PERCEPTIONS OF ADOLESCENTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS: A
DESCRIPTIVE EXPLORATION OF SELECT HIGH SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

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This study examined the perceptions of adolescents from three relatively small school districts
with regard to what they have to say about their relationships with teachers within their schools.
The primary research interest was to explore the way students describe their relationships with
teachers in public high schools.

This descriptive, qualitative study was guided by the themes of naturalistic inquiry. The
primary method of obtaining information was the on-line, open-ended survey, utilized to access
the perspective of each student. The raw data was down loaded and later organized into major
and minor themes.

The results of this study showed that sixteen year olds perceive that the relationship they
have with a teacher does directly impact their academic success and overall learning. While all
students surveyed perceived that a positive connection with a teacher does promote their desire
to learn, there was a significant number that also took ownership for their learning.

This study offers the voice of the student as a contributing factor in ways to not leave any
child behind, and concludes with recommendations for: superintendents, principals and teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

I. CHAPTER 1

A. INTRODUCTION

Each year as the summer holidays for students are winding down, I sit in my small, muggy high school office working on conflicts with individual student's schedules. This never-ending task of making sure that each student has an accurate schedule consumes a large part of my summer. Just when I feel that the entire school's schedules are set, I begin to receive phone calls and walk-ins from students requesting a change in their schedule because they want certain teachers. The question at this moment is, "What is the underlying reason for these students' requests?"

Even as I ask this question, I know there can be multiple reasons for the request, however these teenagers have a perception that they want to learn from certain teachers. Why do they want a specific teacher? Does this have anything to do with the type of relationships these requested teachers form with their students?

As a researcher and educator, I feel drawn to explore this dilemma from the student's perspective about their experiences and perceptions about teachers in the classroom. I believe this active encounter with a student is what Van Manen (1991) calls, "a pedagogical moment." From an etymological point of view, a pedagogue is a woman who stands in a caring relation to children and takes their hand. Is it a caring relationship within the classroom that the students are seeking?

According to Van Manen (1991), reflecting on the life contexts of teenagers and understanding what they value and need may help us to increase our pedagogical thoughtfulness and increase the likelihood of educators demonstrating appropriate pedagogical understanding in their everyday interaction with teenagers.

Within the book *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, et al., 1997), the women interviewed praised teachers that showed them they cared. They equated this type of teacher to a midwife who helped them draw out their ideas and give birth to their own understanding (Belenky, et al, 1997).

Another well know educator, Noddings (1992) proposes a model of education based on the notion of caring: for self, for strangers and distant others, for the human-made world, and for ideas. Noddings argues that in order to engage students in school in productive ways, and to help them develop into caring, moral adults, educators need to engage students in caring relations within schools.

Historically, the purpose of public high schools was to instruct students to learn enough to make them peaceable good citizens and help them form habits of subordination. (Rothbard, 1974). This task alone has become monumental when one realizes that there are today in our country 92,000 public high schools within 15,000 districts (Borosage, 2004). An alarm sounded in the mid-1980s. A rising tide of mediocrity was threatening public schools – a tide that ultimately could dim the nation's economic prospects and shake the foundation of democracy (Linn, 2001).

Four years ago, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This landmark reform plan contains the most sweeping changes to public education since 1965. This new legislation calls for stronger accountability for student achievement,

increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and concentrating resources on proven education methods. However, there are some educators that believe that a core component has been left out of this law and that is ensuring that students feel a sense of community in a caring learning environment (Baumeister, 1996; Brooks, 1990; Comer, 1988; Cotton,1996). Ericson (2002) also feels that the policy makers might well improve the quality of teachers, enforce standardized test to rate and reward individual schools, revise the teacher education programs at universities and still totally fail in achieving anything close to educational excellence in our schools. The reason may be that there is an absence of rational student interaction with the educational system. Students are the statistics but are not often asked to be key contributors to the solution around educational reform.

Nel Noddings (1992), in his *book The Challenge to Care in Schools: An alternative approach to education,* reinforces what the students need in school; a sense of belonging, connection, and engagement in the learning. It is obvious that children will work harder and do things—even odd things like completing homework—for people they care about and trust. The premise is that relationships are an important component to moving our educational system forward.

About two years ago, while I was helping students deal with the death of one of their peers, a colleague gave me information about the "40 Developmental Assets". I read through the information given to me and thought, "ok this is common sense; of course kids need boundaries, support, and a sense of empowerment and constructive use of their time." Six months later, a new parent to the school district invited me to attend a parent meeting at the local private academy. The presenter once again reviewed the assets and the importance of all students acquiring as many of the "40 Developmental Assets" as possible. As I sat and listened to

additional information about these assets, I learned that the Search Institute in Minneapolis, Minnosota had gathered data through an extensive scientific research project and identified forty developmental assets as necessary components for the healthy development of an adolescent. One month later, I was invited to a presentation at the local YMCA to hear once again about the "40 Developmental Assets". The YMCA International has adopted and endorses the nurturing of these assets to help create healthy communities. I was drawn to this framework as a possible answer to why my students request certain teachers.

Six months later I was asked to head a Community Drug Task Force Team for the eleven municipalities surrounding my school district. This group formed a focus group which decided to administer the survey produced by the Search Institute to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our youth in regard to the "40 Developmental Assets". Through the help of Drug Free School Money and Government Agencies, the community acquired enough money to survey all the students from the local public, private and parochial schools in grades 6th -11th on the 40 Developmental Assets.

The result of this focus group sent me back to the literature, and I discovered that the national research gathered from the Search Institute (Scales, Benson, & Leffert 1999) clearly identifies the need for more positive adult relationships in a teenager's life as a key component to reduce use of alcohol, decrease violence and increase academic performance. The national study revealed that a key area that stands out is the lack of adult role models to help them sort out their questions.

As I continued my research, I discovered articles written by James P. Comer M.D., another person who has studied relationships from the student's perspective. Comer feels strongly that adults must understand and nurture the way students develop and learn (Comer,

2001). The more the educator understands the development of youth, the better chance youth have of achieving academically. The cry for more emotionally meaningful, influential adults continues to increase as teenagers witness a wide variety of negative role models on TV and in their personal life (Aronson, 2001). The perception of teenagers Dr. Comer has interviewed believe that adults do not care about them (Comer, 1988). Most of the work in the Yale's School Development Program (Comer, 2001) focuses on younger children and the six developmental pathways a child must travel to become a healthy adult; physical, cognitive, psychological, language, social, and ethical. However, the program has just begun to study the complex nature of teenagers in more depth, which is my area of interest.

Understanding the developmental stages of teenagers appears to be a common theme found in studies that refer to student/adult relationships. The ground-breaking report published in 1989 titled "Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century" was based on 12 years of research and it argued that adolescents have the potential for high level thinking however are at risk of not reaching their growth potential if their developmental needs are ignored.

A recent High School Issue paper published by Temple University (Whitman, 2003), with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, infers that the challenge is to build on the desire that young people have to engage with adults who care about their future. Teachers who engage students in learning through a reciprocally respectful relationship are able to create a climate of trust and caring (Whitman, 2003). The organization *Youth United for Change in Philadelphia* (Whitman, 2003) creates teacher-student alliances at its high schools to initiate conversations between teachers and students.

Even the American School Board Journal's cover story from September 1999 focused on the issue of humanizing America's high schools. Linda Darlington-Hammond, professor of education at Stanford University, argued "many well-known adolescent difficulties are not intrinsic to the teenage years but are related to the mismatch between adolescents' developmental needs and the kinds of experiences most high schools provide. When students need close affiliation, they experience large depersonalized schools…." Another noted researcher, Deborah Meier (1996), who wrote the book *The Company They Keep,* agrees with the concerns of depersonalized high schools. She believes that high schools are atypical institutions designed as though intended to push adolescents to the edge of their sanity. Meier agrees with the premise that we need to consider what it's really like, from the student's point of view, to spend three or four years in a typical high school.

At this point in my reading, I began to determine the purpose of this study. This qualitative study will survey the youth's perspective as to how they perceive their relationship with teachers in their learning environment. The results will attempt to uncover some key topics to help educators understand what essential components may lead to teenagers' success. As educators continue to identify ways to create more positive learning environments, this research study may add an additional insight from the student's perspective in regard to building more positive student/teacher relationships. The information gathered from this study may help educators come to a better way of "knowing" what teenagers perceive as important in building relationships within the learning environment.

B. Statement of the Problem

No Child Left Behind leaves out the opportunity for rational student interaction with the educational system. The focus on academic performance decreases the opportunity for teenagers to have caring relationships with teachers. This study will examine the perceptions of adolescents in regard to their relationships with teachers in high schools.

C. Research Questions

1. In what ways does research support the need for positive student/teacher relationships in high schools? (Chapter II)

2. In what ways do student relationships with teachers' impact student learning?

3. What are the characteristics of teachers who have positive relationships with their students?

4. In what ways does the environment of the classroom impact student/teacher relationships?

II. CHAPTER 2

A. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Introduction

Adult relationships formed within an adolescent's developmental years have been credited as one of the most effective ways to build healthy, productive young adults. (Comer, 2001; Scales, 1999; Noddings, 2003; Goleman, 1998; Sizer, 1999; Whitman, 2003, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development -Turning Points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century, 1989). It is not surprising then, that efforts to isolate and describe what is necessary for relationships to develop have intensified since high schools have come under such scrutiny (Aronson, 2000;Chomsky,2000; Meier,2003). According to many educators and researchers, the development of healthy student/ adult relationships is directly related to the culture and climate of the school community (Lantieri, 2001; Noddings, 1992; Palmer, 1998; Resnick, 1995; Senge, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1992). However, numerous writers have responded to research gathered about youth but not necessarily from the youth's perspective.

The question arises as to what do today's adolescents have to say about their relationships with teachers in the public high school. According to the most comprehensive study to date (Scales, Benson, Leffert, 2002), the Search Institute released the results on adult-youth relationships in their report: *Grading Grown-ups 2002: How Do American Kids and Adults Relate*? and found that adults are not doing what they should. Dr. Peter Benson, co-author of the

study and president of Search Institute, a research and social action organization dedicated to the healthy development of youth, believes that the common detrimental thought in our culture is that people are to take care of themselves and mind their own business. However, his research indicates that our youth need a network of caring adults, in addition to their parents (Scales, 1990).

Another researcher from Yale University, Dr. Peter Comer(1988) notes that the single greatest complaint of students in school is that "The adults don't care!" This sense of alienation could undermine achievement in school for decades to come (Hersch, 1999). Patricia Hersch (1999), in her book *A Tribe Apart* takes the reader into the heart of American adolescent. She believes that part of the solution to the decline of the high school is for adults to begin to listen to the kids and bring adult wisdom to the discussion (Hersch, 1999).

2. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the way students describe their relationships with teachers in public high schools.

3. History of High Schools and Their Purpose

Prior to1900, only ten percent of the population stayed in school long enough to earn high school status. These students were the elite that ran the country and its major institutions (Toch, 2003). In 1635, the first public high school in the United States was founded in Boston, Massachusetts and its curriculum focused on Latin. Later, around 1751, Benjamin Franklin helped establish the American Academy to help meet the needs of more skilled workers (Holton, 1969; Thattai, D., 2001).

Further, in 1789, the state of Massachusetts mandated statewide public schools. The Calvinist Puritan population of Massachusetts Bay saw compulsory education as the best avenue

to indoctrinate the children with their religious beliefs and to stifle public dissent. The state determined the curricula, certified teachers eligible to follow the curricula, and made it illegal for a child not to attend. The history of other New England colonies is similar to that of Massachusetts (Rothbard, 1974).

The southern state of North Carolina founded its public school system on the similar New England ideals of obedience to the government. In 1816, Douglas Murphey, the judge and financier of North Carolina's government-funded public school system, believed that schools were the place where children would form habits of subordination and obedience (Rothbard, 1974). According to Murray Rothbard (1974), socialists Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen were among the most prominent sources of ideological support for compulsory public education in the 1830's. They sought "national, rational, republican education, free for all and at the expense of all, conducted under the guardianship of the state, and for the honor, the happiness, the virtue, the salvation of the state" (Rothbard, 1974).

There were many that believed that to reshape immigrants into "Americans" would require a total government monopoly on education. James Carter, a social engineer, in 1826 believed that the population that could not read must be enticed to learn. If they are not motivated to learn the current government must enforce education to help create good citizens (Rothbard, 1978).

The Secretary of the Board of Education for Massachusetts in 1827 was a man named Horace Mann. He saw children as malleable who could be educated and taught to respond as deserving citizens who would fight to defend the new democracy in this new world. According to Glenn (1977), the 19th century common school was so significant because without a national church, a monarchy, other warring countries, there seemed little for the new colonies to identify

themselves.   Horace Mann believed that public school education could expunge crime, social divisions, and creates a strong democracy (Glenn, 1977).

John Dewey, a key educational leader during the early 1900's, endorsed a new idea referred to as comprehensive high schools. He convinced public educators to expand the elite curriculum in existence and to use the public high school curriculum as a vehicle to help American life and culture become more democratic. Dewey was a member of the *Progressive Movement* and they were responding to the increase in teenage level immigrants who could not handle the current level of academics (Toch, 2003).

The period between 1880 and 1920 saw the student population multiply 20 times (Holton, 1969). There was such an increase in attendance in high schools that this phenomenon was noted as one of the most significant developments in Education during the 20th century (Holton, 1969;Thattai, D, 2001).

In 1918, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education publicized a report entitled the "Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education" (Toch, 2003; Holton, 1969). The clear message in the report stated: Education in a democracy…should develop in each student the knowledge, interests, ideals, habits and powers whereby he will find the right career for himself and use his position to shape both himself and society toward a better world (Commission, 1918). The results of this report increased the high school course offerings from 40 to 274 different subjects. However, only 59 of the 274 reported courses involved traditional academic disciplines.

