Where is the Target? An Examination of the Conceptions of Student Engagement within a School Community

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Introduction

The southwestern corner of Kansas is largely a rural landscape of prairie grasses and agriculture. Located in a small town in this region, in an environment that some would characterize as isolated and harsh, High Plains High School (HPHS) is committed to trying something new for the sake of its students. This research reveals stakeholders' conceptions about student engagement at HPHS in the context of a major school redesign effort. The student body is largely Hispanic (79%) with significant levels of English Language Learners (52%) and economically disadvantaged individuals (80%) (Kansas State Department of Education, 2019). The top five major employers in the community are a meat-packing plant, the school district, a community college, a medical center, and Walmart.

In 2017, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) launched an ambitious school redesign project, titled Kansans Can, which invited schools to redesign their traditional school model for a more student-focused system. This new vision is focused on improvements, not only in academic skills, but also employability and citizenship skills, citing the need to move away from a "one size fits all" education system that relies on state assessments as a primary source of accountability toward a more student-focused system. Kansans Can is organized around five outcomes established by the Kansas State Board of Education: social-emotional growth, kindergarten readiness, use of individual plans of study, high school graduation, and post-secondary success (KSDE, n.d.). High Plains High School was among the schools selected for the inaugural round of school redesign sites; and as such, it is hoped that they will serve as a model for additional Kansas school districts chosen to participate in future waves of redesign initiatives.

In the beginning stages of the redesign planning, High Plains High School faculty and staff administered a survey to all students and discovered that approximately 38% of students felt "disengaged" at school. This disengagement was indicated by low agreement with statements about whether school was fun, or the extent to which students felt they get to do what they do best every day. HPHS administrators found these results worthy of further study in an attempt to better understand how school engagement was being understood and operationalized by students, faculty, and families.

High Plains High School has engaged in some structural changes to their school day as part of the redesign process. Some of these changes involve removal of passing period bells, shorter time periods (called Mods) for classes, and periods in the day devoted to personal tutoring and assistance. After one year of implementation, the school enters a second year of redesign with both successes and challenges to consider. This study examines, retells, and analyzes the stories and perspectives of faculty, students, and parents at HPHS. They do not all agree on the path needed to inspire and engage their students, but they do all seem to love and care about the students.

The challenges faced by rural high schools in their ability to engage and inspire their students include geographic isolation, limited resources/knowledge, and inadequate funding (NSBA Communications, 2018). In an economy that increasingly demands post-high school training and/or degrees, rural communities lag behind their suburban and urban counterparts in educational attainment (NSBA Communications, 2018). Understanding and implementing processes and actions known to increase student engagement have the potential to increase students' graduation rates, productivity in school, aspirations, and sense of belonging (Comadena et al., 2007; Dary et al., 2016; Hazel et al., 2013; Janosz et al., 2008). Through this research, we seek to elucidate the conceptual understandings that faculty, parents, and students hold regarding the construct of engagement, the meaning and purpose of redesign, and ultimately what attributes and resources can be brought to bear in order to broaden the vision of the student body and provide richer opportunities to grow and thrive. Students who are actively involved in and psychologically committed to their schooling may be more likely to capitalize on the opportunities schools can provide and experience positive youth development (Li, 2011). Understanding the ways in which engagement is conceptualized and operationalized within a particular school community has applicability for improved outcomes for all students, and is of paramount importance in any version of school improvement or redesign (Appleton et al., 2008). This knowledge, in turn, has potential for reshaping the ways in which we prepare our pre-service teachers and administrators, especially those most likely to serve the students and families of deeply rural communities.

Literature Review

To many educators, the concept of school engagement intuitively feels as though it makes good common sense. The more engaged a student is, we surmise, the more they will "see the relevance of their experiences, feel connected to their school experiences, and develop more positive attitudes and attributes both in and out of school" (Dary et al., 2016, p. 2). However, as Hazel et al., (2013) remind us, student engagement or school engagement does not have a universally agreed upon definition. It is a complex, multi-dimensional construct open to highly idiosyncratic interpretations depending on your personal viewpoint and experiences. Appleton et al. (2008) find no less than eight constructs, referred to as engagement, in the literature with some studies drawing on the work of Ryan and Deci (2017) on autonomy, belonging, and competence. What does seem to have some consensus in the literature is that student/school engagement is often composed of at least three elements: cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement, and social/emotional engagement (Appleton et al., 2008; Dary et al., 2016; Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Li, 2011; Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

