). The 2018-2019 Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR), the percentage of public high school freshmen who graduate with a regular diploma within four years of starting ninth grade, was 82% for Hispanics, compared to 89% for White students (NCES, 2019).

The disruption to learning caused by the pandemic profoundly impacted all learners. Results from the NAEP (2022) show an average decline of five points in math and three points in reading for the nation's fourth-grade students from 2019-2022. The assessment also revealed that eighth-grade students experienced an eight-point drop in math scores and a three-point drop in reading from 2019-2022. Even more concerning was the achievement gap between high-need and low-need populations grew by roughly 20% in math and 15% in reading (Kuhfield et al.,

2022). The impact of learning loss is greater on higher-poverty districts. In math, the quarter of districts with the highest share of students receiving federal lunch subsidies (with more than 69% of students receiving lunch subsidies) lost the equivalent of 0.66 grade levels. In comparison, low-poverty districts (those with fewer than 39% of students receiving federal grants) lost 0.45 grade levels. The same was true in reading, although the differences were more minor: 0.31 grade levels in high-poverty schools versus 0.25 grade levels in low-poverty schools (Lewis et al., 2022).

### **Factors that Contribute to the Achievement Gap**

The achievement gap affecting Hispanic students is multifaceted and complex (Garza, 2009; Lopez, 2009; Madrid, 2011). Academic disparities often begin with socioeconomic factors. Data shows that approximately one in three Hispanic children live in poverty, compared to 10% of non-Hispanic White children. Children who live in poverty and read below grade level by third grade are three times as likely to not graduate from high school as those who have never been poor (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). Dropout rates are higher for impoverished children. About 68% of twelfth-graders in high-poverty schools graduated with a diploma in 2008, compared with 91% of twelfth-graders in low-poverty schools (NCES, 2011).

As Ramirez and Carpenter (2005) observed, achievement gaps are fueled by multiple gaps within and between groups. Environmental factors and opportunity gaps in the resources available to low-income children versus higher-income families are significant indicators of students' achievement. At least one-third of Hispanic families lack health insurance and many children rarely see a doctor, dentist, or optometrist, and so many health issues go untreated (Berliner, 2009). Hispanic students are much more likely to come from homes where parents do not speak English well—or at all—and where parental education is low compared to peers from

other racial/ethnic groups. More than 40% of Hispanic mothers lack a high school diploma, compared with only 6% of White mothers, and only about 10% of Latina mothers have a college degree or higher, compared with almost one-third of White mothers (Gandara, 2011). There is no better prognosticator of how well children will fare in school than parents' educational achievement (Murnane et al., 1981). Parental involvement is limited compared to peers of other ethnic/racial due to limited English language skills and education. A loving and caring home is crucial for children; however, little education and resources affect educational outcomes. It is difficult for parents to impart knowledge and skills to their children that they do not have.

Factors outside the home have also served to impact Hispanic students' achievement. About 40% of Hispanic students attend hyper-segregated schools— 90 to 100% non-White. In the large central cities in the West, more than 60% of Latinos attend hyper-segregated schools (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2008). This translates to Hispanic students not having access to peers from other dominant cultures, inhibiting their knowledge of broader society's norms, values, and expectations. These students may seldom encounter anyone who has gone to college or who intends to go, so their ambitions and knowledge about getting to college never develop. It also means that Hispanic students are likely to attend under-resourced schools with inadequate facilities and less-qualified teachers than students of other races experience (Gandara, 2011).

Madrid (2011) reinforced that Hispanic students are likelier to attend under-resourced and underserved schools. Hispanic students are more likely to participate in overcrowded schools. This condition often creates unsafe environments, inhibits learning, and lacks access to specially equipped rooms such as science labs, media centers, and libraries because the spaces are used for other educational purposes. Nearly half a million Hispanic high school students attend schools, and more than half receive free or reduced lunch. More than 600,000 California

Latino students attend high schools that fail to offer the number of college prep courses needed to accommodate all the students wishing to enroll in a college preparatory curriculum (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007).

Teacher quality and the instructional approach also contribute to the persistent achievement gap within the Hispanic student population. Many Hispanic students are taught by unqualified, mediocre, and poorly trained teachers (Haycock, 2001). More than 50% of California's intern teacher force, teachers completing credential program coursework and requirements, concentrated in schools with over 90% minority students (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2022). On the other hand, schools with low minority populations had an average of 97% of highly qualified teaching staff. Furthermore, high minority schools have four times as many unqualified mathematics and science teachers compared to low minority schools as the struggle to hire and retain highly qualified teachers at high-needs schools continues. Educators' perceptions of Hispanic students and parents have also impacted students' achievement. Secondary teachers considered work ethic, peer relationships, laziness, and a lack of discipline as the basis for poor academic achievement by Hispanic students (Bol & Berry, 2005). Hispanic students are perceived as having less academic potential than White peers and are less likely than their White peers to be selected for enrichment or advanced programs (Flores, 2007).

Many educators have the impression that Hispanic parents do not care about education or parental involvement; studies show otherwise. Three-quarters of Hispanics, ages 16 to 25, indicate their parents believe attending college after high school is essential; California Hispanics recognize the value of education more than any other group (Johnson & Sengupta, 2009; Lopez, 2009). Undoubtedly, Hispanic parent involvement tends to look different compared to other groups. Zarate (2007) observed that Hispanic parental involvement has two aspects: academic

involvement and life participation. As mentioned earlier, Hispanic parents tend to have less education and grasp of the English language than other groups, impacting their ability to impart academic knowledge and skills to their children. However, Hispanic parents are actively involved with their children by providing advice on life matters, encouraging sibling care for one another, extending encouragement, monitoring children's peer groups, and warning of dangers outside the home (Zarate, 2007).

Too many educators tend to believe that minoritized students are disadvantaged. They are quick to blame students and parents and focus much energy on trying to change behaviors rather than fostering environments that engage students. Many fail to realize that students' poor performance may be indicative of poor teaching skills and performance. Many Hispanic parents' interactions with educators are limited conversations around poor behavior and academic performance, which creates a reluctance to engage with the school community (Garza, 2009; Madrid, 2011).

### **Existing Research on Narrowing the Achievement Gap**

Research has shown that the achievement gap among Hispanic students is multi-faceted, becoming more nuanced because of the global pandemic (Kuhfield et al., 2022; Lewis et al., 2022). As such, any approach to narrowing the achievement gap and meeting the needs of Hispanic students must be based on knowledge about each student's needs and strengths and not on perceptions of group stereotypes (Leavitt & Hess, 2019; Ramirez & Carpenter, 2005). The only way to address the issue is the need for comprehensive support based on a continuum of interventions rather than isolated, singular interventions. Conventional reform recommendations have included organizational changes, reducing class sizes, creating smaller schools, improving school facilities, expanding early-childhood programs, raising academic standards, improving the

quality of teachers provided to poor and minority students, and encouraging more minority students to take high-level courses (Ansell, 2011; Ates, 2022; Gandara 2011; Lewis et al., 2022).

We will explore the drivers of students' achievement more deeply.

### ***Organizational Changes***

Any significant narrowing of the achievement gap begins with organizational change. Effective leadership, characterized by proactive, collaborative, and collegial management, has a profound positive effect on the whole organization. Organizations benefit deeply from supportive leaders who maintain climates of mutual respect (Jesse et al., 2004). Fullan's framework emphasized moral purpose, understanding the process of change, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence-making as core components of leadership for change (Barber & Fullan, 2005). Fullan defined moral purpose as making a positive difference in an environment or organization. To improve an educational system, leaders must focus on closing existing gaps in the system (Barber & Fullan, 2005). The drivers of successful and sustainable change are focusing on direction, cultivating collaborative cultures, deepening learning, and securing accountability (Fullan & Quinn, 2015).

Moreover, whole system reform is a process that continually seeks to refine shared goals and understanding while simultaneously building the capacity and ownership of those within that system. This, coupled with clarity and authentic collaboration, leads to effective and sustainable practice throughout the system. At the root of whole system reform is strong leadership with a focus on people and the need to build social capital to develop strong individuals, but more importantly, the coherence and synergy of solid groups. Leadership will be looked at more closely at a later point. In addition to having a visionary and collaborative leader, organizational changes must include interventions that foster high academic performance and re-engage

students, such as small class sizes, homework and tutoring assistance, and credit recovery, Saturday school, and summer enrichment programs (Dynarski et al., 2008).

### ***Academic Rigor***

Standard-aligned and rigorous coursework has been shown to increase achievement for all students (Ansell, 2011). Rigorous coursework and a culture of high expectations help students to develop critical thinking and how to generalize that knowledge across multiple settings. In mathematics, students who complete the entire college preparatory sequence perform much higher on the NAEP than those who complete only one or two courses. The opposite is true of lower-level traditional vocational courses. The more vocational education courses students take, the lower their performance on the NAEP. Quality and intensity of high school coursework are the most critical factors of success in college and are more important than class rank or scores on college admissions tests. A rigorous curriculum is essential for students bound for vocational or technical programs (Adelman, 1998; Bottoms, 1998). In addition to being aligned with state and national standards, a challenging curriculum should have clear, consistent, and articulated goals and benchmarks. Coursework should include progress monitoring that is not only based on goals and benchmarks: the curriculum must engage students in learning and teach relevant skills that can be translated into various areas. Coursework should be characterized by problem-solving and analytical reasoning (i.e., higher-order thinking skills; Haycock, 2001).

### ***Interventions and Systems of Supports***

Fuchs et al. (2008) provided an evolving definition of intervention and the multi-tiered system of support based on research-principled or validated classroom instruction followed by a validated small group tutoring protocol. Only students who do not respond to these first two tiers of support are referred for a more individualized tier of prevention. This approach incorporates

strategies such as: (1) enhanced cultural competence, (2) comprehensive support for students, (3) outreach to students' families; (4) extended learning opportunities; (5) classrooms that support learning; (6) supportive schools; (7) strong district support; (8) access to qualified staff; and (9) adequate resources and funding (Hanover Research, 2017). The success of school interventions and systems of support hinges on how sensitive and responsive educators and leaders are to their student's individual needs; when responsiveness is high, timely, and strategic, students' outcomes improve (Friend et al., 2009)

### ***School Connectedness***

We all want to feel like we are part of something, that we are seen. High levels of school connectedness create an academic environment in which students believe that adults care about their learning and them as individuals. Connectedness represents students' sense of belonging in the school or classroom or the extent to which they feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school climate, particularly teachers and other adults (Goodenow, 1993). In addition, students connected to school often reveal greater respect and trust for teachers, more thoroughly enjoy the learning process, show a deeper concern for others, and are more likely to employ conflict-resolution techniques (Blum et al., 2005). Students who feel a sense of connectedness in school also exhibit fewer at-risk behaviors and increased positive social interactions (Catalano et al., 2004). This results in a decreased probability of experimenting with illegal substances, carrying or using a weapon, smoking cigarettes, experiencing emotional distress, considering or attempting suicide, or engaging in early-age sexual intercourse, among other behaviors (Battistich et al., 2000; Catalano et al., 2004).

### ***Parental Involvement***

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), there should be two-way interaction, unity of goals,



sustainable trust, and a balance of power between the environments or institutions in which the individual interacts for their development. The two central institutions where students spend their lives are school and family. Therefore, two-way interaction between school and family, unity of goals, the sustainable balance of trust and power, and the quality of parental involvement are determinants of student success. Parental involvement in education in line with expectations increases students' academic success, with parental participation at least as necessary as a school (Ates, 2021). However, many Hispanic parents feel powerless in helping their children learn because they lack formal education and English skills are inadequate or nonexistent. The matter is compounded by the tendency among teachers to ignore the skills and abilities of their Hispanic parents, although parents can influence their child's academic success if parents are encouraged.

It is therefore critical for educators and leaders of Hispanic students to seek parental support and foster an environment in which parental support is valued (Gandara, 2010; Madrid, 2011). All parties must be aware of situations and circumstances that impede and prevent parents from working with teachers and school officials. Many parents work long hours, often in jobs that provide little to no time off, and find it difficult to attend meetings or school events. In addition, beliefs about the role of parents in school and deference to school authority not only impede Hispanic parents' participation in school-related functions but also prevent them from serving as partners in their child's education (Ates, 2021). When educators nurture partnerships with parents, the likelihood of parents increases both in the home and the school (Vega, 2010).

### **Motivation**

The issues impacting the achievement gap within Hispanic populations are well-documented. As we continue to emerge from the pandemic, it is important to examine how to overcome the barriers and challenges to improved students' outcomes. Until now, much has

focused on external factors, both within the school and home, impacting learning for Hispanic students (Madrid, 2011). It is also important to examine motivation as a driver for persistence, change, and improvement, which is discussed below.

## **Foundational Perspectives on Motivation**

### ***Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs***

Maslow's (1943) seminal work *The Theory of Human Motivation* laid out five primary goals, or human needs, that drive motivation: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. McLeod (2013) described Maslow's model of human needs as a five-level pyramid containing these hierarchical levels: physiological (food, water, etc.); safety (shelter, security); belongingness and love (friendship, trust, group affiliation); Esteem (prestige, respect, achievement); and self-actualization (growth, fulfillment, creativity). These primary goals are related to each other, being arranged in a hierarchy of predominance, which means that the dominant goal (or need) will consume the most energy and desire to achieve it while the other goals are minimized.

Once the chief goal is achieved, a higher need emerges and serves as the center of regulation of behavior because gratified needs are not active motivators. Humans are driven by the need to achieve or maintain the various conditions upon which these basic satisfactions are built. Maslow described people as "a perpetually wanting animal," where the average person's needs are only ever partially satisfied and partially unsatisfied (1943, p. 370). Aanstoos (2016) discussed how this intentional ordering is rooted in the idea "that there is no final satiation point at which the person is no longer motivated, but rather that as a particular motivation is sufficiently gratified, another, the higher motive will emerge more prominently" (p. 1). This promotes the idea that once individuals have wielded enough energy to motivate themselves

towards meeting a specific need, they will feel fulfilled enough to move on to the following motivation need level. These needs levels are placed in a particular order from lower “deficiency” needs to higher “growth” needs (the top, fifth level; McLeod, 2013).

Maslow (1943) expanded and refined the human-motivation studies, making revisions according to the needs-hierarchy theory by reexamining ideas from the original theory and expanding on “growth” needs. An example of this process was Maslow’s realization that full satisfaction at any needs level is impossible. Another insight emerged that people move through the model at different speeds and in varying directions. Maslow concluded that people desire to progress through the model sequentially and effectively, but this is not always possible (Johnson et al., 2018).

As a result of Maslow’s (1943) further exploration of self-actualization, three more “growth” needs levels were added to the hierarchy pyramid model. McLeod (2017) noted that these new levels were sequentially added in the 1960s and 1970s as follows: revised level 5, cognitive needs (i.e., knowledge, curiosity, and understanding); level 6, aesthetic needs, such as appreciation and search for beauty, balance, or form; and lastly; level 7, self-actualization, which stayed the same; level 8, transcendence needs, or motivation reaching beyond person ideals-experiences with nature, sex, science, or religion. Maslow’s continued focus on the need for self-actualization led to the identification of characteristics of highly fulfilled (actualized) individuals (McLeod, 2013):

- Efficient perception of reality and tolerate uncertainty
- Acceptance of self and others as they are
- Spontaneous in thought and action
- Problem-focused

- Uncommon sense of humor
- Ability to look at life objectively
- High level of creativity
- Resistant to enculturation
- Concern for humanity
- Deep appreciation for lived experiences
- Few but deep personal relationships
- Peak experiences
- Desire for privacy
- Democratic attitudes
- Strong moral/ethical standards

Maslow's (1943) purpose in distinguishing these types of people was to show that self-actualized individuals work hard to refine their physical talents and the motivations needed to think and act as an outlier. Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been applied to many disciplines and professional settings. Maslow aimed to establish a concept allowing people to use their self-actualization creatively toward goals they find most important in life (Johnson et al., 2018).

### ***Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory***

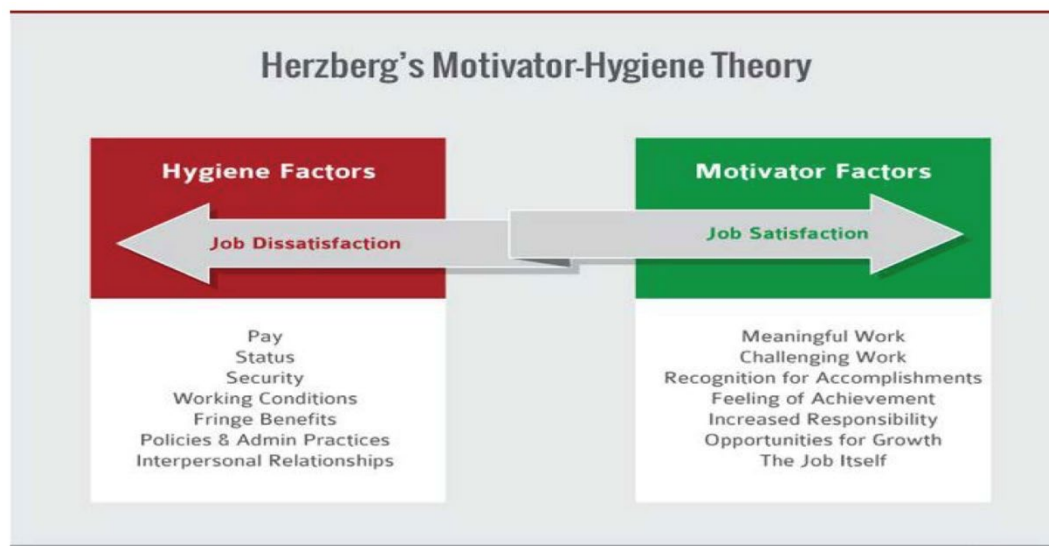
Influenced by Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs Herzberg (1966, 1982) argued that separate sets of mutually exclusive factors, motivation, and hygiene, cause job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Like Maslow, Herzberg also acknowledged physiological, psychological, and self-fulfillment needs in work motivation. Herzberg concluded that satisfaction and dissatisfaction could not be measured reliably on the same scale and conducted a series of studies to determine what factors in work environments cause satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Nickerson,

2021). While Maslow's needs theory underscored the relationship and growth of human needs, Herzberg focused on job satisfaction and attitudes through two distinct categories. Herzberg then set the direction of his testing hypothesis to test the satisfiers and dissatisfiers and concluded that such factors as company policy, supervision, interpersonal relations, working conditions, and salary are hygiene factors rather than motivators (Johnson et al., 2018).

Herzberg (1966, 1982) posited that the absence of hygiene factors could create job dissatisfaction, but their presence does not motivate or create satisfaction. On the other hand, Herzberg determined that (intrinsic) motivators enrich individuals' jobs, including achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement (Figure 2.1). These motivators were correlated with long-term positive effects on job performance, while the hygiene factors regularly produced short-term changes in job attitudes and performance (Gawel, 1997).

**Figure 2.1**

*Motivators & Hygiene Factors (Stierlin & Retzl, 2015)*



Further understanding Herzberg's (1966, 1982) two-factor theory, the two separate ranges of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction support the possibility that individuals can be

content with certain facets of their jobs but discontent with others, which also suggests that merely eliminating hygiene factors would not necessarily lead to job satisfaction but simply appeasement. Adopters of Herzberg's theory understand that "satisfiers" (motivational factors) and "dissatisfiers" (a lack of hygiene factors) are dynamic, constantly interacting, prone to change, and unique to the individual (Misener & Cox, 2001). Certain satisfiers or dissatisfiers may be more critical than others depending on personal and professional contexts. Herzberg's theory was widely adopted within organizations when these entities tended to be rigid and employed top-down management styles. However, as organizations moved towards more innovation, new motivational ideas began to take hold (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005).

### ***McClelland's Three Needs Theory***

McClelland's (1965) three needs theory states that individuals are motivated by the desire for power, achievement, and affiliation. These desires can shift over time, with one trait usually more dominant than the other. McClelland recognized that an individual's motivation could not be oversimplified and noted that differences in personality types and desires affected each person's need to be suitably motivated. McClelland's theory overlaps with Maslow and Herzberg, as they all sought to understand what drives individuals to achievement and self-actualization (Pardee, 1990). This theory (Figure 2.2) has been utilized extensively to gauge individuals' potential and strengths and to understand their desires to better meet their needs (Johnson et al., 2018).