Twenty years after the report, fifty percent of the nation's students were now attending high school. This rapid increase of students and curriculum required a system to manage the numbers in an efficient way. From 1900 to 1996, the percentage of teenagers who graduated

from high school increased from roughly 6 percent to 85 percent (Thattai, 2001). The result of these increases caused high schools to become a type of sorting machine; tracking students according to their intellect and goals (Toch, 2003).

One of the many events that led to the increase in high schools students was the compulsory age requirement of 16. America became the first country to mandate and support 12 years of formal schooling. Other events that impacted the public high school during the 20th century were: the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, and the civil rights movement (Thattai, 2001). All the events mentioned helped forge the broad middle class that is the hallmark of America's democracy and prosperity (Borosage, 2004). Our nation's industrial economy influenced educators' ideas to use the industrial principle of mass production as a way to handle the huge increase in the high school population (Toch, 2003).

In 1959, James B. Conant, a former Harvard University president, wrote a very influential book, *The American High School Today.* The underlying message was that only comprehensive schools with a large enrollment could reduce the cost of educating our children and meet all of their educational needs. This concept was the impetus to consolidate the nation's schools. Accordingly, beginning in the early 1970's, states mandated the merger of smaller high schools. The majority of today's nine through twelfth graders attend high schools of at least one thousand students.

This new "comprehensive" type of high school was created at the beginning of the twentieth century to meet the needs of a specific population that does not exist today. The purpose of high schools during the 19th and 20th century were to meet the needs of the large number of immigrants to the United States and teach them English and the key components of a

democratic system (Toch, 2003). However, Thomas Toch (2003) in his book *High Schools on a Human Scale* reports that our current high schools are not much different than a century ago.

As the United States begins a new century, there are many more challenges to face within the public educational arena (Borosage, (2004). The most recent statistics reveal that there are 53 million students and 3 million teachers in 92,000 public schools (within 15,000 districts). This is a staggering number to manage, and as communication makes the world smaller, it is more vital to produce educated, independent-thinking citizens within our democracy (Borasage, 2004).

4. The Need for High Schools to be Smaller More Intimate Safe Learning Communities

At the beginning of the 21st century, new research emerged that revealed that the comprehensive high school was not meeting the needs of students nor society at large. There is a fundamental flaw in the comprehensive high school that makes it impossible to reach all the developmental needs of our teenagers (Toch, 2003). Unfortunately, the result is that many of our high school students feel alienated.

During the Industrial Era, using curriculum tracks with different standards worked well when the majority of jobs required workers to use their hands rather than their heads and paid them well (Holton, 1969). However, today our global economy requires all students to be prepared well enough for the majority of them to enter a post-secondary institution. The U.S Department of Commerce has found that students who earn a bachelors degree earn 61% more that a student with only a high school degree. Just ten years ago the gap was only 27% (Toch, 2003).

The "Democratic Spirit" established in the secondary public schools, inspired by Dewey and Conant, must now consider ways to educate students from diverse educational backgrounds with the high standards that were once reserved for only the "gifted" population. The obstacle is

the whole ingrained notion found in comprehensive high schools where the courses are fragmented and there is an absence of "focus". These large institutions tend to be cold impersonal places, where sustained relationships among teachers and students are rare (Noddings, 2003).

Theodore Sizer (1984) refers to the dilemma found in large high schools as a "conspiracy of the least." Since the large high schools create a sense of anonymity, this results in a feeling of alienation and apathy. Apathy is quickly followed by lack of motivation and an unconscious decision to put as little effort as possible into their work. The end result of our nation's large comprehensive public high schools is the belief, by many, that our teenagers cannot learn (Toch, 2003).

However, there are many educators that disagree with this belief that teenagers cannot learn and believe that large high schools are the cause of our failing public high schools (Gates, 2004). Our students today are not prepared academically to be successful in college, work and life because American high schools operate in much the same way as they did 50 years ago. The Gates Foundation (2004) is one of many foundations that want to see our education system change and improve. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation committed more than $31 million to develop a nationwide network of 168 alternative schools. These small pilot schools are producing more successful graduates.

The national leader in the effort to create more small schools is New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. He has vowed to create 200 small schools in three years using private money, including $58 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (NY Times, 2004). There is one small high school in New York City where half the students are poor and all have lived in the country less than four years, yet more than 90% of their students graduate and meet

the benchmarks set forth by the state. This kind of accomplishment reinforces the need for small high schools. At another high school, all students are members of the Air Force Junior R.O.T.C. and it is virtually impossible for the students to slip through the cracks. The principal is a retired Air Force captain, who gives parents her home number and attendance is 95% (NY Times, 2004). The principal is creating a bridge by sharing her phone number and building positive relationships.

The executive director of education for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Tom Vander Ark is backing this endeavor in an effort to reverse the trend that one-third of American students are not graduating from high school (Junto, 2004). According to research conducted by the Manhattan Institute, between the ninth and twelfth grades, more than 1 million students will choose to not return to school, without earning a diploma.

A Boston-based educational research and advocacy organization, titled Jobs for the Future, have shown that highly effective high schools foster relationships and are often smaller than traditional large comprehensive high schools (Junto, 2004). This study also suggests that initiatives like No Child Left Behind have actually begun to push thousands of young people out of school and often into the juvenile justice system.

Schools that are considered high achieving realize the importance of student-teacher relationships based on care and mutual respect. One of the main goals of the Federal and state government is to increase high school students' achievement; there is emerging research that suggest that this can be accomplished by reducing their size and developing a sense of community (Brandt, 2003; Johnson, et al., 2002; McRobbie, 2001; Moller, 1998; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1996; Scales, 2002; Senge, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2000; Sparks, 2003).

DuFour and Eaker, (1998) define a school's learning community, as a setting that encourages group cooperation, individual development, and emotional support, as everyone works together to achieve what cannot be accomplished alone. It is imperative that students view their environment as a supportive community if they are to find meaning in their lives. A growing body of research, and basic common sense, reveals that adults play an important role in the development of youth (Scales, 2002). All young people need nurturing and supportive relationships both within and outside of their families. This idea of a need for adult mentors supports the work of Ron Brandt (2003), Gayle Moller (1998), Peter Senge (2000), Peter Scales (2002), Thomas Sergiovanni (2000), and Michael Fullan Sparks (2003), who all indicate that a sense of community within a small school is paramount to a student's success.

Additional research and experience suggest that small schools can provide an opportunity for staff and students to focus more intensively on instruction and to build deeper relationships with one another (Cotton, 2001; Fine, 1998; Raywid, 1996). This idea of a positive learning community suggests a kind of connectedness that is found in a small supportive family structure (Sapon-Shevin, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1992; Comer, 2001).

According to Kathleen Cotton (2001), small schools with a maximum of 400 students increase the likelihood of a student successfully graduating from college. Research conducted over the past 15 years has demonstrated convincingly that, under the right conditions, small high schools are either equal or superior to large schools on every important measure. The large comprehensive high school is proving to be a dead end for an increasing number of economically deprived students where introductory courses seem to be the norm and the higher-level math courses are out of the question (Toch, 2003).

There was another report conducted in Chicago that was based on a study of small schools (350 students or fewer), which found that students in these schools had lower dropout rates, completed more courses, and made higher grades. In addition, parents, teachers, students and community members alike were more satisfied with their schools (Nathan & Febey, 2001). According to research conducted by Joe Nathan and Karen Febey (2001), positive effects of small schools on student performance has been confirmed. Smaller schools produce higher student achievement, higher graduation rates, a safer learning environment and greater satisfaction for families, students and teachers.

5. Understanding the General Developmental Needs of Teenagers

Teenager's basic developmental needs include: a need for close, supportive relationships (Resnick et al., 1997) and a sense of "belongingness" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Leading theoreticians and researchers (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci, et al., 1985; Maslow, 1954) contend that teenagers need a sense of autonomy, belonging, competence and safety. These are basic to human motivation and to what drives and shapes a teenagers' thinking, feelings and behavior. Unfortunately, research suggests that a sense of "belongingness" and community is not strong in many, if not most, public high schools (Battistich et al., 1995).

A team of researchers from the Education Alliance at Brown University shadowed students at seven high schools. They discovered six developmental needs that students have (Clarke & Frazer, 2003):

Voice – the need to express their personal perspective

Belonging – the need to create individual and group identities

Choice – the need to examine options and choose a path

Freedom – the need to take risks and assess effects

Imagination – the need to create a projected view of self

Success – the need to demonstrate mastery

In the book *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform (2004)*, encourages high schools to address these personalization efforts.

The Yale Child Study Center's School Development Program (2003) has been working with schools for the past thirty-two years and is just now working in the high school setting. This program admits that high school is difficult. This is when teens are "placing" themselves in the world and establishing their identity. The more positive role models teenagers encounter, the better chance they have of developing positive identities. Students want to feel welcome to ask questions or offer comments as caring teachers listen and respond differentially to their students (Noddings, 1992; Glasser, 1998; Pigford,2001).

Since human behavior is embedded in a social context (Anderson, 1990) and the need to develop a sense of social and psychological belonging is a major challenge for high school students, educators struggle with the time factor involved in building relationships. According to Glasser (1998), building a feeling of connectedness should be a central goal of all educators. Students will do their homework and pay attention in class for the teacher that has built a sense of belonging. The ability to respect the teacher truly comes as a result of the student feeling respected. When a young person feels the freedom to choose if they want to learn and feels secure in the sense that the teacher believes in them, the result is a positive relationship that stretches students to their maximum potential. The more often students' true needs are satisfied the harder they work as a student and for that teacher (Glasser, 1998).

A student who is at risk of not reaching his/her full developmental potential often struggles to form their identity and is especially in need of a caring relationship. Understanding

18

the developmental needs of a teenager is best explained by Peter Blos (1962, 1979) and Erik Erikson (1968) when they recognized adolescence as a major time in life in which identity development takes place. It is not enough simply to give students learning skills and set them loose: most young people especially if they are at risk, need continual encouragement and help in order to learn what they need for life in today's world. There is an on-going "interpretive dance" between finding meaning in one's life and finding one's identity (Greene, 1997). To understand how and what meanings are created through this process of human interaction requires interpretation and interpretive communities (Beck, 1993). For high school students, the high school institution is where they seek a sense of community and attempt to build relationships. Understanding that relationships are the most important dimension in the process of finding one's identity, (Capra, 1996) relationship building should be a key component when attempting to redefine the needs of our public high schools.

The Child Development Project (CDP) defines "sense of community" as the student's experience of being a valued, influential member of a group, committed to everyone's growth and welfare (Schaps, 1998). Although this project's research is directed toward elementary schools, the human needs are similar for an adolescent to develop their full potential. Research suggests that students' academic motivation, commitment to democratic values, and resistance to problem behaviors all depend upon their experience of the school as a community (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 1997).

For high schools to succeed in the 21st century, educators should strive to understand the individual needs of students and create small positive learning communities with adequate support. To accomplish this, successful educators will base everything they do on what is known about how children and youths develop and learn. (Stipek, 1996; Yair, 2000; Kessler, 2000;

19

Comer, 2001). The evidence is clear that strengthening a sense of community promotes school bonding, and is central to students' healthy development- ethically, socially, emotionally, and academically (Schaps & Battistich, 2002).

6. **Understanding Specific Developmental Assets and How They Impact a Teenager's Life**

The Search Institute of Minneapolis has identified 40 Developmental Assets that are building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up caring and responsible (Scales, Bensonn & Leffert, 1999). The Search Institute is a 40 year old, Minneapolis based, non-profit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to advance the well being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application. Since 1989, the institute has been conducting research grounded in the vast literature around adolescent development. The 40 assets are grouped into 8 categories representing broad domains of influence in young people's lives: (a) support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time are external assets (relationships and opportunities that adults provide) and (b) commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity are internal assets (competencies and values that youth develop internally that help them become self-regulating adults (Scales, 2002).

The framework of developmental assets pulls together many pieces of data into a comprehensive vision of what young people need to thrive (Scales, Benson & Leffert, 1999). The developmental assets are concrete, positive factors that contribute to healthy youth development. Over 1,000,000 6th-12th graders from public and/or alternative schools and from 213 U.S. towns and cities across the country have taken the Search Institute's Profiles of Student Life: Assessment. This specific research indicates that having 31 out of 40 assets "protects" kids from high-risk behaviors and equips them to become productive, academically successful, and

responsible citizens. By utilizing this type of student assessment to identify areas of strength and needs can reveal the areas of highest concern for teenagers.

Prevention research focuses on protective factors that inhibit high-risk behaviors, such as substance abuse, violence, and dropping out of school. Resiliency research identifies factors that increase young people's ability to rebound in the face of adversity and challenges. There are twenty-four high-risk behaviors and eight pro-social youth behaviors that can be identified in the asset's survey, anonymously assessing students' acknowledgement of the forty developmental assets. There are twenty external assets and twenty internal assets. Once areas of strength and need are identified, the data can mobilize a school and to provide more positive influences on the lives of students.

The asset framework is being used across the country in education, coaching, mentoring, community groups, classrooms, school strategic plans, parent education, and drug and alcohol prevention. It is a research based framework that can guide all programs and practices that contribute to creating a safe and caring environment for all students, while at the same time leaving room for creative implementation by teachers, given that anyone and everyone has the potential to build developmental assets in youth.

SUPPORT is the first of the eight categories of developmental assets. Price, Cioci, Penner, and Trautlein (1990) define support as the provision of material benefits (aid), feedback that strengthens identity (affirmation), and caring or nurturance (affect). Youth who feel supported have a sense of connectedness to people that value their thoughts and ideas. The first six asset names and definitions are:

1. Family Support - Family life provides high levels of love and support.

2. Positive Family Communication -Young person and her or his parent(s)

      communicate.