The concept of school engagement does not have a long history in the literature. Early studies referenced only two types of engagement, and in one instance, engagement was characterized as participation in school-run activities (Appleton et al., 2008). Dary et al., (2016) found that many students and educators believed factors like paying attention, completing assignments, or regular attendance were indicators that a student is engaged at school. While these behavioral indicators of engagement do comprise components that relate to positive performance and outcomes (Finn & Rock, 1997; Wang & Holcombe, 2010), reliance on behaviors rooted in compliance may be a legacy of the colonial education in America, where early Puritans intertwined religious and

moral education and deemed reading the Bible as the only reason for literacy (Vatterott, 2015). Then, in the early 1900's, a rise in manufacturing led employers and factory owners to pressure local school boards into prioritizing characteristics that would make good future employees: behaviors like punctuality, timed routines, and following a chain of command (Feldman, 2019). When, in the second half of the twentieth century, behaviorism gained popularity, the professional education community fully embraced the idea of extrinsic reinforcement of behaviors as a way to manage the ever-growing population of students in schools, many of whom were from immigrant families (Feldman, 2019). So perhaps it should not be surprising that for some, school engagement is still characterized by passivity (Lawson, 2017) and compliance, and as such, is evaluating a student's level of engagement by the metric of how well they comply with educational expectations like attendance, work completion, rule following, and recognizing school personnel as authority figures.

In reality, student or school engagement is often conceptualized as a very different set of behaviors, and is typically less focused on school/teacher compliance and more focused on displaying sustained energy, commitment, and persistence in the tasks of learning. Ritchart (2015) speaks of an engaged student being practiced in the skills of communication, collaboration, innovation, and problem-solving. Skinner and Belmont (1993) find that engaged students show an increased involvement in learning activities accompanied by a positive emotional tone, a tendency to pursue tasks at the edges of their competency levels, and increased levels of enthusiasm, optimism, and curiosity. Some researchers find that students are engaged through the interaction of autonomy (internal) and support (external) forces (Lee & Smith, 1999; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Many of these attributes and skills represent a set of high-leverage competencies with cross-disciplinary appeal and lifelong usability that research has shown to be related to positive outcomes like reduced drop-out rates (Dary et al., 2016), increased student achievement (Li, 2011), and increased prosocial behaviors (Montenegro, 2017).

School engagement goes beyond simply increasing observable events like participation rates, note taking, or test scores. The current three-factor model (cognitive, behavioral, and social/emotional) of engagement frequently used in the research seems also to reflect a "directional process initiated by the teacher" (Montenegro, 2017, p. 118). An additional avenue for considering engagement has recently begun to emerge in the literature – that of agentic engagement. Agentic engagement is focused on learners who actively contribute to their own learning as well as the proactive processes enacted as students initiate and respond to teachers' actions (Montenegro, 2017; Reeve, 2012. In this study, the guiding conceptual positions for defining student engagement are aligned with four positions taken from the literature (cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement, social-emotional engagement, and agentic engagement).

Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement addresses the thought life of students in school. Ritchhart (2015) identifies engaged students as practiced in the skills of communication, collaboration, innovation, and problem-solving. Cognitively engaged students are thoughtful and purposeful in the application of effort needed to comprehend complex ideas and acquire difficult skills as they participate in the tasks of learning (Lawson & Lawson, 2013). In this state of engagement, students are typically thinking deeply about ideas and concepts, making meaningful connections,

and sometimes are even entering what might be described as flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) experiences, when one loses track of time and space. Cognitive engagement also includes the use of self-regulatory and metacognitive strategies and goal-directed behaviors (Fredricks, 2011). Students who are cognitively engaged can articulate their thinking, motivations, preferences, and decision-making while in school. Attributes and skills represented by cognitive engagement are important high-leverage competencies with a lifelong utility.

Skinner and Belmont (1993) found teacher behavior to be a strong influence on students' engagement in activities, and that influence tended to come in the form of clear expectations and strategic assistance in the classroom. When teachers are able to create caring, well-structured learning environments in which expectations are high, fair, and clear, students are more likely to report high levels of engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004). Support and academic expectations clearly go hand-in-hand and share crucial roles as both are necessary prerequisites and vital facilitators of learning in the classroom.

