

Interaction among School Culture, Chronic Absenteeism and English Language Proficiency

Progress in Middle Schools within a Suburban Division of Virginia

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Abstract

This quantitative study explored the interplay among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for English Learners (ELs), and overall English language proficiency (ELP) progress, as indicated by the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test, in suburban Virginia middle schools. Utilizing the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency, which encompasses learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection, the research aimed to determine the relationships among these domains, school culture, and student outcomes. The overarching research question addressed the interaction between school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress. Supporting questions examined the connections between school culture and ELP progress, the four cultural competency domains and ELP progress, and school culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs.

Data for school culture ratings were sourced from the Department of Criminal Justice Services' school climate survey. The information on chronic absenteeism rates for ELs and ELP progress came from the Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profile. Analyses employing single and multiple linear regressions were conducted on existing archival data to identify statistical significance and correlations. The study yielded seven significant findings, highlighted three implications for practice, and revealed one policy implication.

The findings from this research could assist current and future school leaders in Virginia middle schools by pinpointing specific aspects of school culture that could potentially enhance chronic absenteeism rates and academic progress in ELs. Additionally, division leaders might

use these insights to tailor professional development for middle school principals and other educational leaders, emphasizing the critical role of a positive school culture. Furthermore, this study could support broader research efforts asserting the impact of school culture on academic success among ELs, identifying vital cultural elements that influence student achievement irrespective of their absenteeism or academic progress rates.

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General Audience Abstract

Principals of Virginia middle schools are tasked with ensuring that all students feel welcome in their building, attend school regularly, and make adequate progress. This quantitative study explored the interplay among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for English Learners (ELs), and overall English language proficiency (ELP) progress, as indicated by the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test, in suburban Virginia middle schools. Utilizing the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency, which encompasses learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection, the research aimed to determine the relationships among these domains, school culture, and student outcomes. The overarching research question addressed the interaction between school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress. Supporting questions examined the connections between school culture and ELP progress, the four cultural competency domains and ELP progress, and school culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs. The study yielded seven significant findings, highlighted three implications for practice, and revealed one policy implication. The findings from this research could assist current and future school leaders in Virginia middle schools by pinpointing specific aspects of school culture that could potentially enhance chronic absenteeism rates and academic progress in ELs. Additionally, division leaders might use these insights to tailor professional development for middle school principals and other educational leaders, emphasizing the critical role of a positive school culture.

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Dedication

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

For decades, students learning English for the first time in secondary schools have faced barriers that impede their ability to access quality instruction compared to their English-speaking peers (Calderón et al., 2011; Garrett et al., 2019). Middle school English learners (ELs) are often asked to show mastery in core content courses despite their background or prior educational experiences. In addition to learning the English language in a shorter period than younger students, ELs in grades 6-12 often receive instruction from teachers who may not understand the impact learning language can have on content development and possibly lack the training to feel equipped to address these needs. During the 2020-2021 school year, English as a second language (ESL) teachers did make the top ten critical shortage endorsement areas in Virginia (VDOE, 2022d). However, each teacher was expected to serve approximately 136 ELs (United States Department of Education [ED], 2022). Similarly, in the 2000s, although “41 percent of teachers had taught English learners, only 13 percent had received any specialized training” (Calderón et al., 2011, p. 112). A study by Garrett et al. (2019) confirms that ELs who attended schools with a higher ratio of students to certified English as a second language teachers had lower speaking proficiency levels, contributing to the growing need for qualified educators.

As a result, these challenges have impacted English learners' progress toward English language proficiency (ELP). A highly qualified educational leader is pertinent to aid ELs in receiving meaningful instruction to prevent state education agencies (SEAs) from intervening to triage the deficits in ELs' performance (Leider et al., 2021). According to Frick et al. (2013), despite the emphasis on EL progress and improving student outcomes, school leaders combat the need to create an inclusive school culture, navigate restrictions from division leadership,

circumvent a lack of resources, campaign for teacher buy-in, facilitate high-quality job-embedded professional development opportunities and support disgruntled parents. As a result, English learners academically progress at slower rates than any other student group (ED, 2017).

Due to these obstacles, provisions made by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) placed further emphasis on underserved populations and improvement-oriented expectations, highlighting historical injustices in the education system that still remain true in the 21st century (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016; ESSA, 2015; Leider et al., 2021). ESSA also transferred accountability for ELs' progress in developing English language proficiency from Title III to Title I, holding state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and schools accountable for ELP progress (ESSA, 2015; Leider et al., 2021). By definition, *Title III* is the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act, which is in place to guarantee ELs, including immigrant children and youth, attain English language proficiency and meet the same challenging academic content and achievement standards expected of other students [ESSA, Section 3102(a) (1-2)] (VDOE, 2022e). However, Title I aims to ensure all students are provided a fair, high-quality education intended to close achievement gaps (VDOE, 2022e). Based on the federal requirements to provide equal access and opportunity, English Learners (ELs) are entitled to participate meaningfully and equitably in educational programs (ESSA, 2015). In compliance with ESSA (2015), SEAs and LEAs must report academic achievement data disaggregated by student groups, which highlights the progress in English language proficiency (ELP) and attendance concerns. Both federal programs work together to yield equitable educational experiences for ELs and their families.

School culture's role in student academic performance and attendance has been studied for years. However, very little research has contributed to ELs' progress in the four domains

(reading, writing, speaking, and listening) of English language proficiency or attendance rates of ELs. Findings from Garrett et al. (2019) show that school culture has positive effects on English language speaking proficiency. However, only students who feel their school environment is safe and respectful show higher listening proficiency levels. However, there was no significant relationship to overall English language proficiency (ELP). Students, both ELs and non-ELs, who attend schools with positive cultures are more likely to have equitable opportunities and positive academic outcomes (Adu-Baffoe & Bonney, 2021; Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; DuFour, 2002; Wagner & Masden-Copas, 2002). Despite the countless research studies on how school culture correlates to student outcomes, none address whether school culture and ELP progress are related. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism, and overall ELP progress.

Background

In 2021, policymakers in Virginia were required to develop culturally competent teachers and leaders professionally; guidance established by the General Assembly in response to House Bill 1904 (HB1904) and Senate Bill 1196 (SB1196) required school boards to ensure that every licensed public school division employee in the state of Virginia completes a cultural competency training every two years (VDOE, 2021). *Cultural competency* is defined as an educator's ability to comprehend their own cultural identity, advancing their understanding of the dimensions of diversity, and utilizing those dimensions to promote student academic achievement, growth, and empowerment (VDOE, 2021). The Board of Education breaks down cultural competency into four domains: self-reflection, pedagogy and practices, learning environments, and community engagement. Within each culture competency domain, there are micro-competencies encouraging educators to recognize and examine their personal experiences,

rituals, and beliefs and how they may influence their interaction with others, to be aware of the importance of culture and changes to instructional practices to address all students, to have high expectations and learning for all students, and to actively participate with internal and external community partners to ensure widespread advocacy for equal access and opportunity for all (VDOE, 2021).

Similar to VDOE, Kohli et al. (2010) defines *cultural competence* as “an awareness of one’s own cultural beliefs and practices” and recognizing that others can have or believe different realities than one’s own (p. 8). Due to the heightened awareness regarding issues related to diversity and understanding others, the cultural competence of professionals should not be ignored (Gregory et al., 2021; Rogers-Sirin & Sirin, 2009). Despite numerous efforts to educate school-based professionals to embrace diversity and cultures, evidence shows that students still experience negative teacher-student interactions and stereotypes in their school environment that may have an adverse effect on their progress (Rogers-Sirin & Sirin, 2009).

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) reinforced guidance prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, or national origin (ESSA, 2015). Therefore, in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA, 2015) to combat the increase in impoverished students by providing federal funding in the most marginalized areas in K-12 education. *ESSA* defines the nation’s law as ensuring full educational opportunities to *all* students and their constitutional rights (ESSA, 2015). In 1970, *Lau v. Nichols* directed LEAs to mitigate the need for ELs to overcome language barriers and have access to meaningful educational programs. Then, in 1981, *Castañeda v. Pickard* established laws that required equal rights for all students in the United States. Shortly following in 1982, *Plyler v. Doe* ensured that

every child in the United States (US), despite their immigration status or documentation, had access to a basic education.

In January 2015, the United States Departments of Justice and Education provided guidance on the civil rights of all students learning English as a second language. According to the 2015 EL Dear Colleague Letter, “The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Civil Rights Division at the US Department of Justice (DOJ) share authority for enforcing Title VI in the education context” (ESSA, 2015, p. 1). Additionally, the ED passed the “English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act, also known as Title III, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA) (Title III)” (ESSA, 2015). This guidance outlines common issues that may impede equal participation in instructional programs, such as Title III funding allocated to supplementary educational programs for ELs. State and local education agencies are expected to comply with all legal requirements to ensure ELs have access to a program that meets their individual needs. Local education agencies (LEAs) are expected to identify and provide support for all ELs within their division. In contrast, state education agencies (SEAs) are tasked with overseeing that ELs are receiving appropriate services supplemental to the core experiences of all students.

After two decades, accountability guidance continued to focus on the state-wide inclusion of ELs. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was in effect from 2002–2015. It updated the ESEA. The law applied to all K–12 public schools in the United States. Before NCLB, many schools did not focus on the progress of disadvantaged students like ELs. ESSA was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and ensuring all students were provided equal opportunities.

In 2017, in response to ESEA’s updated requirements, the VDOE compiled the non-negotiables to which LEAs are federally obligated. Therefore, VDOE established long-term progress goals related to English Language Proficiency (ELP) that gave LEAs incremental thresholds to meet (ESEA section 1111(c)(4)(A)(ii)). The state-determined timeline for ELs to achieve language proficiency is five years. Virginia decided to use the World-Class Instructional Design Assessment (WIDA) ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 assessment to measure progress toward language proficiency. Based on Superintendent’s Memo 168-17, ELs receiving a composite score of 4.4 or higher would meet the ELP exit criterion (VDOE, 2017). ELs in grades K-12 who fail to meet the exit criterion may be eligible for “Composite Proficiency Level Gains” based on the Virginia State Plan to reach their long-term goals and interim measures of progress for the ELP indicator.

According to VDOE (2022e), the number of ELs in a school division varies in Virginia, and the Title III subgrant is based on that number, with the understanding that some LEA populations are too small to meet the minimum requirements. Even if this is the case, the school divisions are still expected to serve and assess English language proficiency (OCR, 2015). Funding is based solely on the number of ELs in each LEA; however, accepting funding does not excuse any LEA from providing meaningful services to ELs (ESSA, 2015).

Problem Statement

In K-12 education, the number of English Learners with various needs are increasing. However, Virginia educators are still expected to navigate and respond to the escalating demand for additional services and support while meeting accountability requirements. In addition, ESSA guidance requires English language proficiency (ELP) progress to increase by at least 2% each year (Calderón et al., 2011; Garrett et al., 2019; Sugarman & Geary, 2018; VDOE, 2022e). In

2022, the number of English Learners (EL) in the Commonwealth of Virginia reached over 117,000, speaking over 240 languages and arriving with various cultural backgrounds and learning experiences (VDOE, 2022e). During fall 2022, ELs made up 13.7% of Virginia's student enrollment, with 62% of those students scoring below basic on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (VDOE, 2022d). This percentage of students scoring below basic on the NAEP is higher than that of other student groups except those with disabilities (VDOE, 2022d). The ED recognizes that ELs face significant disadvantages and wider academic achievement gaps than their non-EL peers (ED, 2017). Despite the extensive research on school culture and its impact on attendance and student academic achievement from top researchers, there is very little evidence regarding the interaction between school culture, EL attendance, and English language proficiency progress for ELs in grades 6-8. An impactful study by Yough et al. (2023) stated, "English language learners (ELL) might be less likely to have positive perceptions of their school environment, or a strong sense of school belonging compared to their fluent English-speaking peers" (p. 143). As the Commonwealth of Virginia continues to monitor ESSA annual targets for various student groups, ELs are consistently underperforming other marginalized groups, like economically disadvantaged students (VDOE, 2022d). As a result, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) worked together to provide guidance to state and local education agencies to ensure ELs have access to meaningful programs and services.

According to the VDOE's School Quality Profile (2022d), English Learners' Progress based on ESSA rates was 49%, falling short of the annual target by 1% based on the ESSA state plan. Data shows Virginia is close to meeting the target but not quite there. Fifty-nine of the 115 qualifying divisions met the annual target (VDOE, 2022d). ELs not making progress also

impacts graduation rates. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), during the 2013-2014 school year, the nation's graduation rate for ELs was just 62%, compared to 82% for all students (ED, 2014). However, almost a decade later, during the 2022-2023 school year, the federal graduation rate for ELs is 69%, compared to 89% for all students in Virginia, with 18.9% of those ELs graduating with Advanced Diplomas. Another indication of ELs failing to meet progress targets is that multilingual learners (MLs) are achieving English language proficiency at a rate of 9% during the 2022-2023 school year. Proficiency rates are not included in Virginia's expectation for division, but less than 10% is an increase from previous years (VDOE, 2022d).

During the 2022-2023 school year, Virginia was composed of 310 middle schools with varying needs and diverse demographics (VDOE, 2022d). Middle school principals are challenged to create a culture that serves ELs and ensures that students meet the state's progress targets for English language proficiency. These obligations forced school leaders at all grade levels, not just in middle schools, to better understand their school's culture and how students and teachers might respond to changes. School culture also determines whether students attend school and access the instruction required to meet these ever-changing demands (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Pogodzinski & Lenhoff, 2017). Understanding that school culture is formed over time is imperative to LEAs meeting federally mandated targets, confirming that creating a positive school culture is only one of many problems school leaders face.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for English Learners (ELs), and overall English language proficiency (ELP) progress based on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test in middle schools

within a suburban division of Virginia, where school culture also captured individual domains based on the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency that include learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection. The researcher answered the question: What is the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress? The researcher analyzed existing archival data provided by the VDOE and the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). Findings from this study informed school improvement efforts that create a culture of the importance of ELP Progress in grades 6-8. As educational research continues to inform best practices, educational leaders will be able to emphasize evidence-based factors that will improve outcomes for all students, not just ELs.