3. Other Adult Relationships -Young person receives support from three or more non-

      parent adults.

4. Caring Neighborhood - Young person experiences caring neighbors.

5. Caring School Climate - School provides a caring, encouraging environment.

6. Parent Involvement in Schooling - Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young

      person succeed in school.

Empowerment as the second category is the "experiences that make (youth) feel powerful" (Tate, 1991). Cardenas Ramirez (1992) believes that empowerment means that adults trust that "solutions to" young people's problems must be fashioned not for "them", but by them. Thus, adults empower youth when youth feel they have meaningful roles to play in their families, schools, and communities. There are few quantitative studies of youth empowerment (Zeldin and Price, 1995).

The next four assets relate to empowerment:

7. Community Values Youth - Young person perceives that adults in the community

      value youth.

8**.** Youth as Resources - Young people are given useful roles in the community.

9. Service to Others - Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.

10. Safety - Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.

Boundaries & Expectations is the category that explains the rules and regulations that address what young people can and cannot do and the consequences for breaking those rules in both the family and school contexts. The following six assets define this area:

11. Family Boundaries - Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.

12. School Boundaries - School provides clear rules and consequences.

13. Neighborhood Boundaries - Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.

14. Adult Role Models - Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.

15. Positive Peer Influence - Young person's best friend's model responsible behavior.

16. High Expectations - Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

Constructive Use of Time is the fourth asset category in the developmental asset framework, and the last category among the external assets. As early as 1979, educators suggested that healthy development must include a variety of constructive opportunities. The four following assets define this category:

17. Creative Activities - Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.

18. Youth Programs - Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.

19. Religious Community - Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.

20. Time at Home -Young person is out with "friends" with nothing special to do.

The **Commitment to Learning** is defined by Schunk (1995) as the academic "self-regulation" that includes motivational processes such as goal setting, believing that one has the

potential to learn, valuing learning, and finding pride in one's efforts**.** In the Search Institute's sample of nearly 100,000 6th through 12th graders studied in the 1996-1997 school year, a caring school climate had a correlation of .40 with school engagement. The more teenagers felt their school had a caring environment, the more they cared about their school and the more interest they showed toward their schoolwork and the more effort they put forth.

There are four assets under this category**:**

      21. Achievement Motivation – Young person is motivated to do well in school.

      22. School Engagement – Young person is actively engaged in learning.

      23. Homework – Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework daily

      24. Bonding to School – Young person cares about her or his school.

      25. Reading for Pleasure – Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per

          week.

      Positive Values as a category is defined by the dictionary as the "social principles, goals, or standards held or accepted by an individual, class, or society" (Newfeldt, 1988). Adolescents' values are molded by everything they are and do. When adults in young people's lives hold similar positive values, make these values known to the teenager, and methodically seek to promote them, they provide a solid guiding influence that aids youth navigate through their social worlds and internalize positive values (Scales, 1990). Under this category the six assets identified are:

      26. Caring –Young person places high value on helping other people.

      27. Equality and Social Justice – Young person places high value on promoting

          equality and reducing hunger and poverty.

      28. Integrity – Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.

29. Honesty – Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."

30. Responsibility – Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.

31. Restraint – Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to

      use alcohol or other drugs.

Adolescents who are **Socially Competent** "often possess sound judgment and the ability to manage circumstances to benefit themselves and others in social situations" (Peterson & Leigh, 1990). Social competence overall is viewed as an important part of development that can bring about positive outcomes and enable youth in many instances to avoid risky behaviors. Five social competencies make up the third category of the internal assets. They are:

32. Planning and Decision making – Young person knows how to plan ahead and make

      choices.

33. Interpersonal competence – Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship

      skills.

34. Cultural Competence – Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of

      different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.

35. Resistance Skills – Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous

      situations.

36. Peaceful Conflict Resolution – Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

Positive Identity and the basic premise of identity development is one of the central tasks of the adolescent period (Erikson, 1968; Sadowski, 2003). Identity can be defined as an integrated view of oneself encompassing self-concept, beliefs, capacities, roles, and personal history. (Scales, 2002). Harter (1990) has suggested that adolescents "who successfully navigate the journey of self–development should acquire a clear and consolidated sense of true self that is

realistic and internalized." This process of identity development will best occur if the following four assets are present:

37. Personal Power – Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."

38. Self-esteem – Young person reports having a high self-esteem.

39. Sense of Purpose – Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."

40. Positive View of Personal Future – Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

According to the National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth (1997), it is the responsibilities of adults to ensure that adolescents find healthy developmental pathways to become self-sufficient adults who have positive social relationships and are good citizens. The questions such as; Am I normal? Am I competent? Am I lovable and loving? need to be answered in the affirmative by caring adults (Scales, 1991). The Search Institute reveals that the scientific evidence for the strength of the developmental asset framework is compelling.

7. The Most Recent Studies on the Development of the Adolescent's Brain

There are some new discoveries in regard to the development of the teenage brain. These studies reveal that adolescent brains are definitely changing during puberty. Dr. Judith Rapoport (2004) and colleagues have discovered, with the help of the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) studies, there is a second wave of overproduction of gray matter, the thinking part of the brain, in teenagers. (Adolescent Brain Development, 2004).

Prior to this study, it was assumed that teens responded differently to the world than adults due to hormones and a need of independence. However, Deborah Yurgelun-Todd (2000) and a group of researchers from McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts have revealed that

teens mostly use the amygdale, a small almond shaped area deep in the brain that guides instinctual or "gut" reactions, while adults rely on the frontal cortex, which governs reason and planning. The difference shown through the MRI was most evident in a study when teenagers and adults where asked to identify the emotions on a number of people's faces. The majority of the teenagers responses where inaccurate and may be the result of their underdeveloped prefrontal cortex. As teens grow older, their brain activity during a similar task tends to shift to the frontal lobe, leading to more reasoned perceptions.

In addition to Deborah Yrugelun-Todd's research, Martin Teicher is also studying the development of the adolescent brain. This new research is proving that the brain does not finish growing by puberty, but is far more dynamic. There are welters of new synapses made within a teenager's brain and then whittle down. It is believed that the adolescent brain is much more susceptible to the effects of experience than previously thought (Focus, 2000).

8. Summary

These new findings help support the need to find out what are the perceptions of adolescents in regard to their relationships with teachers in high schools. During adolescence, according to Dr. Ferris (2004) the developing brain picks up cues from the environment and uses them to help determine "normal" behavior. "If the environment provokes or encourages aberrant behaviors, those behaviors become the norm", says Jordan Grafman of the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Stroke (2004).

The more teachers come to understand what teenagers perceive they need to be successful and the more institutions work on developing caring learning environments, the better chance there will be for meeting the needs of all of our soon to be young adults.

This literature review reveals the need for educators to understand the developmental needs of high school students. This need may include a better understanding from adults as to the dynamic development of the teenage brain. If adults begin to listen and respond to the way students describe what they need in regard to a positive relationship with the adults in their schools, the results could increase the chances of more students finding success in high school. Asset building from the educational environment could also help raise healthy teenagers. The voice of the teenager needs to be heard, and their voice needs to be part of the "No Child Left Behind" solution. If our nation wants to address the true purpose of high schools and increase the academic success of our young people, they might consider responding to what students say they need to be successful in school.

III. CHAPTER 3

A. METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

The recent federal law "No Child Left Behind" requires the adult learning community to find ways to help our youth succeed academically at a prescribed level. Most educators are focusing on the rigor of their schools academics to increase the academic scores of our youth. However, our teenagers are developmentally at a stage in their life where they need to feel connected to the school culture through relationships, not alienated, before they can begin to academically produce their best work (Baumeister, 1996; Brooks, 1991; Chomsky, 2000; Cotton, 1996; Gates, 2003).

A qualitative study from the youth's perspective as to how they perceive their relationship with teachers in their learning environment may help educators assess what they need to do to improve this essential component of not leaving our children alienated and behind. Clarke & Frazer (2003) identified in the recent book *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*, one of the six developmental needs of teenagers is to be able to express their personal perspective.

2. Statement of the Problem

What are the perceptions of adolescents in regard to their relationships with teachers in high schools?

3. Research Questions
1. In what ways does research support the need for positive student/teacher relationships in high schools? (Chapter II)
2. In what ways do student relationships with teachers' impact student learning?
3. What are the characteristics of teachers who have positive relationships with their students?
4. In what ways does the environment of the classroom impact student/teacher relationships?

4. Methodology and Procedures

The study of pedagogy can never be "objective" and because of this, this study will take a qualitative, interpretive approach. (Van Manen,1991). Qualitative information is, primarily, individual narrative reports of experiences. Qualitative information is gathered with methods that are direct, and open-ended, with minimal constraints on what the answers to the questions may be. This type of research include formal research methods such as structured personal interview, case studies, naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba), formal focus groups, participant observation…**but you can also gather qualitative information by simply asking open-ended and exploratory questions within surveys**.(NPRES, 2004).

The nature of this study will be a descriptive exploration and will deal with present conditions. The goal will be to find generalizable attributes. The research will be guided by the themes of naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry also implies the use of an emergent design and the use of humans as primary data collection instruments. Best and Kahn (1998) believe that one can find universal validity through descriptive research. Within educational environments a descriptive exploration is concerned with functional relationships that deal with present conditions and attempts to find generalizable attributes.

Qualitative research can allow the emergence, or discovery, of new, unanticipated information relevant to our Nation's effort to raise academically productive adolescents. With qualitative methods, not only can you gather important descriptive data, but it can help one understand perceptions and interpretations of circumstances and events (NPRES, 2004).

Phenomenological principles are at the heart of the attraction to qualitative research. Nationally, there is "a shift taking place in the professional allegiance of evaluators. Increasingly, they are turning away from traditional positivist approaches and toward the acceptance of phenomenological concepts and techniques" (Fetterman, 1988) to provide new, essential information related to difficult questions, and to learn what is not being asked.

The primary method of obtaining information for this study will be an on-line, open-ended student survey. This method permits the gathering of information regarding an individual's experiences and knowledge, his or her opinions, beliefs, and feelings. The purpose of open-ended survey questions is to access the perception of the person completing the survey, without interference from the interviewer's preconceived notions (Patton, 1980).

In order to keep the respondents and their surveys confidential, the student's responses will be coded. The researcher through content analysis will analyze the data.

31

5. Sampling

A sample is a small proportion of a population selected for observation and analysis. According to Best and Kahn (1998), by observing the characteristics of the sample, one can make certain inferences about the characteristics of the population from which it was drawn. The method of choice for most qualitative research is a nonprobability sampling, which is purposeful. Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). In order to sample the widest possible range of personal characteristics, the researcher has chosen to utilize a maximum variation sampling. This is exemplified in the following criteria according to which the attempted sample will be drawn:

1. Gender	45 females
	45 males
2. Age	16 year old - juniors
3. Academic Profile	Students will be equally distributed
	between the four quartiles.
4. School District Size	Graduation classes of under 200

In terms of the number within the sample, Merriam (1998) contends that the size of the sample is not as important to the study as is the relevancy of what informants can contribute. Therefore, it is the quality of the contribution to the discourse as opposed to the number of people contributing to the research.

Sixteen-year-olds were intentionally chosen because of their placement in the high school. As sixteen-year-olds, the respondents will have attended high school long enough to give

depth to their responses. Since they are not in the process of transitioning out of the high school, the hope was that their responses would not be jaded.

Prior to the study, the researcher received written permission from the three school districts to administer the survey to their students. The researcher will meet and train the designated adult at the three high schools in regard to the purpose of the study. The selected students will be randomly selected and contacted by an educator from their high school to inquire of his or her willingness to participate. If the student agrees to complete the survey, a letter will be sent home to their parents to explain the study and request permission for their teenager to participate. No student will complete a survey without a signed parent permission form. (See Appendix B) The researcher will give the students an access code to a specific web site and the survey will be completed under the indirect supervision of the designated educator from that school.

The sampling for this study will be sixteen-year-old high school students from three small public high schools.

6. Data Collection

An on-line open-ended survey will be used to collect descriptive data regarding the experiences and perceptions of ninety 16-year-old students from three small public high schools in western Pennsylvania. The web survey will utilize HTML forms with multiple-line input boxes, drop down menus, multiple-choice boxes, and will be electronically submitted to the researcher.

According to an article about qualitative internet audience research, (2004) it has been found that one can get as much detail from an on-line survey as they would from an interview. There are two main ways of doing qualitative research on the Internet: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous means all at the same time: this is the Internet research equivalent of

a group discussion. Asynchronous software lets individual people respond. The asynchronous

method will be used for the following survey questions:

7. Survey Questions (for 16 year olds)

1. Many students say that their relationship with a teacher is a significant factor in learning. Define what a healthy positive "student/teacher relationship" means to you.
2. What factor(s) do you believe contribute to your success or lack of success in your school?
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, what is the importance of your relationship with your teachers in terms of you being successful in a course?
4.   If you had a problem in school, what kind of teacher would you turn to for help? Why?
5. Think about a class where you did not have a positive relationship with a teacher. (i.e. you did not care for the teaching style, personality….)How did that affect your effort in the class? Explain with and example. How did that affect your learning in that class? Your grade?
6. If you could change two things within your school, what would they be?
7. Think about a class where you did have a positive relationship with a teacher. How did that affect your effort in the class? Explain with and example. How did that affect your learning in that class? Your grade?
8. In a classroom where you have a strong, positive student/teacher relationship,
    -What does a typical class period look like?
    -What types of activities do you participle in?
    -What does the physical environment of this class look like?
    -In what ways do students participate in class?
9. What would you want to tell a teacher that would help other teachers build stronger relationships with their students?

