# INTEGRATING FACTORS OF GRIT IN SCHOOL CULTURE: CASE STUDIES OF TWO FRESHMAN ACADEMIES

By

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INTEGRATING FACTORS OF GRIT IN SCHOOL CULTURE: CASE STUDIES OF TWO FRESHMAN ACADEMIES

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Abstract: The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the cultural manifestation of grit in two freshman academy environments and describe factors of grit that support student success. This study used purposeful sampling to select sites and participants. Data were collected through: administration of Douglas' (1982) grid and group 24-question survey to determine cultural typology of each school; the administration of Duckworth's (2007) 8 item, Grit-S scale to determine the "grittiness" of each faculty; structured interviews with four teachers and one assistant principal from each site; observations, documents, photographs, electronic communication, flyers, demographic reports, and school websites. Douglas' (1982) grid and group matrix was used as the theoretical framework to explore the cultures of each school and to understand how Duckworth and Quinn's "two-factor" construct of grit, which is consistency of interest and perseverance of effort, is culturally manifested in each school. This study provides analysis of these cases with regard to the four psychological assets of grit, as it relates to the organizational environment of each school: interest (teacher/student school passion); practice (routine school activities); purpose (school vision, mission, and goals); and hope (optimism, opportunities) (Duckworth, 2016). Findings revealed that by examining grid dimensions of each school, the similarities and differences of grit were manifested with regard to teacher and administrator roles, organization and structure of the school, and school programs could be explained. Additionally, by examining group dimensions of each school, similarities and differences of how grit was manifested in teacher goals, stakeholder expectations, collaboration, and stakeholder relationships could be explained. Programs that contributed to the development of grit were those that allowed opportunities for students to engage with technology, their peers, and their teachers, as well as programs that provided time for academic supports. Findings confirmed grit development is possible within a freshman transition program and is manifested in programs and supports for teachers and students in a culture of high expectations, collaboration, supports for students and teachers, and an environment of relationship building. Implications for practice include, the promotion of grit in learning environments, teacher education programs, and improved four-year cohort graduation rates.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

> The only thing that I see that is distinctly different about me is I'm not afraid to die on a treadmill. I will not be outworked, period. You might have more talent than me, you might be smarter than me, you might be sexier than me, you might be all of those things – you got it on me in nine categories. But, if we get on the treadmill together, there's two things: You're getting off first, or I'm going to die, It's really that simple…Oscar-nominated actor and Grammy award-winning musician Will Smith (Duckworth & Eskreis-Winkler, 2015, p. 1).

Following the President Reagan era 1983 report of "A Nation at Risk", the 2001 President Bush, "No Child Left Behind" reform, the 2010 President Obama, "Race to the Top", and now the "Every Student Succeeds Act", the test score accountability movement and conventional educational approaches tend to focus on the cognitive aspects of success and achievement. To predict academic achievement, many researchers have studied intelligent quotient (IQ) scores, standardized test scored, report card grades, attendance, and socioeconomic status. However, understanding only cognitive factors that influence student outcomes does not provide a complete understanding of student success. According to Duckworth (2007), non-cognitive factors such as perseverance, or grit, can help to explain student success even when factors such as IQ and SES are consistent. If students are to truly achieve their full potential, they must have opportunities to engage and develop a much richer set of skills (Shechtman, DeBarger, Dornsife, Rosier, & Yarnall, 2013).

Recent research suggests that "grit", the disposition to pursue long-term goals with sustained interest and effort over time, is a significant predictor of academic achievement (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007). Research supports the idea that intelligence or talent alone is not a valid predictor of academic achievement. Dr. Angela L. Duckworth (2007), studied the grit of West Point cadets. She found out that those who were one standard deviation higher in grit had 62% higher odds of remaining long-term at West Point (Duckworth, 2007). Also noted, grit more strongly predicted cadet retention than SAT scores, high school ranking, or self-control. Grit is not just about working hard on tasks at hand but, rather, working diligently toward the same higher-order goals over extremely long stretches of time. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Grit is considered an essential factor for individuals to succeed at long-term, higher order goals, and to persist in the face of the many challenges and obstacles encountered throughout schooling and life (Schectman et al., 2013). According to a report by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology (2014), "It is the responsibility of the educational community to design learning environments that promote factors, such as grit, so students are prepared to meet 21st century challenges" (p. v.).

While the development of non-cognitive factors, such as grit, can support student success, high schools in the United States are not well designed to enhance the development of these factors. Many students entering high school may feel lost and unimportant due to the size of the school. Often, several middle schools feed into one high school and the sheer size can be overwhelming to many students who are used to a smaller school atmosphere (Roderick, 1993). Heterogeneity in the areas of race, ethnicity, and social diversity of the student body, causes some difficulty for students as well as the increased departmentalization and tracking that occurs in secondary schools (Byrk & Thum, 1989). Secondary schools are known for placing greater

emphasis on competition among students and in ability grouping by offering on-level courses, honors courses, and advanced placement courses (Schumaker, 1998).

Research indicates that some "ninth graders have the lowest grade point average, the most missed classes, the majority of failing grades, and more misbehavior referrals than any other high school grade level (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996, as cited in McCullumore & Sparapani, 2010, p. 448). The largest leak in the "educational pipe-line" occurs in the ninth grade, when students fail to get promoted to the 10th grade (Connell, 2006). Many students encounter failure during their first term in high school, even though their middle school performance showed no indication of academic problems (Pharris-Ciureg et al., 2011). Additionally, the ninth grade year is considered the most critical year for high school students, and according to Bottoms (2006), it is often referred to as the "make or break" (p. 1) year, a time when students are thrust into bigger, less nurturing environments, coupled with higher expectations and fewer adult connections.