Behavioral Engagement

Behavioral engagement encompasses aspects of education like school attendance, positive conduct, following rules, and participation in social or extracurricular activities (Appleton et al., 2008). Fredricks (2011) also links behavioral engagement with completion of assignments and projects, although others find class participation, time invested in assignments, and credits earned to be indicators of cognitive engagement (Appleton et al., 2008). Behavioral engagement is often linked to positive achievement outcomes (Fredricks et al., 2004), but the most important of those outcomes, and the one most articulated in school reform initiatives, is undoubtedly high school graduation (Carter et al., 2012; Legault et al., 2006). Many studies focused on behavioral engagement consider factors like prosocial conduct in school, time spent on homework, and the extent to which students follow the school rules (Lawson & Lawson, 2013) and find that, in general, students with poor behavioral engagement indicators also experience poorer academic and social outcomes. These are students whose conduct is indicative of behavioral disengagement or disaffection (Lawson & Lawson, 2013), a construct often measured via absenteeism, suspensions, and classes missed.

Social-Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement is characterized by the emotional states students report in reaction to schools, teachers, other students, and related activities (Fredricks, 2011). Students' emotional reactions to school can be positive or negative, and are sometimes related to a sense of belonging or feelings of being important to others at school (Fredricks et al., 2004; Yusof et al., 2017). The importance of relationships between and among students and between students and teachers are frequently cited as being of crucial importance to experiencing a sense of belonging to and caring about their school and school work (Klem & Connell, 2004; Lee & Smith, 1999; Wang & Eccles, 2011; Yusof et al., 2017). Hardre and Reeve (2003) articulated that a sense of importance and belonging are related to students' decisions whether or not to continue in school. Klem and Connell (2004) note that, "Students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school" (p. 270). The authors found this, in turn, was linked to higher levels of

engagement, attendance, and test scores, all variables which “strongly predict youth will successfully complete high school and... achieve economic self-sufficiency” (p. 270).

Classroom and school environments that allow and encourage students to experience high levels of academic success, coupled with strong and adaptive teacher-student relationships, are most likely to facilitate high levels of engagement, student confidence, and use of self-regulatory strategies (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). This is echoed in the findings of Skinner and Belmont (1993) who discovered strong empirical support for “a reciprocal relationship between teachers’ behavior and students’ engagement in the classroom" (p. 577). Vollet et al., (2017) found results in their data that suggest positive relationships with teachers can even buffer students from the “motivational cost of belonging to disaffected peer groups” (p. 647). This speaks to the idea of contextualization in the factors influencing school engagement and adds the layer of setting, interactions, and school ecology to the mix. For the purposes of this research study, the social and emotional aspects are considered merged (as social-emotional engagement) both because they are so tightly connected and because one of the goals of the Kansas Can Redesign efforts revolves around social-emotional learning.

Agentic Engagement

More recently, the concept of agentic engagement has emerged in the literature (Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Montenegro, 2017; Reeve, 2006, 2012). Lawson and Lawson (2013) conceptualize this type of engagement as one that connects the ideas of student agency and ecological influences like peers, family, and community to the structures and culture of the school itself. This connection to agency moves the concept of engagement from one that is linear in nature, encompassing teachers’ actions directed toward students, to one more inclusive of students’ particular culture and contexts. Agentic engagement has been articulated as engagement in which the learner has a sense of agency and contributes to learning and instruction (Matos et al., 2018; Reeve, 2012). Students exhibiting agentic engagement show a sense of ownership, agency, and pride in their work which may take the form of letting instructors know their needs and interests, clearly articulating ideas and opinions, expressing preferences, and asking questions in class (Fletcher, 2016; Matos et al., 2018; Reeve, 2012). In addition, agentic engagement connects with learner behaviors which are proactive, self-efficacious, and personalized (Montenegro, 2017). This constructive contribution to the educational process may also have the potential to elicit a more autonomy-supportive style of teaching where a teacher becomes more likely to respond positively to students’ needs and wants (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018; Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Matos et al., 2018). Agentic engagement may contribute to a more negotiated and co-constructed learning experience, creating a kind of feedback loop where students’ actions influence teacher behavior, and vice versa (Lawson, 2017; Reeve, 2012).