10. For each of the following, mark <u>one</u> response. How often does one of your teachers…?

	Very Often	Often	Some-times	Seldom	Never
-help you individually with your school work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-talk to you about what you are doing in school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-ask you about homework	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-go to meetings or events that you are involved in	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. How much do you agree or disagree with the following? Mark one answer for each.

	Strongly Strongly Agree Disagree	Agree	Not- Sure	Dis- agree	
-I work better for some teachers than others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-My teachers really care about me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-I get a lot of encouragement at my school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
-A sense of humor is important in a teacher	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

12. During the last four weeks, how many days of school have you missed because you skipped or "ditched?"

☐ None   ☐ 4-5 days
☐ 1 day   ☐ 6-10 days
☐ 2 days   ☐ 11 or more days
☐ 3 days

13. How much do you agree or disagree with following? Choose <u>one</u> answer for each.

	Strongly Strongly Agree Disagree	Agree	Not- Sure	Dis- agree	
-My school's culture stresses that academic achievement is important.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

14. Check the four adjectives that describe a teacher with whom you can develop a good relationship.

___ Consistent
___ Fair
___ Predictable
___ Random
___ Routine
___ Open to questions
___ Strict
___ Lecturer
___ Facilitator
___ Organized
___ Storyteller

_____ Encourages Group Work

15. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your school experience?

8. Actual Survey (See Appendix A)

9. Data Analysis

Content analysis will be the method used to analyze the data so that conclusions and generalizations can be formulated. This analysis will involve sorting and categorizing the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) encourage researchers to identify smaller units such as phrases that can be used to generate categories. These categories according to Glesne and Peshkin (1992) are referred to as "data clumps".

After the categories are identified, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) there are three ways that themes can be identified: (1) consensus themes – when the majority of the students mention the same theme; (2) supported themes – when approximately half of the students mention the theme; and (3) individual themes – when only one or two students mention the theme. The themes will be arranged according to frequency and not importance.

The researcher will apply content analysis by analyzing the data in two ways. First, each question will be analyzed by the researcher and broken into consensus, supporting, or individual themes. All data from the surveys will then be analyzed using QSR'sN6, which is the latest version of the NUD*ist software for qualitative data analysis. This will permit the researcher to see overarching themes across the specific questions.

Qualitative data analysis is a term that can apply to many methods used for researching questions that will need some type of interpretation of data that can not be reduced to numbers

(Richards, 2002). In this content analysis, the goal is to provide a rich description and insightful presentation of the perception of adolescents' relationships with teachers.

10. Validity and Reliability of Results

Finding credible "truths" in qualitative data that can be acted upon by users should never be considered an easy task. In his discussion of validity in qualitative research Phillips (1987) concludes:

> *Believability, credibility, consensus, coherence—all these things are no doubt important, and a piece of work would be better for possessing them; but these things do not guarantee the truth of research conclusions, indeed, they may not be indicators of truth…Truth is a regulative ideal; it is much better to strive for it…*

External validity refers to what extent the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. One way to increase the possibility of the results of a qualitative study being generalized, Merriam (1998) suggests that the researcher provide enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation and, hence, whether findings can be transferred. In this study, the research will provide rich, thick description of the process as well as the descriptive written summary. The hope will be that readers will be able to compare the research with their experiences. This, in turn will increase reader generalizablilty.

11. Summary

In this chapter, the statement of the problem and research questions was restated. The theoretical framework, methodology, and sampling selections were established. Data collection procedures and analytical methods were described. Issues related to the validity, reliability, and analysis of the results were presented.

IV. CHAPTER 4

A. FINDINGS

1. Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the way students describe their relationships with teachers in public high schools. The primary research interest was to gain an understanding of what teenagers perceive as important in building relationships within the learning environment.

Qualitative inquiry methods were utilized, which allowed the researcher to pursue an understanding of the perceptions of adolescents' relationships with teachers. The on-line, open-ended student survey, which was the primary method for obtaining information, produced meaningful, descriptive data relevant to the research questions. The raw data was downloaded and analyzed for emerging themes. According to Merriman (1998), research which is focused on discovery, insight and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied, offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education.

The fifteen questions utilized on the survey were developed to help gather descriptive data in the subject's own words and from the subject's own perspective. The questions were shaped by the literature review and were further refined following a number of mock completions of the survey by students who are not part of the actual survey.

Once the researcher received approval to move forward with the study from the IRB, the researcher began the process of contacting School District A, School District B, and School District C. The researcher met with the identified contact person at each school and explained the procedures and distributed the parent permission forms and coded identification sheets. It took over four months for each high school to identify the participants for the study, distribute and gather all the signed parent permission slips. The actual completion of the on-line survey took the students an average of 35 minutes to complete. Students completed the surveys under the supervision of the designated person from each district.

This chapter includes a profile of each school district, as provided through the Standard and Poors evaluation service (As of 2002). A discussion of each survey question and a report of major and minor themes follow.

2. Profile of the School Districts

The three school districts that were the focus of this study are similarly situated in suburban-like communities. All of the districts studied have less than 10% minority students. The districts are relatively small, graduating less than 200 students a year. Because this studied high school students, it is important to note that there was only one high school per district.

School District A is located along the Allegheny River with a population of 10,035. It was a thriving steel town until the demise of the steel industry. The school district houses two elementary schools and one junior/senior high school. In 1972 two neighboring districts were forced to merge due to the states mandates. The merger of these two rivaling towns has caused some concerns for the sense of community of the high school. Each elementary school has a different culture due to the difference in economics and diversity.

School District B is located in small town with a population of 14,772. It was a thriving steel town until the demise of the steel industry. The school district houses four elementary schools and one junior / senior high school. The school is one of the top three employers in the community. Of the three districts, their student population has the lowest combined SAT scores and PSSA passing rate. However, the percentage of students planning to attend college is the highest of the three.

School District C is located along the Ohio River with a population of 13,366. It is an affluent community with a 20-minute commute to the city of Pittsburgh. The school district houses two elementary schools, one middle school (6-8) and one high school (9-12). This district is a microcosm of the nation at large; it represents 11 municipalities ranging from very economically deprived to one of the most affluent villages in the country. Since there is a private academy in the community, the wealthiest families send their children to the private school. The school district benefits from their tax base and boasts more opportunity in the area of cutting edge technology for their students. This district offers more AP classes and sends more students to governor school than any other school in their county.

The following data is taken from the Standard and Poors evaluation service (As of 2002).

1. **Headcount Enrollment**
School District A – 1,341
School District B – 2,292
School District C – 1,908

2. **Students per Teacher**
School District A – 13.4
School District B – 16.5
School District C – 14.3

3. Special Education
School District A - 14%
School District B - 11.3%
School District C – 12.2%

4. Operating Expenditures ($ per student)
School District A – 8,807

School District B – 7,477
School District C – 11,959

5. PSSA Passing Rate (%)
School District A – 69.9%
School District B – 62.8%
School District C – 74.2%

6.SAT Combined Score
School District A- 986
School District B– 933
School District C – 1068

7. Attendance *Rate*
School District A – 94.6
School District B – 93.5
School District C – 94.4

8.Seniors *Planning to Attend College (%)*
School District A - 81.6
School District B – 83.2
School District C – 82.9

Survey Questions – The following fifteen questions were completed by 84 students

from districts A,B, and C. The data is a compilation of all sixteen-year-olds' surveyed.

Survey Question 1. **Many students say that their relationship with a teacher is a significant factor in learning. Define what a healthy positive "student/teacher relationship" means to you.**

Out of the 84 students who completed the survey, the researcher and another educator independently to promote inter-rater reliability coded responses. The most common response regarding a healthy positive student/teacher relationship can be generally described as "**comfort"** with 37 references being made. More specifically, 24 responses used the exact term "comfortable." In addition, the researcher grouped other responses that were similar to the word or idea of feeling comfortable. See the chart below for the general categories derived from the responses, the frequency of the responses, as well as the overall percentage of frequency. Included are eight different categories and the actual words used by the students.

TABLE 1: Student Teacher Relationship Categories

Description Categories	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Responses
Comfortable: *Comfortable, Not afraid, not threatened, No hostility, Friendly, Knows on a personal level, Understand each other, Knows your name, Want treated like an adult, Get along, No tension*	37/84	44%
Willing to help: *Willing to help, support, believe in them, Gives extra time for assignments when needed, Does not make students feel stupid*	12/84	14%
Talk /Conversation: *Can Talk to teacher-have a conversation, Conversation outside class, Interaction*	12/84	14%
Trust: *Can Trust the teacher, Bond, Does not judge students, Always there for me, Kind, Truly cares about well-being, No favoritism, Can depend on teacher, Understand each other, Cares*	12/84	14%
Listening: *Will listen*	5/84	6%
Knowledgeable: *knowledgeable, successful teaching, help you pass, positive role model*	4/84	5%
Jokes: *jokes, fun*	2/84	2%
Respect: *respect for each other*	1/84	1%
Total		100%

There were eight identifiable categories listed above. The notion of feeling comfortable with a teacher for learning to occur is the significant factor mentioned. In fact, the other seven categories in many ways are interrelated to the idea of feeling comfortable and accepted.

Survey Question 2. **What factor(s) do you believe contribute to your success or lack of success in your school?**

The researcher and another educator coded responses, independently, to promote inter-rater reliability. The most common response regarding a factor(s) students believe contributed to their success or lack of success were generally in two distinct categories: self and teacher. See the chart below for the general categories derived from the responses, the frequency of the responses, as well as the overall percentage of frequency. Included are six different categories and the actual words used by the students.

TABLE 2: Factors Contributing to Success

Description Categories	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Responses
Teacher: *quality of teachers (2), teacher willing to take extra time to teach me, creative teacher strategies (4), kind friendly teachers (4), teacher checks for understanding, I like the teacher (2), how good the teacher is, can laugh, relationship with teacher (5), teacher encourages me, informed teachers, teachers who really care, too much homework (3), teachers energy and excitement, one's aims and goals in life, determination, making friends with teacher (?), teachers that know their subject(2)*	33/84	39%
Self: *individual motivation (5), resiliency, work ethic(2), dedication, confidence, how much work done outside of class (8), my attention in class level of interest, how hungry I am when tested studying and working hard, I like the subject, (2) my ability to express thoughts and questions to teacher, my innate ability, study skills (2), understanding the material, attending school, paying attention, getting enough sleep*	30/84	36%
Environment *atmosphere (4), visual aides, small class size, friendly learning environment*	7/84	8%
Other: *ability or talk (2), co-curricular activities, reduced stress*	4/84	5%
Family *way someone is raised, family issues (3)*	3/84	4%
Students: *social networking, choice of friends and peer pressure*	2/84	2%

Approximately, one-third of students responded that they were the greatest factor in their success or lack of success as well as one-third of students responding that the teacher is the greatest factor contributing to the students' success or lack of success. Other areas included Environment (8%), Family (4%), Students (2%), and Other (5%). The other category included guidance counselors and principals.

Survey Question 3. **On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the highest and 10) being the lowest), what is the importance of your relationship with your teachers in terms of you being successful in school.**

Pie Chart 1: Importance of Relationships

On a scale from 1-10 (1 being the highest and 10 being the lowest), what is the importance of your relationship with your teachers in terms of you being successful in a course?
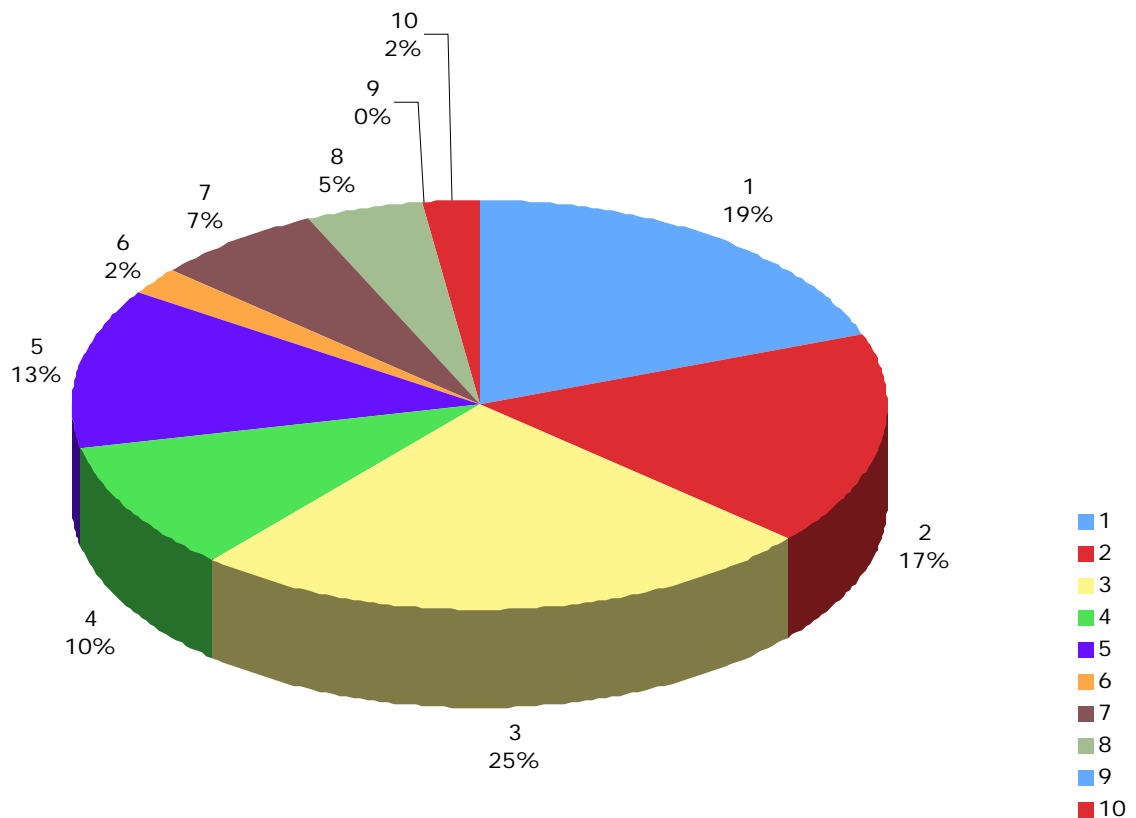
The researcher tallied responses. The pie graph was the chosen way to reflect the students' responses. Over half of the students reported that their success in school is directly related to the positive relationships they have with teachers.