**Figure 2.2***Three Needs Theory (Johnson et al., 2020)*

Dominant Motivator	Characteristics of This Person
Achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Has a strong need to set and accomplish challenging goals.</li> <li>■ Takes calculated risks to accomplish their goals.</li> <li>■ Likes to receive regular feedback on their progress and</li> <li>■ Often likes to work alone.</li> </ul>
Affiliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Wants to belong to a group.</li> <li>■ Wants to be liked, and will often go along with whatever the rest of the group wants to do.</li> <li>■ Favours collaboration over competition.</li> <li>■ Doesn't like high risks or uncertainties.</li> </ul>
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Wants to control and influence others.</li> <li>■ Likes to win arguments.</li> <li>■ Enjoys competition and winning.</li> <li>■ Enjoys status and recognition.</li> </ul>

If individuals' dominant need is power, they are driven to influence others and take control. These individuals or groups do not necessarily seek to implement a dictatorship but hope to motivate others, delegate responsibility, and influence those around them. Prestige, recognition, attention, and wealth are often sought by individuals motivated by power (McClelland, 1985). These individuals are naturally drawn to leadership positions and will likely attempt to work their way through the ranks of any organization. McClelland found that power-motivated individuals were best suited for leadership positions within a company. If they could delegate tasks in the workforce effectively, they were often able to be successful leaders. On the other hand, individuals motivated by power are easily frustrated and prone to leaving. They have a reputation for being "ladder climbers" or working their way up the organization as soon as a better position presents itself (Boneva et al., 1998).

McClelland (1965) described individuals motivated by achievement as those who wish to excel to be better at something. These individuals receive a great sense of accomplishment from surpassing those around them; they like challenges and want to oversee their success. The desire for achievement must come intrinsically, as extrinsic rewards destroy an individual's results-based motivation. Achievement-oriented individuals will change the situation or the location if they feel it is not meeting their needs. These individuals prefer working alone because they thrive on having complete control over outcomes; they work best when results are clear and visible. These preferences can lead achievement-oriented individuals to micromanage. They prefer not to work in a team and often fail to share the workload and responsibility (Johnson et al., 2018). Some believe that the blend of power and achievement is ideal for effective managers. Stahl (1983) thought power was an effective motivator for high-level executives, but power and achievement were necessary for middle and low-level management. It is also believed that effective managers are seldom motivated by affiliation (McClelland, 1985; Stahl, 1983).

Individuals motivated by affiliation place a high premium on social connections and melding with a group (McClelland, 1965). Individuals who seek association are known as pleasers—their primary motivation for performing a task well is their desire to please their coworkers and managers and strive not to disappoint. They rarely leave to seek other opportunities, prefer to stay with what is familiar to them, and are “team players” (Boneva et al., 1998). Although pleasant, McClelland argued that these are often the least effective employees and managers. Individuals motivated by power or achievement always wish to improve their position and status, but those motivated by affiliation often settle (Johnson et al., 2018).

### ***Goal-Setting Theory***

Locke's (1991) goal-setting theory emerged from an emphasis on goals as outcomes.



Locke argued that specific conditions must exist before goals can motivate performance.

Furthermore, goals must be specific and relate to a gap between the present situation and the desired outcome. There must be a belief that the goal is attainable and regular feedback on progress is essential; goals must be reasonably challenging, and the individual must be fairly committed to achievement (Alkaabi et al., 2017). Goals impact performance in the following ways (Locke & Latham, 2002):

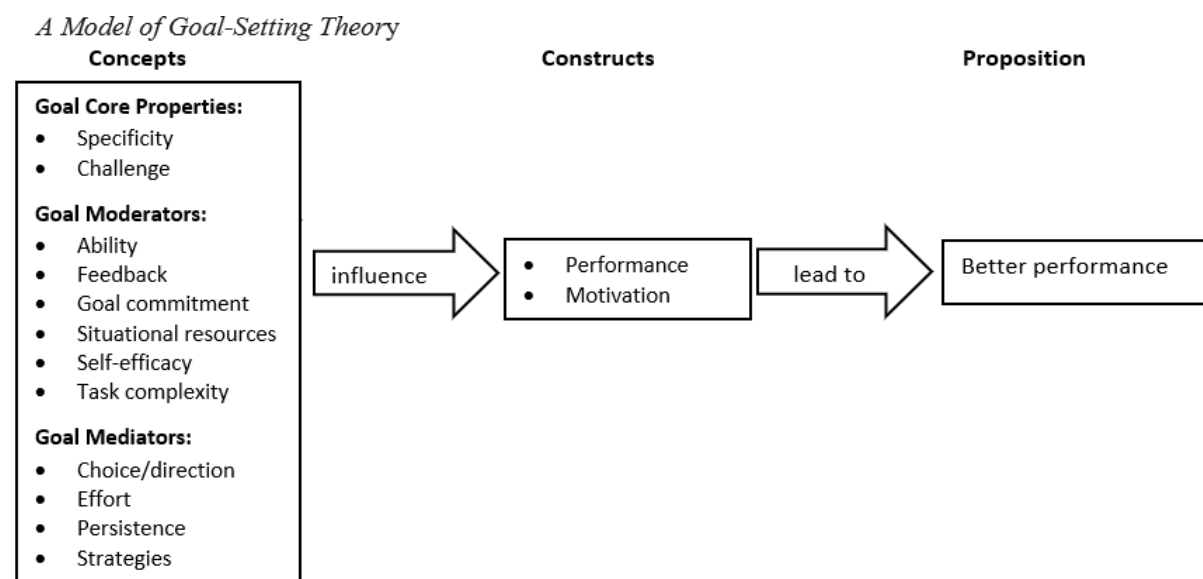
- Goals direct attention and effort toward goal-oriented activities
- Goals have an energizing function; high goals lead to higher effort
- Goals impact persistence; challenging goals prolong effort
- Goals are thought-provoking, lead to discovery and use of task-relevant knowledge and strategies

Locke and Latham (2002) found that when confronted with task goals, individuals instinctually use the knowledge and skills they have already acquired that are relevant to goal attainment. If the path to the goal is not a matter of using automatized skills, people draw from a collection of skills that they have used previously in similar situations. If the goal assigned is new to people, they will engage in thoughtful planning to develop strategies that will enable them to attain their goals (Locke, 1991). Locke and Latham also found that people with high self-efficacy are more likely to develop effective task strategies than those with low self-efficacy. However, there may be a time lag between the goal's assignment and the plan's effects on performance as people search for appropriate strategies (Locke, 1991). When confronted with a complex task, encouraging them to do their best sometimes leads to better strategy than setting a specific challenging performance goal. This is because a performance goal can make people so anxious to succeed that they try new techniques in an unproductive way and fail to learn from

their mistakes (Earley et al., 1989). When people are trained in the proper strategies, their performance improves. However, if the method used by the person is incorrect, then a problematic performance-outcome goal leads to a negative performance outcome compared to a more manageable goal (Audia et al., 2000). Figure 2.3 visually represents the goal-setting framework (Locke & Latham, 2002).

**Figure 2.3**

*Goal-Setting Theory (Adapted from Locke & Latham, 2002)*



Goal-setting theory has been generalized across various settings, with particular attention given to business and industry. Within this context, the willingness to work towards goal completion is the primary source of job motivation. Specific and clear goals lead to greater output and better performance. Explicit, measurable, and clear goals accompanied by a deadline for completion avoid confusion. In addition, goals should be practical yet challenging (Alkaabi et al., 2017; Locke et al., 2002). When this is given, individuals have a sense of pride and accomplishment, creating momentum for attaining subsequent goals. More challenging goals create a greater sense of reward and persistence in achieving them. Feedback is critical as it is a

means of establishing a reputation, making clarifications, and adjusting to goal challenges. It helps individuals work with more involvement and commitment, resulting in greater satisfaction (Juneja, 2022).

## **Contemporary Theories on Motivation**

### ***Expectancy-Value Theory***

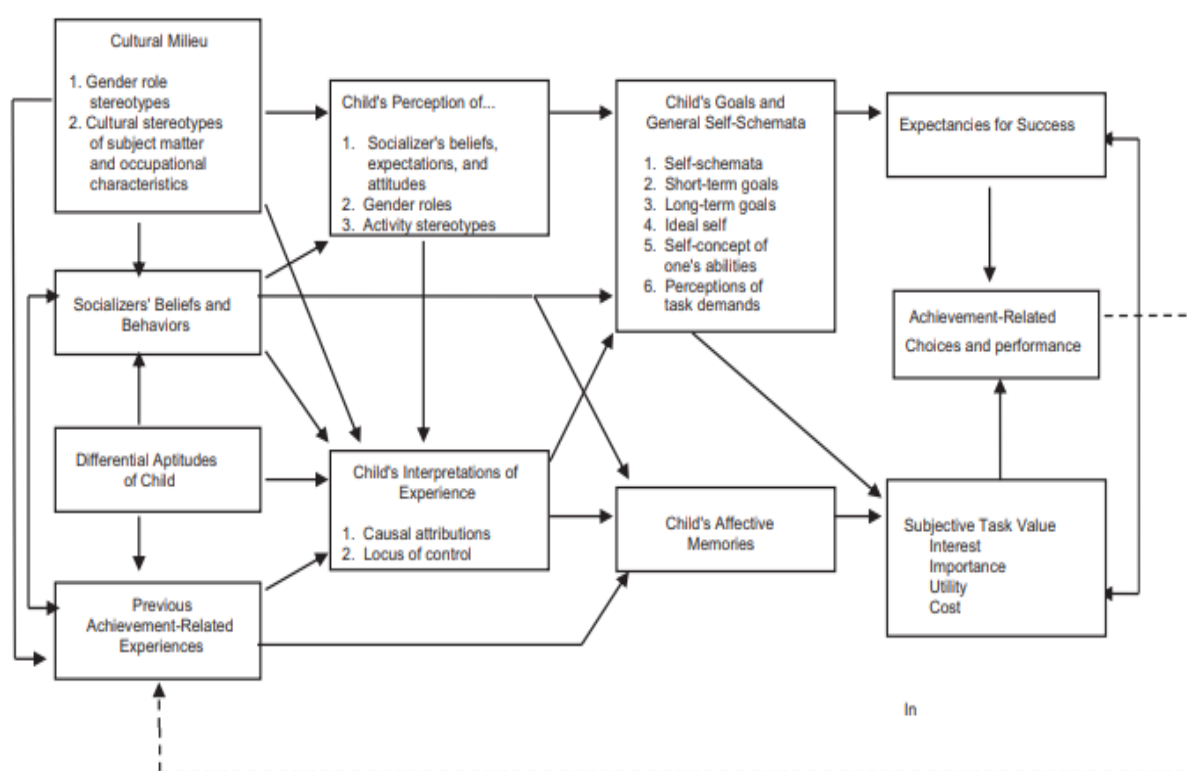
Why does anyone do anything? This is the question that motivation theorists have attempted to explain about individuals' decisions on task selection, persistence, and performance. Expectancy-value theory (EVT) posits that individuals' performance on and choices of different activities are deeply influenced by their expectancies for success, self-concepts of ability (SCAs), and valuing of tasks and activities (Atkinson, 1957; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Through the lens of education, EVT suggests that students will put greater effort into activities that they simultaneously perceive to have value and at which they expect to succeed. The relative value and the likelihood of success individuals place on specific tasks are critical determinants of EVT and are based on three factors: expectancy, value, and cost. Expectancy is the general belief in one's competence in a particular area and can be measured as self-efficacy in that domain. The value placed on a task or activity is comprised of one or more of the following: attainment value, intrinsic value, and utility value. Attainment value is the personal importance of doing well on a task and how this relates to an individual's identity. Intrinsic value refers to the enjoyment an individual gets from undertaking a particular task, while utility value references how well a task relates to current or future goals (Cooper et al., 2017; Wigfield et al., 2020).

Relative cost refers to what "the individual has to give up to do a task, as well as other negative consequences for engaging in any particular task" (Wigfield et al., 2020, p. 665). The perceived cost of different options is key to activity choices and levels of engagement. Negative

and positive task characteristics impact choices, and choices entail costs since one option eliminates the possibility of others (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, 2020).

**Figure 2.4**

*Eccles and Colleagues' Expectancy-Value Theory of Achievement and Choice*

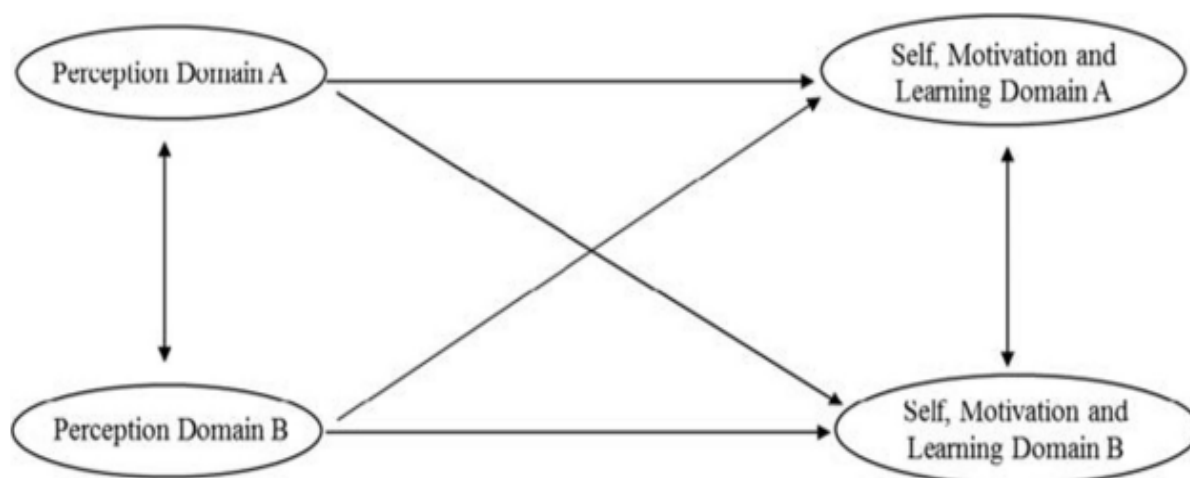


EVT suggests that self-concepts of ability and subjective task-value individuals place upon a task or activity change over time and depend upon the domain. A child may enjoy reading, but upon transitioning to middle school, that passion for reading has faded. Also, students may believe they are good at math but not writing. These changes over time and dimensional comparisons are crucial to understanding an individual's choice selection, persistence, and performance, or lack thereof. Studies have shown that dimensional comparisons play a vital role in expectations for success and value given from tasks across domains. For example, a student who enjoys science and reading but feels their "stronger" area is science may

begin to place less value and effort into reading, thus initiating a self-fulfilling prophecy (Wigfield et al., 2020). Perceptions of ability in one domain can impact perceptions of ability in other domains; students' views on the connection between the subjects determine the magnitude of impact.

**Figure 2.5**

*The Generalized I/E Model (Moller et al., 2016)*



In addition, more studies have shown that self-concepts of ability and subjective task value are greatly influenced by needs, goals, and social and cultural factors. Eccles (1984) states that a person's hierarchy of values, needs, motives, and self-schemata is the driving force behind individuals' expectations for success and task values. These hierarchies of values, needs, and motives are tied to an individual's achievement-related performances, which are impacted by three dimensions: locus of control, stability, and controllability (Weiner, 1985). The variations in these dimensions are predictors of subsequent motivation and individuals' beliefs of their abilities and future success.

Successes attributed to stable, internal, and controllable factors like current ability and more general aptitude are more likely to increase one's estimate of one's abilities and

likely future success than successes attributed to unstable, external, and uncontrollable factors such as good luck or an easy task or easy grader. In contrast, achievement-related failures attributed to unstable, internal, controllable factors like effort would be more likely to support continued high expectations for success than failures attributed to stable, internal, uncontrollable factors such as inadequate aptitude or lack of stable ability/talent. (Wigfield et al., 2020, p. 671)

However, the data clearly shows that children's expectations for success diminish over time (Hulleman et al., 2016). Students' ability-related beliefs decrease across their school years, specifically in the academic achievement domains. This pattern is also seen in the subjective task values children place in tasks and activities. In short, as children develop, they tend to believe they are less competent and place less value on many activities (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Stipek and McIver (1989) stipulate that children become better at understanding and interpreting feedback and participate in more social comparisons with their peers. This phenomenon drives children to more accurate and realistic perceptions of their abilities, and as a result, self-concepts of ability become more negative. Additionally, the school environment changes over time, focusing more on competition and evaluation, thus lowering some children's achievement beliefs (Stipek, 1996; Wigfield et al., 2000).

So, how can EVT buck these trends and positively impact students' expectations for success? In Hulleman et al. (2016) review of EVT, pathways were identified for practitioners to improve student motivation and performance through research-based sources of expectancy, task value, and cost (see Tables 1,2, and 3, respectively).

**Table 2.1***Research-Based Sources of Expectancy-Related Beliefs (Hulleman et al., 2016)*

Expectancy source	Definition
Perceptions of ability/skill	When students perceive they have a high level of ability and/or skill at an activity, they are more likely to experience high expectancy (Bandura, 1997; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002).
Effort attributions	When students believe that their effort will lead to learning, they are more likely to experience high expectancy (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck, 1999; Weiner, 1972).
Success experiences	When students are successful at an activity, or watch others have success, they are more likely to experience high expectancy (Bandura, 1997; Eccles et al., 1983).
Support and scaffolding	When students are appropriately supported in completing an activity (e.g., through encouragement and having the resources necessary to complete the task), they are more likely to experience high expectancy (Bandura, 1997).
Clear expectations	When students know what is expected of them on an activity, and have clearly defined goals, they are more likely to experience high expectancy (Pajares, 1996).
Appropriate challenge	When the difficulty of the task or activity matches students' skill levels, they are more likely to experience high expectancy (Eccles et al., 1983).
Feedback	When students receive feedback that effort matters and skills are amenable to change and are task focused (rather than ability focused), they are more likely to experience high expectancy (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck, 1999).
Growth experiences	When students engage in learning activities that challenge them to grow and learn, and experience growth in their skills and performance improvements, they are more likely to experience both high expectancy and value (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck, 1999; Hong et al., 1999).
Perceptions of others' expectations	Parents' and teachers' expectancies and attitudes shape children's/ students' expectancies; for instance, if teachers have high expectations for their students, these students in turn develop high expectancies (Bandura, 1997; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck, 1999; Eccles et al., 1983).
Perceived task difficulty	When students perceive a subject or task as being not difficult, they develop higher estimates of their own abilities for the subject or task (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002).
Stability attributions	When students attribute success to a stable factor (ability), then they will have higher expectations for future success; if they attribute it to an unstable factor (good luck), they will be uncertain about future success and have lower expectations for future success (Weiner, 2010).

**Table 2.2***Research-Based Sources of Value (Hulleman et al., 2016)*

Value source	Definition
Intrinsic benefits	When students find the activities and academic content enjoyable and interesting, they are more likely to experience high value (Renninger & Hidi, 2011).
Relevance	When students are able to connect what they are learning to their personal lives and/or the real world, they are more likely to experience high value (Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2009).
Context and rationale	When students understand that an activity is meaningful and has a purpose, they are more likely to experience high value (Lepper & Henderlong, 2000).
Variety and novelty	When students engage in activities that are varied and novel, they are more likely to experience high value (e.g., catch and hold interest; Hidi & Renninger, 2006).
Enthusiastic models	When students interact with teachers and other adults who are enthusiastic and passionate about learning, they are more likely to experience high value (Patrick, Hisley, & Kempler, 2000).
Growth experiences	When students engage in learning activities that challenge them to grow and learn, and experience growth in their skills and performance improvements, they are more likely to experience both high expectancy and value (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck, 1999; Hong et al., 1999)
Choice and control	When students feel a sense of control and choice over their learning, they are more likely to experience high value (Patall et al., 2010).
Positive relationships and sense of belongingness	When students experience meaningful student-student and student-teacher relationships, they are more likely to experience high value (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Walton & Cohen, 2007).
Extrinsic benefits	When students receive external rewards and incentives for learning (e.g., prizes, food), they are more likely to experience high value to complete an activity but low value to produce quality work (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008).