This study seeks to better understand how the school constituencies of students, parents, and faculty conceptualize student engagement using these frames of reference (cognitive, behavioral, social-emotional, agentic) from the literature base. An effective effort to increase student engagement in High Plains High School would benefit from a common understanding and agreement about the nature of student engagement. Since these constructs are loosely defined and multidimensional, making sense of the expectations held by the members of this particular

school community appears to be the best way forward. The researchers involved in this study are hopeful that this will provide information and data that might assist in crafting further research designed not only to understand how these complex concepts are manifested in this community but also to help school faculty and staff better serve their community by increasing the sense of engagement and hope for students, teachers, and parents. Finding avenues by which to measure and evaluate the impact of interventions generated by the Kansans Can redesign process can only strengthen this ambitious initiative and help future participants better understand how to implement and evaluate their own change processes.

Methodology

In order to reveal patterns in the conceptualizations, attitudes, and expectations related to student engagement held by the three constituencies studied here (faculty, parents, and students), face-to-face individual interviews were conducted, coded, and analyzed. Researchers conducted twenty-seven interviews (10 faculty, 9 students, and 8 parents) representing each of the three constituencies. A selection protocol and a target set of demographic percentages (Table 1) was given to the school to attempt to secure a representative sample of interviewees. The sample of nine students interviewed included (2) 22% White, (6) 67% Hispanic, (1) 11% African American. Two of the nine students (22%) that were interviewed identified with very low engagement in school (1 on a scale of 1-5 where 5 is highest engagement), two others indicated moderate engagement (3 on a scale of 1-5), and five students rated themselves moderately high (4 on a scale of 1-5). Parent interviewees were (3) 38% White, (4) 50% Hispanic, (1) 12% African American. Two of the parent interviews had to be conducted in Spanish with a translator. Faculty interviewed were (8) 80% White and (2) 20% Hispanic, fairly well-representing a faculty that does not match the ethnicity of the student body. Furthermore, the faculty interviews obtained representation across many teaching disciplines including English language arts, mathematics, science, foreign language, social studies, career and technical education, and counseling. Finally, five out of the nine faculty interviewed for this study have been at the school less than two years, nearly representing the young faculty with 62% of the faculty employed two years or less at HPHS.

Table 1
Targets for Community/School Representation

	Representation Targets from School
Ethnicity	78% Hispanic, 15% White, 2% African American
SES	80% Disadvantaged, 20% Non-disadvantaged
Grade Level	25% in each of grades 9, 10, 11, 12
Gender	50% each male & female
% Low Engagement	38% low engagement

Individual interviews used a protocol designed specifically for each constituency which asked about personal expectations, conceptions of school engagement, and beliefs regarding students'

future plans. Interview prompts developed by the researchers aligned with research questions and included items like, “Describe how you see your students’ engagement with learning in this school?” (parents), “What inspires and engages you?” (students), and “What indicators do you employ in order to gauge student engagement?” (faculty). All interviews were recorded using Zoom and subsequently transcribed, reviewed, and edited for accuracy. Researchers calibrated the coding process by collaboratively coding four of the interviews together with Dedoose software. After completing the calibration process, the remaining 24 interviews were coded individually by various researchers.

A combination of structured and open coding protocols was used in the study. Structured coding utilized the four conceptual orientations for student engagement (behavioral engagement, social-emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, and agentic engagement (see Table 2)). Each of the four conceptual orientations were in turn coded in two ways: 1) a positively-oriented code (+) when the concept was mentioned in a positive context (e.g., talking about student engagement) and 2) a negative (-) code when mentioned in the context of student disengagement (see Table 3). An open coding process was subsequently used to further understandings expressed by the interviewees and to help identify more detailed or unique perspectives on concepts of engagement held by the constituencies.

Table 2

Frequency Table: Raw Engagement Orientation Codes by Constituency

	Faculty	**Parents**	**Students**	**Totals**
Behavioral	149	76	60	**285**
Social/emotional	68	73	77	**218**
Cognitive	77	54	92	**223**
Agentic	47	27	56	**130**
Totals	341	230	285	**856**

Table 3

Frequency Table: Raw Number of + and - Engagement Orientation Codes Per Constituency

	Faculty	**Parents**	**Students**	**Totals**
Behavioral +	117	67	52	**236**
Behavioral -	32	9	8	**49**
Social/emotional +	62	63	67	**192**
Social/emotional -	6	10	10	**26**
Cognitive +	67	49	76	**192**
Cognitive -	10	5	16	**31**
Agentic +	37	27	54	**118**