Survey Question 4. **If you had a problem in school, what kind of teacher would you turn to for help? Why?**

In regards to the kind of teacher students would turn to for help, two main categories emerged from the student responses: teacher's personal attributes or skills and positional or demographic qualities. Within the category of teacher's personal attributes or skills, there were several main themes. They include the following:

- Trust (11)
- Teacher I am comfortable with (10)
- One I know that would not rush and take time with me and listen (9)

Within the category of Positional / Demographic Qualities, two main themes emerged. They include the following*:*

- One that I have had in class (7)
- My counselor (5)

TABLE 3: Kind of Teacher

Description Categories	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Responses
Teacher's Personal Attributes or Skills: Teacher I am comfortable with (10), one I know that would not rush and take time with me and listen (9), open and view things from all sides (4), calm and understanding, they notice when you are struggling, trust(11), talk to me at a teenage level, open minded teacher., would pray with me, sense of empathy, proven that they keep things confidential(3), treat me as an adult, do not judge, one that would be honest with me, compassionate/great personality, like a friend, interested in more than the academics, sincere, willing spirit and is kind., help me through the problem not just listen.	50/84	60%
Positional / Demographic Qualities: Sports coach I can relate to, teacher of the same sex (2), one that I have had in class(7), know outside of school, young teacher, my counselor(5), principal	18/84	21%

There were two significant themes that emerged from this question. Teachers' personal attributes and skills resulted in 61% of the students commenting on this theme. This was identified as the consensus theme for surveys question four.

Survey Question 5. Think about a class where you did not have a positive relationship with a teacher. (i.e. you did not care for the teaching style, personality…) How did that affect your effort in the class? Explain with an example. How did that affect your learning in that class? Your grade?

Out of 84 students who completed the survey, the researcher and another educator, independently to promote inter-rater reliability, coded responses. The responses to not having a positive relationship with a teacher resulted in many scenarios to the situation. The following topics and scenarios are listed in the chart below.

TABLE 4: Negative Experience with Teacher

Topic	Scenario
Negative experience caused me to change my focus/career.	*"My effort in band has diminished. How does it affect my learning? What learning?...He has made me not want to be a band director."*
Class is boring.	*"I disliked everything about him and I absolutely hated going to that class. I didn't enjoy the class and to be honest, I put no effort into doing well just to make him mad."*
Feel Isolated ,I must work on my own.	*"I once had a class where the teacher expected us to teach ourselves out of the book without explaining what we didn't understand. I ended up getting poor grades by the end of the year."*
I do not feel respected.	*"I really don't care what they are saying to me or what they are trying to teach."*
Teacher with bad attitude towards students decreases learning	*"My teacher once said that it did not matter to him if we all failed his class."*
I did not retain the information.	*"This made me apprehensive about attending class and diminished my participation. Although I received an A in the class I felt like I had not learned much in the process."*
Poor teaching strategies result in frustration.	*"I did not really care for her teaching style which made it difficult to pay attention."*
Some learn in spite of teacher	*"I am very determined to do well in school, so she did not affect my learning like she did other students."*
Teacher that yells.	*"I got mad and I didn't do much, some teachers just have to make sure the student is actually doing something wrong!"*

Respondents who experienced a negative relationship with a teacher reported 95% of the time that it did negatively affect their grades. The quotes from the students survey demonstrate the negative emotional impact teachers can have on a high school student. This consensus of data from the students demonstrates the significance of positive relationships in education.

Survey Question 6. If you could change two things within your school, what would they be?

This open-ended question gave the respondents a chance to brainstorm the first two things that came to mind for them without any prompt.

TABLE 5: Changes Needed Within Your School

Description Categories	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Responses
Personal Changes*: Less rules about phones, food, and CD (7), Freedom to leave school during study halls and lunch (4), Shorter classes (4), Longer time between classes (4) More activities offered (4), Freedom in the morning before classes (3), Enforce no smoking rules, Enforce dress code(2), Stop treating students like we are two (2), Students have more say in the rules of the school, We need more school spirit, The people, attitude of most students, Me being in the school, No religious pictures in the school, A better music department, Cliques in school, More diversity of students, A bigger school district, Irrelevant classes, More breaks, Not as much gossip, Student and teachers inability to care, Doing my homework, Paying attention in class, No laptops, No drug dog searches.*	48/84	57%
Teacher Issues*: Amount of homework decreased (4,) You could pick your teachers (3), Teaching style (2), Trust Issues between student and teachers (2), Homework being so much of your overall grade, No Lecturing, Teachers make classes more interesting, Teachers who make learning easier, Teachers that would not punish, Better way to make up work if one is absent, Teachers explain stuff, Have classes taught by 2 teachers to increase chances of getting along with one, Have more than one teacher that teaches each specific so you can choose which teacher you want, Availability of teachers to help, Teachers would not run home on Fridays, Have younger teachers to relate to, Teachers need to not be so biased towards specific students, Teachers are here to teach not gossip, Better student teacher interaction, Teachers be more understanding, Better student/teacher communication, Teachers involved in more co-curricular, Teachers' lack of respect for students, Relationship with teachers, More friendly and trustworthy teachers, The band director, Principal, The nurse, Some of the teachers.*	36/84	43%
Educational Changes: *More electives (8), Worry more about education and less about dress code (2), Bring more technology to our school, Wish we could have blocked scheduling (3) Shorter hours of school (3), Given more advanced books, School needs to offer more advanced placement courses, Text material should be available on the Internet, School should focus on teaching and not teaching to the test, A place where students can hang out when not in class, More tracking, More periods in a day for more classes, 8 periods instead of 9, Increase number of teachers to decrease class size, Summer school classes to offer classes you can not fit into your schedule, Less credits needed to graduate, Plan field trips for weekends, Less tracking of students, Graduation Project, Easier Independent learning programs, Grading Scale.*	33/84	39%

There were four distinct themes that emerged from this question: Personal Changes, Teacher Issues, Environmental Changes, and Educational Changes. Although the personal changes theme resulted in the highest percentage of 57%, the other three supporting categories were not far behind with a range in 40%.

Survey Question 7. Think about a class where you did have a positive relationship with a teacher. How did that affect your effort in the class? Explain with an example. How did that affect your learning in that class? Your grade?

Out of the 84 students who completed the survey, the researcher and another educator coded responses, independently, to promote inter-rater reliability. The most common response regarding the results of a positive experience in *willing to try harder and attend class* with 22 references being made. In addition, the researcher grouped other like thoughts or comments to this category. See the chart below for the general categories derived from the responses, the frequency of the responses, as well as the overall percentage of frequency. Included are seven different categories and the actual words used by the students.

TABLE 6: Positive Experience with Teacher

Description Categories	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Responses
Willing to try harder and attend class: *Even though I wasn't very good at the subject, I still liked going to class, just to see what exciting thing would happen that day. * I pushed myself to do my absolute best on every assignment because I knew my teacher knew my abilities. *My grade was good because knowing that the teacher wanted to teach me made me want to learn. *I really enjoyed the class more, which made me want to work harder on that class. * I worked harder in class. I would take my time on my assignments and turn them in on time but turn in much better work. It was a good place to be and there was no stress. *I am willing to do my work because I understand what we are learning at the time and I don't feel as though I have to teach myself. *I did all of my homework and answered questions in the class. * I thoroughly enjoyed both the teacher and the materials being taught. This allowed me to always come to class happy and eager to learn. * I worked really hard to get a good grade in the class since I liked it a lot. *It made me love the class and even made me learn to appreciate chemistry. I tried very hard and therefore got very good grades.* I enjoyed going to class and learning new things with a teacher whom I could trust and liked. *Your opinions expressed in class will be accepted and not criticized.* I never dreaded going to class, so I had an all around better attitude toward the subject. * Even though these are two classes that I dislike I still maintain a great grade because of the relationship I have with my teachers. *I got along with my teacher and had more effort and willingness to come to class and participate. * I tried hard and did well. *My efforts in class increased amazingly. I wanted to go to the class and learn more from that teacher. *When I was in a class with a good teacher that I liked I would want to go to class I would pay attention and I would work hard. * Since there was no strain, my grade is now in the mid 90's. *I enjoyed being in the class. *In mythology I had a teacher that I understood. *I never thought about skipping that class or going to the nurse during it.*	22/84	26%
Learned more and retained the information: *My learning improved dramatically. *He acted like he was on the same level as me, so I learned more in less time *They made things fun, and interesting, but still taught us a lot. I think that I learned and remembered the most in those classes. *We have detailed discussions, my learning is 3 fold. * It affected my learning in class and grade because I participated and didn't have to work so much at home to understand. * I put more effort in because I enjoyed being there, and I retained more knowledge because of it. * I have this class as a junior and I have learned more from her about history than I have in almost all of my years in history classes in the past. * I worked harder in that class but it did not seem like work. My grades went up and I learned a lot more. * I felt more eager to participate and increased my effort in the class. It was easier to learn overall. *Since my teacher was able to teach me the information I needed I could now participate in class without being nervous and too shy to talk out. * I never felt embarrassed to answer a question, so I received a better grade and learned more. * It affected my learning because there was no strain	14/84	17%

"Table 6 (continued). *"*		
between the teacher and myself. I excelled. I think I remembered and learned more in that class. ***** *It showed in my writing and learning.*		
Want teacher to be proud of them: ***** *I would prepare for tests, do my homework, and come in after school just so he knew that although I was struggling I was putting in 100% of my effort*. ******I think that having a good relationship between us was a very positive influence on my grade. *Because of my relationship with the teacher, I try hard to be a great student in their class because they have helped me by making the class enjoyable.* **For projects I would go above and beyond because I knew the teacher would appreciate my efforts. *He made a great effort to create a relationship with each one of his students and based around the idea that excellence is required in all that you do. This made me glad to be a member of the band and I always gave my very best efforts in that class. *It made me want to do my work better so I could please the teacher. I tried much harder. *I try harder because I do not want to disappoint my teacher and to show respect that I have for them. * My English class has an awesome teacher so I attempt to perform to my full potential. * I have a teacher now who really motivates me. I always feel like if I don't do my homework he will upset and disappointed in me. * You will want to work harder and do better, because you will want to work to please them. * If I look up to a teacher then I will not want to disappoint them by doing bad in their class. * This encourages me to pay* attention more and lead*s to learning the material better. *I was always trying to do my best because I knew the teacher believed in me. * The teacher is cool so I worked a little harder. * I learn it with ease.*	14 /84	17%
Willing to help and take time*: *She is understanding and is there when we need help. *She works with our daily activities and treats us like adults. *I could go to my teacher and she would sit down with me do problems and explain it until I got it. *In a class where I feel comfortable with a teacher, I feel I can get help whenever I need it. * If I had gotten a question wrong in class, the teacher did not have a problem explaining what I did incorrectly, and this helped me. *She goes out of her way to help you and make you feel as comfortable as you can in class (making sure that you understand the material in class). It made me feel like she actually liked her job and us, her students. * My teacher would always help me after school and give me example problems like those that were going to be on the test. * a positive teacher is helpful, rather they raise my enthusiasm about a subject.* if I needed help then he would always help me. *The teacher was very caring and helpful to everyone so it made it a much better place to learn. *Teacher was very caring to everyone. *He knows how to keep kids organized. *A positive relationship involves the idea of the teacher giving the student respect and understanding. *My grade in that class increased because I did not have a fear of being yelled at or having negative comments directed towards me.*	14 /84	17%
Made learning fun*: * I also pay attention more in this class because I have fun in that class and I want to learn more. * When I have fun in that class it is easier for me to learn. He was always active in the lesson and you could tell he really loved what he taught. *My teacher this year is patient and understanding, and really makes English fun. * She is funny and , she makes you laugh. Because of those things I have fun in her class. * You can have fun learning and therefore get more out of the course. It makes me want to do well. * My teacher loved all of his students and*	8/84	9%

"Table 6 (continued)."		
*he had a great personality. The class was fun and that made the work seem easier. * This made the learning experience enjoyable, fun, and always left me wanting to know more. *Her class is very relaxed and based on informal discussion.*		
Long-term relationship developed/Trust: * *I still have a close relationship with my 8th grade history teacher, even though I don't have him as a "teacher" anymore. I still feel that I can go to him for many things and that he'd help me if I ever needed it. * They cared about what we were thinking. My teacher would want to know what's going on in our lives and if something important were going on she would keep up with it and ask how it was going. * Sometimes I would go up during lunch if she wasn't busy and we could talk about things. She is writing me a letter of recommendation for various scholarships/ programs. * In sixth grade, my teacher was one of the most influential teachers I've ever had. He started the year by creating a powerful image of himself so that we paid attention and learned from him. He just had a huge impact on our personal lives and our lives at school. *.. Gave me somebody who I could talk to about anything at all and get honest feedback from many different points of view and roles: older sister, friend, teacher, mother, all of these. The fact that I could talk to somebody like this much less a teacher is saying a lot for me since I rarely talk at all to anybody. I felt she respected me a lot and with that I gave her my utmost. *I was able to really open up to them and was able to ask them anything. * He acted like he was on the same level as me, which was so I learned more in less time.*	7/84	8%
Negative response to question or none at all: *My grade in that class increased because I did not have a fear of being yelled at or having negative comments directed towards me. *My effort went down, I did whatever I could to maintain the grades, but it was not easy *I didn't pay much attention in class so my grades on test and my grade in the class were class because of their teaching skills.*	5/84	6%
Total	84/84	100%

All but five students responded that their positive relationship with their teacher resulted in better

grades. The responses from this question reflect in many ways what the respondents stated they

needed from teachers when they had a negative experience with a teacher.(see question 5)

Survey Question 8. In a classroom where you have a strong, positive student/teacher relationship,
- **What does a typical class period look like?**
- **What types of activities do you participate in?**
- **What does the physical environment of this class look like?**
- **In what ways do students participate in class?**

The researcher has given the 84 respondents the opportunity to answer the above questions in an open-ended format. The respondents responses were tallied and prioritized and are reflected in the chart on the next page.