**Table 2.3***Research-Based Sources of Cost (Hulleman et al., 2016)*

Value source	Definition
Effort and time needed for the activity	When students feel that the workload is unreasonable (e.g., 5 hours/night) and/or unnecessary (e.g., busy work), they are more likely to experience increased cost (Parsons et al., 1980; Perez et al., 2014).
Effort and time needed for other competing activities	When student have too many other demands on their time or do not know how to effectively manage their time, they are more likely to experience high cost (Barron & Hulleman, 2015; Flake et al., 2015).
Loss of valued alternatives	When students feel like the learning activity is not worth their time compared to other things they might do (e.g., socializing), they are more likely to experience high cost (Conley, 2012; Perez et al., 2014).
Psychological and physical reactions to the activity	When students feel unsafe and uncomfortable, either physically or psychologically (e.g., nervous, bored, tired), they are more likely to experience high cost (Eccles et al., 1983; Ramirez & Beilock, 2011).

Lastly, the key to improving students' outcomes is highlighting the importance of considering the impact of students' self-concepts of ability and values in one area to beliefs on abilities and task-value in others to educators, parents, and specialists. Additionally, student task value can be increased by focusing more on students' valuing of and experiences in multiple subject areas rather than just focusing on one. Understanding how these dimensional comparisons impact students can help educators and parents give feedback that counters adverse dimensional comparison effects. Doing so would facilitate students to maintain multiple possible areas of focus in mind and elevate self-concepts of ability and subjective task value across domains (Wigfield et al., 2020).

### ***Self-Determination Theory***

Discussions on what drives humans to action and responsibility, or lack thereof, have continually occurred (Kohn, 1990). The question of what motivates individuals and the lengths

taken to uncover the answers can be summarized: motivation leads to production. By the 1970s, numerous studies on motivation focused on extrinsic rewards to control behavior. This common finding led to the advocacy of rewards as a motivational strategy, and behavior-modification programs based heavily on using rewards were launched into various settings.

Ryan and Deci approached the issue of human motivation from a different viewpoint, believing that “no single phenomenon reflects the positive potential of human nature as much as intrinsic motivation, the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70). Intrinsic motivation, actions taken for their inherent interest and enjoyment, is responsible for greater human learning and achievement over a lifespan than extrinsic motivation, behaviors resulting from other reasons besides intrinsic satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020). Ryan and Deci’s (1999) self-determination theory (SDT) postulates that all humans have three inherent psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—which lead to greater self-motivation and improved mental health and well-being.

Through the empirical process, Ryan and Deci (2020) concluded that competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Harter, 1978; White, 1963) were critical for creating the environment for the optimal flow of the natural tendencies for growth and social development. Ryan and Deci defined autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the following:

- Autonomy: “initiative and ownership in one’s actions. It is supported by experiences of interest and value and undermined by experiences of being externally controlled, whether by rewards or punishments.”
- Competence: “...the feeling of mastery, a sense that one can succeed and grow.  
The need for competence is best satisfied within well-structured environments

that afford optimal challenges, positive feedback, and growth opportunities.”

- Relatedness: “...a sense of belonging and connection. It is facilitated by conveyance of respect and caring.” (2020, p. 1)

SDT represents a broad framework for studying human motivation and needs, focusing on how social and cultural factors impact individuals’ sense of initiative, choice, and performance. Formally, SDT is comprised of the following six minor theories that were developed to describe and explain various phenomena observed through research:

1. Cognitive evaluation theory (CET): relates to *intrinsic motivation*, the motivation based on the fulfillment of behaving “for its own sake.” CET explores the effects of social contexts on intrinsic motivation and how factors such as rewards, relational dynamics, and ego impact intrinsic motivation and interest. CET emphasizes the importance of competence and autonomy supports in cultivating inherent motivation (Center for Self-Determination Theory [CSDT], 2020; Ryan & Deci, 20200).
2. Organismic integration theory (OIT): deals with the various types of extrinsic motivation, their elements, and consequences. Generally, extrinsic motivation aims toward outcomes extrinsic to the behavior itself and manifests in external regulation, introjection, identification, and integration. These various forms of extrinsic motivation are seen as falling along a spectrum of *internalization*. The greater the internalization of extrinsic motivation, the more the person will act of their own volition when conducting the behaviors. OIT also seeks to understand the factors that drive individuals to resist, partially accept, or strongly internalize values, goals, or belief systems. OIT states that autonomy and relatedness support are critical to internalization.

3. Causality orientations theory (COT) depicts how individuals adapt to environments and adjust behavior. There are three types of causality orientations (CSDT, 2020):
  - a. the autonomy orientation in which persons act out of interest in and valuing what is occurring
  - b. the control orientation in which the focus is on rewards, gains, and approval;
  - c. and the impersonal or amotivated orientation characterized by anxiety concerning competence. (para 7)
4. Basic psychological needs theory (BPNT): expands on the relationship between psychological needs and psychological health and well-being. BPNT contends that mental well-being and peak functioning are fostered by autonomy, competence, and relatedness, basic needs that vary in depth and frequency. BPNT is clear that these factors are critical to satisfying needs, and functional costs emerge when gaps exist. Since the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are universal, BPNT considers the impact of cross-developmental and cross-cultural on these factors.
5. Goal content theory (GCT): distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic goals and their impact on motivation and wellness. Extrinsic goals like “financial success, appearance, and popularity/fame have been specifically contrasted with intrinsic goals such as community, close relationships, and personal growth, with the former more likely associated with lower wellness and greater ill-being” (CSDT, 2020, para. 9).
6. Relationships motivation theory (RMT): posits that positive relationships and supportive environments are critical to the well-being of people. High-quality relationships and environments satisfy the relatedness need and positively impact the desire for autonomy and competence. The most beneficial relationships are ones

where “each partner supports the autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs of the other” (CSDT, 2020, para. 10).

Ryan and Deci’s (2000) focus on intrinsic motivation is rooted in the belief that this form of motivation yields greater performance, interest, excitement, persistence, and creativity when compared to extrinsic motivators. Thus, SDT’s focus is not merely on the causes of intrinsic motivation but, more importantly, the environments that create and sustain, rather than diminish and extinguish, the authentic desire to perform. Ryan and Deci recognized that extrinsic motivation is vital in production and persistence, mainly as individuals age and responsibilities grow. Again, the focus of SDT is not simply on the causes or forms of extrinsic motivation but, more importantly, on how well individuals integrate and internalize this form of need satisfaction. Ryan and Deci understood that when extrinsic motivators are at play,

motivation for the behavior can range from amotivation or unwillingness to passive compliance, to active personal commitment. According to SDT, these different motivations reflect differing degrees to which the value and regulation of the requested behavior have been internalized and integrated. Internalization refers to people’s “taking in” a value or regulation, and integration refers to the further transformation of that regulation into their own so that, subsequently, it will emanate from their sense of self.

(Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71)

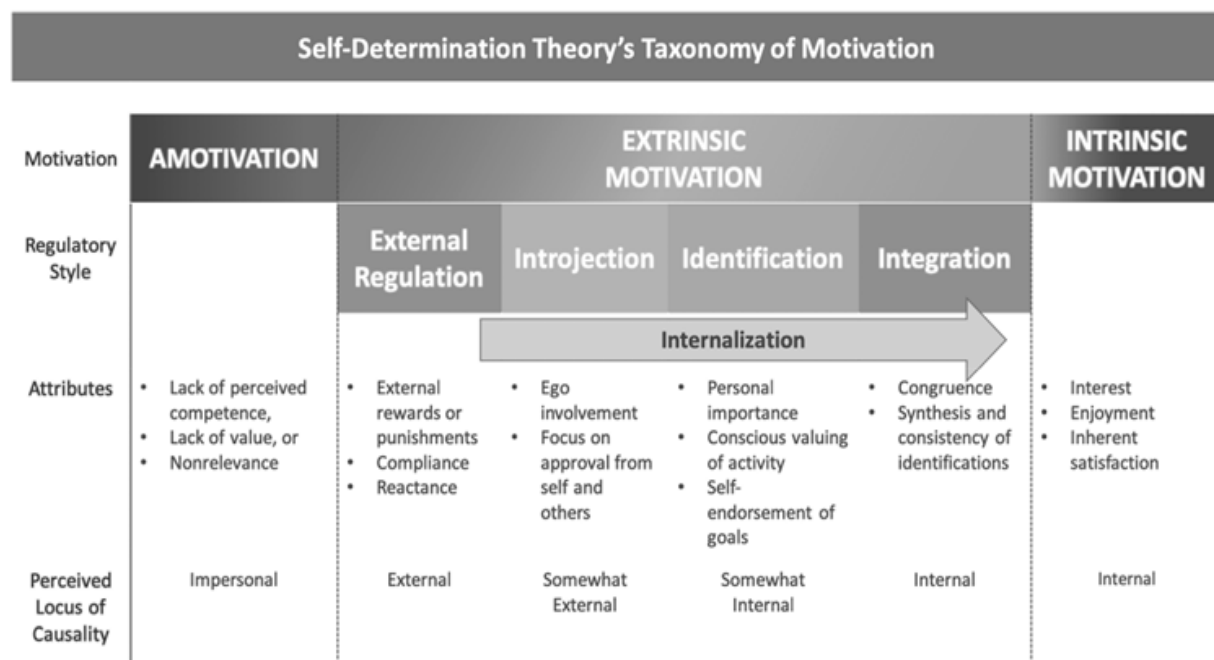
Various studies have shown that *autonomous* extrinsic motivation is correlated with more engagement, improved performance, lower dropout, higher quality learning, and better teacher ratings, among other outcomes (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; Hayamizu, 1997; Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992). In addition, when the needs for connection and belonging are met and perceived competence and efficacy are high, individuals are more likely to integrate

and internalize the values of extrinsically motivated activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). To integrate a behavior or activity, individuals must understand its meaning and combine it with their other goals and values (Kuhl & Fuhrmann, 1998).

Ryan and Deci (2000) wrote that “Such deep, holistic processing is facilitated by a sense of choice, volition, and freedom from excessive external pressure toward behaving or thinking a certain way. In this sense, support for autonomy allows individuals to actively transform values into their own” (p. 74). SDT recognizes that satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness change over an individual’s life and circumstances and is heavily influenced by cultural expectations. Cultural and developmental imprints produce differences in the importance of goals, “the pursuit of which, in turn, yields different satisfaction of basic needs and different levels of well-being” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 75). Figure 2.6 illustrates the self-determination theory continuum and how regulatory processes impact behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

**Figure 2.6**

*Self-Determination Theory’s Taxonomy of Motivation*



SDT has substantial educational implications due to its broad human development and wellness framework. Environments that support basic psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness—are fundamental to the healthy development of students *and* educators. Ryan and Deci are clear on the roles of schools and their impacts on motivation:

schools should nonetheless be supportive contexts for development, provide conditions that enhance students’ adaptive capacities and mental health, and, importantly, do no harm... We also consider how an atmosphere conducive to thriving students requires thriving teachers, and thus the importance of supporting teachers’ basic psychological needs. (2020, p. 2).

Multiple studies have reinforced the critical role intrinsic motivation plays within educational settings. Intrinsic motivation is strongly correlated with higher performance, predicted student engagement, and higher achievement (GPA); however, intrinsic motivation tends to weaken for many students over their school years (Gottfried et al., 2007; Scherrer & Preckel, 2019). This suggests that schools are not doing enough to foster supportive environments to meet students, innate, basic needs.

SDT suggests the following premise as it relates to schools: “(a) more autonomous forms of motivation will lead to an enhancement of students’ engagement, learning, and wellness; and (b) that basic psychological need support from both teachers and parents facilitates such motivation, whereas need thwarting undermines it” (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 3). Classroom educators and school environments that support student autonomy attempt to gain a genuine understanding of student need while acknowledging and responding, where possible, to student perceptions. In addition, students become active participants in the educational process when educators provide meaningful choices and tasks that engage students’ interests and provide a

clear rationale for completing a task (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Reeve et al. (1999) further described autonomy-supportive educators as better listeners, resisted giving answers, voiced fewer directives, more responsive to student questions, greater attention to student interests, more focused on student perceptions, and more support for student initiatives. Reeve and Jang (2006) later found the following behaviors key to supporting student needs:

- Listening to students
- Allowing time for independent work
- Providing opportunities for students to speak
- Recognizing mastery and growth
- Encouraging effort
- Offering scaffolds
- Being open to comments and questions
- Acknowledging student perspectives

To be clear, SDT does not view autonomy as a vehicle for complete independence, where individuals make choices without regard to their context or situation. Instead, SDT views the most effective environments as high in autonomy support and structure. Ryan and Deci (2020) defined structure as “setting clear expectations and goals, having consistency in rules and guidelines, and providing informational supports for engagement and rich efficacy feedback. Good structure “scaffolds” learning so that students rarely face non-optimal challenges and feedback is thus largely positive and efficacy supportive” (p. 4).

We see the positive impact that SDT can have on educational settings. Autonomy-supportive environments not only meet the basic need for autonomy but also satisfies the need



for competence and relatedness. We must not overlook the importance of providing educators with need-supportive environments; like students, teachers have an innate desire for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Leadership, along with intentional policymaking where sound strategy and practice merge, play a crucial role in fostering environments where teachers and students improve performance and thrive.

### **Engagement Versus Motivation**

Motivation and engagement are often used interchangeably, and although they are reciprocal and related, it is critical to understand their differences. Motivation can be described as the match that lights the fire, while engagement is like the wood that continues to fuel that fire. Astin (1984) provided a modern understanding of engagement: the amount of physical and psychological energy a person devotes to an activity/experience. In an educational context, the definition was expanded to highlight that engagement is dependent upon both teacher and student, where “both the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational performance” are crucial (Axelson & Flick, 2010, p. 41). Some have described engagement as how involved or interested an individual is in the learning process and how connected they are to their classes, organizations, and one another (Axelson & Flick, 2010).

Martin and Torres (2016) described engagement as “meaningful student involvement throughout the learning environment” (p. 2), while Guthrie (2001) succinctly wrote that engagement is “a merger of motivation and thoughtfulness” (p. 1). More recently, Abela and Fraumeni (2019) defined student engagement as “a condition of emotional, social, and intellectual readiness to learn characterized by curiosity, participation and the drive to learn more.” (p. 2). Three types of engagement have been identified (Fredricks et al., 2004):

- Behavioral engagement: students observing community norms and participating in activities.
- Emotional engagement: students' feelings of interest, boredom, happiness, sadness, and anxiety.
- Cognitive engagement: closely related to motivation and involves students' desire and ability to engage in a variety of strategies to self-direct learning.

Like with motivation, students engaged with learning perform better academically and demonstrate improved social-emotional well-being. In a study of schools that had experienced structural changes, Marks (2000) found a direct connection between greater psychological engagement, higher grades, and better performance:

Students who are engaged with the school are more likely to learn, to find the experience rewarding, to graduate, and to pursue higher education. ...Although research examining the effect of engagement on achievement is comparatively sparse, existing studies consistently demonstrate a strong positive relationship between engagement and performance across diverse populations. (pp. 154-155)

Li and Lerner (2011) highlighted that students with higher levels of behavioral and emotional engagement were less likely to engage in substance abuse or self-destructive behaviors compared to peers described by lower school engagement. Research has also shown that engagement declines as students progress through school. A Gallup (2013) poll of 500,000 students in grades 5–12 found that approximately 80% of elementary students felt “engaged” in school—attentive, curious, and optimistic about their learning. However, by the eleventh grade, that proportion had plummeted by half, with only 40% feeling engaged (Busteed, 2013). Gallup (2004) asked teens to select three adjectives from a list of 14 to describe how they usually feel in

school; the top choices were “bored” (selected by 50% of students) and “tired” (chosen by 42%). Only two percent said they were never bored (Lyons, 2004).

It has been established that engagement (and motivation) is malleable, and educators and parents play a critical role in igniting that desire to engage in learning. Abela and Fraumeni (2019) outlined six research-based ways to improve student engagement:

1. *Measure it*: measuring student engagement within the classroom and school can help discover what methods are working and promote more focused interventions.
2. *Focus on relationship building*: the most effective educators are the ones who focus on getting to know their students and, as a result, grasp a better understanding of their needs. Creating bonds based on personality and enthusiasm helps build a bridge between content and connectedness.
3. *Balance structure and student autonomy*: students show higher levels of engagement in autonomy-supporting environments rather than controlling settings. Teachers who learn to motivate rather than control not only convey knowledge but also become genuine collaborators with their students, leading to greater satisfaction with the classroom experience for both (Reeve, 2006).
4. *Thoughtful use of technology*: meaningful, research-based activities that incorporate technology significantly increases student engagement and “provide a significant potential for meeting the needs of students with diverse learning styles and for engaging students during the learning process” (Beeland, 2002, p. 6).
5. *Participate in effective questioning*: Caram and Davis (2005) stated that students enjoy learning if they view it as purposeful and that “creating a culture of investigation is a key component to engaging students” (p. 20). Effective

questioning leads to improved motivation, curiosity, and critical thinking. Walsh and Sattes (2017) stated that quality questions “(1) focus students on important content aligned with standards and learning goals, (2) promote one or more carefully defined instructional purposes, (3) facilitate thinking at an appropriate cognitive level, and (4) are clearly and concisely worded so that students understand what is being asked” (p. 27).

6. *Real-world connections*: Student interest in learning increases when schools offer multiple links to the “real world,” such as internships and service projects (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

### **The Role of Leadership**

Effective leadership is grounded in the following: relationships, authenticity, building capacity, and adaptability. Nothing meaningful in the field of education happens in isolation. At the root of meaningful change and growth are a focus on people and the need to build social capital to develop strong individuals, but more importantly, the coherence and synergy of strong groups (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). In a time and place of ever-shifting values and paradigms, people crave authentic leaders because authenticity is a vital bridge that leads to trust. The process is a win-win for all when authenticity is anchored by “passion, behavior, connectedness, consistency, and compassion” (Northouse, 2019, p. 199). Relationships rooted in authenticity produce a sincere desire to serve others and make decisions based on values (Northouse, 2019).

A core responsibility of leadership is to build capacity. Building capacity occurs through working alongside and learning *with* the people we lead. Collective learning is a critical component of effective change processes, generates enthusiasm among participants, and creates the conditions that are more likely to lead to sustainability. Within this collaborative culture,

leadership development naturally occurs. The challenge is understanding the proper balance of “push and pull” factors. Knowing when to lean in and challenge colleagues while simultaneously creating a supportive environment that promotes those internal factors that spur collaboration, sustainability, and growth.

Effective leadership is not only concerned about the bottom line but also with how many influential leaders are developed throughout the process (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). Coupled with this is the need for adaptability. Leadership *styles must adapt* to present circumstances and individuals. It is important not to lose sight of values but recognize that leaders must meet people where they are to meet the challenges they confront together, which rings louder now than ever as people face new ways of teaching and learning, challenging ingrained ways of thinking and doing. A large part of adaptability as a leader has little to do with the individual. Instead, adaptability allows leaders to be a source of strength when guiding, preparing, encouraging, and challenging others to collectively confront the complexities of change. (Northouse, 2019).

Studies have verified the significance of leadership in improving students’ achievement, particularly that of the school principal (Fullan, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Wallace Foundation, 2013). According to Leithwood et al. (2004), leadership is second only to classroom instruction regarding factors that impact students’ outcomes. As we continue to navigate the complexities of the achievement gap within Hispanic students, it is critical to examine the importance of leadership and how leadership can foster environments that motivate and engage students in the learning process.

### **The Development of Educational Leadership**

Leadership takes on many styles and forms and is impacted by the context in which it takes place. However, at its core, leadership is a process of influencing in which

an individual exerts intentional influence over others to structure activities and relationships in a group or organization (Yukl, 2002). Educational leadership has developed over time to include a variety of approaches to improve K-12 education (Nedelcu, 2013). The dominant leadership styles that have existed in education include the outdated model of managerial (top-down) leadership, instructional, adaptive, distributive, and transformational leadership. These models contributed to and advanced the field to meet the ever-changing demands on the educational system. The five significant models will be outlined in the timeline of educational leadership. The purpose of looking at the history of educational leadership is to highlight how leadership models have dealt with and embraced change.