Research Questions

This quantitative study sought to answer the overarching question: *What is the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress?* Through this study, the following supporting questions were also answered:

1. What is the relationship between school culture and ELP progress?
2. What is the relationship between the four domains of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency (learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection) and ELP progress?
3. What is the relationship between school culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs?
4. What is the relationship among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress?

Significance of the Study

For better or worse, a school's culture continuously works to either help or hinder students from learning English as a second language. According to the ED (2017), "A State must

monitor EL students' progress in achieving English language proficiency to ensure that EL students are making appropriate progress with respect to acquiring English" (p. 9). Due to the demands, school leaders would benefit from a better understanding of how school culture can influence meeting the requirement to increase EL progress by at least 2% each year.

Therefore, this study aimed to examine a school's culture that may impact ELs making adequate progress under Titles I and III of the ESEA and to determine the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for English Learners (ELs), and overall English language proficiency (ELP) progress based on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test in middle schools within a suburban division of Virginia, where school culture also captured individual domains based on the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency that include learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection. An increased understanding of the interaction between a positive school culture and improvement efforts would inform the approach of future school leaders (Narayan, 2016; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Furthermore, having a deeper understanding of school cultures' role in attendance and ELP progress will inform principal moves to assist current and future educational leaders with identifying barriers that might impact the educational changes needed to create school cultures that could consequently improve outcomes for ELs. Heskett (2021) states that the biggest determinant of successfully changing an organization's culture is its leader's "interest, support, and even passion." Therefore, it is vital to understand the interaction between a school's cultures and other key factors that may contribute to the capacity building needed to improve ELP progress (Narayan, 2016).

Study Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

Study limitations posed potential weaknesses within the research design that could impact the research outcomes (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). Limitations can threaten the internal or external validity of the study, and it is essential for the researcher to identify limitations (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). The existing archival data for this study was collected from the VDOE School Quality Profile website and the Department of Criminal Justice Services website. Both data sources are accessible to the public. These limitations include the following:

- The study captured responses in the school climate survey that may not be representative of the English Learner (EL) population. The researcher cannot determine how many of the 16,000 student responses were from ELs.
- The study captured responses in the school climate survey based on students who attended school in person. Students who attended school virtually were not included in all responses.
- The study did not capture many components of community engagement despite the community's impact and involvement in providing student opportunities.

Delimitations

The delimitations describe the parameters of the study (Miles, 2019). The existing archival data is published by the VDOE and DCJS. The delimitations for this study are determined as follows:

- The study included a large school division in Virginia that serves a larger EL population than other Virginia divisions.
- The study included data from less than 25 comprehensive middle schools (grades 6-8) in Virginia. This limits the study geographically.

- The study captured the survey responses of 16,000 Virginia students in grades 6-8. This limits the study's scope (Miles, 2019).

Definitions of Virginia-Specific Key Terminology

Chronic Absenteeism: In Virginia, a student is “chronically absent if the rate of their days absent divided by their total days in membership is greater than or equal to 10 percent.” Chronic absenteeism is only calculated for students whose daily membership is at least 50% of the 2022-2023 school year. (VDOE, 2022c)

English Learner (EL): According to Section 9101(25) of ESEA (amended by ESSA), an EL in the Commonwealth of Virginia is a student

- (A) who is aged 3 through 21;
- (B) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school;
- (C)(i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English;
- (ii)(I) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and
- (II) who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency or
- (iii) who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant, and
- (D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual —
 - (i) the ability to meet the challenging State academic standards;
 - (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is

English; or

(iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society. [ESEA Section 8101(20)]

(ESSA, 2015, p. 393) Can also be referred to as multilingual learners (MLs).

English Language Proficiency (ELP) Progress: The percent of EL students who demonstrated growth on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 English Language Proficiency assessment from the previous year based on the ELP indicator (ESSA, 2015). To capture progress, a student must have two consecutive years of data. See Table 5. Virginia’s exit criterion is a composite score of 4.4 or higher on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. (VDOE, 2017).

Middle School: A school with grades 6 through 8. (VDOE, 2022b)

Definitions of Key Terminology

English Language Proficiency (ELP): According to the University of Wisconsin-Madison [WISC] (2023), ELP consists of six levels: Level 1-Entering, Level 2-Emerging, Level 3-Developing, Level 4-Expanding, Level 5-Bridging, Level 6-Reaching and an EL’s ability to speak, listen, read, and write.

Organizational Culture: A system of routines, values, beliefs, and norms that influence the decisions of each member of the organization based on the leader’s guidance (Schein, 2017).

School Culture: The guiding norms, beliefs, and values of a school and how it operates; similar to the school’s personality (Schein, 2017).

School Improvement: Data-informed, capacity-building efforts to improve academic achievement, leadership, systems, and processes within a school (Bryk et al., 2010).

WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0: An English language proficiency test that measures students’ academic English language skills. The ELP exams assess students’ English abilities in the following domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Students are assigned an overall

proficiency score that can be used for instructional placement, identification, or reclassification of ELs (WISC, 2023). WIDA scores are the measure used to determine English language proficiency (ELP) progress, in Virginia (ED, 2017).

Definitions of School Culture Domains

In 2021, Virginia policymakers required all educators to be culturally competent. The guidance provided by VDOE was that all school divisions must meet the minimum requirements based on the four domains of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency. School boards had the flexibility to extend beyond the expectations but were not required to do so. For example, training was not required for any school staff without a teaching license, but school boards could make it required for all staff, not just licensed staff. Virginia merged their definition to ensure alignment between the academic and national definitions of cultural competency. Therefore, each domain has its definition and a list of micro-competencies that coincide with the specific capacity-building topics for division-level professional development. According to VDOE (2021), “the four domains are interrelated and require continuous reflection, attention, and practice over time” (p. 5). Table 1 includes the micro-competencies for all licensed professionals based on the minimum standards.

Culturally Competent Community Engagement: Domain IV of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency - collaborative partnerships with internal and external stakeholders about equitable access for all (Scanlan & Johnson, 2020; VDOE, 2021).

Culturally Competent Learning Environment: Domain III of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency - fostering inclusive excellence that impacts all learning environments (Tanase, 2020; VDOE, 2021).

Culturally Competent Pedagogy and Practice: Domain II of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency - the relevance of culture and adapting professional practices to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds (Howard, 2021; Tanase, 2020; VDOE, 2021).

Culturally Competent Self-Reflection: Domain I of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency - The importance of continually examining personal experiences, the influence of diversity, and how influences manifest in lived experiences (Kressler, 2020; VDOE, 2021).

Table 1

Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency Domains

Micro-Competency for All Licensed Professionals	
Self-reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuously reflect on one's own beliefs, behaviors, lived experiences, and practices and their impact on one's educational decision making, and on one's interactions with others generally.
Pedagogy and Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a classroom and school culture in which all dimensions of diversity are respected and valued. Provide ongoing opportunities for student reflection and interpersonal interactions with diverse peers; support the development of self-regulation strategies, empathy, and civil discourse. Build positive relationships with students and families and instruct students on building and maintaining positive peer relationships in the educational setting. Communicate with students, staff, families, and the community in linguistically and culturally responsive ways. Build student capacity to think critically and consider alternative perspectives.
Learning Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create safe, and culturally affirming learning environments where all dimensions of diversity are respected, and all students are held to high expectations.
Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support students in learning about dimensions of diversity in the community. Provide opportunities for students to be active contributors in solving relevant local, state, national, and global community challenges. Create opportunities for authentic student, family, and community engagement by cultivating relationships beyond the classroom anchored in affirmation, mutual respect, and validation. Work with students and families to process and respond to incidents of discrimination.

Note. From *Board of education guidance on cultural competency training for teachers and other licensed school board employees in Virginia public schools*, by Virginia Department of Education (2021).

Study Organization

This quantitative study, which uses existing archival data, consists of five chapters. Chapter One introduced the study and provided an overview, background information, an in-depth description of the problem statement, a statement of purpose, research questions, the significance of the study, and limitations and delimitations. Chapter One also included definitions of key terms. Chapter Two included a review of the literature related to school culture and improving student outcomes, including the purpose of the literature review, the impact and rationale, the researcher's search process, and key themes that emerged related to the review of the literature. Chapter Three provided insight into the research design, existing archival data, population, data collection procedures, and data treatment and management, and analysis techniques. Chapter Four is an overview of the existing archival data, data collection, analyses, and summary of the data analyses. Chapter Five captured the most significant findings, implications of the findings, suggestions for future research, reflection, and a summary of the study results.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The desire for organizations to maintain or improve outcomes has intensified in the past few decades. Whether the need is to increase sales, decrease customer wait times, or improve patient care, there is an ongoing requirement to get better (Linnander et al., 2021). The same is true of schools. To improve, schools must identify ineffective practices and implement educational change (Adu-Baffoe & Bonney, 2021; Narayan, 2016; Schein, 2017). As principals battle with the demands of policies and educational reforms that threaten the longevity of their organization with potential school closure, Schein (2017) emphasized the magnitude of developing and maintaining a positive organizational culture that makes change possible. Researchers highlight the components of organizational and school culture, which include building leaders accurately identifying their problems of practice, facilitating conversations about root causes, and creating an action plan to remove barriers impeding their improvement efforts (Adu-Baffoe & Bonney, 2021; Bryk et al., 2010). Educators must also understand that improvement work is an iterative process and may not solve the problem after the first attempt (Bryk et al., 2010; Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018).

When envisioning improvement efforts in Virginia, school leaders often consider seeing an increase in the school's Standards of Learning (SOL) scores (Virginia Standards of Quality, 2021). However, the Standards of Accreditation (2017) imply an improvement could also be a decrease in chronic absenteeism or discipline referrals or an increase in graduation rates or English Learners (ELs) meeting federally mandated English language proficiency (ELP) targets. Deal and Peterson (2016) accentuated student achievement as a symptom of how operative the culture of school improvement is. Based on Deal and Peterson's perspective, if school leaders are

not working for all students, they must change their actions. This reminds practitioners that change is inevitable and that embedding a school improvement culture within an organization facilitates intentional change (Leithwood et al., 2019; Nehez & Blossing, 2022).

Purpose of Literature Review

This review examined the literature related to organizational culture and the improvement of student outcomes. For this chapter, the literature on organizational culture has been reviewed and limited to applications specific to public schools. Many school systems search for a “golden ring,” a program or initiative utilized to solve their problems or achieve their goals (Meyer-Looze et al., 2019, p. 172). When that program or initiative does not work, school leaders may implement a different approach, creating improvement or *initiative fatigue* due to not effectively identifying and addressing root causes (Linnander et al., 2021; Meyer-Looze et al., 2019). This review of literature depicts the paths of current literature related to school culture and improvement efforts.

In the early 1900s, researchers studied how organizational cultures affect performance and improvement (Jaques, 2013; Linnander et al., 2021; Ostroff et al., 2013). Deal and Peterson (2016) stated that school culture practices impact a principal’s improvement efforts. Therefore, school culture is a resolute factor in school improvement. This review considers the importance of examining school culture and providing an in-depth review of complex improvement processes. For a complete picture of culture, it is imperative to highlight the importance of how a school is structured, internally and externally (Schein, 2017). According to Bayar and Karaduman (2021), a school’s culture can motivate students to study, create positive competition, and develop social and physical growth in students. Therefore, this literature

review investigates the intricacies and interaction of school culture, attendance, and English language proficiency progress that may create a culture of school improvement.

Impact of the Review

The results of this literature review yielded a greater insight into how a principal's influence on creating and maintaining a culture of school improvement may foster ELP progress. Improving schools aims to advance teaching and learning practices and create optimal student learning conditions (Acosta et al., 2020; Fullan, 2008; Hargreaves, 1998; Standards of Accreditation, 2017). For example, rescheduling English Language learners into content classes with integrated English as a Second Language (ESL) support compared to the current pull-out model may result in better outcomes (Demerath, 2018; Ontario's Principal Council, 2009; VDOE, 2019). The history of change in any educational setting dates back to the mid-1900s; however, this is a result of educational reforms that should have considered the influence of organizational culture on the capacity of a school to generate change (Schein, 2017). An increased understanding of why educational change is necessary and identifying ways to make change more effective will inform the efforts of future school leaders (Adu-Baffoe & Bonney, 2021; Shah et al., 2022). Findings from the impactful studies reviewed (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Narayan, 2016; Yough et al., 2023) stated that school culture relates to student absenteeism, academic achievement, and the importance of English language learners' perceptions of their learning conditions.

According to Bayar and Karaduman (2021), "School culture plays an important role in the academic achievement and motivations of students" (p. 107). When emphasis is placed on relationships between teachers and students, constructive competition, and opportunities for social and physical learners, it creates a positive school culture and positive impacts on student

achievement. Similarly, Narayan (2016) highlighted the importance of recognizing that an organization's culture is composed of subcultures; staff socialization, myths, and rituals are essential to forming a culture of school improvement. Meanwhile, Figure 2 elaborates on the Culture of School Improvement and the six imperative subcultures to make changes that will foster educational progress (Narayan, 2016). Lastly, Yough et al. (2023) confirmed that English proficiency was influenced by English Learners' (ELs) perception of their school's culture but was not connected directly to teacher-student relationships. This study defined *English proficiency* as the student's grade point average (GPA) and their standardized math and reading test scores (Yough et al., 2023). All three impactful studies provide insight into the research gaps related to the interaction of school culture and overall English language proficiency progress.

Rationale

This study examined the interaction between creating a positive culture of improvement in schools and pinpointing the data needed for managing the changes necessary to improve student outcomes. An increased understanding of the components that impact creating a positive school culture and the connection to future improvement efforts will inform the approach of future leaders (Narayan, 2016; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Furthermore, a better understanding of the interaction between school culture, attendance, and ELP progress will assist current and future educational leaders identify barriers that impact a school's culture and provide evidence-based educational changes for potential replication based on a common problem of practice. Therefore, it is vital to understand how principal practices foster school cultures that support the capacity-building needed to improve student outcomes.