Agentic -	10	0	2	**12**
Totals	341	230	285	**856**

Results

Behavioral Conceptions of Engagement. Coded interview data show that all constituencies hold to some behavioral interpretations of school engagement (Table 2), a finding which might not seem surprising given the experiences reported by Dary et al., (2016), in their report on conceptions of engagement. What did surprise us was that, although interviewees referred to behavioral orientations of engagement a total of 285 times, 149 of those references came from faculty. Behavioral orientation to student engagement centers on behaviors like attendance, compliance, work completion, and student conduct (Fredricks et al., 2004), and has been shown to contribute to positive school outcomes like increased achievement (Appleton et al., 2008). However, the concept of school engagement as largely behavioral reveals an orientation that may prioritize passivity and compliance (Lawson, 2017) over deep, meaningful learning. The interviews revealed widespread behavioral conceptions of engagement with statements by various constituents such as, "Everybody actually doing their work and having good grades and being on top of everything…" (Student 6), or "...they're becoming very persistent in their learning and very engaged in their learning and doing the things they need to do to improve" (Faculty 4). However, we also heard statements like, "What really inspires or engages them is when they see a zero in the grade book" (Faculty 2), which might reveal an understanding of behavioral engagement concepts as either a motivating factor for teachers to employ to more fully engage students or as punitive elements used to elicit compliance from students. Parent responses often were behavioral in nature and some looked back in time to the way school used to be. For example, Parent 2 said,

> And we can see to ask ourselves, you know, with what was wrong with what it used to be. Kids came to school. They had a schedule. They came to class. They all had um, all the classes that they needed.

The faculty focus on behavioral conceptions of engagement were the most prominent, and faculty stood out even more when the negative (-) conceptions of disengagement were examined (see Table 3). 65% of the comments mentioning behavioral disengagement came from faculty. Excerpts displaying this orientation include, "I mean they're literally just here, basically we're free government babysitting to keep them for eight hours…" (Faculty 6), and "Well, I think if you look at their grades and you look at their attendance and you look at how they act in the classroom." (Faculty 4).

While many parent responses indicated behavioral engagement was an important orientation some elaborated on future success and pro-social skills. Responses like, "...being productive and helping in their community." (Parent 6) or "...if you can do a little bit of everything to be more well-rounded ... be familiar with the different groups ... and have different types of friends." (Parent 5) are a few of the excerpts from parents.

Agentic Conceptions of Engagement. Students interviewed gave responses that were more frequently coded to a positive agentic orientation of engagement than the other groups. Students

discussed their own goals more frequently and commented on how school either contributed to them or was an obstacle to them. As an example, a student responded to a question about what he thought about in school with this:

> ...how I can better myself and if I do, do well in school now and if I'm engaged and I put effort forward, I think that doing well will help my future. And like I think about what I want to do for my family and what my dad has done for us. So, I just think about, yeah-. I want to give back, I guess. With the effort that I put in now (Student 8). (Agentic-oriented excerpts were less commonly encountered across all constituencies.)

Faculty interviewed were more likely to mention agentic engagement concepts within a negative context, when compared with parents and students, often describing in greater detail students who are lacking agentic engagement. 81% of comments coded to agentic disengagement (-) came from faculty. Faculty interviewee 1 described disengaged students in this way:

> ...they have to be self-motivated and they're struggling with that. And so, they're like I'm bored, I'm bored. And I'm like, but you're failing two classes, you're not working on your work, you know, that kind of thing. It's kind of funny how they come up with this 'I'm bored' term.

Commentary like this seems to indicate that students are experiencing this agentic disengagement as a lack of agency or influence over events, the environment, or their own abilities to marshal resources needed to succeed in school. These are students who have, as Reeve (2012) tells us, given up an expectation of success, and no longer see a "student-initiated pathway to positive educational outcomes" (p. 591) for themselves. This disaffected and passive student behavior functions to decouple the agentic engagement feedback loop so that a teacher may be less likely to respond positively or support students' needs (Fitzpatrick et al., 2018; Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Matos et al., 2018).

Cognitive Conceptions of Engagement. Students mentioned cognitive engagement concepts with the highest frequency, followed by teachers and then parents. Taken as a whole, all constituencies mentioned cognitive engagement in a positive sense approximately six times more frequently than aspects of cognitive disengagement. Student interviewees brought up cognitive disengagement 31 times and were the source of roughly 60% of all mentions of cognitive disengagement. For example, Student 1 responded to the question, "So what do you like to think about deeply when you're in school?" with this response, "When I'm in school… Um…Topics that don't necessarily relate to school." All three groups, but more often parents exhibited some struggles when asked to articulate what students thought about deeply while in school.