### ***Managerial Leadership***

Managerial leadership consisted of one person leading the school and was applied predominantly from the 1960s to the late 1970s when the leader's primary focus was managerial tasks (Nedelcu, 2013). Administrators' responsibilities centered around student safety, organizing daily operations, supply requisition, and budget management. Under this leadership style, the instruction duties were handled entirely by teachers who worked in isolation within their classrooms (Murphy, 1988). However, federal and state policies, like the *Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974* (U.S. Congress, n.d.), began to force managerial leaders to shift towards instructional leaders to create equal educational opportunities for all students (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Managerial skills continue to play an essential role in leadership; however, greater emphasis has been placed on teaching and learning (Neumerski, 2012; Rigby, 2014).

### ***Instructional Leadership***

The notion of instructional leadership originated from various school studies in the 1970s and 1980s (Hallinger, 2005). Instructional leadership stresses improving teaching and learning

and focuses on teachers' behavior as they participate in activities directly influencing students' achievement (Hallinger, 2005). Several definitions and applications of instructional leadership exist, but the most widely accepted is Hallinger's, which defines instructional leadership using three dimensions:

- defining the school mission
- managing the instructional program
- developing the school learning climate

Hallinger (2005) outlined these dimensions into ten instructional leadership functions. Defining the school mission is critical in framing and communicating school goals. Managing the instructional program involves coordinating the curriculum, supervising and evaluating instruction, and monitoring student progress. Developing a learning climate is a function of protecting instructional time, supporting teachers, providing incentives for learning, organizing professional development, and maintaining high visibility (Hallinger, 2005).

Instructional leadership is heavily centered around the principal as it mainly focuses on the principal and their tasks in coordinating and managing instruction (Aas & Brandmo, 2016; Nedelcu, 2013). Nedelcu wrote that Hallinger sees instructional leaders as hands-on principals, deeply focusing on the curriculum and eager to work with teachers on instructional programs and improving students' outcomes. Some critique instructional leadership as too dependent on submissive followers (Marks & Printy, 2003). Over time instructional leadership moved to the background as new leadership styles emerged. Leithwood (2013) described this fading because of the narrow focus on classroom practices. Yet, instructional leadership remains crucial because it focuses on the foundations of education: the quality of teaching and learning. Modern instructional leadership focuses on influencing teaching and learning processes but recognizes

that leadership must consider the structural environments for teaching and learning (Leithwood, 2013).

### ***Adaptive Leadership***

Adaptive leadership, which closely aligns with situational leadership, focuses on the adaptations needed in response to changing environments. In essence, “*adaptive leaders prepare and encourage people to deal with change*” (Northouse, 2016, p. 257). Adaptive leadership requires leaders to mobilize, motivate, organize, orient, and focus the attention of others. A key point of adaptive leadership is the ability to encourage a change in organizational values to confront changing circumstances (Heifetz, 1994). Based on the work of Heifetz (1994) and Northouse (2016), there are six leader behaviors that are critical in the adaptive leadership process:

1. *Get on the balcony*: a metaphor for the leader rising above the challenge of the current situation to find perspective.
2. *Identify adaptive challenges*: leaders must evaluate and diagnose challenges and determine whether the situation is an adaptive or technical issue.
3. *Regulate distress*: shifting situations challenge beliefs, attitudes, and values and cause stress; the adaptive process requires leaders to “create a holding environment, provide direction, protection, orientation, conflict management, and protective norms, and regulate personal distress” (Northouse, 2016, p. 265) in changing environments.
4. *Maintaining disciplined attention*: requires encouraging people to focus on the demanding work ahead; this is difficult as individuals do not like their beliefs, values, and behaviors challenged.
5. *Give the work back to the people*: balance the need for guidance and structure with



autonomy; too much managing can cause people to lose confidence, the desire to problem-solve, and creativity.

6. *Protect leadership voices from below:* leaders must be cognizant of and open to the ideas and perspectives of people who may be outliers or marginalized within the organization.

### ***Distributive Leadership***

Distributive leadership emphasizes multiple sources of influence within an organization and promotes the “leader plus” quality of leadership work (Harris, 2013). This leadership model gained popularity in the 1990s as new educational system demands were brought on by policy changes because of the *Improving American Schools Act* (IASA; U. S. Department of Education, 1994). Glickman (1989) posited that the principal is not solely responsible for instruction, but they are leading a group of instructional leaders. The sustainability of long-term improvement is the responsibility of a team of leaders (Elmore, 2000). School accountability increased with the adoption of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2002) and became the driving force for educational leaders to address the needs of all students through a distributive leadership approach (Thompson et al., 2004). Through distributive leadership, leaders can delegate responsibilities and simultaneously combat multiple issues or initiatives. In this model, all stakeholders are considered to share the responsibility of instruction and learning to ensure all students learn (Thompson et al., 2004).

### ***Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leadership began to develop in the 1980s in response to a new focus on charismatic and inspirational elements in leadership (Bryman, 1986). Northouse (2016) defined transformational leadership as “the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower.

This type of leader is attentive to the needs of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential” (p. 164). Transformational leaders motivate followers to work towards transcended goals and towards achievement and self-actualization (Leithwood, 2013). Transformational leaders seek to foster capacity building and higher personal commitment to organizational goals, leading to increased effort and productivity (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Learning communities with embedded transformational leadership styles improve students’ outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2010). Transformational leadership is committed to increasing awareness of the value of organizational goals and inspiring staff to “transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 375).

Leithwood et al. (2010) developed a comprehensive transformational school leadership model based on six leadership dimensions and four management dimensions. Their leadership dimensions include building school vision and goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, representing professional practices and values, demonstrating high-performance expectations, and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions (Leithwood et al., 2010). The management dimensions include staffing, instructional support, monitoring school activities, and community focus (Leithwood et al., 2010).

Hallinger and Heck (2010) noted that the most significant difference between transformational leadership and other leadership models was the focus on generating innovation and change within an organization and its leaders. This differed from previous leadership models that focused on completing duties and maintaining control (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). A transformational leader must possess at least one of these characteristics: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Nedelcu, 2013). The transformational leader is expected to lead by creating a sense of purpose, developing

a climate of high expectations, recognizing accomplishments, creating situations that stimulate learning, modeling school values, promoting confidence, and constantly promoting innovation and change (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). The 21st century continues to demand transformational leaders who cultivate a culture of change to meet student needs in preparing students for post-secondary challenges (Key, 2010).

### **Fullan's (2001) Framework for Leading in a Culture of Change**

Fullan's (2001) framework proposed that leadership for change emphasizes moral purpose, understanding change processes, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making (Barber & Fullan, 2005). Fullan (2002) stated that educational leaders must be much more attuned to the big picture and much more sophisticated at conceptual thinking and transforming the organization through people and teams. Barber and Fullan (2005) stated that to improve an educational system, leaders must focus on closing existing gaps in the system. It is the responsibility of transformational leaders to bring awareness to educators about their moral obligation to support the learning of all students. Fullan (2002) described the following as critical for understanding change processes:

- Innovate selectively with coherence
- Develop collective meaning and commit to new ways
- Appreciate the challenge of implementing new ideas
- Reframe resistance as a potentially positive force
- Reculturing is required for profound, sustainable change to occur
- Embrace the challenging and complex work of change

Fullan (2005) stated that relationship building is a task that every educational leader must develop and master. Fullan noted that, "Leaders must be consummate relationship builders with

diverse people and groups — especially with people different than themselves. This is why emotional intelligence is equal to or more important than having the best ideas. In difficult times, emotional intelligence is a must” (2002, p. 7). This element is the most difficult for education leaders to grasp because they must be able to build relationships with people from whom they differ. Goleman et al. (2002) wrote that it is essential for leaders to be able to self-manage their own emotions and be able to have empathy toward others.

The work of creating and sharing knowledge is key to effective leadership. Fullan (2002) stated that information is only valuable after it has been converted to knowledge through a social process, with effective organizations promoting knowledge giving *and* knowledge seeking. The key to all of this is a commitment to sharing. Fullan posited that “for the knowledge society to thrive on a deep and continuous basis, it must have a moral compass. The knowledge society and moral purpose (social responsibility to others and the environment) need each other” (2002, p. 8). The sharing of knowledge by all establishes a community of continuous growth.

Coherence-making requires transformational leaders to have an internal system of checks and balances that allows them to manage problem-solving without losing momentum. Fullan and Quinn (2016) expanded on the importance of a coherence framework to bring about successful and sustainable change. Within the coherence framework (Fullan & Quinn, 2016), influential leaders employ the following strategies:

- Focusing direction: set a small number of ambitious goals directly related to students’ achievement and mobilize the whole organization to support a central moral purpose: improving society through improving educational systems.
- Cultivating collaborative cultures: foster interconnected and supportive cultures focused on instructional improvement within and across schools and between schools.

- Deepening learning: improve teaching at all system levels by understanding the learning process and how to influence it.
- Securing accountability: develop conditions that maximize internal accountability and promote understanding of the value of external accountability measures.

Fullan's (2002, 2016) framework calls for leadership development at all levels, but more importantly, building a commonly maintained approach for improving students' outcomes. Effecting change and achieving coherence are challenging endeavors. Fullan and his colleagues emphasize that coherence is not simply alignment. More accurately, coherence consists of a shared deep understanding of the intent and nature of the work (Fullan, 2005, 2016). Coherence can only be achieved through dedicated and purposeful interaction among stakeholders, and it must be continuously attended to because organizations are constantly changing as circumstances arise.

### **Summary**

Hispanic students are not making sufficient academic gains and continue falling behind their peers of various ethnic and racial groups. The problem was exacerbated by the negative impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic and subsequent school closures. (Gandara, 2010; Garza, 2009; Lopez, 2009; Madrid, 2011; NAEP, 2022). The literature reviewed examined various factors that have contributed to the achievement gap within the Hispanic community. In addition, the literature review explored the question of what motivates individuals to act and persevere, first looking at foundational theories on motivation and then considering more contemporary theories, such as expectancy-value and self-determination theory, on motivation. Lastly, the literature review outlined the importance of leadership, effective leadership styles, and leading in an environment of change.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### **Research Design**

This research study employed a convergent parallel case study design, where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed. The advantage of using a mixed-methods design is that it integrates the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods while reducing limitations, while a variety of research methods leads to research questions being answered with the goal of finding sensible solutions (Creswell & Poth 2018; DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017). A case study approach, where the researcher explored a real-life, contemporary case, was used to analyze educational leaders' beliefs on student motivation and engagement in Hispanic communities in light of the pandemic. In addition, the case study examined the role leaders play in fostering motivating and engaging environments and the processes and programs used to improve students' outcomes. Motivation is generally defined by perceptions of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and expectations for success (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

### **Setting and Participants**

The sample school was in an urban school district in Southern California, serving approximately 22,000 pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade at 20 sites and one virtual setting. The district serves a student population that is 90% Hispanic and approximately 65% of students are socio-economically disadvantaged, as evidenced by participation in free and reduced lunch programs. The school site being studied had an enrollment of 3,470 students, with Hispanic students comprising 89% of the population. In addition, 64% of students at the school site are eligible for free or reduced lunch or have parents/guardians who did not receive a high school diploma (California Department of Education, 2022). For this study, the school leaders, principals, district

directors, assistant superintendents, and superintendents had direct involvement with the planning and implementation of processes and programs that improve students' outcomes. In addition, these educational leaders were able to provide their perceptions/beliefs on student motivation and engagement and their impact on student learning.

The backdrop of this study was the implementation of a new schedule: a move from a traditional six-period day to an eight-period block schedule (Figure 3.1). School leaders, pre- and post-pandemic, realized that students were not making sufficient gains and the schedule was not allowing the flexibility needed to implement meaningful changes, which made a convincing argument for the needed schedule change. School leaders spent a year researching, informing, and educating stakeholders on the benefits and flexibility provided by an eight-period block schedule. As part of the process, school leaders involved stakeholders (i.e., parents, students, staff) in the learning and discovering process. Students' feedback was key and played a key part in developing the new schedule. Finally, after much work and reorganization, the school site studied opened the 2022-2023 school year with their new schedule.

**Figure 3.1**

*Block Schedule*

<b>8 PERIOD BLOCK SCHEDULE</b>		
	<b>BLUE DAY</b>	<b>GOLD DAY</b>
<b>8:30 - 9:59</b>	<b>Period 1</b>	<b>Period 2</b>
<b>9:59 - 10:15</b>	<b>Snack &amp; Passing</b>	
<b>10:15 - 11:46</b>	<b>Period 3</b>	<b>Period 4</b>
<b>11:46 - 11:51</b>	<b>Passing</b>	
<b>11:51 - 1:55</b>	<b>Lunch Period 5</b>	<b>Lunch Period 6</b>
<b>1:55 - 2:01</b>	<b>Passing</b>	
<b>2:01 - 3:30</b>	<b>Period 7</b>	<b>Period 8</b>

As a result of these changes, school leaders fostered an environment with more student choice and autonomy in selecting courses and pathways while creating a flexible schedule that allowed students time to access other various resources and programs (i.e., dual-enrollment college courses, the College & Career Center, the Wellness Center, peer tutoring, or employment). They also increased student autonomy through programs such as Student Voice and Student Advisory Council. School leaders were able to significantly increase the number of Math and English-Language Arts intervention classes, double the number of Student Success Labs—courses that provide content-specific interventions along with social-emotional learning and organizational skills, as well as provide peer tutoring during student's off-period within the school day. The increased flexibility of the schedule change allowed space for students to re-take courses for credit recovery. Traditionally, students needing credit recovery would need to wait for summer courses; however, results and participation in summer courses were often inconsistent.

### **Sampling Procedures**

The sampling strategy used in the study was purposeful, convenient, and mixed. Purposeful sampling selects a sample that will generate the greatest opportunity for the researcher to gain insight into the case; a sample that meets the researcher's criteria and goals of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Convenience sampling involves the selection of the participants based on time, money, and effort, while mixed sampling meets various interests and needs through triangulation and flexibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study surveyed and interviewed school leaders, site administrators, district directors, assistant superintendents, and superintendents that have direct involvement in developing school processes and programs at the secondary level.



## **Instrumentation and Measures**

Surveys allow for data to be collected in an indirect manner while learning about general trends in participants' opinions, experiences, and behaviors (Driscoll, 2011). To quantify and identify trends in school leaders, site administrators, district directors, assistant superintendents, and superintendents' beliefs on Hispanic students' motivation and engagement, the survey was both practical and applicable. The target length of the survey was 15 minutes to facilitate greater participation. The survey included 50 questions in which the participant selected a response using a Likert scale and demographic data were requested from participants. The survey was comprised of the following questionnaires: Perceptions on Student Motivation (PSM; Hardre et al., 2008), Motivating Students Questionnaire (MSQ; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008), and Beliefs and Practices Questionnaire (BPQ; D'Elisa, 2015).

The Perceptions of Student Motivation (PSM) questionnaire (Hardre et al., 2008), was based in part on the School Engagement and Effort Scale (SEES), a student self-report instrument (Vallerand et al., 1997). The PSM includes two primary scales for a total of 20 items on a 5-point Likert scale. The Motivation Scale contains seven items and assesses school leaders' perceptions of students' motivation. The remaining 13 items explore reasons school leaders endorse for students' lack of motivation. The Motivating Students Questionnaire (MSQ) examines school leaders' self-efficacy for motivating students and the strategies utilized (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). The measure examines three primary areas—general motivational strategies, extrinsic strategies, and general beliefs. The Beliefs and Practices Questionnaire (BPQ) supplements the information obtained through the PSM and MSQ (D'Elisa, 2015). These additional items assess school leader beliefs and practices in three additional areas: the relevance and importance of student motivation, theoretical orientation favored, and motivational practices.

Interviews allow the researcher to gain detailed insights from participants, discover how they make meaning of the world, and understand their perspective (Driscoll, 2011). A semi-structured interview method was used, featuring broad, open-ended questions that allowed flexibility to explore emerging themes as the participants responded. The interview method included various forms of questions—descriptive, interpretative, ideal, “devil’s advocate,” and hypothetical—to illicit rich and authentic responses and understand the issue from various perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to the interview questions, the protocol, which served as an interview guide, included a preface, interview instructions, recording instructions, research questions, and closing. Using the same protocol for all interviews guarantees the same line of questioning was followed and time with each participant is maximized (Patton, 2002). The target length of the interviews was approximately 45 minutes. Confidentiality agreements were obtained prior to the interviews and interviews were recorded with the participants’ permission. Lastly, school demographic, academic data, and organizational documents (e.g., reports and strategic plans) were analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of school settings, programs, and achievements.

### **Reliability**

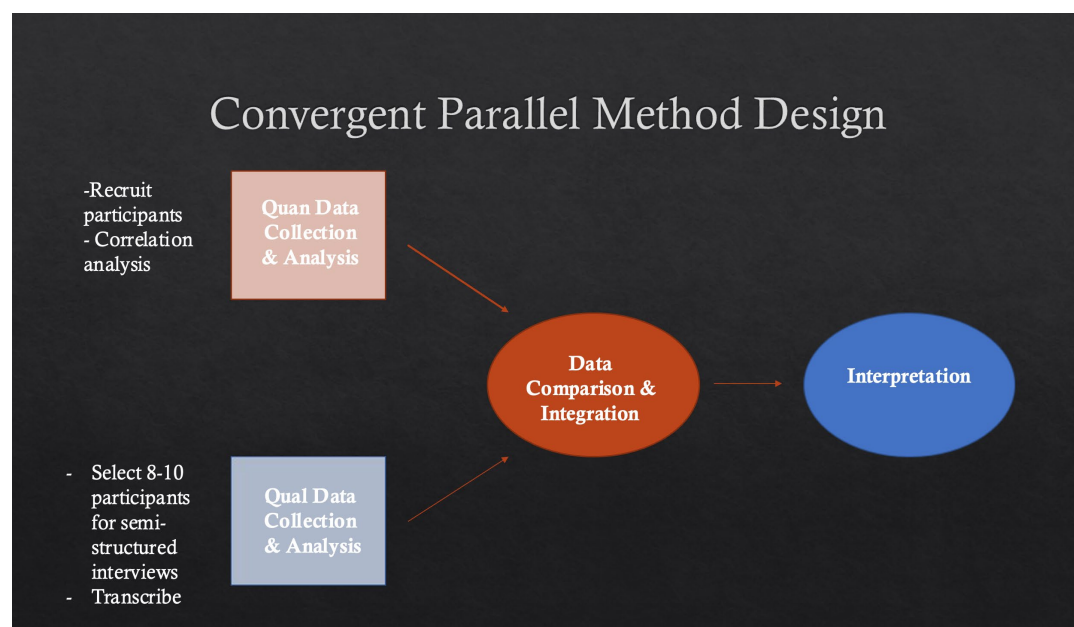
Reliability is the degree to which a specific research method can produce consistent results from one study to the next. Impacts on reliability include subject error and bias along with observer error and bias (Gibbs, 2012). To ensure reliability for the quantitative component of the study, the researcher used internal consistency measures through Cronbach’s alpha. To ensure the credibility of the qualitative data of the study, interviews were coded, and peer reviewers coded a subset of the interviews (Gall et al., 2007).

## **Validity**

Validity refers to the degree that evidence reflects the reality being measured. Impacts on validity include changes to participants' environment, testing and instrumentation, regression, and equalization of treatments (Gibbs, 2012). To ensure validity for the quantitative component of my study, the researcher conducted content and criterion-related analysis. Criterion-related validity measures how well one measure predicts an outcome for another measure. A test has this type of validity if it is useful for predicting performance or behavior in another situation (past, present, or future). Triangulation was used to look for patterns of thought and practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Content validity refers to the extent to which the items on a test are representative of the entire domain the test seeks to measure (Messick, 1995; Shepard, 1993). Trustworthiness was addressed through member checking and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **Plan for Data Collection**

Permission was obtained from the district superintendent through a formal written request (email), followed by a phone conversation, to gain access to school leaders, site administrators, district directors, and assistant superintendents. Once permission was granted, approximately 15 identified site principals, district directors, assistant superintendents, and superintendents were contacted for participation in the study via email with the consent form and link for the survey. The surveys were conducted via an online format to give participants an opportunity to complete surveys at their own discretion. Eight to 10 school leaders were selected for semi-structured interviews. Qualitative sampling operated under the saturation principle. Interviews were transcribed, organized by themes, and connected to larger research literature. Quantitative and qualitative data were integrated to identify patterns and relationships. The data collection process is illustrated in Figure 3.2 below.