Search Process

The researcher conducted literature searches using EBSCOHost via the Virginia Tech Online Library to understand the current literature on school culture and improvement practices

that increase student outcomes. The Virginia Tech Interlibrary Loan Program was also utilized during the initial search to secure relevant peer-reviewed publications, books, and other unavailable literature. Key search terms were *school climate* or *school culture* or *school environment*, *school improvement*, *English language learners* or *English as a second language*, *English language proficiency*, *leadership*, *attendance*, and *secondary schools*. Initially, there were over 1,653 scholarly articles, dissertations, and books to review. After scanning each source's abstract, that number was reduced to 176 included in the literature review.

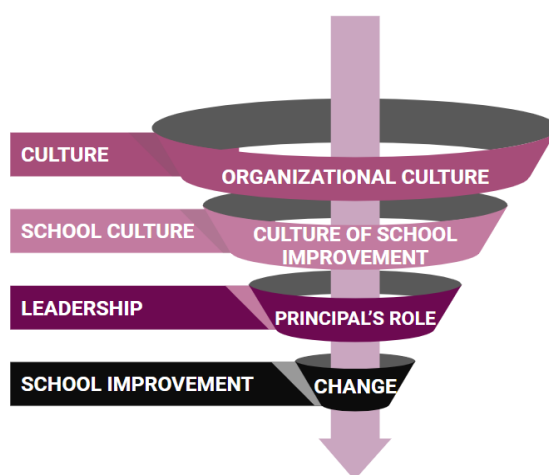
The literature yielded three relevant research studies based on relevance to this topic and a review of abstracts from primary sources published between 2012-2023. In addition, the reference lists from the impactful studies guided the researcher to additional peer-reviewed scholarly articles, books, and reports. After a critical analysis of the literature, the emerging themes from the impactful studies are organizational culture, the culture of school improvement, and managing complex change (Demerath, 2018; Hargreaves, 1995; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Peterson & Deal, 2002; Turan & Bektas, 2013).

Based on the studies, the literature review includes an in-depth analysis of organizational culture, comparing school culture and climate as well as the defining components of school culture and the connections to student achievement (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Narayan, 2016; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Yough et al., 2023). The elements of a culture of school improvement: the role of the principal, the importance of a vision and mission, professional practices, norms, and ethics, instructional, external, and transformational leadership, the policies related to developing and evaluating school leaders, and building professional capacity (Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018; Tienken & Mullen, 2022; Vito, 2020). The literature review captures the research that solidifies the connection among school culture, attendance, and student

achievement. Narayan (2016) stated that “organizations, such as schools,” must manage change to improve (p. 36). After carefully reviewing the literature, the researcher captured the emerging themes related to school culture and student outcomes. In Figure 1, the researcher identified the themes based on the literature review; after reviewing scholarly sources related to school culture, organizational culture was identified as the broad focus of the literature. Organizations consisted of hospitals, businesses, and, for the purpose of this study, schools. After narrowing the research to school culture and improving student outcomes specifically, the literature shifted to defining a culture of school improvement. Based on the sources, the principal was identified as the key contributor due to their leadership, which determines the changes needed to improve student outcomes. Lastly, due to the continual publication of scholarly-reviewed articles, the researcher continued to monitor EBSCOHost, utilizing the alert function to reach saturation.

Figure 1

Emerging Themes from the Review of Literature



Note. This figure demonstrates the researcher's organization of the literature review and the relationship among the themes of the literature reviewed.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture combines its attitudes, beliefs, customs, values, norms, perspectives, expectations, myths, and trends to create its unique identity (Dogan, 2017; Hoy & Miskel, 2010; Torres, 2022; Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019). As Narayan (2016) indicated, organizational culture is essential when influencing an organization's performance, with the understanding that humans are the heart of any organization (Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Naveed et al., 2022; Turan & Bektas, 2013). An organization's culture is an intricate process that includes a variety of components, such as the group's functions and values through attitudes, assumptions, economy, rituals, habits, language, and other structures of socialization (Handayani & Rasyid, 2015; Naveed et al., 2022; Schein, 2017; Torres, 2022; Turan & Bektas, 2013). An interesting aspect of culture is that it points out the circumstances below the surface; culture is multifaceted and deep (Linnander et al., 2021; Torres, 2022). As Torres (2022) stated, "Culture may present different levels of depth depending on the characteristics of the individual institution and its social and cultural context" (p. 261).

Schein (2017) indicated, "The total set of shared basic assumptions of a given organizational culture can be thought of as its DNA; then we can examine some of the individual genes" that may encourage or discourage certain behaviors (p. 21). Often, leaders may recognize the symptoms of the circumstances or behaviors, but the confounding variables below the surface are not explicit (Alvesson, 2011; Hall & Hord, 2015; Schein, 2017; Torres, 2022). According to Schein (2017), a group's culture is an individual's personality (p. 8). It has been said that "culture is pervasive" (Schein, 2017, p. 14); culture also influences the handling of fundamental tasks, exploring the various environments, and managing internal operations (Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018; Nehez & Blossing, 2022).

Ultimately, school cultures are a subset of organizational cultures as a whole, and often associated with this subset of school culture is the concept of school climate (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Ostroff et al., 2013; Schein, 2017; Sergiovanni, 1991). Findings from an impactful study by Pogodzinski and Lenhoff (2017) determined a significant relationship between school climate and chronic absenteeism. Similarly, Hall and Hord (2015) recognized vital factors that describe how schools' organizational cultures support the various demands placed on schools to improve. Those factors require building principals to be instructional leaders focusing on mastery, collaborative learning opportunities, and creating a shared vision. Scholars (Hall & Hord, 2015; Hoy & Miskel, 2010; Schein, 2017) defined the constructs of school culture as artifacts that can be observed: the organization's structures, patterns, values, norms, and the fundamental beliefs that create the organization's foundation (Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Schein, 2017). These artifacts impact an organization's productivity (Lewis et al., n.d.; Sabancı et al., 2016). Therefore, ensuring that the organization's stakeholders focus on what the organization wants to create is crucial.

School Climate vs. School Culture

Over the years, researchers have defined and redefined *school culture*, addressing different implications—the school's perception of its culture and the culture from an organizational perspective (Schein, 2017). Educational researchers' definition of culture often adopts an anthropological approach (Schein, 2017). Culture is the lifestyle of the group that is reflected in the school's behaviors, with an understanding that changing any behavior for a period of time could result in a permanent lifestyle change (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017; Deal & Peterson, 2016). Furthermore, Deal and Peterson (1998) provided a more detailed definition of school culture as “the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about or avoid talking

about, whether or not they seek out colleagues for help, how teachers feel about their work and their students, and how students feel about school” (p. 10).

Throughout the literature review, school culture emerged as a complex and sometimes paradoxical phenomenon that can substantially impact a school’s effectiveness regarding staff performance and student outcomes (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Lewis et al., n.d; Peterson & Deal, 2002). As Ostroff et al. (2013) asserted, the term *climate* refers to what happens, while the word *culture* encompasses an in-depth understanding of why things happen.

However, culture is often confused or conflated with climate. It is not uncommon for culture and climate to be interchangeable in context. This confusion has presented educators with challenges in fully comprehending the theories and considering the connection between the two terms (Ismail et al., 2022, p. 264). However, key researchers emphasize climate as the primary leverage point for any culture (Gruenert, 2008; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). A school’s climate manifests in the school building as “the way we feel around here”; conversely, school culture is “how we do things around here” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 9). One component of a school’s culture is the climate, which emphasizes the importance of organizational structures such as instructional practices, school safety, and stakeholder relationships (Kohl et al., 2013; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Peterson & Deal, 2002; Thapa et al., 2013). Although ongoing discussion continues to acknowledge the differences between the concept of school culture and that of school climate, evidence shows that researchers often address climate despite their intentions to study culture (Thapa et al., 2013).

School culture focuses on organizational norms, values and codes, and systems of beliefs and includes how these expectations and assumptions are conveyed through stakeholder actions,

traditions, customs, and rituals (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Thapa et al., 2013). According to Schein (2017), the relationship between culture and climate reveals that key components like expectations, patterns, beliefs, traditions, and climate all indicate culture. A school's culture is defined by how administrators and other stakeholders work together, problem-solve, and handle barriers (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018). Due to the complexity of school cultures and dynamics, school culture is created over time, further emphasizing the role all stakeholders play in the composition of a school's culture and the change process (Bryk et al., 2010; Zhu et al., 2011). Managers and leaders alike have been encouraged to develop a robust organizational culture to attain a straightforward approach to commitment and overall performance (Owoyemi & Ekwoaba, 2014). Consequently, school culture influences improvement (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Demerath, 2018; Eger & Prášilová, 2020; Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018).

According to Kohl et al. (2013), the school culture is a manifestation of the various interactions of its key players and basic constructs. The experiences often happen outside the classroom or school when stakeholders and educators encounter one another (Kohl et al., 2013). Critical to these interactions is the involvement of these players in different relationship configurations: parents, administrators, teachers, students, and colleagues. Occurrences also appear in various interaction spaces, such as collaboration of peers, required meetings, school-based endeavors and activities, and in school-community relations such as parent-teacher meetings or site-based committees involving community members (Kohl et al., 2013; Turan & Bektas, 2013). The *student experience* can be defined as a compilation of relationships with parents, other students, teachers, and administrators, allotted time to reflect on class, unsupervised time with peers, and school events that may occur in the school or community

(Kohl et al., 2013; Yough et al., 2023). The definition of *school leadership* and *culture* is nested processes that contribute to crucial stakeholders' experiences (Turan & Bektas, 2013). Likewise, Senge (2000) asserted that an organization could achieve its goals based on solid cultures, whether in businesses or schools.

School Culture - Positive and Negative

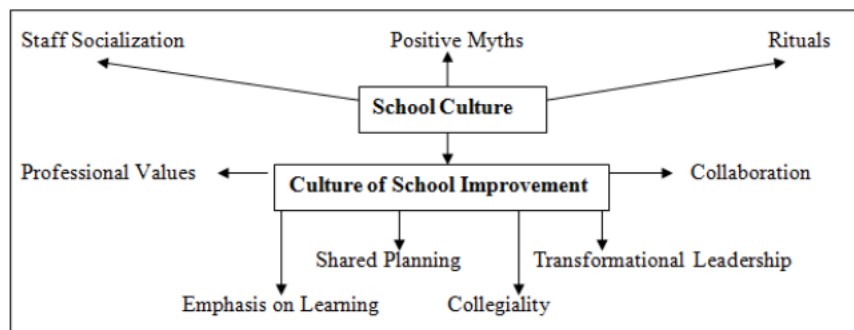
Griffith (2003) suggested that schools with good cultures have similar characteristics but omit a structure that pinpoints or classifies the attributes. School culture has several layers; administrators, teachers, staff, parents, students, and other community stakeholders attribute their experiences to the school's perceived culture. Building leaders who pay attention to their school's culture may experience increased success with student achievement, professional growth, and development of master teachers who understand decision-making (Adu-Baffoe & Bonney, 2021; DuFour, 2002; Wagner & Masden-Copas, 2002). If there is an ineffective culture, the underpinning is climate issues impeding a school's ability to improve (Senge, 2000; Thapa et al., 2013). Conversely, an influential school culture fosters increased student outcomes by instilling values, encouraging rectitude, and building sovereignty within the building (Demiroz, 2020; Susilo et al., 2018). As shown in Figure 2, a school culture includes a shared vision, collaboration and collegiality, parent involvement, and effective communication. A sense of urgency has framed the phenomenon of a school culture when addressing the caliber of instruction provided to students coupled with a principal's ability to determine and lead the change processes needed for improvement (Amtu et al., 2020; Leithwood et al., 2019; Narayan, 2016; Nehez & Blossing, 2022).

An influential (positive) school culture leads to hard work and high achievement, while an ineffective one results in students and teachers losing motivation and disengaging (Amtu et

al., 2020; Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Susilo et al., 2018). In addition, schools with a positive learning culture encourage key stakeholders to work in communities that offer professional support, foster trust, and have a positive impact (Cohen et al., 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004). However, an individual's perception of the school climate is contingent upon the subject (Yough et al., 2023). Therefore, communicating clear goals for high student achievement is vital to guiding school leaders' efforts as they collaborate with teachers and students. Conversely, the lack of communication could negatively impact student outcomes or experiences (Goldring et al., 2009; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Murphy, 2010).

Culture of School Improvement

Effective leadership is an essential component of school culture. According to Narayan (2016), due to the influence of school culture, school leaders should dissect their school's culture to determine areas for improvement. The culture of school improvement is linked to student motivation and achievement. The conceptual framework in Figure 2 that guided this quantitative study was generated from an analysis of literature investigating the existence and effectiveness of varying forms of school culture in a secondary school (Narayan, 2016). The intended outcome of this conceptual framework was for school leaders to boost their school cultures. Therefore, division leaders focusing on continuous improvement have a roadmap to support middle school leaders in positively impacting student outcomes.

Figure 2*Conceptual Framework*

Note. Conceptual framework. Retrieved from “Culture of school improvement: Exploring its existence and effectiveness,” by N.A. Narayan, 2016, *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(2), p.37 (<https://doi.org/10.21276/sjhss.2016.1.2.1>).

Role of Ritual and Positive Myths

Ceremonies, traditions, rituals, and symbols are the more visible aspects of culture (Ismail et al., 2022; Peterson & Deal, 2002). According to Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008), the following are characteristics of an organization’s culture:

- 1) holistic and refers to phenomena that cannot be reduced to single individuals; 2) historically related; 3) related to anthropological terms; 4) socially constructed; 5) soft, vague, and difficult to catch; 6) inert and difficult to change; 7) terms such as ‘myth,’ ‘ritual,’ ‘symbols,’ ‘heroes,’ and similar anthropological terms used to characterize culture; 8) most commonly refers to ways of thinking, values, and ideas of things rather than the concrete, objective and more visible part of an organization. (p. 36)

Likewise, Kreitner (1992) stated that organizational cultures are compiled from the myths, beliefs, values, rites, and common language shared and narrated by the organization’s members. These components of an organization’s culture are integral to the daily routines and functions of

the school (Kreitner, 1992; Peterson & Deal, 2002). Such fundamental, cultural-shaping components are a result of implementation over time and acceptance of various ways of acting, behaving, and celebrating custom within the organization (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Kreitner, 1992; Peterson & Deal, 2002; Schein, 2017; Schreiber, 2019).