Faculty appear to understand the concept of cognitive engagement but are quick to mention that they don't see that behavior in students. Comments like the following, seem to show an awareness of the ideas related to cognitive engagement: "I think we need to keep them curious and, you know, whether it's in literature or math or science or whatever that for them, education is about there's a whole world out there…" (Faculty 8) That awareness though, is tempered by an understanding that students may not display the kind of thoughtful and purposeful application of effort (Lawson & Lawson, 2013) needed, as seen in this statement: "...I don't see it in our student body, the persistence to figure it out" (Faculty 8).

Social-emotional Conceptions of Engagement

Conceptions of social-emotional engagement emerged in similar frequencies across all three constituencies. Each of the groups mentioned the value of positive social relationships in the school. Faculty interviewee 8 mentioned students coming for the social aspect of school but struggling with the emotional component with this statement:

> I think we probably have a probably pretty high number of students who kind of are emotionally checked out. You know, I think, I think they come, for the social aspect, which is important, but I don't know that we're making, that bridge that, you know, is (the) emotional and learning part, I think, I think we have a lot of students (who) emotionally are exhausted. Maybe overwhelmed. Maybe feel a sense of, yeah, I don't care. You know kind of complacent, apathetic. That's kind of kind of what I see.

Interestingly, some students and parents were asking for deeper and more meaningful relationships with their teachers. Student 5 responded to a question about what would make school more engaging with, "just trying to have a relationship with the teacher". Parents also expressed a desire for better relationships between teachers and students and some, such as Parent 8, put blame at least partly on the use of technology.

> (Translator for Parent 8): So, she (her daughter) was more engaged, she believed, when the teachers were more on hand or teaching and explaining more, "conversating," giving them more information. She thinks that then she was learning a lot more.
> (Interviewer): Does she think then...it sounds like she's saying there's less dialogue now in the classroom, less conversation, and that the computers are a problem with that?
> (Translator for Parent 8): She's nodding yes, and yes.

Another parent put it this way through a translator:

> (Translator for Parent 3): "... she's mentioning how, what she can do is just pray for the teachers so that they can be a little bit more aware when students are wanting to reach out to them."

It would be hard to overstate the importance of relationships among teachers and students. A positive sense of belonging and caring have been linked in the research to increased interest in school assignments (Klem & Connell, 2004; Lee & Smith, 1999; Wang & Eccles, 2011; Yusof et al., 2017), decisions about whether to continue in school, as well as improved attendance and test scores (Klem & Connell, 2004). Our data point to this aspect of engagement is one of importance to parents, teachers, and students. Parents and students seem to sense, almost intuitively, that this is a part of the school experience with the potential to influence student engagement and success in ways that are hard to measure and quantify, but that can motivate students toward resilient attitudes and buffer the effects of adversity (Vollet et al., 2017).

Discussion and Implications

Discussion of the Data. The interviews data revealed that the stakeholder groups (faculty, students, and parents) do not hold to a uniform conception of student engagement. That said, all groups expressed significant conceptions aligned to a behavioral orientation to student engagement. Faculty members, by far, mentioned behaviorally-oriented conceptions of both

student engagement and disengagement more than students or parents. Two of the faculty interviews revealed another behavioral orientation advocating increased "consequences" as a preferred solution to problems of student disengagement. While all three constituencies expressed ideas coded to social emotional orientations with relatively similar frequencies, students more frequently articulated a cognitive or agentic conception of student engagement. These results provide a window into differences that might be useful for HPHS to explore as it defines targets for improving student engagement. Community conversations about these conceptions and goals might be a useful avenue of bringing focus to the efforts and actions of the school in addressing low student engagement.