**Figure 3.2***Research Method Design***Plan for Data Analysis**

For quantitative data analysis, basic descriptive statistics were used. For qualitative analysis, the researcher used Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis spiral framework:

- Data collection
- Managing and organizing the data
- Reading and memoing emergent ideas
- Describing and classifying codes into themes
- Developing and assessing interpretations
- Representing and visualizing the data
- Account of findings

Coding involves interacting with the data using different techniques, like questioning, making comparisons, drawing on personal experience, and looking at language (Corbin &

Strauss, 2008). In analysis, the researcher drew from several of these techniques while reading through the interview transcripts and observation notes. Once both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, they were compared and integrated to reach interpretations and findings.

### **Ethical Issues**

The aim of inquiry is to add to the accumulation of knowledge, solve complex problems, and enrich the general standing of society. Establishing and adhering to principles of ethical research is key to gaining public trust, laying the foundation for collaborative work, establishing accountability measures, encouraging public support, and promoting social responsibility and safety (Resnik, 2020). This research proposal was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Concordia University, Irvine and was conducted within the parameters of the institution's ethical standards. Additionally, the researcher completed Social and Behavioral Research training through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program) to ensure that best practices and ethical research methods were used.

In research studies, ethical concerns are likely to arise in the collection and presentation of the findings, which are directly impacted by the participant and researcher relationship (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ethical considerations included how much the researchers revealed about the purpose of the study to the participants, how informed the consent from the participants was, the privacy and protection from harm to the participants, and the standard data collection techniques. To maintain participant confidentiality, participant personal data was not collected during qualitative surveys. In addition, participant information collected during interviews was only known to the researcher and university supervisor. To ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner, the researchers took careful steps to acquire permission from the school site to approach their site leaders and to inform participants of the purpose of the study, as well as

ensuring they understood participation was voluntary. During the interviews, explicit permission was requested to record the sessions.

One of the principles of ethical research is objectivity, which strives to avoid or minimize bias and ensures that any personal interests or opinions are disclosed. The researcher is Hispanic, and having experienced the cultural challenges and the economic, academic, and resource scarcity faced by many students within this community, minimizing bias was key. In addition, ethical concerns were likely to occur in the collection and presentation of the findings, which were directly affected by the participant and researcher relationship (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the research design, including details of the study methodology, participants, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis. The study combined both qualitative and quantitative measures to provide a more comprehensive collection of data to better understand educational leaders' beliefs on student motivation and engagement and how educational leaders are fostering these environments to motivate and engage Hispanic students and improve students' outcomes. The researcher used appropriate tools and ethical standards to ensure the study would add to existing knowledge in this area.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The intent of this case study was to analyze educational leaders' beliefs on student motivation and engagement in Hispanic communities. In addition, the case study examined the role leaders play in fostering motivating and engaging environments and the processes and programs used to improve students' outcomes. The research study employed a convergent parallel design, where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed. The advantage of using a mixed-methods design was that it integrated the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods while reducing limitations. In addition, a variety of research methods leads to research questions being answered with the goal of finding sensible solutions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017).

A survey was used to collect quantitative data on school leaders' beliefs about Hispanic students' motivation and engagement. The survey included 50 questions in which the participants selected a response using a Likert scale; additionally, demographic data was requested from participants. Interviews allow the researcher to gain detailed insights from participants, discover how they make meaning of the world, and understand their perspective (Driscoll, 2011). A semi-structured interview method was used, featuring broad, open-ended questions that allowed flexibility to explore emerging themes as the participants responded. The interview method included various forms of questions – descriptive, interpretative, “devil’s advocate”—to illicit rich and authentic responses and understand the issue from various perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are secondary school leaders' beliefs about student motivation and engagement within a Hispanic community?
2. Considering the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic, how are secondary school

leaders engaging and motivating Hispanic student groups since the return from school closures?

3. How do school leaders foster learning environments that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness?

### **Demographic Data**

For this study, school leaders were selected from a comprehensive urban high school in Southern California. The high school enrolls approximately 3,500 students, with over 90% of Hispanic/Latino descent. English learners comprise nearly 10% of the student population, approximately 13% receive special education services, and nearly 70% of participate in free/reduced lunch programs. This high school is part of an urban school district that serves approximately 22,00 students and is comprised of two high schools, a continuation school, four middle schools, and 13 elementary schools. Eight school leaders completed the survey, of whom seven participated in the semi-structured interview. To protect the identities of school leaders, a number was used in place of names (e.g., SL1). Table 4.1 presents demographic data collected from participants. Four are male and four female. Three school leaders are Hispanic/Latino, four are White, and one is African American.

**Table 4.1**

#### *School Leader Demographic Data*

School Leader	Years in Current Position	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity
SL 1	3-5	Female	45-54	White
SL 2	3-5	Female	45-54	African American
SL 3	3-5	Male	35-44	White
SL 4	3-5	Male	45-54	White
SL 5	3-5	Male	55-64	White
SL 6	6-10	Female	45-54	Hispanic
SL 7	6-10	Male	55-64	Hispanic
SL 8	1-2	Female	35-44	Hispanic



## Survey Results

Participants completed three different questionnaires for a total of 50 Likert-style responses: the Perceptions on Student Motivation (PSM; Hardre et al., 2008), Motivating Students Questionnaire (MSQ; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008), and Beliefs and Practices Questionnaire (BPQ; D’Elisa, 2015) questionnaires.

### Perceptions on Student Motivation

The Perceptions of Student Motivation (PSM; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008) questionnaire includes two primary scales for a total of 20 items on a 5-point Likert scale. The Motivation Scale contains seven items and assesses school leaders’ perceptions of students’ motivation. The remaining 13 items explore reasons school leaders endorse for the student’s lack of motivation, with home factors, relevance, aspirations, peer factors, and personal factors as subscales. Tables 4.2 to 4.7 outline the results expressed as percentages for the PSM items.

**Table 4.2**

*Perception of Student Motivation (PSM): Motivation Scale Responses*

Likert Item	Almost never true	Usually not true	Occasionally true	Usually true	Almost always true
<i>Effort Subscale</i>					
Students really try to learn.	0.0%	0.0%	25%	62.5%	12.5%
Students work at learning new things.	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	75%	12.5%
Students don’t put forth much effort to learn the content.	0.0%	62.5%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%
<i>Engagement Subscale</i>					
Students generally pay attention and focus when being taught.	0.0%	0.0%	25%	75%	0.0%
Students generally do class-related tasks and assignments willingly.	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%	75%	12.5%
Students are distracted and off-task.	0.0%	62.5%	25%	12.5%	0.0%
<i>General Interest Item</i>					
Students are generally interested in what they are asked to learn.	0.0%	0.0%	50%	50%	0.0%

**Table 4.3***Perception of Student Motivation (PSM): Peer Factors Subscale Responses*

Likert Item	Almost never true	Usually not true	Occasionally true	Usually true	Almost always true
Generally, students who are not interested in learning are that way because of peer pressure to devalue school.	37.5%	50%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Negative peer pressure is a big reason why some students are not motivated to learn in school.	12.5%	0.0%	75%	12.5%	0.0%

**Table 4.4***Perception of Student Motivation (PSM): Home Factors Subscale Responses*

Likert Item	Almost never true	Usually not true	Occasionally true	Usually true	Almost always true
Generally, students are unmotivated because their parents don't care about or value education.	50%	25%	25%	0.0%	0.0%
Students often lack effort at school because they don't have support at home.	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	0.0%
Some students just have too many problems to make school a priority.	0.0%	12.5%	50%	37.5%	0.0%

**Table 4.5***Perception of Student Motivation (PSM): Relevance Subscale Responses*

Likert Item	Almost never true	Usually not true	Occasionally true	Usually true	Almost always true
When students are not engaged in school, it's because they don't see the value of what they are being asked to learn.	12.5%	0.0%	12.5%	62.5%	12.5%
If students don't see the point of learning the content, then they aren't motivated to learn it.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	75%	25%

Most often, if students aren't engaged at school, it's because they don't see the relevance of the content in their world.	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	62.5%	25%
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**Table 4.6**

*Perception of Student Motivation (PSM): Personal Factors Subscale Responses*

Likert Item	Almost never true	Usually not true	Occasionally true	Usually true	Almost always true
Some students are not motivated to learn because they are just lazy.	50%	0.0%	37.5%	12.5%	0.0%
Some students just don't care about learning.	62.5%	12.5%	12.5%	0.0%	12.5%

**Table 4.7**

*Perception of Student Motivation (PSM): Aspirations Subscale Responses*

Likert Item	Almost never true	Usually not true	Occasionally true	Usually true	Almost always true
If students are not motivated to learn, it is often because they don't have aspirations that connect to education, such as plans to go on to college.	25%	37.5%	12.5%	25%	0.0%
Some students aren't motivated to work in school because education has no place in the future they see for themselves.	12.5%	37.5%	25%	25%	0.0%
Most often, if students aren't working in class, it's because they don't see how useful the information can be.	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	75%	12.5%

Table 4.8 provides summary statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) for each item within the PSM. Results indicate the statements receiving the highest mean scores (usually true – almost always true) included “If students don't see the point of learning the content, then they

aren't motivated to learn it" ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ) and "Most often, if students aren't engaged at school, it's because they don't see the relevance of the content in their world" ( $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ). Statements that received the lowest average ratings (almost never true – usually not true) included "Generally, students are unmotivated because their parents don't care about or value education" ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ), "Generally, students who are not interested in learning are that way because of peer pressure to devalue school" ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ), and "Some students just don't care about learning" ( $M = 1.9$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ).

**Table 4.8**

*PSM Respondents Summary Statistics*

Item	Mean	SD
PSM 1	3.9	0.64
PSM 2	4.0	0.50
PSM 3	3.8	0.46
PSM 4	3.9	0.78
PSM 5	2.4	0.52
PSM 6	2.5	0.71
PSM 7	3.5	0.53
PSM 8	1.8	0.83
PSM 9	3.6	1.19
PSM 10	2.4	1.11
PSM 11	2.5	0.93
PSM 12	4.3	0.43
PSM 13	3.3	0.71
PSM 14	4.1	0.60
PSM 15	2.6	1.06
PSM 16	1.8	0.66
PSM 17	4.0	0.53
PSM 18	2.9	0.78
PSM 19	2.1	1.25
PSM 20	1.9	1.36

*Note.*  $n = 8$ , PSM = Perceptions on Student Motivation.

The PSM contains seven items to establish school leaders' perceptions of student interest, effort, and engagement. Table 4.9 provides summary statistics for each motivation subscale

found in the PSM. Results indicate that school leaders' perceptions regarding the aforementioned areas have little variation across the subscales, with all three items scoring within the occasionally true to usually true range. Items within the effort subscale included statements such as "Students work at learning new things," statements like "Students generally pay attention and focus when being taught" were found in the engagement subscale, while statements such as "Students are generally interested in what they are asked to learn" formed part of the general interest subscale.

**Table 4.9**

*PSM Motivation Scale Summary Statistics*

Scale/subscale	Mean	SD
PSM Effort Subscale	3.42	0.93
PSM Engagement Subscale	3.38	0.92
PSM General Interest Item	3.50	0.53

*Note.*  $n = 8$ . PSM = Perceptions on Student Motivation.

The PSM includes 13 items intended to determine the reasons school leaders ascribe to students demonstrating a lack of motivation. As Table 4.10 illustrates, school leaders attributed the relevance category ( $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) as having the greatest impact on student motivation. Sample items within the relevance subscale included "When students are not engaged in school, it's because they don't see the value of what they are being asked to learn" and "Most often, if students aren't engaged at school, it's because they don't see the relevance of the content in their world." School leaders rated personal factors ( $M = 2.0$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) as having the least impact on student motivation. Sample items within the personal factors subscale included "Some students are not motivated to learn because they are just lazy" and "Some students just don't care about learning."

**Table 4.10***PSM Reasons Summary Statistics*

Scale/Subscale	Mean	SD
PSM Home Factors Scale	2.50	1.02
PSM Relevance Scale	4.00	0.83
PSM Aspirations Scale	3.00	1.18
PSM Peer Factors Scale	2.31	0.95
PSM Personal Factors Scale	2.00	1.32

*Note.*  $n = 8$ , PSM= Perceptions on Student Motivation.

**Motivating Students**

The Motivating Students Questionnaire (MSQ) examines both school leaders' self-efficacy for motivating students and the strategies utilized (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). The measure examines three primary areas: general motivational strategies, extrinsic strategies, and general beliefs. Items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale, consistent with that described for the PSM. Tables 4.11 to 4.13 outline the overall results expressed as percentages for each item contained within the MSQ.

**Table 4.11***Motivating Students Questionnaire (MSQ): Motivating Strategies Scale Responses*

Likert Item	Almost never true	Usually not true	Occasionally true	Usually true	Almost always true
<i>Relatedness Subscale</i>					
When students are unmotivated, it is important to try to connect with them personally and build relationships to bridge the gap.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
When students are not interested in learning, it is necessary to try to support them through whatever may be going on.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25%	75%
If students are not trying to learn, it can be attributed to things outside school and let	25%	37.5%	12.5%	25%	0.0%

them work it out.

*Relevance Subscale*

To promote students' motivation, information should be provided about why what is being taught is valuable for them.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25%	75%
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*Aspirations Subscale*

Student motivation can be enhanced by connecting the skills they are learning to their futures.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
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*Acknowledge Peer Pressure Subscale*

Motivating some students requires getting them away from their peers.	12.5%	12.5%	62.5%	0.0%	12.5%
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*Can't Influence Subscale*

With some students, we just don't waste time trying to motivate them.	62.5%	12.5%	25%	0.0%	0.0%
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For some students, there is nothing that can be done to enhance their academic motivation.	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%	0.0%
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**Table 4.12**

*Motivating Students Questionnaire: Extrinsic Rewards & Constraints Subscale Responses*

Likert Item	Almost never true	Usually not true	Occasionally true	Usually true	Almost always true
<i>Extrinsic Rewards Subscale</i>					
Sometimes students are motivated by giving them rewards or privileges.	0.0%	0.0%	25%	75%	0.0%
Rewards are very effective motivating strategies for students to get their work done.	0.0%	25%	25%	50%	0.0%
Public praise and rewards are positive influences on students' motivation in school.	0.0%	0.0%	25%	37.5%	37.5%
<i>Extrinsic Constraints Subscale</i>					

Students are motivated by supervising them closely and structuring their time and tasks for them.	0.0%	25%	25%	50%	0.0%
A good way to motivate students is to deny them privileges and choices until the work is done.	25%	37.5%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%

**Table 4.13***Motivating Students Questionnaire: General Beliefs Scale Responses*

Likert Item	Almost never true	Usually not true	Occasionally true	Usually true	Almost always true
<i>Motivation as Malleable Subscale</i>					
Teachers/staff really can do a lot to influence students' motivation.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	87.5%
Students' motivation is generally pretty responsive to teachers'/staff's influence.	0.0%	0.0%	25%	25%	50%
<i>Motivation as Transient Subscale</i>					
Students' motivation changes from day to day, so we just have to accept those good and bad days.	12.5%	37.5%	25%	25%	0.0%
Students just come to school either motivated or unmotivated.	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	0.0%	12.5%

Table 4.14 provides summary statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) for each item within the MSQ. The findings show that school leaders agreed most (usually true – almost always true) with statements such as “When students are unmotivated, it is important to try to connect with them personally and build relationships to bridge the gap” ( $M = 5$ ,  $SD = 0$ ), “To promote students' motivation, information should be provided about why what is being taught is valuable for them” ( $M = 4.8$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ), and “Teachers/staff really can do a lot to influence students' motivation” ( $M = 4.9$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ). School leaders gave the lowest ratings (almost never



true – usually not true) to items such as “With some students, we just don’t waste time trying to motivate them” ( $M = 1.63$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) and “For some students, there is nothing that can be done to enhance their academic motivation” ( $M = 2.0$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ).

**Table 4.14**

*MSQ Respondents Summary Statistics*

Item	Mean	SD
MSQ 1	4.4	0.49
MSQ 2	3.9	0.64
MSQ 3	5.0	0.00
MSQ 4	4.8	0.46
MSQ 5	4.8	0.46
MSQ 6	2.4	1.19
MSQ 7	5.0	0.00
MSQ 8	2.9	1.13
MSQ 9	1.6	0.92
MSQ 10	2.0	1.07
MSQ 11	3.8	0.46
MSQ 12	3.3	0.89
MSQ 13	3.3	0.89
MSQ 14	2.6	1.06
MSQ 15	4.9	0.35
MSQ 16	2.1	1.36
MSQ 17	4.3	0.89
MSQ 18	4.1	0.83
MSQ 19	2.1	0.83

*Note.*  $n = 8$ .

The following component of the MSQ clusters strategies into the following four categories: relatedness, aspirations, relevance, and acknowledging peer pressure. The final category represents the level of helplessness in influencing motivation. As seen in Table 4.15, the aspirations scale ( $M = 5.0$ ,  $SD = 0.00$ ) received the highest ratings (almost always true) with items such as “Student motivation can be enhanced by connecting the skills they are learning to their futures.” This was closely followed by the relevance scale ( $M = 4.8$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ), which included items such as “To promote students’ motivation, information should be provided about

why what is being taught is valuable for them.” School leaders disagreed most (almost never true – usually not true) with the can’t influence scale ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ), which contained items such as “With some students, we just don’t waste time trying to motivate them.”

**Table 4.15**

*MSQ Strategies Summary Statistics*

Scale/Subscale	Mean	SD
MSQ Relatedness Scale	4.0	1.40
MSQ Aspirations Scale	5.0	0.00
MSQ Relevance Scale	4.8	0.46
MSQ Acknowledge Peer Pressure Scale	2.9	1.13
MSQ Can’t Influence Scale	1.8	0.98

The MSQ also included items to gauge school leaders’ perceptions of extrinsic rewards and constraints. As seen in Table 4.16, school leaders rated motivational strategies that involve extrinsic rewards higher (occasionally true – usually true) than extrinsic constraints (usually not true – occasionally not true). The extrinsic rewards scale included items such as “Sometimes students are motivated by giving them rewards or privileges” and “Public praise and rewards are positive influences on students’ motivation in school.” The extrinsic constraints scale included statements such as “A good way to motivate students is to deny them privileges and choices until the work is done” and “Students are motivated by supervising them closely and structuring their time and tasks for them.”

**Table 4.16**

*Extrinsic Strategies Summary Statistics*

Scale/Subscale	Mean	SD
MSQ Extrinsic Rewards Scale	3.7	0.81
MSQ Extrinsic Constraints Scale	2.7	1.01

The MSQ also assessed beliefs regarding the malleability and stability of motivation. As Table 4.17 illustrates, school leaders strongly (usually true – almost always true) believe that

motivation is malleable, with this scale containing items such as “Teachers/staff really can do a lot to influence students’ motivation” and “Students’ motivation is generally pretty responsive to teachers/staff’s influence.” School leaders expressed lesser agreement (usually not true – occasionally not true) with items within the transient scale, such as “Students’ motivation changes from day to day, so we just have to accept those good and bad days” and “Students just come to school either motivated or unmotivated.”

**Table 4.17**

*MSQ Beliefs Summary Statistics*

Scale/Subscale	Mean	SD
MSQ Malleable Scale	4.6	0.73
MSQ Transient Scale	2.4	1.20

**Beliefs and Practices**

The Beliefs and Practices Questionnaire (BPQ) was created to supplement the information obtained through the PSM and MSQ (D’Elisa, 2015). These additional items assess school leader beliefs and practices in three additional areas: the relevance and importance of student motivation, theoretical orientation favored, and motivational practices. Tables 4.18 and 4.19 outline the overall results expressed as percentages for each item contained within the BPQ.