However, the school principal can shape the culture by participating in and encouraging rituals that celebrate essential values (Bonda & Mitchell, 2015; Peterson & Deal, 2002; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988). Daily tasks or routines have their significance augmented, and as a result, they begin to symbolize the organization's collective values. Simple occurrences can become customs or rituals that convey shared values and connect the people within the organization together with their everyday experiences (Ismail et al., 2022; Peterson & Deal, 2002). Rituals can take on various forms; school activities like ceremonies, traditions, informal and special lunches, parent meetings, classroom parties, arrival in the morning, dismissals, the first day of school, and graduation all have the potential of becoming rituals (Bonda & Mitchell, 2015; Peterson & Deal, 2002). In addition, repeated behaviors that reinforce shared values and beliefs form routines (Bonda & Mitchell, 2015; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Peterson & Deal, 2002). Conversely, Elmore and McLaughlin (1988) found that similar happenings become more complicated when schools protect their core instructional practices from potential judgments and react to the demands for change based on compliance-driven rituals. As a result, underperforming school districts are inundated with practices, rituals, politics, culture, and contracts that impede a school's ability to improve (Bonda & Mitchell, 2015; Ismail et al., 2022).

Schein (2017) stated that integrating rituals, traditions, values, and behaviors all bind to create culture. In addition to incorporating these elements, it is imperative to share each component that portrays and systemizes a positive school culture (Narayan, 2016; Schreiber,

2019). According to Deal and Peterson (1998), some patterns are social, and others develop around the work. Schein (2017) added that the process of developing shifts in the culture requires

A cognitive redefinition through teaching, coaching, changing the structure and procedures where necessary, consistently paying attention to and rewarding evidence of learning the new ways, creating new slogans, stories, myths, rituals, and in other ways coercing people into at least adopting new behaviors. (p. 314)

Core values often connect directly to rituals and ceremonies (Moxley, 2000; Schein, 2017).

Therefore, school leaders should nurture the traditions, ceremonies, rituals, and symbols that directly express, strengthen, and reinforce the school culture to influence staff socialization (Ismail et al., 2022).

Staff Socialization

According to Kouzes and Posner (2012), school leaders who guide with their hearts recognize and value individual staff success and collective organizational successes (p. 269). Fundamentally, organizational cultures perpetuate through the socialization of new constituents in the school (Kouzes & Posner, 2016; Lim, 2010; Tahir et al., 2018). According to Spillane (2005), leadership is more than an organization just existing; it is the general leadership practices and contribution of many in the organization; the focus must be on the interconnectedness of the leader and the organization (Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Schein, 2017; Yarn, 2022). Theoretically, socialization is a process where individuals obtain the expertise needed to perform their role (Crow, 2006a; Lim, 2010; Tahir et al., 2018). Huff (2010) defined *socialization* as a process where principals learn the skills needed to lead their schools toward excellence.

Some researchers (Daresh & Playko, 1994; Heck, 1995; Normore, 2004) argued that the lack of professional socialization will affect the leader's performance and identity. Empirical

researchers Greenfield (1985) and Male (2006) divided the socialization processes into two notable and distinct classifications. The first class or category of the socialization process is professional socialization. A school leader must internalize the profession's norms to socialize and learn the culture's knowledge, skills, and behaviors (Greenfield, 1985; Normore, 2004). The second socialization process category is organizational socialization, which typically occurs after a new leader is appointed—new leaders want to calibrate their preferences based on their school's constituents, policies, and priorities (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Greenfield, 1985; Male, 2006).

Moreland and Levine (2001) posited that socialization is a subjective process involving novices attempting to conform their behaviors to fit their organizational and professional norms and identity. This process mimics the ongoing individual undertaking when joining an organization, team, or profession. All socialization processes involve learning (Crow, 2006b; Lim, 2010; Tahir et al., 2018). Based on that, Duke (1987) emphasized that the socialization process is a necessary, ongoing, evolving learning process for principals; through socialization, principals learn how to be influential school leaders. Professional socialization will influence the leader's first year's values, attitudes, and personality (Duke, 1987; Moreland & Levine, 2001; Tahir et al., 2018). A school leader will also experience the organizational socialization process when becoming a member and fully "immersed within the school's culture and context" (Tahir et al., 2018, p. 234).

Transformational Leadership

Role of the Principal

Leadership is a significant theme in organizational culture (Hall & Hord, 2015; Narayan, 2016; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Ryu et al., 2022; Schein, 2017). According to key researchers in the field, culture is generated, ingrained, evolved, and ultimately influenced by the principal (Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Ryu et al., 2022; Schein, 2017). Principals must perpetrate the

grassroots focus on student outcomes and advancing a positive school culture (Hargreaves, 1995; Ryu et al., 2022; Thurman & Hackmann, 2015). According to Young et al. (2017), a principal must create and maintain a culture that empowers its professionals and includes a shared commitment to school improvement efforts within the building (Demerath, 2018, p. 488). In the words of Ryu et al. (2022), the school principal cultivates “the narrow dyadic relationships between individuals,” which serves as a vehicle for commitment and improvement (p. 1).

Cultures often outlive members of any organization (Schein, 2017; Torres, 2022; Turan & Bektas, 2013). Therefore, shifting the culture when it thrives on consistency is hard. After all, it provides context and certainty; when stakeholders immerse themselves in the cultures, the results yield cohesion (Narayan, 2016; Schein, 2017; Torres, 2022). As Torres (2022) asserted, “Elements of culture (values, beliefs, ideologies) must be considered in terms of the extent to which they are shared, situated along a continuum representing the varying degrees of cultural cohesion between the stakeholders” (p. 258). This continuum requires leadership, focus, cooperation, and strategy to make an effective change (Chennattuserry et al., 2022; Ryu et al., 2022; Torres, 2022).

According to Turan and Bektas (2013), a good leader has the power to make necessary organizational changes based on data, while better leaders can change people. The state of the school determines the need for change, and the time a school has been in a particular status determines the intensity of that change (Hargreaves, 1995; Kotter, 1996; Schein, 2017). A change idea should be based on actual problems of practice. When the goals are clear and problems adequately identified, the building leader must gauge the school’s current culture to assess how the school’s culture can foster, on the one hand, or impede, on another, the cycle of change (Demerath, 2018; Fullan, 1998; Narayan, 2016; Schein, 2017).

Educational leaders must understand that within any organization or school, multiple cultures will influence the general practice of its social actors, for example, within various departments or groups (Little, 2002, 2012; Ryu et al., 2022; Schein, 2017; Torres, 2022). A leader's stance on how a school should function will be imposed on the group; this is the initial leadership phase, but this type of cultural influence does not generate culture immediately or spontaneously (Fullan, 1998; Ostroff et al., 2013; Schein, 2017). Therefore, the leader must remain engaged. Effective principals linked to positive school culture are essential components to well-functioning schools (Engels et al., 2008; Narayan, 2016). It has been discovered that the leader's success is shaped by their ability to empower, inspire, and motivate staff (Engels et al., 2008; Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018; Schein, 2017). Similarly, Engels et al. (2008) purported that school principals who identify as mentors or innovators successfully create a positive school culture and can be categorized as transformational leaders.

Conversely, principals who identify themselves as managers or strategic leaders have more difficulty creating a positive school culture based on their focus, stability, control, and predictability (Chennattuserry et al., 2022; Engels et al., 2008; Narayan, 2016; Schein, 2017). When distinguishing between the terms *leadership* and *management*, scholars like Schein (2017) have drawn clear lines; "leadership creates and changes cultures, while management and administration act within a culture" (p. 11). Leaders articulate a shared vision and norms while fostering and supporting teacher-led initiatives (Lipscombe et al., 2023; Narayan, 2016; Sabanci et al., 2016). Implementing school reforms without successfully implementing changes to the school culture is impossible (Eger & Prášilová, 2020). After all, championing an emphasis on teaching and learning is based on the strong correlation between school administrators and school cultures (Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves, 1995; Narayan, 2016; Ryu et al., 2022). According to

Bayar and Karaduman (2021), the school leader is liable for forming a strong, affirming school culture. Principals are responsible for developing an influential school culture through a shared vision, emphasizing a partnership with the administration, and effectively communicating with all team members (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Sabancı et al., 2016).

Analysis of school culture emphasizes that the strongest correlation is the relationship between the leader and his/her guiding practices (Narayan, 2016; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Turan & Bektas, 2013). The principal's function is to be the guiding leader, further emphasizing the influence of the connections between school leadership and culture (Turan & Bektas, 2013). School culture practices impact the principal's improvement efforts (Hargreaves, 1995; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Peterson & Deal, 2002). Leadership branches beyond the role of the principal. Shared leadership cultivates and sustains cultures, encourages purposive conditions for collaboration, and supports resource allocations for time, structures, and budgetary needs (Datnow, 2011; Hickey et al., 2022; Hord, 2004; Salas-Vallina et al., 2022; Sanchez et al., 2022). As Turan and Bektas (2013) have stated, "School leadership and culture can be nested processes" (p. 157). However, the correlation between school culture and leadership is based on a principal's ability to change the culture positively or negatively (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Durukan, 2006; Turan & Bektas, 2013).

The school leader's primary role in creating a positive environment is to create school culture by making the "shared vision compatible with the school culture" (Turan & Bektas, 2013, p. 157). Leaders should build rapport with their staff to gain the traction needed to develop their organization and impact their culture positively (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Duncheon & DeMatthews, 2023; Sanchez et al., 2022; Turan & Bektas, 2013). Collaboration between school leaders and other school members is essential for implementing and articulating a shared vision

and maintaining consistency within the existing cultures (Durukan, 2006; Ganon-Shion et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Turan & Bektas, 2013). However, the culture must be analyzed to understand a principal's improvement efforts (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). The in-depth analysis of a principal's approach to improvement and shaping the culture is crucial when creating a school's shared sense of purpose and distributive leadership; a proactive approach yields a better result than avoidance (Engels et al., 2008; Harris, 2010; Liu et al., 2021; Torres, 2022).

Creating school culture through the experience and interplay among all the key players in a school, of which the principal is only one, is imperative (Peterson & Deal, 2002). Therefore, it is essential to reveal what conditions promote and prevent improvement efforts to recognize whether certain practices should be changed to determine the effective strategies (Adu-Baffoe & Bonney, 2021; Hargreaves, 1995; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). For many school leaders, organizational change is necessary to shift their school's culture. However, first, stakeholders must understand what elements are forming the current culture and what sub-cultures could negatively impact it (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Such elements that prevent a negative impact on the school's culture may include vision and mission for school improvement; ethical practice and norms; learner-centered instructional leadership; an understanding of policy, community, and external leadership measures; and the ability to build leadership capacity (Demerath, 2018; Fullan, 1998; Narayan, 2016; Schein, 2017; Tienken & Mullen, 2022).

Vision, Mission, and School Improvement

A strategic approach to school improvement emphasizes communicating a clear vision and mission. Still, the endless confusion about the significance of a mission and vision in the

school improvement process continues to impede the work of school leaders (DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Gurley et al., 2015). Defining each term is imperative to provide clarity and build the capacity of current or future leaders. The organization's mission and vision statements are often used interchangeably despite the clear distinction between the two (DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Gurley et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2022; Vito, 2020). A mission statement provides insight into the overall purpose of an organization, "stating the business of our business" and answering the inquiry about "Why do we exist?" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 58; Gurley et al., 2015, p. 222). A coherent and succinct mission statement is vital to solidifying a shared understanding of the school's primary work (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Gurley et al., 2015). In short, without concise delivery and simplifying the school's mission, stakeholders may interpret their purpose differently, confusing why they do their work (Gurley et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2022).

Despite the terms' interchangeable usage, *mission* and *vision* (like climate and culture) have distinct definitions in the literature. Gurley et al. (2015) stated that a vision statement articulates the organization's future. DuFour and Eaker (1998) summarized a vision statement as an answer to the question, "What do we hope to become?" The vision statement frames a portrait of an exemplary school and provides a purpose to achieve its vision successfully (Gurley et al., 2015). According to Stemler et al. (2011), a vision statement goes above and beyond a motto or catchphrase that should include clear, measurable verbiage to better meet the needs of the organization "in a predictable way" (p. 384). A clear vision empowers the school community and provides principals with a vital resource that informs practice. Organizations with a more substantial commitment to their shared vision are proven more effective (Teddle & Reynolds, 2003; Vito, 2020).

DuFour and Eaker (1998) revealed that the clear communication, application, and stewardship of an organization's mission and vision, along with its aims and values, are essential for effectively improving schools. To create better conditions for all stakeholders, school leaders use continuous improvement techniques to attain their vision, accomplish their mission, and advance their core values (DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Martin et al., 2022; Meyer-Looze et al., 2019). Suppose a school's mission and vision statements lack essential components, such as purpose or a shared vision. In that case, it may impact a shared focus on improving student experiences as the organization's primary purpose (Meyer-Looze et al., 2019). Fullan (2008) emphasized that creating a shared vision is vital; it must remain fluid, especially when introducing possible change. Fullan (2008) also recommended that school leaders focusing on improvement remain open to organizational outcomes that may gain more awareness of the conditions before creating the organization's vision (Martin et al., 2022; Meyer-Looze et al., 2019; Vito, 2020).