The preponderance of comments regarding a behavioral, compliance-based view of student engagement may also be antithetical to the 21st century skills held as a major target of the KSDE redesign efforts (Watson, 2019). Some of the interviews within this study suggest teachers equate engagement with behavioral indicators like good grades, following instructions, or doing classwork and homework. This conformity/compliance-oriented lens is likely a perspective that harkens back to industrial-age classrooms, and reflects a more teacher-directed form of engaged interactions with students (Lawson, 2017). Infrequently, a broader, more inclusive student-centered perception of engagement was heard from faculty. The implications of the former are a system of hegemony, where the school culture sustains the notion that engagement is defined by compliance, not by self-ownership and self-direction of learning. Engagement viewed as completion of work or achieving desired grades, rather than as student ownership of inquiry, perpetuates a culture focused on expectations *for* students rather than expectations *of* students (Ritchhart, 2015). Such a culture will not be successful in engaging all students in ownership of learning. Policy and resources that encourage and facilitate a shift away from compliance and towards a more agentic version of engagement is desirable and necessary. More conversation is needed to facilitate understanding of the students' agentic conceptions of school engagement, and why some faculty seem to be at odds with this conceptualization.

As noted earlier, cognitive engagement concepts were mentioned with the highest frequency by students, who, in many cases, seemed to yearn for teacher assistance that would help them to better understand and master the content being taught. On its face, this finding seems to reflect students' interest in navigating the cognitive demands of high school successfully. It may also reveal a general sense of students' desire for closer social interaction and engagement with faculty.

Any such conversations about the various conceptions of student engagement must be held with a great deal of care and empathy as the interviews revealed some undercurrents of blame between constituencies. Some parents and students laid responsibility on faculty for a lack of care and personal connections with their students. At least 10 interview excerpts noted a lack of help from teachers. An overreliance on technology as a delivery mode was mentioned by one parent and one student. Some faculty and parents placed blame on other disengaged and busy parents for the crisis in student disengagement. One faculty member raised the issue of the mismatch between ethnicity or culture of the teachers and the community at large as a contributing factor. Issues of ethnicity were mentioned 30 times in the interviews. Finally, two faculty and four parent comments suggested the root cause of student disengagement was connected to the school redesign efforts themselves, and a return to a more traditional structure

for students was suggested. Examination of the root causes and effective remedies for low student engagement at HPHS will require more conversation among the community and a willingness to find common understandings and perspectives about student engagement and the redesign process.

Implications for School Redesign, Policy, and Practice. Perceptions of constituencies and stakeholders are critical within the context of a school redesign initiative. Positive change, such as the redesign of schools, requires some degree of common understanding and a shared vision of both the change process and expected outcomes (Costa & Kallick, 1995). The working definition and beliefs that stakeholders hold regarding engagement matters, especially if the goal at HPHS is to increase student engagement. This requires that the constituencies and stakeholders in the school arrive at some mutual understandings. This study reveals underlying differences among parents, students, and faculty in their conceptualization of engagement, and the basis for systemic redesign. A deeper understanding of these differing views may reveal how this educational community might interact in both productive and adaptive ways to achieve shared outcomes. This, in turn, would be beneficial to designing strategies to mitigate disengagement and to shift the beliefs about what engagement looks like in the classroom. Moving all constituencies away from blaming each other and towards seeking common understandings throughout the organization will enhance efforts to engage students in more meaningful and purposeful ways.

The perspectives of students and parents are also a critical but often neglected source of data for informing policy makers. The voices of the disenfranchised need to be heard in order to understand the structural and cultural aspects of school that lead to disengagement and perhaps to formulate a path to stronger student engagement. This study reveals a familiar cultural gap in perceptions between those who advocate engagement as simply a matter of personal responsibility and choice and those looking for obstacles that are more pernicious and systemic. Policy, communication, and dialog that spans, and subsequently moves beyond this gap, will be an essential part of successful KSDE redesign efforts.

Another theme of this study is the examination of underlying factors and constituent perspectives related to student engagement within the context of an isolated high school, seeking to reinvent itself in the statewide school redesign effort (Kansas State Department of Education, n.d.). The issues of equity and inclusivity are highly relevant to any such effort to understand student engagement (Zyngier, 2008). Student engagement is highly susceptible to the influences of isolation, poverty, and discrimination. Likewise, inequities in school engagement contribute to ongoing social inequities (Thomson, 2002). The playing field is not always level in promoting student engagement. Expectations of students in a context of differentiated opportunities (poverty, backgrounds, etc.) has been dubbed by Goodlad as a “monstrous hypocrisy” (1984, p. 161). Communities lacking in resources may find the path to student engagement more difficult.