**Table 4.18**

*Beliefs and Practices Questionnaire: Importance/Relevance & Practices Scale Responses*

Likert Item	Almost never true	Usually not true	Occasionally true	Usually true	Almost never true
<i>Importance/Relevance Scale</i>					
I believe motivating students is an important part of my job.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
I often think about ways to motivate students when devising programs and resources.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	87.5%

*Practices Scale*

Grading and classroom practices should place more emphasis on learning and mastery than on test performance.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	87.5%
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**Table 4.19***Beliefs and Practices Questionnaire: Theoretical Beliefs Scale*

Likert Item	Almost never true	Usually not true	Occasionally true	Usually true	Almost always true
The reasons students give themselves for their success or failure do not influence their level of motivation. (Attribution Theory)	25%	37.5%	12.5%	25%	0.0%
If a student believes they will succeed on a task they are more likely to try. (Expectancy-Value Theory)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50%	50%
Students' achievement is more connected to innate ability than effort and motivation. (Self-theory/Implicit Theory)	50%	50%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Student motivation increases when they are given more autonomy in the classroom. (Self-Determination Theory)	0.0%	25%	25%	50%	0.0%
Students are motivated to master the material they are being taught. (Goal Theory)	0.0%	0.0%	87.5%	12.5%	0.0%
Students are motivated to achieve grades or meet benchmarks. (Goal Theory)	0.0%	0.0%	50%	50%	0.0%
Student motivation is enhanced when students feel competent about what they are learning. (Self-Determination Theory)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50%	50%
Student motivation increases when they feel connected at school. (Self-determination Theory)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	87.5%

Table 4.20 provides summary statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) for each item within the BPQ. The findings show that school leaders strongly favored items (usually true – almost always true) such as “I believe motivating students is an important part of my job” ( $M = 5.0$ ,  $SD = 0.00$ ), “Grading and classroom practices should place more emphasis on learning and mastery than on test performance” ( $M = 4.9$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ), and “Student motivation increases when they feel connected at school” ( $M = 4.9$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ). School leaders expressed less agreement with items such as “Students’ achievement is more connected to innate ability than effort and motivation” ( $M = 1.5$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) and “The reasons students give themselves for their success or failure do not influence their level of motivation” ( $M = 2.4$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ).

**Table 4.20**

*BPQ Respondents Summary Statistics*

Item	Mean	SD
BPQ 1	5.0	0.00
BPQ 2	4.8	0.35
BPQ 3	2.4	1.19
BPQ 4	4.5	0.53
BPQ 5	1.5	0.53
BPQ 6	3.3	0.89
BPQ 7	3.1	0.35
BPQ 8	3.5	0.53
BPQ 9	4.5	0.53
BPQ 10	4.9	0.35
BPQ 11	4.9	0.35

*Note.*  $n = 8$

As mentioned previously, items were included in the BPQ to ascertain the theoretical beliefs of school leaders as it relates to motivation. These items were meant to explore the theoretical areas of attribution theory, expectancy-value theory, implicit theory, self-determination theory, and goal theory to complement the information obtained through the PSM and MSQ. Table 4.21 illustrates the summary results for items pertaining to each theoretical framework. The data demonstrates that school leaders favor expectancy-value theory ( $M = 4.5$ ,

SD = 0.53) and self-determination theory (M = 4.21, SD = 0.93) in their theoretical belief systems. School leaders expressed the least favorability for Implicit Theory (M = 1.5, SD = 0.53) as a theoretical belief system.

**Table 4.21**

*Beliefs and Practices Questionnaire: Theoretical Beliefs Summary Statistics*

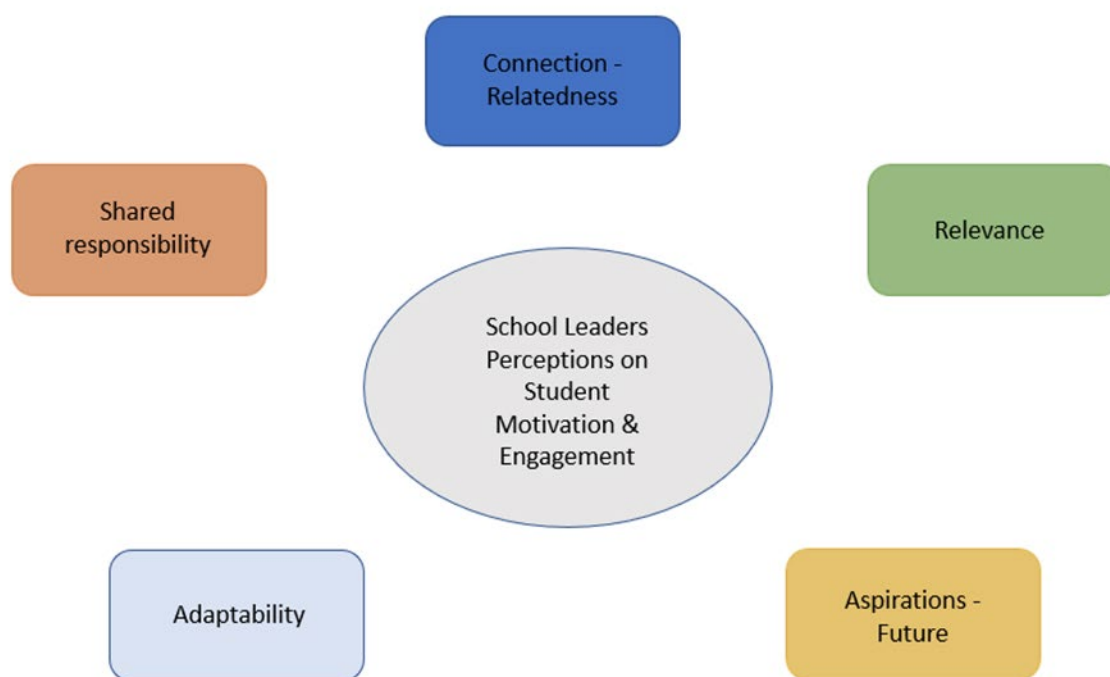
Theoretical Belief	Mean	SD
Attribution Theory	2.4	1.19
Expectancy-Value Theory	4.5	0.53
Implicit Theory	1.5	0.53
Self-Determination Theory	4.2	0.93
Goal Theory	3.8	0.87

### **Interview Results**

The researcher interviewed seven school leaders, individuals who have significant influence over school-wide policies and programs, to gain further insights into their perspectives on student motivation and engagement as school communities continue to grapple with the impact of the pandemic, school closures, and subsequent return to school. Participants were asked nine open-ended questions during a semi-structured interview. Five themes emerged after participant responses were coded. These themes are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1**

*Themes Based on School Leaders' Perceptions of Student Motivation and Engagement*



### **Connection – Relatedness**

The need for connection/relatedness speaks to the roles various members of the school community play in student motivation and engagement. Feeling connected to others is an important element for learning and growth to flourish (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Throughout interviews with school leaders, the theme of connection/relatedness was interwoven in their beliefs about student motivation and engagement. In addition, school leaders highlighted this theme's importance in providing caring learning environments and building trust with students. Table 4.22 provides participant responses associated with the theme of connection/relatedness.

**Table 4.22***Participant Responses Associated with Theme of Connection/Relatedness*


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SL 1	“I think that we can heavily influence student motivation. I think that with the right approach, when we try to connect with the student, we can motivate them to become engaged and open to learning, maybe content that they’re normally not interested in. And if we can take that a step further and connect the content to how we can impact the student, then I think we could really engage them and motivate them to do well in that area... I think that as a role model, being Latina, first generation, it really is important for me to connect with as many students as I possibly can because if I can do it and they learn my story, then I think they can see themselves achieve.”
SL 2	“ I think you build really good relationships with students when they see that you lived a very similar life and might not be the same, but at least they’ll understand you a little bit better.”
SL 3	“...black and brown are students going to be more involved if they can see a reflection of themselves in what they’re learning... and in any type of acknowledgment of your part in history, your culture, your ethnicity, your religion... when our students begin to feel recognized, acknowledged, respected in what they’re learning... I think motivation is going to change in all of those different areas as well.”
SL 4	“...it’s learning the students’ stories, learning who they are, working with families trying to really like, connect the dots and be a resource to them. I feel like when you can have that type of mutual sort of understanding and trust with students, parents, guardians, and school, you can do a lot with that. But it takes, I think, having open communication to figure out where the gaps are and where we could fit into helping the situation.”
SL 5	“I think the first thing that you have to talk about is the rapport that a teacher or a coach has with their students. If you build a strong rapport, if you build a culture that is based on trust, it’s based on mutual respect, it changes the dynamic, whether it’s in the classroom or on the playing field, so dramatically...those students are going to be willing to work so much harder for you because they know that you care about them.”
SL 7	“I’d say the number one factor with student engagement and motivation has to do with the teacher and the connection that teacher is able to make with the students...I found that when students can trust the teacher they will, they will bend over backward to meet the teacher’s expectations. Students want to do well, and when they have that connection with the teacher, they will work for the teacher more than they will for the grade.”

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## Relevance

Educators most frequently attribute student motivation to intrinsic causes, specifically the student's view of the relevance and value of the topic (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Previous studies found that teachers endorsed relevance (the lack of it) as a reason for students lacking motivation and promoted the use of strategies related to relevance over all other reasons and strategies (D'Elisa, 2015). The researcher found the concept of relevance as a consistent theme in discussions with school leaders, who emphasized its importance in igniting and sustaining motivation/engagement for students. Table 4.23 provides participant responses associated with the theme of relevance.

**Table 4.23**

*Participant Responses Associated with Theme of Relevance*

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SL 1	"...that's where connecting the content to real life, and more specifically to themselves, their areas of interest really comes into play... So, the more we know of them, of their interest, and so forth, the more we can promote how these tasks can help them out in the long run, even if it's in a small way."
SL 4	"I'm a firm believer that as an (educator) one of your jobs is to really, I think, inspire students to see the value of whatever it is that you're teaching... to figure out ways to connect your curriculum with the students, so that it becomes meaningful, and I think through that meaning students can see the value in it, and then they'll actually put forth effort to complete whatever the task is."
SL 5	"...it's also taking your curriculum and making it relevant and applicable to their lives. And there are so many creative ways that you can do that that keep students motivated, and it shows that... this is your schema, this is this is your wheelhouse, and this is how the curriculum connects."
SL 6	"I think we need to continue to keep morph socially, understanding the social structures that exist in our area. They're everywhere, right? But we have to look at everybody as unique to the area that they live in. And so, we need to be sensitive to that and understanding of what our kid's needs are, and what our parent's needs are for their students because it's different in our community than maybe in your community."

- SL 7 “I think it’s really important for students to have access to literature or curriculum that reflects their experiences, their history, their customs, and culture. So, I think that is something we have missed for decades, and we are now kind of really becoming more aware of and focused on.”
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### **Aspirations – Future Utility**

Studies have shown that student motivation and engagement are connected to aspiration/future utility, or the belief that one can become something later in life. Promoting and nurturing a high level of aspiration has been strongly tied to relevance (D’Elisa, 2015; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Aspirations can help students improve their achievement and are much more influential when they are accompanied by high expectations. Promoting aspirations and a focus on future outcomes becomes even more important when working with student populations who may not have the cultural capital and resources that other groups may have (Khattab, 2015). The importance of aspirations/future utility as it relates to student motivation and engagement also emerged as a theme in participant responses. Table 4.24 provides some insights into school leaders’ thoughts on aspiration/future utility.

**Table 4.24**

*Participant Responses Associated with Theme of Aspirations/Future Utility*

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- SL 4 “...the average student at our school...they’re just focused on the here now, right, and so for them it would be about understanding like when we teach this subject, whatever it is, here’s why it matters. Here’s how it matters to sort of like our collective in the world, but also, here’s how it matters to you...and how it impacts your future. And when you start to make those connections, they start to hopefully see the value of what it is that they’re learning again.”
- SL 4 “School should be that place where they’re (students) trying new things, they’re taking risks, they’re learning about themselves, and they have a supportive environment to just to grow as a human... and they could see that they can have a future, whatever that future looks like; that we’re going to support them through that process of shaping their future.”
- SL 5 “...the expectations that we set for our students, whether it’s in the classroom or on the playing field. I’ve always believed that if you set high standards, high

expectations, students are going to rise to that challenge. They're going to rise to that level of expectation... to build trust to foster some semblance of belief, and really show a student that you believe that they're capable of doing this or that."

SL 6 "...we started something that we call 'Pick Your Passion,' which was, you pick something that you love. The school's hard enough as it is, and getting engaged is another way to do it, so we've given them (students) more choices with our schedule, allowed them to take these courses (CTE and visual and performing arts), and everybody chose one...that's going to get them excited about their future...not so that they will just focus on that, but so they can have a well-rounded experience."

SL 7 "So, I think that starts with identifying what the student's goal is. What is there? What is it they want to do? They might not have all the answers, but the majority of the students you talk to have an idea of what they want to do, what field they want to go into, whether or not they want to go to college. If they have some career ideas beyond that, though what? What are they good at? What are their strengths? So, helping them see kind of where they already are successful and kind of connecting that with what they're doing. And this is something we have a lot of work to do around. But helping students identify what kind of learner they are, what their strengths are, and how it connects to how they're learning, how what they're doing right now connects to their big picture, their goal for themselves in the future."

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### **Adaptability/Flexibility**

In the researcher's conversations with school leaders, the need to embrace change and "think outside the box" in a rapidly changing environment was a theme that became apparent. Adaptability is the ability to adjust to changing circumstances and a willingness to compromise. From a structural and organizational standpoint, adaptability is critical in creating programs and policies that engage and motivate students in their learning environments; the pandemic has changed the landscape, and the need for adaptability has never been greater. Thus, adaptive leadership focuses on the adaptations needed in response to changing environments. In essence, "adaptive leaders prepare and encourage people to deal with change" (Northouse, 2016, p. 257).

Adaptive leadership requires leaders to mobilize, motivate, organize, orient, and focus the attention of others. A key point of adaptive leadership is the ability to encourage a change in organizational values to confront changing circumstances (Heifetz, 1994). From students'

perspective, adaptability/flexibility can be equated to and result in greater student choice and autonomy. School environments that support student autonomy/choice attempt to gain a genuine understanding of student need while acknowledging and responding, where possible, to those needs. In addition, students become active participants in the educational process when educators provide meaningful choices and tasks that engage students' interests (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Table 4.25 provides insights into school leaders thoughts on adaptability/flexibility.

**Table 4.25**

*Participant Responses Associated with Theme of Adaptability/Flexibility*

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SL 1	“...as a leader, we made it more of a point to establish flexibility and understanding not only for teachers who are going to have a direct impact on our students but on the students and families that need it as well. I think it's much more holistic than just the students, because we do have to emphasize the importance of mental health on our school staff as well... we switched over to the eight-period block with the intention of building supports within the school day because we know that from past experiences and data, the students that do need it the most, meaning academic support opportunities to improve their academic performance or skills, when they're offered outside of the school day are the ones who least access it.”
SL 3	“Our job is not to limit you (students) and say you're going to go and sit in this classroom and read about this and learn about this and do this... but have a variety of different paths to get to the goal that you want, and we honor all and respect all of those paths, and we're excited to be able to see you get there. We just want to help you get there.”
SL 5	“...building a culture of empathy is a benefit (of the pandemic) ... I do think it did help foster a culture of empathy where we are a lot more sensitive and a lot more cognizant of the struggles that our students have to go through outside of the classroom, and that goes back to then just being sensitive and building relationships and really showing them grace. We use that term so much in the pandemic, show the students grace, families show the teacher's grace. Like everybody needed to show everybody grace in some way or another. But in turn, what that created was a culture that's a little bit more empathetic, and I think that's definitely a good thing.”
SL 6	“... the 8-period day is really creating a lot of options for us that we knew it would create. Some of those are interventions within the school day, which is obviously super important...it gives them (students) some flexibility to make classes up within the school day...we've also given them some flexibility to be able to take some of the classes like animation, film, construction tech, audio-visual and engineering pathways

to help bridge the gap...we're giving them more opportunities for intervention. We're giving them more opportunities for enrichment. We're giving them more opportunities to do things that they may love doing outside of their core classes, all while trying to get kids to a certain level to where they're, you know, college prepared."

- SL 7 "...the major thing we did coming back was we shifted from a traditional six-period day to a 7-period day that's in an 8-period block. The driving reason for that was to create more time during the school day, so students can access all resources. So, by creating an 8-period day, where students take seven periods, it leaves one period open for students to access their counselors. The Wellness Center, the College & Career Center, peer tutoring, time with their teachers or tutoring with their teachers. It also allows them to participate in different programs on campus, so they can utilize that time for collaboration, study groups, or they can use that time to work or help with family obligations. That is their true time and period. So, it really gives them some ownership in their day, and what their needs are... In addition to that, it allowed us to create intervention within the school day, which we've never been able to truly do so. Now we have built-in intervention where it's not optional. Students are scheduled into a class for math, English, or science so that they can get the support they need."
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### **Shared Responsibility**

The theme of shared responsibility emerged in the researcher's discussions with school leaders. Persistent learning gaps, increased initiatives, and the effects of the pandemic have necessitated a greater level of shared responsibility in order to meet the needs of students. Shared leadership can be connected to distributive leadership, where leaders delegate responsibilities and simultaneously combat multiple issues or initiatives. In organizations that value shared responsibility, all stakeholders are considered to share the responsibility of instruction and learning to ensure all students learn (Thompson et al., 2004). Shared responsibility, or distributive leadership, emphasizes multiple sources of influence within an organization, capacity building, and focusing on a collective purpose (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Harris, 2013). Table 4.26 highlights school leaders' responses as it relates to shared responsibility.

**Table 4.26***Participant Responses Associated with Theme of Shared Responsibility*


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SL 1	“...we have more teacher buy-in this year with all the changes and depth of conversations that impact instruction, what they teach, and how they teach it because the administration has stepped back and teacher leaders are leading that wave of change.”
SL 2	“...leadership is trying to find those key players in all the different functioning parts of the school that they can raise up to take on leadership roles...supporting teachers and counselors to take those roles as well... leadership, in general, should be focused on that. I think you see the importance of even more since Covid, which just exasperated everything.”
SL 3	“...leaders drive culture and communicate a shared vision. When you, as the leader, can communicate that message and get your staff on board, get your students on board, get your parents on board, you have this collective vision that allows for that achievement to happen.”
SL 4	“I really feel like the culture that we’ve established here has been shared leadership. So, within our admin team, we’re here to support... our instructional leadership team or the leadership coalition that is completely run by teachers. Admin is present for it. We’re there to offer perspective, to give input in terms of what the district goals are and what we see as a site, where we want to go and how we’re going to do that work... in terms of the type of work that you do, day in and day out, we’re (administration and teachers) side to side. We’re shoulder to shoulder. We’re doing that work together... we want to have that type of cohesion with our teachers, in our community so that we can get things done and ultimately impact students’ achievement.”
SL 6	“And so, it’s really important to know who are those people that can be leaders, and who can take us where we need to go, and then, understanding that everybody provides a role in leadership if you’re willing to give them a chance. Everybody excels at something... the key is finding what those things are that people bring. And I think that same thing goes for students, student leadership, find out what they bring, what they can offer to help others. If you have a truly concerted effort from your whole group, then leadership becomes much easier, and you start to see some of the results that you want to see.”
SL 7	“...leadership is critical, but not just the administrative leadership; it has to do with the teacher. Leadership in having teacher leaders help really guide the instructional path for the staff. That’s where you’re going to get buy-in through the PLC, when you have your teacher leaders really driving those discussions and driving the direction the schools headed... they know what we need to achieve, and then, having them guide as a leadership team, guide the whole group so that we can bring along all the rest of the staff.”

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### **Summary**

This chapter was a presentation of the data and findings from surveys and interviews to analyze educational leaders' beliefs on student motivation and engagement in Hispanic communities. In addition, the case study examined the role leaders play in fostering motivating and engaging environments and the processes and programs used to improve students' outcomes. Ten school leaders, individuals who have significant influence and authority over school-wide programs and policies, were identified for survey and interview participation. The school leaders serve a comprehensive urban high school in Southern California with a student enrollment of approximately 3,500 students, with over 90% of the student population of Hispanic/Latino descent.

Eight school leaders completed the survey, of which seven were able to participate in the semi-structured interview. A 50-question survey based on a Likert scale was used to collect quantitative data on school leaders' beliefs about Hispanic students' motivation and engagement. The quantitative data showed school leaders supporting theoretical beliefs connected to expectancy-value and self-determination theories on motivation. A semi-structured interview method was used, featuring broad, open-ended questions that allowed flexibility to explore emerging themes as the participants responded. Several themes emerged from the qualitative data in the areas of connection/relatedness, relevance, aspirations/future utility, adaptability, and shared responsibility.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

It is often said that anything is possible through hard work. There is no doubt that much can be accomplished through determination and focus, but it is also apparent that many face headwinds and barriers that make the journey feel painstakingly difficult and oftentimes, insurmountable. The researcher grew up in a home full of love but short on resources. The researcher's parents had little formal education. The researcher's father was an orphan who came to the United States as a teenager. He was only able to complete elementary school. His mother dropped out of high school. Although the importance of education was preached at home, the researcher often felt unequipped and ill-prepared to confront the challenges faced at school.