Professional Values, Norms, and Ethics

Ethics is a methodical approach to moral choices and the values that reinforce those choices (Moore, 1903). Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defined *ethos* as "the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution." The term *ethics* derives from the Greek *ethos*. Bass and Steidlmeier (1998) asserted that there are three foundational ideas in which the ethics of leadership are supported:

- (1) the moral character of the leader, (2) the ethical values embedded in the leader's vision, articulation, and programs which followers either embrace or reject, and (3) the morality of the processes of social, ethical choices and action that leaders and followers engage in and collectively pursue. (p. 182)

Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) ensured that achieving organizational objectives is based on moral and ethical leadership—influencing followers’ values, beliefs, and behaviors. Above all other leadership capacities, it is pertinent for school principals to have the ability and responsibility to model moral and ethical leadership and educational practices (Koç & Fidan, 2020). According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011), an administrator’s conduct should guide decision-making based on professional ethics and principles, leadership styles, personal probity, and soundness when considering each student’s best interests.

Some have stipulated that school leaders must acknowledge each aspect of their work as decision-makers to evaluate whether current decision-making processes reflect ethical and professional norms (Drago-Severson, 2012; Koç & Fidan, 2020; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Paradigms of practice relating to the norms, values, beliefs, and ways of interacting with one another help to give school culture its shape and textures. After all, it is crucial to acknowledge how organizations initiate cultural norms, establish respect and trust, and encourage risk-taking to champion a culture of school improvement (Drago-Severson, 2012; Hargreaves, 1998; Hoy, 2012). According to Thapa et al. (2013), school leaders must foster well-established and clearly articulated expectations and value systems to create a positive learning environment. School culture has an integral role in affecting teachers’ behaviors, beliefs, actions, and attitudes and, therefore, plays an essential part in determining school behavior norms (O’Keefe et al., 2020; Thapa et al., 2013; Zhu et al., 2011). According to Gross and Shapiro (2004), leaders of schools must cultivate a foundational understanding of ethics, given the strong connection between school culture and ethical behavior. Similarly, a relationship exists between the importance of ethical leader conduct and student achievement (Koç & Fidan, 2020; O’Keefe et al., 2020; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

Learning and Instructional Leadership

Leadership is crucial in school effectiveness and instructional improvement (Demerath, 2018; Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019). In an accountability era, pedagogical beliefs and instructional leadership practice are essential components of principal effectiveness (Huong, 2020; Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019). Zahed-Babelan et al. (2019) claimed that heightened attention to instructional leadership proves the trend of continuous reforms in education systems worldwide (p. 139). According to Hallinger and Huber (2012), these changes led to a noticeable magnification of the importance of school leaders keeping instruction at the forefront in tandem with other demands. After all, leadership is a crucial component of organizational effectiveness (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019).

An effective instructional leader is critical to school persuasiveness (Hallinger & Huber, 2012; Leithwood, 2004). Improvement-focused leadership influences many school factors, particularly instruction, resulting in better learning outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heck & Moriyama, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019). Furthermore, the teaching and learning process is fundamentally relational and directly connected to school aims, behaviors, climate, and expectations that influence and impact cultural relationships (Huong, 2020; Thapa et al., 2013).

Peariso's (2011) research on the building principal as an instructional leader included four critical factors. The first component is creating a shared mission and identifying explicit goals. A shared mission is a crucial facet of instructional leadership; the principal, as lead teacher, is responsible for articulating the school's academic goals to partners and the external community (Huong, 2020; Thapa et al., 2013). The second component is a constant pulse of the teachers' progress— "principals need to be more concerned with the supervision,

encouragement, and monitoring of classroom instructional practices” (Huong, 2020, p. 48). The third component is professional learning for teachers and other staff. School leaders must encourage and provide professional development opportunities, such as peer coaching, peer observations, and student engagement (Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018). Finally, the last component is professional leadership. This factor shows how principals influence classroom and school conditions and how the school leader contributes to school effectiveness, with the focus being directly and indirectly on student outcomes.

The standard description of school culture is the organizations’ unique working conditions, distinguishing one school from another (Huong, 2020; Ontario’s Principal Council, 2009; Young et al., 2017). A collaborative culture includes a professional learning community focusing on school improvement goals (Young et al., 2017). According to Kırıl (2020), the caliber of instruction and student achievement in the classroom is imperative to impacting student outcomes. Improving schools is linked to enhancing instructional programs. Instructional leaders work to create systems that “develop, align, and implement curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are responsive to student needs, reflect high expectations, and align with academic standards” (Buffalo State, 2017, p. 37).

Leaders with an instructional focus facilitate problem-solving opportunities around challenging, engaging, and equitable instructional practice. Therefore, leading learning is the link to developing and implementing curricular resources and support systems that maximize learning spaces, instructional technologies, the use of data, staffing decisions and allocations, professional learning, and a responsive system that nurtures the improvement of student outcomes (Huong, 2020; Young et al., 2017). Furthermore, effective building leaders create a culture of professional development for teachers and feedback on teaching practices. When creating a

culture of internal and external accountability, administrators should support instruction with resources, observe and assess academic outcomes, and regularly communicate the progress of school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2018, p. 28). Therefore, principal preparation programs recommend the instructional leadership approach because principals play a vital role in improving instruction (Narayan, 2016). Such a culture is imperative for continuous school improvement (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Huong, 2020).

Collaboration: Community and External Leadership

Key researchers recognize that an organization's forces play an essential role in how a leader can shape a school's culture (Bell & Kent, 2010). Working together towards a common goal is vital for several reasons. For example, the school reserves the library to create an opportunity for parents to have coffee with school administration and teachers; the coffee donated and served by the local coffee shop shows a solid external relationship (Education Review Office [ERO], 2008b). This form of community leadership fosters "the desire to extend parental choice, increase home-school partnerships, and improve educational outcomes" (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 170). In addition, the connection between the schools, parents, students, and "other groups and agencies within the wider community" can work together to create unique learning opportunities for students with differing abilities or behaviors (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 171).

Schools are integral to their communities (Leithwood, 2021; Mutch & Collins, 2012). The expertise of key stakeholders is value-added to school affairs (Bell & Kent, 2010; Mutch & Collins, 2012). Therefore, the critical factors that influence a positive school culture are an authentic approach to parent-community collaboration, access to the school staff, and culturally competent responses based on cultures and diverse needs (Bell & Kent, 2010; Gross et al., 2015;

Mutch & Collins, 2012). Schools that engage their parents work tirelessly to ensure the partnership benefits the whole child (Mutch & Collins, 2012). The school's goal to remain engaged with the external community is beneficial when the school leader's vision and commitment to work with parent partners is evident (ERO, 2008a; Mutch & Collins, 2012).

According to Gross et al. (2015), "The four school factors that appeared to contribute to strong community partnerships were (a) strong school leadership, (b) inviting school culture, (c) teacher commitment to student success, and (d) collaboration and communication among partners" (p. 23). Community members have expressed the need for a vision-oriented principal who respects the school and honors the community's role in supporting trusting partnerships. Community partners described their counterparts as possessing an "open door policy," meaning the partnership lent itself to community voice and choice (Bell & Kent, 2010; Gross et al., 2015). For example, "building productive relationships with families, enhancing the school's connection with its wider community, collaborative decision-making, the distribution of leadership among the school's stakeholders, staffing the instructional program, and the alignment of resource allocation with the school goals" support external partnerships (Gross et al., 2015; Leithwood, 2021, p. 3). Pogodzinski and Lenhoff (2017) found that a school's "organizational climate is significantly associated with chronic absenteeism and is important for guiding interventions, and also for dispelling any notions that chronic absenteeism is entirely a problem of home or environment" (p. 17). Chronic absenteeism results in missed instruction, significantly impacting student academic performance (VDOE, 2022a).

The culture of a school underscores the assumptions and qualities that validate the relationship between the home and school (Mutch & Collins, 2012). Willems and Gonzalez-DeHass (2012) described school-community partnerships as valuable connections committed to

collaboration and sharing responsibility to advance the development of all students' well-being. According to Gross et al. (2015), "School-community partnerships can impact student success, post-school outcomes, and positively influence and benefit the community in return" (p. 10). Schools committed to being inclusive empower parents to actively engage in decision-making that directly affect their children, creating a platform to express concerns and ask questions. Strong school partnerships between parents include engaged students, a positive atmosphere, and skilled teachers who maximize student learning time (Mutch & Collins, 2012; Willems & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2012). Therefore, effective learning partnerships positively impact student outcomes (Mutch & Collins, 2012; Willems & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2012).

Effective leadership is critical when creating meaningful and respectful partnerships (Liu et al., 2021; Mutch & Collins, 2012). Learning partnerships that generate opportunities for parents to stay engaged in their child's education are imperative when collaborating to foster student success (Mutch & Collins, 2012). Effective leaders build relationships, remove obstacles, and "give parents the confidence to become involved in their child's learning" (ERO, 2008a, p. 3). A key to breaking down barriers is actively identifying and understanding effective communication (Mutch & Collins, 2012; Sabancı et al., 2016).

Building Professional Leadership Capacity

According to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), the role of a professional leader is "to develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of quality education, academic outcomes, and the well-being of each student" (Standard, 2015, 1) (NPBEA, 2015). The PSEL standards also assert, "Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (Standard 5, 2015, 1). The literature supports these standards consistently

(Demerath, 2018; Fowler et al., 2018; Mansour, 2011). The empowerment of all constituents and the demand for shared leadership and self-efficacy are important. Shared leadership creates a platform for successors to lead with a less negative impact on improvement efforts (Demerath, 2018; Hargreaves, 1995). As an influential researcher shared, “A principal fosters a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student’s overall achievement and strives to meet district guidelines and policies for each student’s overall achievement” (Yarn, 2022, p. 1).

Building the capacity for school improvement entails thoroughly reviewing the synergy between school processes (Mansour, 2011; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Capacity must occur within and among three unified domains: personal, interpersonal, and organizational (Mansour, 2011; Stoll, 1999). The demand for capacity-building requires opportunities for collaboration (Stoll, 1999). School improvement has two principal categories: a collaborative climate and a shared dedication to that collaboration that results directly from mutual inquiry and collective learning by all who work in the school (Mansour, 2011; Demerath, 2018; Harris & Lambert, 2003).

Building capacity for improvement implies the need for acute changes within schools (Harris & Lambert, 2003; Mansour, 2011). As Harris and Lambert (2003) stated, the process involves “building relationships, trust, and community” (p. 4). However, capacity-building is beyond an individual approach; it is about ensuring the school can create and sustain itself independently (Schein, 2017; Senge, 1990) by infusing learning conditions that foster progress and transformation (Hopkins & Harris, 2001). Progress maintains momentum only when the conditions inside a school are favorable for change. If the internal conditions are unfavorable, it will not matter how needed or positive the new change initiative is (Harris & Lambert, 2003;

Hopkins & Harris, 2001). Likewise, Harris and Lambert (2003) held that it will fail if school improvement depends on one individual or external driver (p. 13).

According to Fullan (2006), capacity-building is a task that involves internal and external support. Externally, policymakers work to generate and sustain “the necessary conditions, culture, and structures; facilitating learning and skill-oriented experiences and opportunities; [and] ensuring interrelationships and synergy” (Stoll & Bolam, 2005, p. 52). Internally, school leaders collaborate with the stakeholders to achieve optimal success by supporting teachers’ professional practices and fostering high-quality professional development (Kıral, 2020; Stoll & Bolam, 2005; Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019).

Managing Complex Change

According to Nehez and Blossing (2022), change initiatives and organizational improvement are complex endeavors that emphasize the significance of principals’ work in developing a supportive and collaborative organizational culture (Leithwood et al., 2019; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). A leader can identify a different approach to any problem, communicate a clear goal and its meaning, and create systems to support the work, but if the goal is to generate change, the new approach must include a synergetic experience for all stakeholders (Ostroff et al., 2013; Narayan, 2016; Schein, 2017). Change and improvement are complex processes. The complexities are “evolutionary, relational, temporal, and cultural” (Nehez & Blossing, 2022, p. 311). Cultural change inevitably involves “unlearning and relearning” and is, therefore, transformative by definition (Schein, 2017, p. 324). Therefore, changing an organization’s culture is synonymous with destroying the pre-existing one (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). Resistance to change is often the result of school leaders attempting to change their followers’

behavior, which impedes the process and creates opposition to the change idea (Narayan, 2016; Schein, 2017).

Culture often remains and extends beyond the tenure of the organization members (Schein, 2017). Cultural change is difficult due to the effects of value stability that can carry on from one group of members to others (Narayan, 2016; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Schein, 2017; Turan & Bektas, 2013). After all, culture gives its stakeholders and members institutional meaning and a sense of stability and predictability. When any phenomenon functions as a part of the fabric of an organization, the institution also gains stability (Narayan, 2016; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Schein, 2017). The same is valid for change. According to Turan and Bektas (2013), “Good leaders have the power to change organizations, while better leaders have power to change people” (p. 157). The state of the school determines the need for change, and the time a school has been in a particular status determines the intensity of change required (Narayan, 2016; Schein, 2017). The goals should focus on concrete problems; when they are clear and problems adequately identified, it is “appropriate to do a culture assessment to determine how the culture may aid or hinder the change process” (Schein, 2017, p. 335).

Nehez and Blossing (2022) stated that “reforms and demands for quick fixes constrained principals’ possibilities to promote change” (p. 326). Therefore, it is essential “to identify arrangements that promote and prevent the improvement efforts to understand what needs to be changed, that is, to make more structural improvements and gain momentum” (Nehez & Blossing, 2022, p. 327). For many school leaders, organizational change is necessary to shift their school’s culture. As with any change, schools may experience implementation dips, but they may also be created by the fear of change and the lack of skills to make it work (Fullan, 2002). However, stakeholders must understand what elements are forming the current culture

and what sub-cultures could negatively impact it (Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). According to Nehez and Blossing (2022), leadership practices can create conditions for school improvement by better understanding the need and conditions for change and making necessary adjustments.