The specific descriptions the respondents gave as to what is their perception as to what happens in a classroom where there is a strong, positive student/teacher relationship, opens the lens for educators. Questions about activities and student participation tended to be supported themes in the respondents' answers.

TABLE 7: Environment

Description Categories	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Responses
What does a typical class period look like? * *the first five minutes of class is open discussion of what is happening in the school and over the weekend. (11)*students are busy and interested and interacting, student surrounding teacher paying attention (11)*students have fun with laughter and learn at the same time (11)*there are debates taking place, open minded class discussions, and students asking for help on assignments (9)I go to class and do not want to leave because I enjoy being there, class time passes quickly, feel happy, comfortable and relaxed (8)*class begins with a review of the previous day (8) *period is organized and laid back (6) *teacher first lectures, the students get into groups to complete activities that relate to the lecture, there is a set routine (3) *students are working with each other (3) *teachers stay on task(3)- putting answers on the board (2) *learning something new(2) *students are respectful of teacher and listens (2) *open discussion without trying for participation points(2)*short presentations of material*getting t class on time,*everyone has a role in the class*	84/84	100%
What types of activities do you participate in? *In what ways do students participate in class?* *students do group work (19) *many activities that relate to our learning (all students can talk) (11)*open forum to share ideas, student ideas are valued, want to volunteer ideas (10)*fun games to play, review games (7)*students are putting on skits and working on posters (7)*hands on activities(4)*the activities include humor and laughter(4)*questions are answered(3)*students take turns being leader within groups and have to report the result (3)*teacher structures the class so all students participate (3)*assignments are organized (2)*students read aloud , only if they are comfortable doing so. (2)*watch movies, videos stories, * focusing on current events*debates*no busy work*students take notes.*	84/84	100%
What does the physical environment of this class look like? *posters on the walls that relate to the subject, decorations, bright colors, couches, room is a calm color, looks like home (18)*seated in a u shape with the teacher in the middle so we are all connected as one class is set up in cluster desks for groups to be effective, seats in a circle, sitting at tables(5) *students work on the walls (5)*everybody gets along, there is a sense of community (5)*students are relaxed (4)*class size small enough for all students to share information (3)*Everyone laughing and having a good time while learning(3)*students sit where they want (3)*large enough for all the students with room to walk around (2)*classroom is neat and organized*can be hectic because we feel comfortable*atmosphere is light*temperature is comfortable.*	53/84	63%

Survey Question 9. What would you want to tell a teacher that would help other teachers build stronger relationships with their students?

In regards to the advice that students offered to help teachers, three themes emerged: time, attributes/ skills of a teacher, and academics. Time and attributes of a teacher were major themes with academics emerging as a minor theme. The researcher and another educator, independently to promote inter-rater reliability, coded the three description categories.

TABLE 8: Suggestions to Teachers

Description Categories	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Responses
Time: *Take time to dialogue with students (listen) (13), Take time to help (9), Give students one on one time, Talk to them outside of school*	34/84	40%
Attributes / Skills of a Teacher: *Never yell at a student, nor show you are angry, Be flexible(3), Respect your students (3), Act like you are on the same level, treat like emerging adults /friends (4), Need to be an example – of a caring adult, Ask for students' opinions, Be funny, nice and laid back , maintain a sense of humor (4), Make students feel good about themselves, Find a balance between friend and teacher, Care about students as individuals, Do not act superior. nor be intimidating, Should want all your students succeed, Let students know you are also learning from them, Give all students a fair chance and do not judge, Do not try too hard , do not be uptight, Show your personality, Show students you love teaching (3), Be a mentor, Relaxed classroom environment, Trust students, Show emotions in class (not yelling)*	33/84	39%
Academics: *Explain subject material in an interesting way, No surprise tests, Be involved in the student learning, Relate their subject area to the outside world, Less homework and check for understanding, Ask students to evaluate teachers' performance, Be consistent, Have class more student run, Understand and be open to different learning styles, Check for understanding, Do not lecture, group work, Make learning fun.*	13/84	15%

The percentage result of this question does not total 100% due to the fact that some students chose not to respond to this question. The two major themes of taking time for a student and the teachers' own personal attributes emerged as the key factors the students want new teachers to know.

Survey Question 10. **How often does one of your teachers…**

TABLE 9: Frequency of Caring

Prompt	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
…help you individually with your school work?	8/84 10%	30/84 36%	23/84 27%	25/84 30%	4/84 5%
…talk to you about what you are doing in school?	13/84 15%	21/84 25%	35/84 42%	17/84 20%	6/84 7%
…ask you about homework?	17/84 20%	25/84 30%	24/84 30%	16/84 19%	6/84 7%
…go to meetings or events that you are involved in?	4/84 4%	15/84 18%	23/84 27%	25/84 30%	21/84 25%

The descriptive data gathered from the above question indicate that 35% of the respondents seldom or never felt that a teacher with their schoolwork helped them individually. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents perceived that their teachers seldom or never talked to them about what they were doing in school. In addition, 26% perceived that their teachers seldom or never asked them about their homework. The highest percentage of 55% reported that their teachers seldom or never attended meetings or events where they are involved.

Survey Question 11. How much do you agree or disagree with the following:

TABLE 10: Agree/Disagree

Prompt	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I work better for some teachers than others	53/84 63%	28/84 33%	4/84 4%	5/84 6%	0/84 0%
My teachers really care about me	4/84 5%	39/84 46%	35/84 42%	7/84 8%	3/84 4%
I get a lot of encouragement at my school	10/84 12%	40/84 48%	17/84 20%	14/84 17%	7/84 8%
A sense of humor is important	61/84 73%	18/84 21%	4/84 4%	0/84 0%	2/84 2%

The importance of the above question is the high percentage of students who feel that their teachers care about them and receive encouragement. However, there are 54% of the students who are either not sure or disagree that their teachers really care about them. Additionally, 45% do not indicate that they receive a lot of encouragement at their school.

Survey Question 12. During the last four weeks, how many days of school have you missed because you skipped or "ditched?"

TABLE 11: Attendance Issue

Description Categories	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Responses
None	58/84	69%
One	16/84	19%
Two	4/84	5%
Three	5/84	6%
Four-Five	3/84	4%
Six-Ten	1/84	1%

This question was asked to see if there is any correlation between feeling valued at school and a students attendance. This could be addressed in a future study. The data revealed that 69% of students surveyed never skipped school. This may be due to the random selection of students.

Survey Question 13. How much do you agree or disagree with the following:

TABLE 12: School Culture

Prompt	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My school's culture stresses that academic achievement is important.	20/84 24%	49/84 58%	13/84 15%	5/84 6%	2/84 2%

Twenty-three percent of the population surveyed did not feel that the school's culture stresses academic achievement. This data is the compilation of the students who were not sure, who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Survey Question 14. **What four adjectives that describe a teacher with whom you can develop a good relationship?**

Respondents were given twelve possible adjectives. They were asked to choose four of the

twelve that best describe a teacher with whom they could develop a good relationship. The

responses were tallied and are presented in the chart below.

TABLE 13: Descriptive Adjectives

Description Categories	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Responses
Open to Questions	74/84	88%
Fair	58/84	69%
Encourages Group Work	50/84	60%
Organized	47/84	56%
Storyteller	41/84	49%
Consistent	28/84	33%
Random	21/84	25%
Routine	10/84	12%
Facilitator	8/84	10%
Strict	3/84	3%
Lecturer	3/84	3%
Predictable	2/84	2%

This question identified the top four themes as:
- o Open to Questions (88%)
- o Fair (69%)
- o Encourages Group Work (60%)
- o Organized (56%

<u>Survey Question 15.</u> Is there anything else you would like to share about your school experience?

There were 61 students who completed this question on the on-line survey. The researcher and another educator independently to promote inter-rater reliability coded responses. When given the opportunity to share their own experiences about high school, 46% of the respondents indicated in various ways that they have had a positive experience in high school. More specifically, 29 responses inferred a positive relationship with their teacher. Some students shared a personal experience about school while others reiterated and reinforced statements that were asked in previous questions. (See Appendix for complete responses to question 15)

The only new topic that emerged from this question was the concern about too much homework and it's negative impact on the respondents' grades. See the table on the next page for the responses in regard to positive experiences and to the topic of homework.

TABLE 14: Additional Comments by Students

Description Categories	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Responses
Positive experience in high school: *Overall, I have had a positive school experience. Most of my teachers this year are easy to get along with and have many good characteristics that a teacher that is able to have a healthy student teacher relationship should have. * My teachers for advanced classes care more about me...* My relationship with teachers is important to me. I love the teachers that I have my close relationship with and I am going to continue my relationship even after high school. Many teenagers need a reason to come to school. Why not becomes that reason? Wouldn't you want a student to think that you're their favorite teacher? I know I like when people think well of me. I honestly hold those select few teachers that I'm close with to my heart and my relationship with them has made my high school experience that much better because of it. Yes they are my teachers, but in years to come, they will also be my friends. Memories and FRIENDS last a lifetime. * I really enjoy the relationship with my teachers and think that this has enhanced my learning. They have formed me into the best student I can be, and I am very thankful for this. * My school experience is a typical one. I have teachers that I hold dear to my heart and they are almost like additional parents or friends to me. * I like school most of the time. Even though things are getting harder, I like the relationships -even friendships- that I have made here. * I think for the most part I have a good relationship with about half of my teachers and I know that I can go to them if I am ever in any sort of trouble. * It was really tough fitting in but there were some teachers that made it all better. The teachers didn't care if you were the smart one or if you were the popular one. They cared about you. I think that without some of those teachers I wouldn't be where I am today. I'm very glad that there are teachers that care..* Once I came here, I was really amazed with the freedom and relationships the students had with their teachers. I would see kids just go into a room and sit down and have a normal conversation with a teacher and feel completely comfortable. * I can only think of a few teachers that I have not liked or classes I have not enjoyed. I am proud of the district I go to and I almost always look forward to coming to school, even if there is a test... . I count myself fortunate to have a relationship (and a personality) that allows me to bond with my teachers. * All teachers are very different, there are some that I would love to have again (French teacher) and some that I would rather take another class just to avoid the teacher (my current math teacher). * I enjoy school.* Teachers are more valuable than most people assume...*.... I don't have too many problems in school. I come here to get my education like I am supposed to. I work hard for the grades that I achieve...* I really have enjoyed classes a lot more because of the teacher and they make a huge difference if students are enjoying school or not. * No matter what teachers you have or where you go to school, high school should be the best time of your life...* Students will always learn best in different structures, but is beneficial to have to learn to adapt to different teaching styles.*As I have gotten older and more mature, I have been able to enjoy the school life more and more as I have been able to have a better relationship with certain teachers at my school.* My school experience so far has been good...* I like school overall...* My school is pretty nice for me...* There are good experiences and I will miss most things about my school...*: I like it so much, I actually want to be an English/business teacher. * For the most part school is pretty good, having friends and some cool teachers...* My test grades with teachers I like tend to be a bit better...* The more teachers kind of act not as much like a we kids do but sort of know what things to say or how we talk and things and has a good heart and humor that teacher will get a lot of thank you from students* School is OK.* .. some good some bad but I try to make the best of them.* I think overall it is run very organized.* I do well regardless of teacher relationships, really to me its all about whether or not I want to and if I feel respected.* I have had a strong relationship with at least two teachers a year, which is not bad...*	29/84	46%

"Table 14 (continued)."	3/84	5%
Too Much Homework: * *I wish that more teachers would consider how much homework we get at night when giving us assignments.* * *Teacher should not pound kids with home work they have to understand that we play sports have 8 other subjects that give home work, and also a lot of kids work at age 16 so they should take that into consideration.* * Unfortunately, the classes of our school require a lot of homework. We are crammed within our 42-minute periods, AND we have to do homework at home too. I know that students need to study at home for tests and things like that, but I think that the busy work should be done in school. * I have way too much work from all of my classes. I take a lot of the weighted classes, and I do homework from the minute I get home to school until midnight almost every night. It basically discourages kids to take honors classes.*		

One of the most heart wrenching comments from question fifteen was presented in the form of

an event that happened to a student: (the student's typing errors were not corrected)

> *" One day I was walking up there stairs and I fell. In fact*
> *I was racing up the stairs because I didnt want to be late. Well*
> *anyways back to the story; when I fell I kept slipping down the stairs, I*
> *tryed to grab onto the wall but I couldnt it was too slippy. No one*
> *would help me they where all laughing. I WAS AMBARRASSED!!! I didnt kno*
> *what to do but cry. So i did the end."*

This single event reinforces the need to develop a better sense of community within high

schools.

In the following chapter, the researcher will address the research questions using the

major emerging themes from the 15 survey questions and attempt to embed them within the

literature. The process of connecting ideas that emerge from the data to literature is common in

qualitative research. In addition, implications for future studies will also be addressed.