Navigating the complexities of school and expectations often felt like a lonely endeavor since all his parents could offer was encouragement rather than the practical resources and skills he needed. Although the encouragement was needed and appreciated, the researcher often felt unmotivated, disconnected from school life, and unsure of how to navigate post-secondary education's turbulent waters. This was the researcher's experience as a Latino student. However, through constant encouragement, sheer determination, and perseverance, the researcher was the first college graduate in his family. The road was not easy. It is an all-too-common experience within minority groups, particularly the Hispanic/Latino community. Where the researcher was able to succeed, many like him were not.

These headwinds and barriers continue to be pervasive within minority communities. The pandemic negatively affected students of all ages, colors, and backgrounds but had a deeper impact on students of color (Lewis et al., 2022; NAEP, 2022). March 2020 ushered in a new era within the field of education: school closures, high levels of absenteeism even upon return, staff shortages, increased rates of misbehavior, mental health challenges, and learning loss (Lewis et



al., 2022). Serving as a school administrator during this time, the researcher witnessed first-hand the challenges faced by all due to disruptions to learning and the school community. The researcher witnessed skyrocketing absenteeism, a decline in academic performance, and increased mental health and social-emotional needs. Students' motivation, engagement, and a sense of purpose dropped for many students; the researcher also witnessed it in his children.

It is these experiences that drove the researcher to explore factors behind persistent achievement gaps within the Latino/Hispanic community and how these gaps were exacerbated by the pandemic. It is these experiences that led the researcher to explore the impact of motivation and engagement on students' achievement. And it was these experiences that led the researcher to study how school leaders are cultivating motivation and engagement to foster effective learning environments.

Ten school leaders, individuals who have significant influence and authority over school-wide programs and policies, were identified for survey and interview participation. The school leaders serve a comprehensive urban high school in Southern California with a student enrollment of approximately 3,500 students, with over 90% of the student population of Hispanic/Latino descent. Eight school leaders completed the survey, of which seven were able to participate in the semi-structured interview. A 50-question survey based on a Likert scale was used to collect quantitative data on school leaders' beliefs about Hispanic students' motivation and engagement.

### **Answers to Research Questions**

#### **Research Question One**

Research question one stated, what are secondary school leaders' beliefs about student motivation and engagement within a Hispanic community? Two themes emerged:

connection/relatedness and relevance. The need for connection/relatedness speaks to the roles various members of the school community play in student motivation and engagement. Feeling connected to others is an important element for learning and growth to flourish (Ryan & Deci, 2000). School leader five described connection/relatedness in the following manner:

If you build a strong rapport, if you build a culture that is based on trust, it's based on mutual respect, it changes the dynamic, whether it's in the classroom or on the playing field, so dramatically...those students are going to be willing to work so much harder for you because they know that you care about them.

The researcher found the concept of relevance a consistent theme in discussions with school leaders, who emphasized its importance in igniting and sustaining motivation and engagement for students. School leader five explained relevance in the following manner:

it's also taking your curriculum and making it relevant and applicable to their lives. And there are so many creative ways that you can do that that keep students motivated, and it shows that... this is your schema, this is this is your wheelhouse, and this is how the curriculum connects.

So, what drives a person to do anything? This is the question that motivation theorists have attempted to explain about individuals' decisions on task selection, persistence, and performance. From Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs—physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization—to McClelland's (1965) three needs theory based on achievements, affiliation, and power, to more contemporary frameworks focused on expectations for success and task value and needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 1999; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992), the work to find what drives us continues. Within the context of schools and learning environments, Ryan and Deci (2020) stated,

schools should nonetheless be supportive contexts for development, provide conditions that enhance students' adaptive capacities and mental health, and, importantly, do no harm... We also consider how an atmosphere conducive to thriving students requires thriving teachers, and thus the importance of supporting teachers' basic psychological needs. (p. 2)

School leaders play a key role in providing supportive environments that help students of all backgrounds thrive. Understanding school leaders' perspectives on student motivation and engagement is key to understanding how they respond to student needs, particularly when working with high-need populations *while* adapting to the new challenges brought on by the pandemic. School leaders' survey results, comprised of the Perceptions on Student Motivation (PSM; Hardre et al., 2008), Motivating Students Questionnaire (MSQ; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008), and Beliefs and Practices Questionnaire (BPQ; D'Elisa, 2015) questionnaires, indicate the following that school leaders overwhelmingly believe that students are motivated and willing learners when content and school experiences are made relevant.

Of the eight school leaders surveyed, 75% indicated strong agreement (usually true – almost always true) with statements such as “Students really try to learn” and “Students work at new learning new things.” When presented with the statement, “When students are not engaged in school, it’s because they don’t see the value of what they are being asked to learn,” 75% expressed strong agreement (usually true – almost always true). All school leaders expressed strong agreement with the statement, “If students don’t see the point of learning the content, then they aren’t motivated to learn it,” while 88% stated strong agreement (usually true – almost always true) with the statement, “Most often, if students aren’t engaged at school, it’s because they don’t see the relevance of the content in their world.”

In interviews with school leaders, the importance of making content and school experiences relevant to engage and motivate learners was made clear. School leader four stated:

I'm a firm believer that as an (educator) one of your jobs is to really, I think, inspire students to see the value of whatever it is that you're teaching... to figure out ways to connect your curriculum with the students, so that it becomes meaningful, and I think through that meaning students can see the value in it, and then they'll actually put forth effort to complete whatever the task is.

School leader six emphasized the importance of relevance and understanding the unique needs of students and the community:

I think we need to continue to keep morph socially, understanding the social structures that exist in our area. They're everywhere, right? But we have to look at everybody as unique to the area that they live in. And so, we need to be sensitive to that and understanding of what our kid's needs are, and what our parent's needs are for their students because it's different in our community than maybe in your community.

Additionally, the results suggest that school leaders strongly believe that developing authentic relationships and building connections with students is a key driver of student motivation and engagement. All school leaders agreed (usually true – almost always true) with statements such as “When students are unmotivated, it is important to try to connect with them personally and build relationships to bridge the gap” and “When students are not interested in learning, it is necessary to try to support them through whatever may be going on.” School leader seven stated how connection builds trust, which leads to improvement:

I'd say the number one factor with student engagement and motivation has to do with the teacher and the connection that teacher is able to make with the students...I found that

when students can trust the teacher, they will bend over backward to meet the teacher's expectations. Students want to do well, and when they have that connection with the teacher, they will work for the teacher more than they will for the grade.

School leader four expressed the link between connection and communication:

it's learning the students' stories, learning who they are, working with families trying to really like, connect the dots and be a resource to them. I feel like when you can have that type of mutual sort of understanding and trust with students, parents, guardians, and school, you can do a lot with that. But it takes, I think, having open communication to figure out where the gaps are and where we could fit into helping the situation.

Lastly, school leader one highlighted the importance of sharing one's story to relate to one another:

I think that we can heavily influence student motivation. I think that with the right approach, when we try to connect with the student, we can motivate them to become engaged and open to learning maybe content that they're normally not interested in. And if we can take that a step further and connect the content to how we can impact the student, then I think we could really engage them and motivate them to do well in that area... I think that as a role model, being Latina, first generation, it really is important for me to connect with as many students as I possibly can because if I can do it and they learn my story, then I think they can see themselves achieve.

The results also suggest that school leaders strongly believe that student motivation and engagement are malleable and, as a result, respond to changes in programs, resources, and approaches. All school leaders overwhelmingly agreed with statements such as, "Teachers/staff really can do a lot to influence students' motivation" and "Students' motivation is generally

pretty responsive to teachers/staff's influence." Studies have shown that educators who believe that motivation is malleable will be less focused on the reasons for the lack of student motivation and engagement and more concentrated on using strategies to improve it (D'Elisa, 2015). School leader three expressed the concept of flexibility (or malleability) in the following manner:

Our job is not to limit you (students) and say you're going to go and sit in this classroom and read about this and learn about this and do this... but have a variety of different paths to get to the goal that you want, and we honor all and respect all of those paths, and we're excited to be able to see you get there. We just want to help you get there.

School leader five expressed the idea of flexibility or malleability through the lens of empathy:

building a culture of empathy is a benefit (of the pandemic) ... I do think it did help foster a culture of empathy where we are a lot more sensitive and a lot more cognizant of the struggles that our students have to go through outside of the classroom, and that goes back to then just being sensitive and building relationships and really showing them grace. We use that term so much in the pandemic, show the students grace, families show the teacher's grace. Like everybody needed to show everybody grace in some way or another. But in turn, what that created was a culture that's a little bit more empathetic, and I think that's definitely a good thing.

## **Research Question Two**

Research question two stated, considering the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic, how are secondary school leaders engaging and motivating Hispanic student groups since the return from school closures? Two themes emerged in this discussion: adaptability/flexibility and shared responsibility. Adaptability is the ability to adjust to changing circumstances and a willingness to compromise. From a structural and organizational standpoint, adaptability is

critical in creating programs and policies that engage and motivate students in their learning environments. School leader one explained the need for adaptability/flexibility in the following manner:

as a leader, we made it more of a point to establish flexibility and understanding not only for teachers who are going to have a direct impact on our students but on the students and families that need it as well... we switched over to the eight-period block with the intention of building supports within the school day because we know that from past experiences and data, the students that do need it the most, meaning academic support opportunities to improve their academic performance or skills, when they're offered outside of the school day are the ones who least access it.

Shared responsibility can be connected to distributive leadership, where leaders delegate responsibilities and simultaneously combat multiple issues or initiatives. In organizations that value shared responsibility, all stakeholders are considered to share the responsibility of instruction and learning to ensure all students learn (Thompson et al., 2004). Shared responsibility, or distributive leadership, emphasizes multiple sources of influence within an organization, capacity building, and focusing on a collective purpose (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Harris, 2013). School leader two described the need for shared responsibility as follows:

leaders are trying to find those key players in the different functioning parts of the school that they can raise up to take on leadership roles supporting teachers and counselors to take those roles as well. Leaders, in general, should be focused on that. I think you see the importance even more since COVID, which just exasperated everything.

When the researcher first set out to answer the above question, the assumption was that the data would lead to a focus on student motivation on a granular or micro level. Instead, the

response to this question was more about the need for bold, macro-level actions to confront difficult and changing circumstances. In conversations with school leaders, the feedback was similar: students were not experiencing the level of success they wanted, and things were only magnified by the pandemic. It was clear to this group of leaders that major (and uncomfortable) changes were needed that would require a high level of adaptability and shared responsibility to make it happen. In the aftermath of the pandemic, school leaders came to the following realizations: school leaders must embrace change and boldly act upon it in a rapidly shifting environment.

In response to the great needs and rapidly changing environment, school leaders did the following as described by school leader seven:

the major thing we did coming back was we shifted from a traditional six-period day to a 7-period day that's in an 8-period block. The driving reason for that was to create more time during the school day, so students can access all resources. So, by creating an 8-period day, where students take seven periods, it leaves one period open for students to access their counselors, the Wellness Center, the College & Career Center, peer tutoring, time with their teachers or tutoring with their teachers. It also allows them to participate in different programs on campus, so they can utilize that time for collaboration, study groups, or they can use that time to work or help with family obligations. That is their true time and period. So, it really gives them some ownership in their day, and what their needs are... In addition to that, it allowed us to create intervention within the school day, which we've never been able to truly do so. Now we have built-in intervention where it's not optional. Students are scheduled into a class for math, English, or science so that they can get the support they need.



As previously mentioned, adaptability is the ability to adjust to changing circumstances and a willingness to compromise. From a structural and organizational standpoint, adaptability is critical in creating programs and policies that engage and motivate students in their learning environments. Adaptive leadership focuses on the adaptations needed in response to changing environments. In essence, “adaptive leaders prepare and encourage people to deal with change” (Northouse, 2016, p. 257). Adaptive leadership requires leaders to mobilize, motivate, organize, orient, and focus the attention of others. A key point of adaptive leadership is the ability to encourage a change in organizational values to confront changing circumstances (Heifetz, 1994).

The amount of work and courage it took this group of school leaders to prepare, encourage, organize, and mobilize to enact this change cannot be overstated. To implement the change to an eight-period block schedule, the cornerstone for allowing greater flexibility for greater student choice, support, and relationship building, more than one year of conversations and education on the benefits and costs of moving to the new schedule took place. This group of school leaders had to convince district leadership of the merits of a shift to an eight-period day, which was especially complex considering all other secondary schools in the district remaining on a traditional 6-period schedule.

Once district approval was granted, school leaders were able to present this schedule as an option to school staff. This was a months-long process of informing and educating school-based leadership on the benefits and challenges of moving to a new schedule and discussions and meetings with departments, professional learning communities (PLCs), and school leadership to gain momentum and buy-in. In addition, school leaders met with student and parent groups to share the benefits of proposed schedule changes. These conversations and information sessions ultimately led to voting and approval of a new schedule. Once the new schedule was approved, a

complete re-working of the master schedule took place, professional development on new schedule implementation was provided, along with professional development and training for new programs and courses incorporated as a result of the new schedule.

The results also suggest that school leaders equip others and promote shared responsibility in times of change and challenging circumstances. School leader four described shared responsibility in the following manner:

I really feel like the culture that we've established here has been shared leadership. So, within our admin team, we're here to support... our instructional leadership team or the leadership coalition, that is completely run by teachers. Admin is present for it. We're there to offer perspective, to give input in terms of what the district goals are and what we see as a site, where we want to go and how we're going to do that work... in terms of the type of work that you do, day in and day out, we're (administration and teachers) side to side. We're shoulder to shoulder. We're doing that work together... we want to have that type of cohesion with our teachers, in our community, so that we can get things done and ultimately impact students' achievement.

School leader one said, "we have more teacher buy-in this year with all the changes and depth of conversations that impact instruction, what they teach and how they teach it because administration has stepped back and teacher leaders are leading that wave of change." School leader six noted,

it's really important to know who are those people that can be leaders, and who can take us where we need to go, and then understanding that everybody provides a role in leadership if you're willing to give them the chance. Everybody excels at something... the key is finding what those things are that people bring. And I think that same thing

goes for student leadership, find out what they bring, what they can offer to help others.

If you have a truly concerted effort from your whole group, then leadership becomes much easier, and you start to see some of the results that you want to see.

In order to enact this titanic shift in scheduling, school leaders realized the need to bring along and equip leaders from all stakeholder groups - teachers, students, and parents. As previously mentioned, persistent learning gaps, increased initiatives, and the effects of the pandemic necessitated a greater level of shared responsibility to meet the needs of students. Shared leadership can be connected to distributive leadership, where leaders delegate responsibilities and simultaneously combat multiple issues or initiatives. In organizations that value shared responsibility, all stakeholders are considered to share the responsibility of instruction and learning to ensure all students learn (Thompson et al., 2004). Shared responsibility, or distributive leadership, emphasizes multiple sources of influence within an organization, capacity building, and focusing on a collective purpose (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Harris, 2013).

Considering this, leadership at the school being studied has been greatly distributed among the Leadership Coalition, a group of approximately 35 teacher-leaders (approximately 160 teachers are on site). The Leadership Coalition has been the driving force of change at the school. These leaders drive the conversations of change within their Professional Learning Communities and departments, lead most professional development opportunities, and serve as the voice for embracing change. In addition, student leaders have a place at the table. The Associated Student Body (ASB) and the Student Advisory Council play an active role in leading change and advocating for the needs of students, meeting with school leadership to voice their concerns, sharing student feedback, and recommending a student-focused environment.

### Research Question Three

Research question three stated, how do school leaders foster learning environments that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness? The previously described themes of connection/relatedness, relevance, and adaptability/flexibility re-emerged, as well as the theme of aspirations/future. Studies have shown that student motivation and engagement are connected to aspiration/future utility, or the belief that one can become something later in life. Promoting and nurturing a high level of aspiration has been strongly tied to relevance (D'Elisa, 2015; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Promoting aspirations and a focus on future outcomes becomes all the more important when working with student populations who may not have the cultural capital and resources that other groups may have (Khattab, 2015). School leader seven described a focus on the future as follows:

they might not have all the answers, but the majority of the students you talk to have an idea of what they want to do, what field they want to go into, whether or not they want to go to college. If they have some career ideas beyond that, what are they? What are they good at? What are their strengths? So, helping them see kind of where they already are successful and kind of connecting that with what they're doing...and how it connects to how they're learning, how what they're doing right now connects to their big picture, their goal for themselves in the future.

The survey results showed that out of several theoretical frameworks on motivation, school leaders favored frameworks that emphasized autonomy, competence, and relatedness/connection. This stance supports Ryan and Deci's (1999) self-determination theory (SDT) which postulates that all humans have the three abovementioned inherent psychological needs, which lead to greater self-motivation and improved mental health and well-being. They

described three inherent needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is having a voice and taking ownership of one's actions. Autonomy thrives when filled by experiences of interest and value and is undercut when one feels externally controlled.

Competence is the feeling that one can succeed and grow. Competence thrives in well-structured environments that are challenging, provide positive feedback and opportunities for development. Relatedness creates belonging and is found in environments rooted in care and respect (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Abla and Fraumeni (2019) outlined various proven strategies to improve student motivation and engagement, which included a focus on relationship building, balancing structure with student autonomy, and real-world connections; these concepts share many similarities with SDT and themes expressed by school leaders participating in the study.

Throughout the interviews and conversations with school leaders, there was a distinct focus on connection, relevance, aspirations/future, and flexibility when discussing the components of effective learning environments and how they lead to student autonomy, competence, and relatedness. School leaders expressed the following as key factors in supporting environments that promote student autonomy, competence, and relatedness:

### ***Student Choice, Voice, and Flexibility***

School leaders foster environments that promote autonomy through student choice and flexibility and understood the importance of providing student choice and flexibility (autonomy) when advocating and implementing their new eight-period schedule. Ryan and Deci (2000) wrote, "...deep, holistic processing is facilitated by a sense of choice, volition, and freedom from excessive external pressure toward behaving or thinking a certain way. In this sense, support for autonomy allows individuals to actively transform values into their own" (p. 74). School leaders' thoughts on student choice and flexibility are encapsulated in the following statement:

the eight-period day is really creating a lot of options for us that we knew it would create. Some of those are interventions within the school day, which is obviously super important...it gives them (students) some flexibility to make classes up within the school day...we've also given them some flexibility to be able to take some of the classes like animation, film, construction tech, audio-visual and engineering pathways to help bridge the gap...we're giving them more opportunities for intervention. We're giving them more opportunities for enrichment. We're giving them more opportunities to do things that they may love doing outside of their core classes, all while trying to get kids to a certain level to where they're, you know, college prepared.

Not only have school leaders fostered an environment with more student choice and autonomy in selecting courses and pathways, but they have also created a flexible schedule that allows students time to access other various resources and programs, i.e., dual-enrollment college courses, the College & Career Center, the Wellness Center, peer tutoring, employment, etc. They have also increased student autonomy through programs such as Student Voice and Student Advisory Council.

### ***Relevance and a Focus on the Future***

School leaders foster environments that promote competence by establishing relevance and a focus on the future. School leaders spoke at great length about the need to make content and school experiences relevant to students to increase student motivation and engagement. Closely tied to relevance is the belief that nurturing high levels of aspiration, or a focus on the future, also helps to improve students' achievement (D'Elisa, 2015; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Promoting aspirations and a focus on future outcomes becomes even more important when working with student populations who may not have the cultural capital and resources that other

groups may have (Khattab, 2015). Ultimately, when students clearly understand the relevance of what they are learning and how it directly impacts their future, they are more likely to engage and persevere in their learning. School leader one shared the following as it relates to relevance and aspirations:

that's where connecting the content to real life, and more specifically to themselves, their areas of interest really comes into play... So, the more we know of them, of their interest, and so forth, the more we can promote how these tasks can help them out in the long run, even if it's in a small way.

School leader five noted that

it's also taking your curriculum and making it relevant and applicable to their lives. And there are so many creative ways that you can do that that keep students motivated, and it shows that... this is your schema, this is this is your wheelhouse, and this is how the curriculum connects.

Additionally, school leader four described how

School should be that place where they're (students) trying new things, they're taking risks, they're learning about themselves, and they have a supportive environment to just to grow as a human... and they could see that they can have a future, whatever that future looks like; that we're going to support them through that process of shaping their future.