According to Narayan (2016), the other practices that impede improvement work are avoiding teacher disputes, organizing daily tasks, and having a false sense of success. Therefore, administrators must engage in this work by shifting how to manage the school, challenge stakeholders, and think outside the box (Narayan, 2016; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). For example, “instead of pushing change all the time, we need to pull change, drawing people into what interests them and challenging them through leadership” (Burner, 2018, p. 130). However, considering external influences is pertinent to transforming cultures that promote school improvement. “Practices within school cultures are not static and are not isolated to external arrangements” (Nehez & Blossing, 2022, p. 326). Therefore, the principal’s role in maintaining school culture and supporting improvement work has become more challenging (Engels et al., 2008; Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Lastly, “educational change needs to be justified, as does any other kind of change, so those who are going to change will see the relevance of change” (Burner, 2018, p. 131).

Conclusion

The theory behind culture is a challenge to delineate; however, the key researchers stand in solidarity with the idea that culture influences the system in which stakeholders can operate (Narayan, 2016; Schein, 2017). Understanding organizational culture creates a valuable advantage in the school setting due to the complex components involved (Schein, 2017; Turan & Bektas, 2013). According to Swindler (2009), “Organizational culture has captured the attention

of many school leaders because of its potential to enhance a school's performance" (p. 72). As such, this literature review illuminates the grassroots components involved in creating a culture of school improvement by establishing a clear mission and vision based on professional values and the emphasis placed on learning (Demerath, 2018; Vito, 2020). Analyzing the complex processes involving critical components of school culture can facilitate a better understanding of school improvement efforts and practices that build principals' ability to manage the changes needed to improve English language proficiency (Garrett et al., 2019; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Yough et al., 2023).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design of this quantitative study. This chapter explains and justifies the study's purpose, research question and design, sample selection, data collection procedures, data treatment, and data analysis techniques.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for English Learners (ELs), and overall English language proficiency (ELP) progress based on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test in middle schools within a suburban division of Virginia, where school culture also captured individual domains based on the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency that include learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection. This quantitative study utilized single linear regression and multiple regression analyses to examine existing school data on the relationship among school culture, chronic absenteeism, and English language proficiency (ELP) progress in a large division in Virginia based on the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) ACCESS for English language learners (ELLs) 2.0 assessment. The researcher examined how school culture and chronic absenteeism may impact ELP progress for ELs, also referred to as English learners (ELs), attending comprehensive middle schools in a large division in Virginia during the 2022-2023 school year based on Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) EL Progress rates, also referenced as ELP Progress rates. The researcher analyzed existing data provided by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). Findings from this study contributed to the school improvement efforts that foster a culture of ELP Progress in grades 6-8. Capturing a better understanding of school culture and chronic absenteeism's impact on ELP Progress rates

will assist district-level educational leaders with identifying and removing barriers that impact principals' ability to make changes that will improve educational outcomes for ELs. The study aims to inform current and future secondary leaders of the importance of school culture and how it may influence meeting Virginia's rising long-term ELP Progress target and improve educational outcomes for ELs in Virginia.

Researcher's Professional Background and Assumptions

This study evolved from the researcher's time as a general education math teacher and assessment coordinator in a Virginia middle school. As a middle school math teacher, the researcher had the opportunity to teach ELs in a sheltered classroom setting. The ability to effectively use data to inform instruction and the passion for school improvement resulted in becoming an effective assessment and remediation coordinator. A background in assessment and teaching subgroups known to underperform their peers opened up a door for a division-level position as the student growth and school improvement specialist, allowing a work expansion from grades 6-8 to PK-12. As the school improvement specialist, collaborating with division leaders to determine the root cause of teacher/student engagement, attendance concerns, and student performance was the underlying school culture. As the researcher, it was assumed that school leaders who keep the school's mission and vision at the forefront of their daily focus have a more positive school culture, which yields lower chronic absenteeism rates and higher student progress/growth.

The researcher's current position as an EL Assessment and Title III Specialist for the VDOE has resulted in a hyperfocus on ELs' progress on the WIDA ACCESS test. This current position does not give any additional access or privileges; all data was retrieved from a public pre-existing online database made available for all schools and school divisions in Virginia by

VDOE. The motivation for this study was to assist school divisions with making connections to what may be impacting ELP progress in grades 6-8.

Research Questions

This quantitative study aimed to answer the following question: *What is the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress?* Through this study, the following supporting questions were answered:

1. What is the relationship between school culture and ELP progress?
2. What is the relationship between the four domains of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency (learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection) and ELP progress?
3. What is the relationship between school culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs?
4. What is the relationship among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress?

Research Design

This study utilized a non-experimental, quantitative design based on existing data from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), “Quantitative approaches focus on carefully measuring (or experimentally manipulating) a parsimonious set of variables to answer theory-guided research questions and hypotheses” (p. 206). Due to the complexity of this study, the researcher investigated multiple variables: DCJS’s school climate surveys, VDOE chronic absenteeism rates, and WIDA ACCESS for ELLs’ progress from VDOE’s ESSA rates. After carefully considering potential methodologies to determine the relationship among school culture, chronic absenteeism, and EL Progress rates, the researcher narrowed the selection to a

two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) or single linear regressions and multiple regression. A two-way ANOVA would be the better methodology selection if the variables were more categorical. Single linear regressions and multiple regression methods determine the relationship between continuous variables being addressed by the research questions. Due to the types of variables in this study and the visual linearity output, single linear regressions and multiple regression methodology provide a justifiable approach to analysis. According to Uyanık and Güler (2013), “Regression models with one dependent variable and more than one independent variable are called multilinear regression” (p. 234). Therefore, this study used single linear regressions and multiple regression models and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program to determine the interaction between school culture and chronic absenteeism on English language proficiency progress based on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs in more than 10 middle schools in Virginia. The researcher selected SPSS for data management and analysis due to the coursework and practice while attending Virginia Tech. The researcher used existing data sets from a single school year, 2022-2023, with no influence from subjects or their responses.

To determine if there is a relationship between school culture, chronic absenteeism, and English language proficiency progress, the researcher determined the interactions based on single linear regressions and multiple regression. The dependent variable was ELP progress rates based on WIDA ACCESS scores. The independent variables were school climate survey results based on the four domains of Virginia’s Framework for Cultural Competency and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs.

Existing Data

To address the research question, “*What is the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress?*” the researcher used three data sources for this

quantitative study. The first data point is the spring 2023 WIDA ACCESS ESSA rates for Virginia ELs in grades 6-8; this data was accessed using the Virginia School Quality Profile Download Data feature (VDOE, 2022d). The second data source was more than 10 middle schools' spring 2023 chronic absenteeism rate, also retrieved from the School Quality Profile Download data (VDOE, 2022d). The last data point is the 2023 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions results that can be found on the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) website. Due to the contents of the questionnaire, the researcher focused on sections of the survey that aligned with the four domains of Virginia's Framework for Cultural Competency: learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection.

Population/Site Selection

The sample selection was a suburban area in Virginia. This division was selected because it serves more than 15,000 ELs in Virginia with over ten comprehensive middle schools. The information was retrieved from the VDOE School Quality Profile and the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services website.

Data Collection Procedures

Before collecting the existing archival data for this quantitative study, the researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program) (Appendix A). The researcher needed to obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Virginia Tech University prior to collecting any data using the IRB Existing Data Research Protocol. Upon IRB approval for this one-way transfer of Not Human Subjects Research (Appendix B), the researcher followed specific steps to collect data for the middle schools included in this study.

First, the researcher accessed VDOE’s School Quality Profile and selected the Download Data option to review ELP Progress rates for every school in the selected division. See Table 2 for each selection during the search process. To access each school’s ESSA rate, the researcher filtered the results to view comprehensive middle schools. All information collected during this step was stored in a secure, password-protected Google Drive.

Table 2

Data Sources and Types

Data Source	Data
Virginia Department of Education - School Quality Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assessment - ESSA Rates (English learner progress) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reporting Level - School ○ Divisions - All ○ Schools - All ○ Data Type - ESSA ○ Indicator - English Learner progress ○ School Year - Most recent year available ● Chronic Absenteeism rates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School Quality Profile ○ Divisions - All ○ Schools - All ○ Data Type - Accreditation ○ Indicator - Chronic Absenteeism ○ School Year - Most recent year available
Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services - Secondary School Climate Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Section I: General Questions ● Section II: Belongingness, Relationships, and School Supports ● Section III: Safety ● Section VI: Well-being ● Section V: Global School Climate and Demographic

The second step was to collect each school’s Chronic Absenteeism data. To access the data, the researcher accessed VDOE’s School Quality Profile for each middle school in the selected suburban division in Virginia and used the Download Data function of the School Quality Profile to capture data for the 2022-2023 school year. The researcher recorded the chronic absenteeism rates for all students, and the chronic absenteeism for English learners in the comprehensive middle schools included in this study. For the purpose of this study, the researcher only used the rates for ELs. All information was recorded into a Google Sheets spreadsheet and stored in a secure, password-protected Google Drive.

The third step was to review the Secondary School Climate Survey results. The data was accessed using the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services website. Each middle school report and the sections that capture school culture were reviewed. See Table 3 for the specific questions. The partnership between the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) yields results that capture VDOE’s teacher and staff working conditions and DCJS’s school climate survey. The survey consisted of 84 student questions and was split into five sections; some students were asked up to 16 additional questions based on their responses. See Table 3 for each section. Each middle school report was reviewed, and the sections that capture school culture based on the four domains of Virginia's Framework of Cultural Competency were included in this study. See Table 3 for the specific sections and questions used to capture each school’s culture.

Table 3

Secondary School Climate Survey Questions

Learning Environment	
Question	Response

How positive or negative is the atmosphere of the school?	Very Negative (1) – Very Positive (6)
How does your school’s atmosphere impact your learning?	Very Negative Impact (1) - Very Positive Impact (7)
Since you have been at this school, the overall school atmosphere has...	Has become much worse (1) - has become much better (7)
Pedagogy and Practice	
Question	Responses
Relationship among students: Students care about other students at this school.	Strongly Disagree (1) - Strongly Agree (6)
Relationships between students and adults: Adults care about students.	Strongly Disagree (1) - Strongly Agree (6)
Rigorous Instruction: Teachers expect me to use facts and evidence.	Strongly Disagree (1) - Strongly Agree (6)
Community Engagement	
Question	Responses
School Connectedness: Students attend school-sponsored events	Strongly Disagree (1) - Strongly Agree (6)
Self-Reflection	
Question	Responses
Student Engagement: Students belong at this school.	Strongly Disagree (1) - Strongly Agree (6)
Perception of Safety: I feel safe in my classes.	Strongly Disagree (1) - Strongly Agree (6)
Social-emotional Learning: I stop and think before doing anything when I am angry	Strongly Disagree (1) - Strongly Agree (6)

Note. Adapted from “2023 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions,” by Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services [DCJS] (2023).

School culture could be a score that ranges from 1.0 to 7.0, capturing the total number of students who responded to each question and their responses during the 2022-2023 school year.

Chronic absenteeism is based on the percentage of ELs who missed ten or more days during the 2022-2023 school year; this could also be a percentage that ranges from 0.0% to 100.0%. Lastly, ELP Progress rates are based on the number of students who have two consecutive years of WIDA ACCESS scores, spring 2022 and spring 2023, and also show a specific score increase based on the student's overall composite proficiency levels and grade level. Table 5 identified the incremental score requirements that qualify for ELP Progress based on the Virginia Consolidated State Plan, also referred to as the Virginia ESSA Plan.

Data Treatment/Data Management

The data from this study were collected for every middle school in the selected suburban Virginia. No student-identifying information other than the EL classification was included in this archival data, and all data is accessible to the public. Data was stored in a password-protected VT Google spreadsheet and kept on a secure network.

Data Analysis Techniques

The researcher conducted single linear regressions and multiple regression analyses. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for English Learners (ELs), and overall English language proficiency (ELP) progress based on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test in middle schools within a suburban division of Virginia, where school culture also captured individual domains based on the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency that include learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection. The simple linear regression analysis was used to identify the relationship between one independent variable and a dependent variable. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to identify the relationship between two or more independent variables and a dependent variable. According to Iqbal (2020), "Linear regression

techniques can be used to model linearly separable data sets and can be used to find the nature of the relationship among variables” (p. 12).

The researcher collected and organized the data from VDOE and DCJS into a password-protected Google spreadsheet where identifying information was redacted. After collecting and organizing the data, the researcher verified that all data was complete and accurate. Data was then entered and verified in SPSS. Due to VT coursework, SPSS was used to conduct single linear regressions and multiple regression analyses to assist the researcher with a better understanding of the relationships among the variables.

In SPSS, the researcher entered each variable separately. School culture ratings were entered based on the questions from the survey. Each question represented a column in SPSS; each row represented a middle school. Once all ratings were entered, the researcher used SPSS to combine survey questions to determine an overall school culture rating. The steps to calculate the overall school culture were to select Transform and then Compute Variable and manually add each question to yield the overall school culture rating that was used to perform the linear regression models for this study. Once the overall school culture rating was computed, the researcher entered the chronic absenteeism for ELs rates and ELP progress rates in SPSS as separate columns.

After all existing data was entered into SPSS, the researcher utilized the Analyze>Regression>Linear features to run the linear-based regression models. The researcher also selected Statistics before running the linear regression and checked the following boxes: Estimates, Confidence intervals, Model fit, R squared change, and Collinearity diagnostics to determine the statistical significance and correlation for each model. The independent and dependent variable for each model was determined based on the research questions. See Table 4.

The researcher confirmed that each model was accurate in SPSS and then carefully reviewed the SPSS summary tables to answer the research question. The researcher also used the SPSS outputs to determine whether to reject or fail to reject the following overarching null and alternative hypotheses as well as the supporting hypotheses—the null hypotheses change based on each model’s independent and dependent variable(s).

H₁₀: There is no significant interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

H₁₁: There is a significant interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

Table 4

SPSS Linear Regression Input

Research Question	Independent Variable(s)	Dependent Variable
1	School Culture	English language proficiency (ELP) progress
2	Learning Environment	English language proficiency (ELP) progress
2	Pedagogy & Practice	English language proficiency (ELP) progress
2	Community Engagement	English language proficiency (ELP) progress
2	Self-Reflection	English language proficiency (ELP) progress
3	School Culture	Chronic Absenteeism rate for ELs
4	School Culture & Chronic Absenteeism rate for ELs	English language proficiency (ELP) progress

Methodology Summary

This chapter explained the methodology and analysis the researcher used during this study—the purpose of this study, research questions, and the research methodology. Due to the quantitative, non-experimental design comparing both one and two variables, the researcher conducted single linear regressions and multiple regression analyses. The researcher utilized pre-determined data, to explore the relationship among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and English language proficiency progress based on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. This chapter also includes the selected sample, data collection process, data treatment and management, and data analysis.