The worthwhile and lofty vision of the KSDE redesign effort is undoubtedly bumping up against the pernicious challenges uncovered by this study of student engagement. Such challenges include the establishment of positive and supportive human relationships for all students, addressing the impact of geographic isolation, and the diverse mindsets of stakeholders in the school community. This sheds light on both the progress and the challenges to the

implementation of school redesign as perceived by students, faculty and parents who are experiencing it. Themes of inequity and limited access in an isolated setting, like High Plains High School, inevitably emerged from the interviews. Only by uncovering perspectives, beliefs, and mindsets through stakeholder interviews will we understand what is underneath the data showing concerning numbers of students who are disengaged. These perspectives deserve the attention of additional research and action.

Student and parent perspectives must be understood and addressed. Insights gained from asking students about the underlying reasons for engagement or disengagement with school can lead to important changes that can make the school more inspiring and relevant. The leadership at HPHS is interested in learning about the perspectives revealed in this study in order to gain insights about engaging more of the student body. Engaging such a changing and diverse student body requires a broad perspective. It is a regional and cultural shift in understanding that is required. The data from this study reveal that the redesign efforts will need to embrace, not only teachers and students within the school, but parents and the larger community outside the school as well.

Implications for Teacher Education and Teacher Redesign. Educator preparation programs (EPPs) are an important focus for developing an educator workforce with the skills necessary for fostering authentic student engagement. Current and future teachers will be the curators of the culture of classrooms. If this culture is to be relevant and transformative it must support a conception of engagement that fosters student ownership. The ultimate success of the Kansans Can redesign effort will depend upon this conception taking root in the minds of all stakeholders.

EPPs across the nation are seeking ways to respond to the changing dynamics and needs of P-12 schools. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities released a report in 2017 that provided recommendations to university administrators. Among the recommendations was a strengthening of collaboration between teacher preparation programs and partners among P-12 schools and systems (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2017). In Kansas, mutually beneficial collaborations have been created to better support teacher shortages, clinical experiences, recruitment, and articulation agreements. As of 2018, the potential for collaboration between EPPs and P-12 schools around the KSDE Kansans Can school redesign effort has only been explored or articulated in a cursory way. The significance of this study is that it is one of the early efforts of academic institutions in Kansas to engage in supportive research and collaboration in a KSDE redesign school.

The data from this study will be valuable in informing policy related to teacher preparation and development. A redesigned school requires redesigned teachers. Fitting old mindsets and human skills into new school structures is a recipe for failure. Teachers that are competent in fostering positive personal relationships, implementing project-based learning, utilizing Web 2.0 - 4.0 technologies (Khanzode & Sarode, 2016), and providing career guidance to students seem to be most necessary to successfully staff the intended vision of a redesigned HPHS. Educator preparation programs across the State of Kansas and nation will need to shift emphasis to developing these skill sets to effectively provide the type of teacher workforce this vision requires.

Redesigning school structures (time and schedules, grouping of students, grouping of teachers, curriculum, and rearranging the physical environment) are important but incomplete without the powerful influence of redesigned teachers with new understandings, expectations, and skills. Information from this study is providing valuable insights regarding teacher readiness to take on the challenges of reinventing school in an isolated, rural environment experiencing rapidly changing demographics. A more nuanced and detailed understanding of student engagement is certainly a valuable tool for teachers and teacher educators.

Redesigned teachers ultimately come from educator preparation programs (EPPs). EPPs can better support the school redesign efforts such as "Kansans Can" undertaken by the Kansas State Department of Education (n.d.) by adjusting program design to better promote the following priority characteristics among teacher candidates and practicing teachers:

- Excellence in building personal and meaningful relationships with students.
- Understanding the nuances, impact, and relevance of the concept of school engagement among a wide range of school constituencies.
- Expectations of student learning and thinking, not completion of work as a goal of school.
- Expectations of student understanding, not just knowledge, as a goal of school.
- Expectations of student independence, rather than dependence.
- Efficacy in the teacher's use of educational technology to promote the engagement of students.
- Excellence in understanding and working with diverse populations, including the ability to learn, identify and adjust to the needs of specific populations quickly (e.g., trauma-informed instruction, specific ethnic groups, rural students, students from poverty).

Systemic change is underway at HPHS and in the State of Kansas. HPHS is undergoing a remarkable transformation of school structures. Achieving a new vision of school with success will depend, in part, upon common understandings around the goal of student engagement, upon redesigning teachers to work within the new structures of a redesigned school, and on effectively addressing the inequities found in the context of a rural, isolated community with rapidly changing demographics.

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