Finally, school leader six shared,

we started something that we call "Pick Your Passion," which was, you pick something that you love. The school's hard enough as it is, and getting engaged is another way to do it, so we've given them (students) more choices with our schedule, allowed them to take these courses (CTE and visual and performing arts), and everybody chose one...that's

going to get them excited about their future...not so that they will just focus on that, but so they can have a well-rounded experience.

Students feel and become more competent when they actively engage in learning that they can connect to and see as valuable to any future aspirations. School leaders created a schedule that opened up opportunities for students to “Pick a Passion.” Previously, because of master scheduling constraints, access to preferred courses was limited. With the flexibility of the new schedule, all students were able to participate in classes of high interest (e.g., engineering, construction technology, audio/visual, film, visual and performing arts). Students who previously had to choose between athletics and a high-interest course such as engineering, for example, now had the opportunity to participate in both.

Part of making experiences relevant with an eye on the future is providing the necessary support and scaffolds to ensure that students are learning; this promotes student feelings of competency. A major issue, pre- and post-pandemic, has been the need for intervention. Again, master scheduling conflicts did not allow for ample intervention courses during school hours. After school interventions and tutoring often proved ineffective and lacked participation. The change in schedule allowed more flexibility for intervention and tutoring within the school day. School leaders were able to significantly increase the number of math and English language arts intervention classes, double the number of Student Success Labs—courses that provide content-specific interventions along with social-emotional learning and organizational skills, as well as provide peer tutoring during student’s off-period within the school day. The increased flexibility of the schedule change has allowed space for students to re-take courses for credit recovery. Moving from the traditional six-period day to what is a seven-period day within the eight-period block schedule allowed “slots” for students to re-take courses for credit recovery. In some select



cases, students are allowed to take a full, eight-course schedule to recover credits more quickly; these cases are rare, and students who are interested in an eight-period schedule are screened to ensure success. Traditionally, students needing credit recovery would need to wait for summer courses; however, results and participation in summer courses were often inconsistent.

### ***Intentional Connections***

School leaders foster environments of relatedness by prioritizing intentional connections. As mentioned earlier, relatedness is “a sense of belonging and connection. It is facilitated by conveyance of respect and caring” (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 1). Furthermore, positive relationships and supportive environments are critical to the well-being of people. High-quality relationships and environments satisfy the relatedness need and positively impact the desire for autonomy and competence (Center for Self-Determination Theory, 2020). Positive relationships and meaningful connections do not happen by accident; they require a level of intentionality. Emerging from the pandemic, school leaders observed a significant decline in student social-emotional well-being. Many students were simply disconnected, negatively impacting their levels of motivation and engagement. School leader five shared the following regarding connection/relatedness:

I think the first thing that you have to talk about is the rapport that a teacher or a coach has with their students. If you build a strong rapport, if you build a culture that is based on trust, it's based on mutual respect, it changes the dynamic, whether it's in the classroom or on the playing field, so dramatically...those students are going to be willing to work so much harder for you because they know that you care about them.

Additionally, school leader three expressed,

black and brown are students going to be more involved if they can see a reflection of themselves in what they're learning... and in any type of acknowledgment of your part in

history, your culture, your ethnicity, your religion... when our students begin to feel recognized, acknowledged, respected in what they're learning... I think motivation is going to change in all of those different areas as well.

The importance of building relationships and connections cannot be overstated. People thrive in environments where they feel supported, cared for, and seen. An environment where empathy, an intense interest in understanding others, is present is a key component of student engagement and motivation. So, how do you know if efforts to build connections are working? The results are often first seen in subtle ways, such as increased participation in clubs, athletics, school events, etc. The benefits of improved connections are also seen in reduced behavior incidents and improved student academic achievement. Lastly, when attempting to gauge improvement in school connectedness, it is important to speak with students. Make students part of the conversation by soliciting their input in school climate surveys, student advisory councils, and "Student Voice" sessions, where they have an opportunity to express their thoughts on the direction of where things are headed.

School leaders responded with a renewed focus on meaningful connections within the classroom; teachers and students building trust and rapport. Although school leaders recognize there is much work to be done in this area, a renewed focus was placed on all teachers receiving professional development on programs such as Capturing Kid's Hearts. Programs such as this equip teachers to implement transformational processes focused on social-emotional well-being, relationship-driven culture, and student connectedness. School leaders also created a "Wellness Center" where students would have greater access to counselors and school-based therapy. For students at higher levels of risk, Student Success Lab sections were increased to not only aid in academic intervention but also teach and guide social-emotional literacy. School leaders also

recognized that programs such as athletics and student clubs promote the building of connections between students and the school. The new schedule allowed for more athletics and club offerings, as well as a threefold increase in the number of ASB course offerings. School leaders also understood that building connections with students and families was developed by hiring staff who share similar backgrounds as the student population. The last two years have seen almost 40 staff members retire or leave the profession. There has been a thoughtful effort to fill these positions with professionals who share similar experiences and backgrounds with the population they serve.

### **Where Things Stand**

Although conversations and preparations were underway for well over a year, it is important to note that the bold changes made by school leadership have only been in place since the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year. The school leaders who participated in the study are candid in their discussions of the long-term impact their changes may have and the hard work that is ahead, but they are steadfast in their belief that business as usual was not an option. At the time of this study, the new eight-period schedule, along with the new courses, intervention, clubs, etc. that came along with it, had only been in place for one full semester; data collection and data mining is ongoing. However, there are preliminary signs that their beliefs about student motivation and engagement and subsequent changes are moving things in the right direction.

Prior to these changes, 45% of the class of 2024, the group of students who started high school with distance learning, were behind on credits; the number has since dropped to 12%. School leaders believe that introducing greater student choice in clubs, socio-emotional resources, and course selection has resulted in a 57% decrease in instances of student fighting. The new schedule has allowed for greater flexibility and more time for participation in clubs and

athletics, which have set an all-time high; approximately 1,500 students participate in clubs, while 1,300 students are participating in athletics. As a result of changes in scheduling, class sizes have been reduced, and teachers now have 90 minutes of preparation time daily. In addition, teacher satisfaction with the new schedule is high, with 91% of teachers voting to keep the schedule for the next school year.

### **External Factors' Impact on Achievement**

The study focused on school leaders' beliefs on motivation and engagement and how those beliefs can lead to environments where student choice, flexibility, relevance, and building connections thrive. However, it is important to revisit some key external factors that influence students' achievement. Any significant narrowing of the achievement gap begins with organizational change. Effective leadership, characterized by proactive, collaborative, and collegial management, has a profound positive effect on the whole organization (Jesse et al., 2004). In addition to having a visionary and collaborative leader, organizational changes must include interventions that foster high academic performance and re-engage students, such as small class sizes, homework and tutoring assistance, and credit recovery, Saturday school, and summer enrichment programs (Dynarski et al., 2008).

Academic rigor is a key external factor in students' achievement. Standard-aligned and rigorous coursework has been shown to increase achievement for all students (Ansell, 2011). Rigorous coursework and a culture of high expectations allow students to develop various levels of thinking and how to generalize that knowledge across multiple settings. In addition to being aligned with state and national standards, a challenging curriculum should have clear, consistent, and articulated goals and benchmarks. Coursework should include progress monitoring that not only are based on goals and benchmarks. The curriculum must engage students in learning and

teach relevant skills that can be translated into various areas. Coursework should be characterized by problem-solving and analytical reasoning (Haycock, 2001).

Multi-tiered systems of support and interventions play a key role in improving students' outcomes. Fuchs et al. (2008) provided an evolving definition of intervention and the multi-tiered system of support based on research-principled or validated classroom instruction followed by a validated small group tutoring protocol. Only students who do not respond to these first two tiers of support are referred for a more individualized tier of prevention. This approach incorporates strategies such as: (1) enhanced cultural competence, (2) comprehensive support for students, (3) outreach to students' families; (4) extended learning opportunities; (5) classrooms that support learning; (6) supportive schools; (7) strong district support; (8) access to qualified staff; and (9) adequate resources and funding (Hanover Research, 2017).

Lastly, the importance of parental involvement cannot be overstated when discussing students' achievement. The two central institutions where students spend their lives are school and family. Therefore, two-way interaction between school and family, unity of goals, the sustainable balance of trust and power, and the quality of parental involvement are determinants of student success. Parental involvement in education in line with expectations increases student academic success, with parental participation at least as necessary as a school (Ates, 2021). Some strategies to improve parental involvement include picking one communication tool, shorter and more frequent communication, sharing accountability, inviting parents to be partners, equipping and empowering parents (Gandara, 2010; Madrid, 2011).

### **Implications for Practice**

This study explored the beliefs on student motivation and engagement from the perspective of school leaders, individuals who have significant influence over school-wide

programs and policies. Much research has been previously conducted on student motivation and engagement from the perspective of students and teachers (Axelson & Flick, 2010; D’Elisa, 2015; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008; Marks, 2000; Martin & Torres, 2016). The study also explored how school leaders reacted to pandemic challenges and how they are fostering effective learning environments for a student population already encountering strong headwinds. The researcher found key takeaways that can catalyze others working to improve students’ outcomes:

- School leaders overwhelmingly believe that students are motivated and willing learners *when* content and school experiences are made *relevant*.
- School leaders strongly believe that developing *authentic* relationships and building *connections* with students is a key driver of student motivation and engagement.
- School leaders strongly believe that student motivation and engagement are *malleable* and, as a result, *respond to changes* in programs, resources, and approaches.

In times of adversity and unique challenges, school leaders can foster effective learning environments by:

- Embracing change and *boldly acting upon it*, in a rapidly shifting environment.
- Equipping others and promoting *shared responsibility* in times of change and challenging circumstances.

School leaders find promoting student autonomy, competence, and relatedness an effective way of supporting higher levels of student motivation and engagement. As a result, school systems, programs, and policies should be based around:

- Student choice and flexibility
- Relevance and a focus on the future
- Intentional connections

### **Limitations**

Due to the depth of data collection methods, a small number of school leaders from one high school participated in the study. Replication of this study across multiple schools, grade levels, and school districts would help to generalize findings across various settings.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the findings of this study, the following areas are recommended for further research. First, the importance of school leaders in developing effective learning environments in times of rapid change and unique challenges cannot be underestimated. However, there is not a clear understanding of how teachers and support staff perceive school leadership in facilitating or hindering effective learning environments in unique and rapidly changing circumstances.

Additionally, relevance was identified as an important factor for improving student motivation and engagement. Further research into the impact of increased student agency at the secondary level, particularly in terms of curriculum selection and development of school systems/experiences, as a conduit to increase relevance and future utility is needed. One of the participants stated that one of the benefits of the pandemic was that it ushered in a “culture of empathy” across the school. This moves the conversation from simply recognizing an issue to developing a deeper understanding of an issue and building a connection. Further research is needed to explore how schools are transformed when “cultures of empathy” exist.

### **Summary**

This chapter was a discussion of the findings on educational leaders’ perceptions of student motivation and engagement and how they are fostering effective learning environments post-pandemic. The following five themes emerged from surveys and conversations with school leaders:

- Connection/Relatedness
- Relevance
- Aspirations/Future
- Adaptability/Flexibility
- Shared Responsibility

These themes formed the framework in which school leaders have operated when supporting higher levels of student motivation and engagement. In addition, they have served as a compass for school leaders when recognizing the need for change and boldly acting upon it when confronted with challenging circumstances. School leaders expressed favorability for motivational theories that promote student autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as well as frameworks that set high expectations for success and connect future utility. School leaders are driven by beliefs that students are willing and capable learners when content is highly relevant, building authentic relationships and connections are critical gateways to improved outcomes, and that student motivation is malleable and does respond to change. School leaders also expressed the need to embrace change, act upon it, and equip others to share in the leadership and responsibility of the tasks at hand. Lastly, school leaders reinforce that student choice and flexibility, intentional connections, paired with relevance, and a focus on the future are the catalyst for creating environments that support student autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

### **Conclusion**

The field of education has been confronted with unique and exceptional challenges brought on by the pandemic. The effects of the pandemic have compounded many of the factors that impact student motivation and engagement. When working with minority student populations who have historically faced strong headwinds, the impact can be magnified. The



purpose of this study was to explore, in light of the pandemic, school leaders' beliefs on student motivation and engagement. Further, the study looked at how leaders have provided programs and resources for improving motivation and engagement, fostering positive learning environments through greater autonomy, mastery, and relatedness. The study revealed that although the task is daunting and there is much work to be done, school leaders can enact changes and foster learning environments in which motivation and engagement improve, and learning thrives. In a time when many in the field of education may feel overwhelmed, have more questions than answers, and are simply tired, there is hope.

The quantitative data showed school leaders supporting theoretical beliefs based on greater student autonomy, mastery, and relatedness, influencing the lens through which they respond to motivation and engagement. A semi-structured interview method was used, featuring broad, open-ended questions that allowed flexibility to explore emerging themes as the participants responded. Several themes emerged from the qualitative data in the areas of connection/relatedness, relevance, aspirations/future utility, adaptability, and shared responsibility. These themes formed the backdrop in which school leaders shared guiding principles and thoughts on the importance of relevance, building connections, and thoughtful actions impacting student motivation and engagement in positive ways. The study highlighted the need to embrace change, take bold actions, and equip others to share leadership and responsibility when encountering challenging times. Lastly, the study established that the keys to supporting student motivation and engagement are found in student choice and flexibility, deep relevance with a focus on the future, and intentional connections.

As previously mentioned, there is much work to be done as we continue to grapple with the effects of historical headwinds and the unprecedented challenges brought on by the

pandemic. However, those who serve students should be encouraged and inspired by the fact their actions can, and do, impact students in a positive way. One participant of the study stated that a positive outcome of the pandemic had been a “culture of empathy” spreading around the campus. That speaks to a deeper desire to know, connect, understand, stand in the gap, and boldly act on behalf of the students we serve. There is hope. This case study told the story of a school that emerged from a global pandemic stronger. This case study told the story of leaders who embraced change brought on by unforeseen circumstances, and boldly acted upon it. This case study told how leaders view student motivation and engagement and how that drives them to foster environments where students have choice, are supported, and feel connected.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix A: Perceptions of Student Motivation Questionnaire (PSM)**

*(Adapted from T. D'Elisa, 2015)*

Likert scale: 1= almost never true; 2 = usually not true; 3 = occasionally true; 4 = usually true;  
5 = almost always true

1. Students really try to learn.
2. Students work at learning new things.
3. Students generally pay attention and focus when being taught.
4. Students generally do class-related tasks and assignments willingly.
5. Students don't put forth much effort to learn the content.
6. Students are distracted and off-task.
7. Students are generally interested in what they are asked to learn.
8. Generally, students are unmotivated because their parents don't care about or value education.
9. When students are not engaged in school, it's because they don't see the value of what they are being asked to learn.
10. If students are not motivated to learn, it is often because they don't have aspirations that connect to education, such as plans to go on to college.
11. Students often lack effort at school because they don't have support at home.
12. If students don't see the point of learning the content, then they aren't motivated to learn it.
13. Some students just have too many problems to make school a priority.
14. Most often, if students aren't engaged at school, it's because they don't see the relevance

of the content in their world.

15. Some students aren't motivated to work in school because education has no place in the future they see for themselves.
16. Generally, students who are not interested in learning are that way because of peer pressure to devalue school.
17. Most often, if students aren't working in class, it's because they don't see how useful the information can be.
18. Negative peer pressure is a big reason why some students are not motivated to learn in school.
19. Some students are not motivated to learn because they are just lazy.
20. Some students just don't care about learning.

## **Appendix B: Motivating Students Questionnaire (MSQ)**

*(Adapted from T. D'Elisa, 2015)*

Likert scale: 1= almost never true; 2 = usually not true; 3 = occasionally true; 4 = usually true; 5 = almost always true

1. I have indicators that are used to successfully identify unmotivated students.
2. If students are not initially motivated, I can usually help improve their motivation through available programs, resources, and strategies.
3. When students are unmotivated, it is important to try to connect with them personally, use relatedness to bridge the gap.
4. To promote students' motivation, information should be provided about why what is being taught is valuable for them.
5. When students are not interested in learning, it is necessary to try to support them through whatever may be going on.
6. If students are not trying to learn, it can be attributed to things outside school and let them work it out.
7. Student motivation can be enhanced by connecting the skills they are learning to their futures.
8. Motivating some students requires getting them alone away from their peers.
9. With some students, we just don't waste time trying to motivate them.
10. For some students there is nothing that can be done to enhance their academic motivation.
11. Sometimes students are motivated by giving them rewards or privileges.
12. Students are motivated by supervising them closely, and structuring their time and tasks

for them.

13. Rewards are very effective motivating strategies for students to get their work done.
14. Students' motivation changes from day to day, so we just have to accept those good and bad days.
15. Teachers/staff really can do a lot to influence students' motivation.
16. Students just come to school either motivated or unmotivated.
17. Students' motivation is generally pretty responsive to teachers'/staffs' influence.
18. Public praise and rewards are positive influences on students' motivation in school.
19. A good way to motivate students is to deny them privileges and choices until the work is done.



### **Appendix C: Beliefs and Practices Questionnaire (BPQ)**

*(Adapted from T. D'Elisa, 2015)*

Likert scale: 1= almost never true; 2 = usually not true; 3 = occasionally true; 4 = usually true;  
5 = almost always true

1. I believe motivating students is an important part of my job.
2. I often think about ways to motivate students when devising programs and resources.
3. The reasons students give themselves for their success or failure do not influence their level of motivation.
4. If a student believes they will succeed on a task they are more likely to try.
5. Students' achievement is more connected to innate ability than effort and motivation.
6. Student motivation increases when they are given more autonomy in the classroom.
7. Students are motivated to master the material they are being taught.
8. Students are motivated to achieve grades or meet benchmarks.
9. Student motivation is enhanced when students feel competent about what they are learning.
10. Grading and classroom practices should place more emphasis on learning and mastery than on test performance.
11. Student motivation increases when they feel connected at school.

**Appendix D: Demographic Questions**

1. Level (high school, district)
2. Position (district administrator, site administrator, teacher-leader, other)
3. Years in current position
4. Gender
5. Age
6. Race

### **Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. How many years have you been a site/district administrator or teacher-leader?
2. Please describe your experience working with high-need, Hispanic student population groups.
3. What are your perceptions of student motivation and engagement?
  - a. How do motivation and engagement impact students' achievement?
  - b. How does working with high-needs minority groups change your approach to student motivation and engagement?
4. What roles does leadership play in cultivating effective learning environments and achieving improved students' outcomes?
  - a. How does your leadership role/style change when working with high-needs, minority groups?
5. Since returning from school closures, what programs, resources, and/or strategies has your school/district utilized to foster effective learning environments?
  - a. Are these efforts demonstrating positive impacts/gains?
  - b. Were these resources, programs, and or strategies used prior to Covid?
6. How do school leaders foster learning environments that cultivate student autonomy, competence, and relatedness?
  - a. How can school leaders increase students' expectations for success?
  - b. How can school leaders increase the value students place upon their learning?
7. Do teachers at your school/district believe it is their responsibility to ensure that every student master grade-level curriculum?
  - a. What are some characteristics your teachers display that make you believe that?

- b. What roles does the site/district administrator play in developing shared responsibility for students' outcomes?
- 8. Do teachers at your school/district believe they have a greater impact on students' outcomes than their home environment, parental involvement, or prior students' achievement?
  - a. If so, provide examples or evidence that lead you to believe that.
- 9. As your school/district continues to emerge from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, what are the greatest challenges being encountered?
  - a. Describe the greatest challenges through the lens of student motivation and engagement.
  - b. What are the greatest opportunities because of the pandemic?

## Appendix F: CITI Certificate

		Completion Date 12-Sep-2021 Expiration Date 11-Sep-2024 Record ID 44936111
This is to certify that:		
<b>Humberto Franco Garcia</b>		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">         Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.       </div>		
<b>Social &amp; Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher</b> (Curriculum Group) <b>Social &amp; Behavioral Research</b> (Course Learner Group) <b>1 - Basic Course</b> (Stage)		
Under requirements set by:		
<b>Concordia University Irvine</b>		
		
Verify at <a href="http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wbdc88414-7408-475c-917c-d367cedba8f0-44936111">www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wbdc88414-7408-475c-917c-d367cedba8f0-44936111</a>		