Based on the steps provided, the researcher compared ESSA rates, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and school climate survey data to determine the correlation between school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and English language proficiency progress using single linear regressions and multiple regression models.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for English Learners (ELs), and overall English language proficiency (ELP) progress based on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test in middle schools within a suburban division of Virginia, where school culture also captured individual domains based on the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency that include learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection. The overarching research question of the study was: *What is the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress?* Supporting research questions were as follows:

- 1) What is the relationship between school culture and ELP progress?
- 2) What is the relationship between the four domains of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency (learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection) and ELP progress?
- 3) What is the relationship between school culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs?
- 4) What is the relationship among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress?

Data Collection

The sample population included data from more than ten Virginia Middle schools. In order to examine the relationship between school culture and English language proficiency progress, the researcher used components of the school climate survey that captured school culture based on Virginia's Framework for Cultural Competency four domains (VDOE, 2021).

The existing archival data was based on the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services school climate survey administered during the 2022-2023 school year. The EL chronic absenteeism rates for ELs and English Language Proficiency Progress data were captured from the Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profiles for the 2022-2023 school year.

For school culture, the researcher used responses to the survey questions that sought to capture the four domains of Virginia's Framework for Cultural Competency: learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection. School culture data included all participating students at each middle school, which were collected and requested at the school level. The demographics of these students were not captured due to the anonymous submission. A total of approximately 16,000 student responses from more than 10 Virginia middle schools were included in this study. The higher the mean of each domain of Virginia's Framework for Cultural Competency, the more positive the response from students; *strongly agree* or *very positive* indicated the highest score of six. Scores ranged from 0 to 6.

With regard to chronic absenteeism for ELs rates, the researcher accessed absenteeism rates calculated by the Virginia Department of Education based on the percentage of ELs who missed ten percent or more of the total 180 instructional days during the 2022-2023 school year (VDOE, 2022c). Each middle school has a chronic absenteeism rate based on their EL enrollment. For English language proficiency (ELP) progress, the researcher accessed ESSA rates based on gains measured by Virginia's state ELP assessment, the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test. Proficiency gains were determined based on Virginia's definition of ELP Composite Proficiency Level Gains, with gains for students in grades 6-12 ranging from a 0.1 to 0.4 increase in overall ACCESS proficiency. See Table 5 to determine grade-specific increases that result in ELP progress.

Table 5

Composite Proficiency Level Gains, WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0

Proficiency Level	Grades K-2	Grades 3-5	Grades 6-12
1.0 - 2.4	1.0	0.7	0.4
2.5 - 3.4	0.4	0.4	0.2
3.5 - 4.4	0.2	0.2	0.1

Note. Retrieved from “Revised State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Amendment 3,” by U.S. Department of Education (2019).

Data Analysis Methodology

The researcher conducted an individual single linear regression model for school culture and overall ELP progress based on the 2022-2023 school year. Similarly, the researcher conducted individual single linear regression models for each domain of Virginia’s Framework for Cultural Competency to establish the relationship between each domain and overall ELP progress. Additionally, the researcher conducted a multiple linear regression model to determine a possible relationship between school culture, chronic absenteeism, and overall ELP progress. Further, the researcher conducted an individual single linear regression for school culture and overall chronic absenteeism rates for ELs. Data for this study were analyzed using SPSS.

Prior to conducting the models, the researcher determined that the linear regression met the assumptions needed to conduct a regression analysis. The first assumption is meeting the minimum sample size requirements. In this study, the sample size represented more than ten middle schools. The second assumption is the normality of the dependent variable. In this study, the dependent variable was represented by the ELP progress of each school, and the independent variable varied based on the linear regression model. Based on the One-Sample Kolmogorov-

Smirnov Test in SPSS, the test distribution was normal. The third assumption is identifying if outliers existed in the model. In this study, the researcher reviewed SPSS histograms to determine outliers. These plots needed to reflect the frequency and the standard deviation of the independent and dependent variables based on the research question.

The fourth assumption is the determination of multicollinearity; based on the SPSS Collinearity Statistic variance inflation factor (VIF) of 1, multicollinearity was not a problem in the regression model. After conducting the regression analysis, the researcher identified the statistical significance based on the Model Summary, ANOVA, and Coefficients outputs at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$). For ease of use, the researcher combined the three outputs to emphasize how statistically significant each relationship is.

Table 6

Relationship between School Culture (SC) and Overall English Language Proficiency Progress

Model	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	Significance	Correlation	R Square	Model Significance
1 Constant	-78.102		.043		.346	.003
SC	7.224	.588	.003	.588		

As reflected in Table 6, school culture explained 34.6% of the variation in overall ELP progress. The model was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) with a moderate positive correlation ($r = .588$); thus, there is a significant relationship between school culture and overall ELP progress. This means that the higher the school culture rating, the higher the ELP progress and the researcher rejected the null hypothesis.

H₂₀: There is no significant relationship between school culture and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

H2₁: There is a significant relationship between school culture and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

Table 7

Relationship between Learning Environment (LE) and Overall English Language Proficiency Progress

Model	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	Significance	Correlation	R Square	Model Significance
1 Constant	-38.740		.169		.301	.007
LE	19.859	.548	.007	.548		

As reflected in Table 7, the learning environment explained 30.1% of the variation in overall ELP progress. The model was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) with a moderate positive correlation ($r = .548$); thus, there is a significant relationship between the learning environment and overall ELP progress, meaning the higher the learning environment rating, the higher ELP progress and the researcher rejected the null hypothesis.

H3₀: There is no significant relationship between learning environments and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

H3₁: There is a significant relationship between learning environments and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

Table 8

Relationship between Pedagogy and Practice (PP) and Overall English Language Proficiency Progress

Model	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	Significance	Correlation	R Square	Model Significance
1 Constant	-102.201		.030		.342	.003
PP	31.888	.585	.003	.585		

As reflected in Table 8, pedagogy and practice explained 34.2% of the variation in overall ELP progress. The model was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) with a moderate positive correlation ($r = .585$); thus, there is a significant relationship between pedagogy and practice and overall ELP progress, meaning that the higher the pedagogy and practice rating, the higher the ELP progress and the researcher rejected the null hypothesis.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between pedagogy and practice and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between pedagogy and practice and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

Table 9

Relationship between Community Engagement (CE) and Overall English Language Proficiency Progress

Model		Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	Significance	Correlation	R Square	Model Significance
1	Constant	-28.249		.354		.214	.026
	CE	20.206	.463	.026	.463		

As reflected in Table 9, community engagement explained 21.4% of the variation in overall ELP progress. The model was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) with a moderate positive correlation ($r = .463$); thus, there is a significant relationship between community engagement and overall ELP progress, meaning the higher the community engagement rating, the higher ELP progress and the researcher rejected the null hypothesis.

H₅₀: There is no significant relationship between community engagement and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

H₅₁: There is a significant relationship between community engagement and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

Table 10*Relationship between Self-Reflection (SR) and Overall English Language Proficiency Progress*

Model	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	Significance	Correlation	R Square	Model Significance
1 Constant	-86.702		.046		.324	.005
SR	28.383	.569	.005	.569		

As reflected in Table 10, self-reflection explained 32.4% of the variation in overall ELP progress. The model was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) with a moderate positive correlation ($r = .569$); thus, there is a significant relationship between self-reflection and overall ELP progress, meaning the higher the self-reflection rating, the higher ELP progress, and the researcher rejected the null hypothesis.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between self-reflection and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between self-reflection and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

Table 11*Relationship between School Culture (SC) and Chronic Absenteeism rates for ELs*

Model	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	Significance	Correlation	R Square	Model Significance
1 Constant	124.103		<.001		.513	<.001
SC	-5.992	-.717	<.001	-.717		

As reflected in Table 11, school culture explained 51.3% of the variation in the overall chronic absenteeism rate for ELs. The model was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) with a strong negative correlation ($r = -.717$); thus, there is a significant relationship between chronic absenteeism rates for EL and school culture, meaning the lower the school culture rating, the higher the chronic absenteeism rate for ELs and the researcher rejected the null hypothesis.

H7₀: There is no significant relationship between school culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs.

H7₁: There is a significant relationship between school culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs.

Table 12

Relationship between School Culture (SC) and Chronic Absenteeism rates for ELs (CA) and Overall English Language Proficiency Progress

Model	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	Significance	Correlation	R Square	Model Significance
1 Constant	-75.394		.225		.281	.014
CA	-.022	-.015	.955	-0.15		
SC	7.094	.557	.038	.577		

As reflected in Table 12, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs and overall school culture explained 28.1% of the variation in overall ELP progress. The model as a whole was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$); however, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs were not statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$); therefore, chronic

absenteeism is not a significant predictor with a very weak negative correlation ($r = -0.15$). This means that the lower the chronic absenteeism rates for ELs and the higher the school culture ratings, the higher the ELP progress, and the researcher rejected the null hypothesis.

H₁₀: There is no significant interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

H₁₁: There is a significant interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP Progress rates based on the WIDA ACCESS test.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and overall ELP progress, as well as the relationship between chronic absenteeism rates for ELs and domains of school culture based on Virginia's Framework of Cultural Competency. The overarching research question was: *What is the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress?* Supporting research questions were as follows:

- 1) What is the relationship between school culture and ELP progress?
- 2) What is the relationship between the four domains of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency (learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection) and ELP progress?
- 3) What is the relationship between school culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs?
- 4) What is the relationship among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress?

After analyzing data from this study, the researcher determined that school culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs significantly impact English language proficiency progress. Chapter Five provides a summary and discussion of the findings, implications of the findings, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The study aimed to examine the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress, as well as the four domains of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency. The researcher examined the main research question and the four supporting research questions, which addressed components of school culture that may impact English language proficiency progress. The overarching research question was: *What is the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress?*

Supporting questions were as follows:

- 1) What is the relationship between school culture and ELP progress?
- 2) What is the relationship between the four domains of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency (learning environment, pedagogy and practice, community engagement, and self-reflection) and ELP progress?
- 3) What is the relationship between school culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs?
- 4) What is the relationship among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress?

The study exemplified that school culture, the domains of school culture, and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs impact English language proficiency progress. Additionally, the four domains of cultural competency--self-reflection, pedagogy and practices, learning environments, and community engagement--also influenced ELP progress. Therefore, the data analysis determined that higher school culture ratings and lower chronic absenteeism rates for ELs yield higher ELP progress.

Summary of Findings

The primary study findings were highlighted after conducting individual single linear regressions and multiple regression analyses to examine the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and ELP progress.

Finding 1

School culture significantly impacted overall ELP progress. School culture had a positive statistically significant relationship with ELP progress ($p = .003$; $p < 0.05$), and the greatest positive correlation of this study ($r = .588$) is presented in Table 6. Therefore, as school culture survey ratings increased, ELP progress increased. In middle schools within a suburban division of Virginia, school culture ratings in grades 6-8 strongly correlate to the English language proficiency progress rates.

According to Bayar and Karaduman (2021), school culture is essential to academic performance and student motivation. School culture catalyzes student outcomes through values, norms, and beliefs within any building (Demiroz, 2020; Susilo et al., 2018). A positive school culture leads to students making an earnest effort to make progress, while an ineffective culture results in a lack of motivation and lackluster performance from both teachers and students (Amtu et al., 2020; Bayar & Karaduman, 2021; Nehez & Blossing, 2022; Susilo et al., 2018).

Finding 2

Pedagogy and practice significantly impacted overall ELP progress, and there is a stronger positive correlation between the pedagogy and practice domains of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency and ELP progress than the other domains. Cultural competence in Virginia is broken down into four domains: self-reflection, pedagogy and practice, learning environments, and community engagement. While all four domains had a

statistically significant relationship with ELP progress ($p = .003$; $p < 0.05$), pedagogy and practice had the strongest correlation ($r = .585$) to ELP progress presented in Table 8. Self-reflection, learning environments, and community engagement also had a moderate positive correlation, represented in Tables 7, 9, and 10. In middle schools within a suburban division of Virginia, pedagogy and practice in grades 6-8 have a stronger positive correlation to the English language proficiency progress rates compared to self-reflection, learning environments, and community engagement. Therefore, when pedagogy and practice ratings increased, ELP progress increased.

As accountability continues to be the focus of education, effective building leaders emphasize pedagogy and instructional leadership practices (Huong, 2020; Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019). Similarly, school outcomes and school cultures strongly correlate when the emphasis is placed on teaching and learning (Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves, 1995; Narayan, 2016; Ryu et al., 2022). Furthermore, Huong (2020) and Thapa et al. (2013) explained how the pedagogy and practice process directly connect to the school's aim, behaviors, culture, climate, and expectations that influence cultural relationships. VDOE (2021) confirms that establishing a classroom and school culture that respects and values all dimensions of diversity is one way to create a culturally competent environment.

Finding 3

Self-reflection significantly impacted overall ELP progress. Self-reflection had a statistically significant relationship with ELP progress ($p = .005$; $p < 0.05$), as presented in Table 9. The self-reflection domain of school culture has a moderate positive correlation ($r = .569$) to ELP progress. Therefore, if school leaders increase the opportunities for students and teachers to

reflect on their experiences related to diversity and awareness, then ELP progress should increase.

According to Fullan (2008) and Vito (2020), school leaders who focus on improvement should be aware of the school's condition when creating the school's vision. Continuously reflecting on beliefs, behaviors, lived experiences, and practices and how they impact decision-making is imperative when cultivating a school culture that encourages self-reflection (VDOE, 2021). Findings from this study confirm the "importance of continually examining personal experiences, the influence of diversity, and how influences manifest themselves in lived experiences" (VDOE, 2021, p. 6).