<center>**V. Chapter 5**</center>

<center>**A. Conclusions, Personal Reflections, and**</center>

<center>**Recommendations**</center>

1. Overview

The four guiding research questions for this study were designed to help the researcher present the way students describe their relationships with teachers in public high schools. The primary research interest was to gain an understanding of what teenagers perceive as important in building teacher/student relationships within the learning environment.

Chapter four presented the findings of the raw data in table and graph format. The fifteen questions utilized in the survey were developed to help gather descriptive data in the subject's own words and from the subject's own perspective. The questions were shaped by the literature review and were further refined following a number of mock completions of the survey by students who are not part of the actual survey.

Chapter five will now utilize the responses from the fifteen questions to answer the research question as stated in Chapter 1 of this document.

2. Addressing the First Research Question: In what ways does research support the need for positive student/teacher relationships in high schools?

The first question regarding research supporting the need for positive student/teacher relationships were addressed in Chapter 2: The Literature Review. The information discussed in Chapter 2 will again emerge in answering questions 2, 3, and 4. It is necessary to use this

information as a means for the triangulation of the claims that will be made. In answering the questions that follow, the researcher triangulated the conclusions based on the researcher's experience, the literature, and the responses of students via this study.

3. Addressing the Second Research Question: In what ways do student relationships with teachers impact student learning?

The second guiding question was, "In what ways do student relationships with teachers' impact student learning?" This question was really a very straightforward question with the tallied responses falling in a positive or negative category. In reviewing the raw data printed out from the on-line survey, there was a resounding "yes" by students who believe that their relationships with their teachers do significantly impact their learning.

As a counselor in a secondary school, I continually see the correlation between a student's learning and a positive relationship between the instructor and student. When possible I will alter students' schedules to help ensure that learning will occur.

In the survey question number 2, the students were asked "What factor(s) do you believe contribute to your success or lack of success in your school?" Over one-third (39%) of the students responded that their teacher is the greatest factor contributing to their success. One can infer from their responses that the developmental need of teenagers to want a supportive relationship with their teachers identified by Resnick (1997), Baumeister and Leary (1995), and Maslow (1954) is supported by these responses.

The students' responses to question three of the survey was the most resounding report to help answer the second research question, with over half of the students (61%) reporting that their success in school is directly related to the positive relationships they have with their

teachers. Table 3 in Chapter 4 shows a pie graph that depicts the students' responses to the question of "on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the highest and 10 being the lowest), what is the importance of your relationship with your teachers in terms of you being successful in school". These findings are congruent with the results from The Search Institute (2002). In this previous study, the researchers identified external and internal assets necessary for a student to evolve into a healthy adult. One of the external categories, "*support*", includes the importance of adult relationships. According to the Search Institute (2002), non-parent adults can help develop a sense of connectedness for adolescents. Feeling connected to adults in the school and viewing them as role models is what the majority of the students in this study identified as helping them with their success in school.

There was one other question asked in the survey that shed more light on this topic of teacher/student relationships. Question seven, which was an open-ended survey question, asked the students to think about a class where they did have a positive relationship with a teacher. The students were to give examples as to how their relationship with this teacher affected their effort, their learning, and their grade. The most common response from students was that they were willing to try harder and attend class if they felt they had a positive relationship with the teacher of that particular class. The students realized that this positive relationship resulted in a better grade and an increase in their learning. This idea of a positive adult mentor (teacher) supports the work of Ron Brandt (2003), Gayle Moller (1998), Peter Senge (2002), Peter Scales (2002), Thomas Sergiovanni (2000), and Michael Fullan Sparks (2003), who all indicate that a sense of community within a small school is paramount to a student's success.

The researcher for this study intentionally chose three moderately small high schools to gather the qualitative data. Throughout the literature review, the emphasis on building a sense of

community was also linked to this new notion that smaller high schools will produce better academic success. There was no intent to compare small high schools with large high schools in this study. However, the emerging research suggests that students' achievement can be accomplished by developing a sense of community. Teacher/student relationships are a key factor in this endeavor (Brandt, 2003; Johnson, et al., 2002; McRobbie, 2001; Moller, 1998; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1996; Scales, 2002; Senge, 2002; Sergiovanni, 2000; Sparks, 2003).

There is another way to interpret the students' responses to questions 2, 3 and 7. This alternative perspective would require the reader to assume that at some point in these students' educational career the student felt alienated and not valued by a specific teacher. This negative experience may have helped them value the specific teachers that did and do encourage relationships to develop. This would be a question for a future study. According to Dr. Comer's (1988) research, there are many students that feel that adults do not care about them and never listen. Educational institutions that are set up in a comprehensive manner and are only focused on academic success may be encouraging students to become disengaged and apathetic about their learning.

Question five on the survey asked students to explain how negative experiences with teachers impacted their efforts, their learning, and their grades. Respondents who experienced a negative relationship with a teacher reported 95% of the time that it did negatively affect their grades. The most alarming responses were from those students that stated that their negative encounter resulted in them changing their focus and career plans. Recent studies revealed that one-third of American students are not graduating from high school (Junto, 2004). This

astonishing number of dropouts may have remained in school had they formed a positive relationship with a teacher in their school.

In my experience as a counselor, there are ways to intervene and reduce the drop out rate. For some students the set hours and earlier school start are not possible due to their personal life. An activity that helped me identify which students needed more attention involved the teachers and note cards. Each student's name attending the high school was placed on individual note cards. The cards were hung on the walls of a private room in the school. Each teacher was asked to place a star on ten of the cards with the names of the students they felt they had built a relationship. At the end of the activity the cards of the students that did not have any stars were presented to the teachers. This activity was a visual reminder to teachers that many students do not have connections with adults in the school.

A survey conducted in Illinois with 7,200 students revealed that 1,800 of the students would "probably" or "definitely" have chosen not to return to their high school if they had to do it over again (Education Update, 2004). When students reported in question five that they did not feel respected, the result was they were feeling bored, and isolated, they felt isolated. They were actually giving the researcher a lens into that area of the "40 Developmental Assets" where students need to feel valued.

The new research on the development of the adolescent's brain also indicates those high school students' perceptions of uncaring, apathetic, and angry teachers may be skewed due to their underdeveloped prefrontal cortex. What this means is that teens may not do a good job at reading the faces of adults in terms of their true emotions. While this research reveals that students may not interpret situations accurately, it also indicates that the adolescent brain is much more susceptible to the effects of negative experiences than previously thought (Focus, 2000).

Students' scenarios about their negative experience with boring, apathetic, or yelling teachers may impact the students' future desire to learn from another teacher. Since students hear from other students the events that happen in a class, it is no wonder that students seek out the counselor before school begins to request certain teachers. This idea of students having an "amygdala attack" or a feeling that their heart is racing and they want to "get out of high school" or out of a class is understandable as their amygdale rule their feelings, relationships, and learning (Pool, 1997). According to Rick Allen as quoted in the Educational Update (2004), "As more schools discover the benefits of involving students in the high school reform process, the inclusion of their voices may prove to be a valuable catalyst for change."

Since the results from the survey were not 100% in agreement that teacher's relationships with students help with the student's success, it is important to consider why some students perceived their success in school differently. Question two of the survey asks students to identify what factors contribute to their success. While 39% reported teachers as the key contributing factor, a surprising 36% reported that it was their own motivation, resiliency, innate ability, and internal drive that resulted in their success in school (see Table 2). Perhaps this response is the result of students not encountering positive teacher relationships in the past and as a result, they have turned inward to find the drive to succeed or have built a non-parent adult relationship outside of the school. According to the USA Today, there is a school engagement report that is to be published soon in the Journal of Public Health, which calls for educators to do more to keep students "connected." According to the report, 60% of students in secondary schools say they do not feel cared for or included in their school (Toppo, 2004).

The remaining descriptive categories for question two on the survey were minor themes, such as: the environment (5%), the family (4%), and other students (2%). These students (11%)

felt that it was neither their teachers nor themselves that influenced their success in school. It is interesting to note how low the factor of "family" was for this question. Perhaps this is part of the adolescence developmental need to pull away from their parents as they form their own identity.

4. Addressing the Third Research Question: What are the characteristics of teachers who have positive relationships with their students?

The first question on the on-line survey asked the sixteen-year-old students to define what a healthy positive "student/teacher relationship" meant to them. As the students responded to this open-ended question, they most often used the word "*comfortable*" in their description. The ability a teacher had to allow students to feel "*comfortable*" in the educational classroom was the major theme with 44% of students responding in this manner. These students echo what Batistich (1995) suggested is missing in many high schools and that is a sense of belongingness and community. The voice of the students clearly identifies the characteristics they need in a teacher.

Similarly, in question four of the on-line survey, the characteristics of trusting (feeling comfortable, and wanting teachers who take time and listen) were the major emerging themes. Noddings (1992), Glasser (1998), and Pigford (2001) all acknowledge that students want to feel welcome to ask questions as caring teachers listen and respond differentially to them. The personal skills and attributes (characteristics) of a teacher resulted in 61% of the students responses as to what kind of teacher would they turn to for help.

When students were asked in question seven to give examples of teachers with whom they have had a positive relationship, once again the students identified the teachers that were willing to help and take time with them: "*She goes out of her way to help you and make you feel*

as comfortable as you can in class (making sure that you understand the material in class). It made me feel like she actually liked her job and us, her students." Other students referred to a sense of trust: *"They cared about what we were thinking. My teacher would want to know what's going on in our lives and if something important were going on she would keep up with it and ask how it was going."* The book, *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (2004), encourages high school teachers to allow students to express their personal perspectives and help them create individual and group identities. Insightful teachers are able to imbed this concept of trust in the students feeling respected.

Question nine of the on-line survey asked students to give new teachers advice as to what would help build stronger relationships with their students. Forty percent stated new teachers should take "*time*" to dialogue with students in and out of school. The characteristic that encompasses all that the students want from a teacher may be embodied in the word "pedagogue". This word was defined in Chapter One as a woman/person who stands in a caring relation to children and takes their hand. According to the Search Institutes study (2002), students need teachers to be positive, caring adult role models portraying responsible behavior.

The four adjectives most often identified by the sixteen-year olds in this study to describe a teacher with whom they can develop a good relationship are a teacher that is *open to questions (88%), fair (69%), encourages group work (60%), and organized (56%).* These students are unknowingly describing what is needed to create a true sense of community. Creating a sense of community requires a great deal of effort by all participants and a commitment to the time it takes to develop a sense of feeling comfortable with each other. Anderson (1990) agrees the need to develop a sense of psychological belonging within high schools is a major challenge. Educators struggle with the time factor involved in building relationships. The new federal law

"No Child Left Behind" has created a tension in the high schools between our low achieving students and teachers, because both are fearful that the students will not score high enough on the standardized tests to earn a high school diploma. Most young people, especially if they are at risk, need continual encouragement and help in order to learn what they need to succeed. Educators need to build relationships with these at risk students and give them individually what they need.

The final question of the survey asked students if there was anything else they wanted to share with the researcher. Fifty-three of the participants chose not to respond to the last question. Twenty-nine of the thirty-one that did respond chose to respond in a positive vein about their high school experience. Three students commented on the fact that they felt that they had way too much homework and that was what caused them to not like high school. One student stated *"It was really tough fitting in but there were some teachers that made it all better. The teachers didn't care if you were the smart one or if you were the popular one. They cared about you. I think that without some of those teachers I wouldn't be where I am today. I'm very glad that there are teachers that care"*. A future study might involve ten counselors from different high schools gathering quotes from students to be compiled into a book.

5. Addressing the Fourth Research Question: In what ways does the environment of the classroom impact student/teacher relationships?

The reference by students to the word "comfortable" can be taken on a psychological level and a physical level. Specific words used by the students were "*not feeling afraid, not threatened, no hostility*". One of the internal assets identified through the research done by the Search Institute (2002) is a student's "*Commitment to Learning*". The more teenagers felt their school had a

caring environment, the more they cared about their school and the more interest they showed toward their schoolwork and the more effort they put forth. As I looked at the data from the survey, I could hear in their responses a plea for more caring teachers.

When the participants were asked what a typical classroom looked like, they described a colorful room with posters on the wall. The set up of the desks varied from being placed in a circle or in a U. It was evident that the historical practice of desks lined up in a row was never mentioned. Some students felt that chairs and couches and window treatments like home made a room more conducive for learning. There were others that felt that the classrooms needed to be large enough to display their work on the walls, in an organized fashion, and have a consistent room temperature.

It is interesting to note that the participants never mentioned computers or technology as part of their classroom, even though all three districts have some computers within their classrooms. Computer has become generally an acceptable "pencil" for students and students are quite adept at communicating through instant messaging to their friends. However, it is possible that this generation of students realize that the use of computers in some ways has reduced the ability to form connections and relationships.

6. Personal Reflections

This journey of trying to understand why students request certain teachers has been long and insightful. I have found that much of what I have read reinforces what I already knew on a subliminal level. As an educator and counselor, I find myself often blaming the parents and outside factors for a student's failure in school. I now see that the high school system needs to look more closely at the intricate internal community with whom the students engage every day.

Teenagers are creatures that are evolving into adults at an accelerated pace in today's society and they are telling us that they need positive role models and also meaningful adult relationships as they emerge from their adolescent cocoon.

My journey, towards my Doctorate, began September of 2001 when I enrolled in the Educational Leadership required class entitled CORE I. During this class, I read many thought provoking educational books and created my own small woman's study group that has been instrumental in keeping me focused and encouraging me to complete this dissertation. Their suggestions helped me avoid many pitfalls in the process of completing my study. One great suggestion was to find a way to avoid transcribing all of my data for analysis purposes. I followed their advice and spent many hours creating an on-line survey that would require my subjects to type their responses themselves.

After meeting with my committee and completing my overview, I reworked my literature review being mindful of their recommendations. The additional research on the development of the teenage brain helped me understand the various responses I received about teachers. Then I submitted my research proposal for approval. Once I received my approval to move forward with my research from the IRB, I began the process of contacting District A, District B, and District C.