Finding 4

Learning environments significantly impacted overall ELP progress. As presented in Table 7, learning environments had a positive statistically significant relationship with ELP progress ($p = .007$; $p < 0.05$). The correlation ($r = .548$) between the learning environments domain and ELP progress was moderate. According to VDOE (2021), school leaders should emphasize creating a culture that fosters inclusive opportunities for all learning environments.

According to Thapa et al. (2013), school leaders must foster well-established and communicated expectations and systems to create a positive learning environment. Creating safe learning environments that affirm all cultures and every dimension of diversity is being respected while all students are held to high expectations (VDOE, 2021). Despite numerous efforts to provide professional development to educators about embracing diversity and other cultures, Rogers-Sirin and Sirin (2009) confirm that students still have negative teacher-student encounters, which can have a negative impact on student progress. Lastly, Yough et al. (2023)

stated that ELs might not perceive their school environment as positively as their non-EL peers, which may impact progress.

Finding 5

Community engagement significantly impacted overall ELP progress. Based on Table 8, the correlation between community engagement and ELP progress was moderate ($r=.463$). Despite community engagement being the lowest correlation of the Virginia Framework for Cultural Competency domains with ELP progress, there was still a statistically significant relationship with ELP progress ($p =.026$; $p < 0.05$).

According to Leithwood (2021) and Mutch and Collins (2012), schools are an integral part of the community. The partnership between school and community can impact student outcomes during and after school and benefit the community (Gross et al., 2015). Therefore, the connection between the schools, parents, students, and other agencies within the community can work together to provide opportunities for students with differing interests and skills (Mutch & Collins, 2012; VDOE, 2021). The external community benefits school leaders' vision and commitment to working with parents, making connections, sharing responsibilities, and advancing the well-being of all students (ERO, 2008a; Mutch & Collins, 2012; Willems & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2012). Therefore, VDOE (2021) emphasized extending relationships beyond the classroom to create authentic stakeholder engagement opportunities grounded in “affirmation, mutual respect, and validation” (p. 7).

Finding 6

School culture significantly impacts chronic absenteeism rates for ELs. As presented in Table 11, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs had a positive statistically significant relationship with school culture ($p = <.001$; $p < 0.05$). Therefore, as chronic absenteeism rates for ELs

increased, ELP progress decreased. In middle schools within a suburban division of Virginia, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs in grades 6-8 have a strong negative correlation ($r = -.717$) to the English language proficiency progress rates.

According to VDOE (2022a), student academic performance is significantly impacted by chronic absenteeism due to missed instructional time. Similarly, school culture is associated with absenteeism, which dispels chronic absenteeism being related solely to the home environment (Pogodzinski & Lenhoff, 2017).

Finding 7

School culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs significantly impact ELP progress.

School culture and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs had a positive statistically significant relationship with ELP progress, which is presented in Table 12. Therefore, in middle schools within a suburban division of Virginia, school culture ($r = .557$) has a moderately strong correlation, and chronic absenteeism rates for ELs ($r = -0.15$) in grades 6-8 have a very weak negative correlation to the English language proficiency progress rates. Therefore, for every percentage point increase in ELP progress, there is a 0.15 decrease in chronic absenteeism rates and a .557 increase in the school culture ratings.

Key researchers emphasized that ELs are less likely to perceive their school's culture positively than their non-EL peers. According to Garrett et al. (2019), when ELs acquire their ELP, school culture positively affects the listening component when learning the English language. However, students must also feel safe and respected in their learning environment.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings from this research study, there are three implications for school leaders' practice. These include professional development for building a positive school culture,

collaboration to determine causes of chronic absenteeism for ELs, and using data to adopt or adapt attendance policies that may increase attendance rates for ELs.

Implication 1

School divisions should provide professional development for school leaders related to building a positive school culture. Due to the strong positive correlation between school culture and ELP progress and the significant impact, school leaders should emphasize the importance of creating a positive school culture for all students and building positive relationships with stakeholders. Teaching and learning are essential components of a school's culture. Therefore, teachers and staff need access to high-quality, job-embedded professional learning opportunities to build capacity. Lastly, principals should ensure ELs have access to culturally competent teachers and staff to increase academic outcomes. This implication was associated with Finding 1, Finding 2, Finding 3, Finding 4, and Finding 5.

Implication 2

School divisions should collaborate with school improvement teams to complete a comprehensive needs assessment to determine the root causes of chronic absenteeism rates for ELs in grades 6-8. Based on the weak negative correlation between chronic absenteeism rates for ELs and school culture and the significant impact, school leaders should take a closer look at the data and story behind the data to create an action plan to increase cultural competence and decrease chronic absenteeism rates. Due to the limited research specific to ELs, school divisions must identify how school culture impacts attendance; student progress is impacted when students miss instructional time. This implication was associated with Finding 6 and Finding 7.

Implication 3

School divisions should adopt or adapt attendance plans to include the Virginia

Framework for Cultural Competency domains for any chronically absent ELs. Due to the weak negative correlations related to ELP progress and the statistical significance and moderate, strong correlations between school culture and ELP progress, school and division leaders must create interventions to lower chronic absenteeism rates for ELs and increase the school culture rating of every EL. For divisions with attendance plans or policies in place, school leaders should reflect on the current practices and modify them based on needs. This implication was associated with Finding 1, Finding 2, Finding 3, Finding 4, Finding 5, Finding 6 and Finding 7.

Implications for Policy

This study examined the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism rates for ELs, and overall ELP progress. Policymakers increasingly hold school leaders accountable for students' academic success and well-being. Over time, school leaders have been tasked with more than managing finances, maintaining a safe and orderly building, or ensuring buses arrive on time. Despite the additional demands, school leaders have the greatest impact on school culture and the systems in place to create the cultures within a school. However, effective principals are linked to a positive school culture and are essential to schools functioning well (Engels et al., 2008; Narayan, 2016; Tienken & Mullen, 2022).

Implication 1

Policymakers should provide division leaders with professional development related to effectively implementing the Professional Standards for Educational Leadership and the importance of creating a positive school culture.

With the understanding that every principal preparation program is different based on its curriculum, requirements, mandates, and needs, we must understand how to prepare prospective educational leaders (Tienken & Mullen, 2022). PSEL (2015) consists of 10 domains that work together to yield better outcomes for each student's academic and personal success. Despite the variation in principal preparation programs, policymakers should ensure that principal evaluators are equipped with the skills necessary to determine whether building leaders are meeting the standards. In the event that they are not, training on how to support them is necessary. Professional development that will yield effective division and school leaders will result in better student outcomes.

Implications for Future Research

This study examined the interaction among school culture, chronic absenteeism, and overall ELP progress. It was limited to middle schools from one suburban school division in Virginia and could be expanded or altered to better inform others of practices that improve English language proficiency.

1. Due to the small sample size, future studies should consider expanding this quantitative study to grades 6-8 in a Virginia region, grades 9-12, or K-12 in the current school division to increase the sample size. Expanding this study would capture the impact of school culture and chronic absenteeism for ELs on ELP progress on a larger scale.
2. Future research should also consider only utilizing school culture ratings from ELs within the school division. The current study included school culture ratings for ELs and non-ELs; controlling the study for ELs only will better inform how school culture impacts chronic absenteeism and ELP progress.

3. The study could focus on graduation rates for secondary ELs (grades 6-12) who have attended a Virginia school all six years rather than in addition to ELP progress.
4. Future research could be qualitative or a mixed method to identify effective principal practices utilized to create positive school cultures and the impact on student outcomes.

Summary of Findings and Implications

The data for the Virginia middle schools included in this quantitative study yielded seven findings, three implications for practice and one implication for policy. School culture ratings, chronic absenteeism rates, and ELP progress were analyzed to determine the statistical significance. Findings from this study indicated that a school's culture significantly impacts both chronic absenteeism rates for ELs and ELP progress. Based on the findings, the researcher determined that the negative correlations involving chronic absenteeism rates were due to the variables units. As the chronic absenteeism rates increased, ELP progress decreased. This supports decades of research that if students are not attending school, their academic performance is significantly impacted. Therefore, despite the negative correlations, ELP progress increases as chronic absenteeism rates decrease (Pogodzinski & Lenhoff, 2017; VDOE, 2022a).

The findings of this study also have practical implications for school leaders. School divisions can use the findings from this study to determine where to focus professional development and emphasize the importance of creating and maintaining a positive school culture. Based on the seven findings, school improvement efforts should focus on current and future school leaders' emphasis on the importance of school culture and the its impact on ELs attending school and making academic progress. The implication for policy related to the literature also highlighted the importance of professional development for the division leaders responsible for evaluating and coaching school leaders, emphasizing the importance of school

culture and student outcomes is imperative to student progress. The implications for future research would expand the field's understanding of the relationship between school culture and other potential variables that impact student outcomes and potentially inform practices that could positively impact a broader scope of PK-12 education.

Conclusion

Literature regarding the relationship between school culture and student achievement has been studied for decades; this study confirmed that school culture also plays a significant role in English learners acquiring English language proficiency. This research emphasizes the need for school and division leaders to focus on the complex transformational change needed to improve school culture. In the post-COVID educational setting, this research can inform where divisions can shift their focus to create a culture of school improvement. The researcher plans to share this research with current and future secondary leaders to encourage potential influences on ELs meeting Virginia's rising long-term ELP Progress targets.

Researcher's Reflection

Reflecting on my professional experiences and personal background while conducting this quantitative research, I continued asking myself why I chose this topic. Starting as an accounting major, I realized my passion was kids. I was unsure in what capacity, but I knew I wanted to make a difference in children's lives. Starting with a provisional license, I jumped right in. As a December graduate, the division hired me as a "remediation teacher" for the remainder of the school year, meaning I taught the eighth-grade students who struggled in their scheduled math class. I finished that year strong and taught summer school. However, I felt unprepared to teach my first sixth-grade math class, I was the only math teacher and had yet to learn what a professional learning community (PLC) was. I spent most days and nights figuring

out how to get my students to understand each standard conceptually. I spent countless hours contemplating which lesson was better and working through the days I felt was unsuccessful—realizing I was not sure what success looked like and unclear of how to monitor my success.

After slowly figuring things out, I realized my rosters based on the master schedule included students who experienced very little success in the math classes—students who felt defeated and did not believe in themselves. To my surprise, at the end of the year, only four of my ten students passed their first standardized math test. While I was not pleased with the results, I received praise for my ability to get students who were failing below basic to experience success. Those students went on to continue to experience educational successes. As my career continued, I noticed my niche was planning lessons for students who needed more confidence in themselves and experienced little success. By my sixth year, I only taught students with disabilities or English learners. Due to this, I received several opportunities for professional development and realized that when using data to inform my instructional decisions, my students experienced success. By my seventh year, I was teaching all ELs. The students were making progress, and the teachers felt equipped to support one another and meet each student where they were. Then I realized I wanted to work at a school that felt like a family. I wanted to do everything to ensure my students success and support my teammates when they need it. As a classroom teacher, I was unsure of what was happening, but I knew I loved my job and my students. I was willing to do whatever was required of me. Over time, I realized the school's culture was one team, one dream, and we lived it daily.

Continuing my career and moving out of the classroom, I saw that despite the overall school's culture, there were several subcultures within the school. Each department had its own culture, each PLC had its own culture, and each grade level team had its own culture. As one of

the school-level instructional leaders, I was tasked with navigating each culture and ensuring that each subset of the school was progressing. As my career continued from school-level to division-level leadership, I shifted to supporting principals and other school leaders. While my lens adjusted, and the scope of my school improvement work expanded, the root cause of the challenges that varied from school to school and principal to principal remained the same. Principals who struggled to get teachers to attend professional development or staff meetings had issues with the school culture. Schools where the African American and Hispanic students were chronically absent had school culture issues.

As I continued working with schools being monitored by VDOE and performing individual comprehensive needs assessments, it was evident that each school had issues with its culture of school improvement. Due to the complexity of school cultures, there were very few quick wins; principal and division leaders were hesitant and, in some instances, helpless when attempting to scale back the transactional changes. Effective leaders had the capacity to mitigate changes based on the many facets of their school's culture without impacting student outcomes. Ineffective leaders or leaders who take over a school with challenges were supported through the school improvement process. Still, school and division leaders often needed guidance determining an entry point. However, this quantitative study provides current and future school and division leaders with the necessary data to create a positive culture of school improvement. The keywords from this study captured my passion, and I hope students will benefit from the findings and implications of this study.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval



**Division of Scholarly Integrity and
 Research Compliance**
 Institutional Review Board
 North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
 300 Turner Street NW
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
 540/231-3732
 irb@vt.edu
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 20, 2023
TO: Charles L Lowery
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE: L. Bradley - School Culture, Attendance and ELP Progress
IRB NUMBER: 23-1303

Based on the submitted project description and items listed in the Special Instructions section found on Page 2, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) has determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by HHS and FDA regulations.

Further review and approval by the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) is not required because this is not human research. This determination applies only to the activities described in the submitted project description and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made you must immediately submit an Amendment to the HRPP for a new determination. Your amendment must include a description of the changes and you must upload all revised documents. At that time, the HRPP will review the submission activities to confirm the original "Not Human Subjects Research" decision or to advise if a new application must be made.

If there are additional undisclosed components that you feel merit a change in this initial determination, please contact our office for a consultation.

Please be aware that receiving a "Not Human Subjects Research" Determination is not the same as IRB review and approval of the activity. You are NOT to use IRB consent forms or templates for these activities. If you have any questions, please contact the Virginia Tech HRPP office at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu.

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Not Human Subjects Research**
 Protocol Determination Date: **December 20, 2023**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

Appendix B

CITI Program Certificate



Completion Date 11-Sep-2021
 Expiration Date 10-Sep-2024
 Record ID 44907514

This is to certify that:

LaShel Bradley

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Social & Behavioral Research

(Curriculum Group)

Social & Behavioral Research

(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)

CITI

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w566939b9-1002-4367-ba8b-349d0ec93cfc-44907514