I found it most difficult to initiate and organize the data that I needed from District A. Although the Superintendent was very supportive of my project, the principal did not return my many phone calls to begin the research in his district. I resorted to contacting a high school friend who was the district's gifted coordinator to help me connect with the administrator in the building. Through the efforts of the district's gifted coordinator, she was able to identify thirty students to complete the permission forms and complete the on-line survey under her

supervision. It is important to note that the students were randomly chosen from the junior class. My decision to randomly utilize all sixteen year-olds, instead of eliminate students that had an Individual Educational Plan in the study, made the process easier for the district. This also gave me a better cross section of the sixteen-year-old population.

The assistant principal was my contact person in District B. I met with her and explained the intent of the study. She randomly chose 30 sixteen-year-old students and explained, distributed, and gathered all the parental permissions. The counseling intern organized and oversaw the students taking the on-line survey in District B. Even after the students turned in their parent/student permission forms, they were slow in responding to the passes that were sent out to them to complete the survey. It took two months for the district to complete the on-line surveys and this district was the first to complete all the surveys.

I do not know why I thought gathering the data from District C would be easier, maybe because I work in this district. Unfortunately, this was not the case. I had to remind myself from past experience that sixteen-year-olds are consistently reticent of returning parent permission slips. I had randomly pulled students' names and had a counseling intern speak to each student. After one month, only ten of the thirty students followed through with the completion of the survey. I finally went into all the junior English classes to explain the purpose of the study and asked for volunteers. This process worked well.

Once I received notice from each of the districts that the students had completed the survey, I downloaded their raw data. My plan had been to take their typed information from the participants in my study and utilize QSR'sN6 to analyze this qualitative data for overarching themes across the specific questions. Unfortunately, I was unable to utilize this program because all of the students' raw data needed to be set up in a different format. I then decided to utilize

myself and another educator to independently code my participants' responses to promote inter-rater reliability.

Another paper obstacle was keeping track of the numbers assigned to each district and making sure that only one student was assigned an individual number (See Appendix C). District A began having the students take the survey before they had received the sheet with the assigned numbers. This error was caught on the first day and only eight students were then assigned the same number and that information was noted and handled when interpreting the raw data.

Technology also created some problems during the gathering of the data. One student completed the survey but then did not hit the submit button. There were forty-four females who returned their signed parent permission form and completed the survey and forty-one males who also returned their signed parent permission form and completed the survey.

All three districts have a relatively stable population. There is a focus in all three districts for graduates to go on to some form of post-secondary instruction. In Chapter Four, I noted that Standard and Poors reported in 2002 that all three districts post-secondary placement was in the eighty percent range. The controversial new Federal Law "No Child Left Behind" has thrust the three districts in this study into a frenzy of tutoring, testing, and teaching to the test. As a counselor in one of the districts and knowing the climate of the other two districts, there is not much time available for opportunities for teachers to interact individually with their students.

7. Implications

The implications emerging from this study refer to recommendations for more time built into the academic day for teachers to have "real" conversations with their students. Students express the importance of feeling comfortable within the school but also an accepted opportunity to ask questions when confused. Professional development in the areas of building relationships and understanding the emotional intelligence of adolescents would be beneficial. The students need to have an active voice in building a community of learners.

- Administrators can help create a meaningful voice for adolescents by requiring teachers and counselors to add to their annual goals meaningful ways to build relationships.

- Teachers' professional development should be comprehensive, including experiential building experiences, understanding the new research around the development of the adolescent brain, and more training on the developmental needs of teenagers.

- Teachers need time built into the academic day to improve the physical environment of their rooms.

- Teachers' need a continuous, on-going, long-term plan to improve the sense of community within their classrooms and bring the soul back to our schools.

- Administrators need to require yearly goals from teachers and counselors, documenting strategies they use to build "Assets" with their students.

- Master teachers who are identified by students as relationship building individuals should be mentors to other faculty members.

- Teachers need time formally and informally to get to know their students as individuals.

- Teachers are the pivotal impetus to change the current culture of detachment in our nation's schools.

- High School Students need to have a choice as to which their teachers will be.

- Students' voices could be heard during in service days by having students present their thoughts to their staff.

8. Recommendations for Future Studies and Projects

Based on emerging concepts that surfaced throughout this study, the following are recommendations for future studies:

- Compare the responses in regard to how male versus females describe their relationship with teachers.

- Explore the three districts studied in more detail by comparing the responses from each district.

- Gather student stories on an audiotape or videotape from the three districts.

- Plan an in-service day where teachers would watch a performance by students utilizing students presenting the findings of this study.

9. Concluding Remarks

The results of the study showed that the majority of the sixteen year olds interviewed believe that their positive relationships with specific teachers have contributed to their success in school. It was made clear from their various responses that they want their teachers to encourage a sense of community by creating a comfortable setting for learning to take place. Students want their teachers to take the "time" to get to know them.

When one reflects on raising healthy, caring high school students, one realizes that it is complicated and a complex thing to do. However, to increase the chances of teenagers growing into healthy adults the educational environment needs to play an integral role and set up intentional goals. The role of the teacher within a classroom and the high school itself is vastly complex. In Richard Ingersoll's book "Who Controls Teachers' Work?" he explains that there are two competing views today as to the role of a teacher. The first role compares schools to factories with a quota to fulfill. This means that teachers are under the microscope to improve students' academic skills, as dictated by the new federal laws. The second view regards teachers as professionals who need a sense of autonomy to do their job well. Teen's responses to a recent Gallup Youth Survey provide support for the second view. Their comments about which teachers they respond best to suggest that keeping a group of kids engaged in learning requires having plenty of latitude to be highly creative, to build strong relationships, and to tailor the learning process to the needs of each student (Ingersoll, 2004).

The voice of the student found within this study supports Ingersoll's suggestion. It is time for educators and the federal government to listen to the high school student, change the way education has happened for the last one hundred years, and change the cold, sterile environment where we expect adolescents to learn and succeed and become productive citizens.

Appendix A

Appendix A

Actual Survey

If you have used a computer
before, this survey should not be
difficult to fill out. Should you have
any questions, please ask your
guidance counselor(s).
Remember: your participation is
very valuable and your answers
will be used to improve the
academic experience. Please
answer truthfully and to the best
of your knowledge.
Is this text too small for you to
read comfortably? Is it too big?
Click repeatedly below until the
text is the size you want. Once
you click each time, it may take
a few moments for your
browser to resize the text.
+ Larger - Smaller
IMPORTANT!
Please enter your student ID number below that corresponds to
your name on the sign-in log:
1. Many students say that their relationship with a teacher is a
significant factor in learning. Define what a healthy positive
"student/teacher relationship" means to you.
Type your response in the box below:
2. What factor(s) do you believe contribute to your success or
lack of success in your school?
Type your response in the box below:
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, what is the importance of your
relationship with your teachers in terms of you being
successful in a course?
Select an option from the choices below:
Please make a selection
4. If you had a problem in school, what kind of teacher would
you turn to for help? Why?
Type your response in the box below:
5. Think about a class where you did not have a positive
relationship with a teacher. (i.e. you did not care for the
teaching style, personality...) How did that affect your effort
in the class? Explain with an example. How did that affect

81

your learning in that class? Your grade?
Type your response in the box below:
6. If you could change two things within your school, what would they be?
Type your response in the boxes below:
1.
2.
7. Think about a class where you did have a positive relationship with a teacher. How did that affect your effort in the class? Explain with and example. How did that affect your learning in that class? Your grade?
Type your response in the box below:
8. In a classroom where you have a strong, positive student/ teacher relationship,
What does a typical class period look like?
What types of activities do you participle in?
What does the physical environment of this class look like?
In what ways do students participate in class?
Type your response in the box below:
9. What would you want to tell a teacher that would help other teachers build stronger relationships with their students?
10.
11.
Type your response in the box below:
Select your response for each question below:
How often does one of your teachers...
...help you individually with your school work?
...talk to you about what you are doing in school?
...ask you about homework?
...go to meetings or events that you are involved in?
Select your response for each question below:
How much do you agree or disagree with the following:
I work better for some teachers than others
My teachers really care about me
I get a lot of encouragement at my school
A sense of humor is important
12. During the last four weeks, how many days of school have

you missed because you skipped or "ditched?"

13.

14. What four adjectives that describe a teacher with whom you
can develop a good relationship?

Select an option from the choices below:

Please make a selection

Select your response for each question below:

How much do you agree or disagree with the
following:

My school's culture stresses
that academic achievement
is important.

Select FOUR numbers from the choices below:

1. Consistent

2. Fair

3. Predictable

4. Random

5. Routine

6. Open to questions

7. Strict

8. Lecturer

9. Facilitator

10. Organized

11. Storyteller

12. Encourages Group
Work

15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your
school experience?

Type your response in the box below:

When you are finished, click the "Submit Survey" button below.

Thank you for your participation!

SUBMIT SURVEY

Designed by Dan Klein Consulting.

CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: **Perceptions of Adolescents' Relationships with Teachers: A Descriptive Exploration of Select High School Communities**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Holly Edwards Voelp, M.Ed., Professional School Counselor,

123 Oakdale Drive, Zelienople, PA 16063: Phone: 724.452. e-mail: hvoelp@yahoo.com

CO-INVESTIGATORS: None

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: N/A - Doctoral Student at the University of Pittsburgh

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of adolescents in regard to their relationships with teachers in high schools. "No Child Left Behind: leaves out the opportunity for rational student interaction with the educational system. The focus on academic performance decreases the opportunity for teenagers to have caring relationships with teachers.

Who is being asked to take part in this study?
Approximately 90 sixteen-year-old high school students from three small suburban public schools will be invited to participate in this research study.

What are the procedures of this study?
Your child will be asked to participate in this research study, your child will be asked to complete a series of questions on a secured Internet site. Their responses will be utilized to identify common themes around the topic of positive educationally focused relationships. This Internet questionnaire will take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

 How will my eligibility for the study be determined?
A designated person from your school has been asked to randomly select 15 male and 15 female students to participate. All students are eligible to participate in the Internet questionnaire.

What are the possible risks and discomforts of this study?
There is little risk involved in this study. No invasive procedures or medications are included. The major potential risk is a breach of confidentiality, but we will do everything possible to protect your privacy. To reduce the likelihood of a breach of confidentiality, all educators involved have been thoroughly trained to maintain your privacy.

Another potential risk associated with your child's participation is the psychological discomfort some people experience when they respond to specific questions found on questionnaires. Your child may choose not to answer questions.

Will I benefit from taking part in this study?
Your child will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study. However, your child may learn more about themselves as a result of completing this questionnaire.

Are there any costs to me if I participate in this study?

There are no costs to your child for participating in this study.

How much will I be paid if I complete this study?

If your child completes the assessment session, your child will not receive any compensation for completing the questionnaire

Will anyone know that I am taking part in this study?
All records pertaining to your child's involvement in this study are kept strictly confidential (private) and any data that includes your child's identity will be stored in locked file at all times. A number will be assigned to your child's information and your child's name will be separated from this coded information during storage. At the end of this study, any records that personally identify your child will remain stored in locked files and will be kept for a minimum of five years. Your child's identity will not be revealed in any description or publications of this research

In unusual cases, your child's research records may be released in response to an order from a court of law. It is also possible that authorized representatives from the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office, the University of Pittsburgh IRB may review your child's data for the purpose of monitoring the conduct of this study. Also, if the investigators learn that your child or someone with whom your child is involved is in serious danger of potential harm, they will need to inform the appropriate agencies, as required by Pennsylvania law.

Is my child's participation in this study voluntary?

Yes! Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to have your child take part in it, or your child may stop participating at any time, even after signing this form. Your decision will not affect your relationship with the University of Pittsburgh or anyone at your school, nor will your child lose any benefits that you might be eligible for because of this decision. Your child may be withdrawn from the study at any time by the investigators: for example, if your child were subsequently found to meet any of the study criteria that would exclude you from participating.

How can I get more information about this study?

If you have any further questions about this research study, you or your child may contact the investigators listed at the beginning of this consent form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate at the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office, 1-866-212-2668.

****

SUBJECT'S CERTIFICATION

- **I have read the consent form for this study and any questions I had, including explanation of all terminology, have been answered to my satisfaction.**

- **I understand that my child and myself are encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that those questions will be answered by the researchers listed on the first page of this form.**

-

- **I understand the researchers are often seeking subjects for other studies.**

    I agree _____ I do not agree _____ to allow these researchers to contact me about the possibility of participating in other research projects

- **I understand that my child's participation in this study is voluntary and that my child is free to refuse to participate or to withdraw my consent and discontinue my child's participation in this study at any time.**

- **I agree to permit my child to participate in this study.**

_____   _____

_____
Print Name of Child

I understand that, as a minor (age less than 18 years), the above-named child is not permitted to participate in this research study without my consent. Therefore, by signing this form, I give my consent for his/her participation in this research study.

_____   _____
Parent's or Guardian's Name (Print)   Relationship to Participant (Child)

_____   _____
Parent's or Guardian's Signature   Date

VERIFICATION OF EXPLANATION

I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research study to the above named child in age appropriate language. He/she has had an opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she has provided affirmative agreement (i.e., assent) to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Investigator's Signature   Date
_____
Investigator's Printed Name

This research has been explained to me, and I agree to participate.
_____ _____
Signature of Child-Subject   Date

_____
Printed Name of Child-Subject

CERTIFICATION of INFORMED CONSENT

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual(s), and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual(s) have about this study have been answered, and we will always be available to address future questions as they arise.

_____ _____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent   Role in Research Study

_____ _____
            Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix C

Sample School Log
Date Counselor's Initials ID Student Name
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