In response to concerns about failure rates among ninth grade students and in support of mandates included in the No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation, ninth grade transition programs were developed to increase promotion rates of ninth graders. Self-contained learning communities for ninth graders, called Freshman Academies, have been developed to combat this problem and support students during the transition into high school. The intent of the Freshman Academy is to engage, motivate, and build the academic skills of ninth-graders to ensure promotion to 10th grade and lay a foundation for continued advancement to graduation.

## Problem Statement

The Freshman Academy is designed to provide a systematic response to intervention (RtI) with intensive personalized academic and social supports to address the problems with lack of preparation for high school, skill gaps, weak engagement and low attendance that lead to failure and to dropping out (Bottoms, 2006; Connell, Eccles, Kemple, & Legters, 2006; Fritzer &

Herbst, 1996; Fulk, 2003; McCallumore & Sparapini, 2010; Mizelle, 1995; Smink & Schargel, 2004). This model also provides time for teachers to work in collaborative teams, attend professional development and develop flexible and effective ways to support students' success. Support for students includes intensive instructional focus on math and reading with strategic interventions in place as well as a culture of academic purpose (Bottoms, 2006; Connell, Eccles, Kemple, & Legters, 2006; Fritzer & Herbst, 1996; Fulk, 2003; McCallumore & Sparapini, 2010; Mizelle, 1995; Smink & Schargel, 2004). Research on the impact of the Freshman Academy model incorporated by Talent Development has documented improvement, using pre-post and match-control designs, in climate, attendance, reading and math achievement, course passing, credit accumulation in core academic courses, promotion and graduation rates (Legters & Kerr, 2002). In theory, success in ninth grade in turn, will support and increase high school graduation rates. For the purpose of this study, the ninth grade transition program and freshman academy model are one in the same.

While legislative reforms and ninth grade transition programs, called Freshman Academies, have been created to increase promotion rates and decrease dropout rates in the U.S., research indicates this goal has been accomplished in some instances but has not in other instances (Bottoms, 2006; Fulco, 2009; Habeeb, 2013; Kerns, 2014; Lee & Ready, 2007; Leonard, 2011; MDRC, 2013; Park & Datnow, 2009; Seng, 2014). After a twenty-year study in Broward County, Florida, only 16% of their freshman academy programs were considered successful and special education students were found to be at a disadvantage (Fulco, 2009; MDRC, 2013). Three quantitative studies comparing achievement, promotion rates and graduation rates of freshman academies to ninth graders in traditional high schools, in East Tennessee, a Georgia suburb, and South Carolina, found no significant difference in achievement between the freshman academies and the traditional high schools (Kerns, 2014; Leonard, 2011; Seng, 2014).

It stands to reason, given the evidence of the influence of grit on student success (Duckworth, 2007), that the lack of success in promoting freshman retention may be due to freshman academy programs that fail to promote development of non-cognitive factors, primarily grit, in their school culture. Cultures that promote grit may influence promotion rates, thereby impacting graduation rates. The implication is to embed ways of promoting grit in the culture of freshman academy environments. Schools can start by creating educational environments that promote grit and design instructional programs to promote "grittiness" in students to help them succeed in their freshman year of high school and beyond.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the cultural manifestation of grit in two freshman academy environments and describe factors of grit that support student success.

## Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

Central Question: How was grit manifested in the culture of these systems? How do the cultural experiences of a ninth grade transition program support the factors of grit in first year ninth graders?

1) How did grid and group explain the cultural manifestation of grit in each of these schools?
2) What were teacher perceptions about the types of school programs or other school factors that contribute to the development of grit in these schools?
3) What were the teacher perceptions about their roles in the development of grit in these schools?
4) What other finding in the data were relevant to this study?

## Theoretical Framework

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and how human beings come to "know" and acquire knowledge. The epistemological perspective that guided this research study is social constructivism. Creswell (2013) asserted with constructivism "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things" (p. 24). Through our interactions, meaning is constructed as we engage with the world we are interpreting (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Schwandt, 2007). This case study involved engaging in the world of two freshman academies, exploring the experiences of ninth graders, and observing cultural factors in each school's organization that support the factors of grit, thus laying the foundation for promotion to tenth grade, and eventually graduation from high school.

Harris (2005) has conducted extensive research regarding school culture and suggested three approaches: the holistic approach, the symbolic approach, and the dualist approach. For this case study, I used a dualistic approach to understand the "espoused beliefs and knowledge of the cultural members and the interrelationships and actions of the cultural members" (p. 31). Mary Douglas' grid and group analysis (1982) provided a typology for understanding underlying processes of social change thus enabling educators to meet the methodological challenges in cultural research. The grid and group matrix is designed to classify school culture and draw specific observations about the participant's values, beliefs, and behaviors (Harris, 2005). For this case study the grid and group matrix is used as the theoretical framework to explore the cultures of each school and to understand how the two-factor construct of grit is culturally manifested in each school. Grid and group is a framework that has two dimensions that serve as a screen through which the culture of an organization can be perceived through various options (Douglas, 1982). Grid is the degree to which an individual's choices, within a social system are constrained or determined by role expectations, rules, and procedures. In strong-grid environments there is

little autonomy, specifically defined roles, rules and responsibilities, and power and authority is centralized. Group represents the degree to which people value group relationships and the extent to which they are dedicated to the larger social unit (Douglas, 1982). In strong group environments there is strong allegiance to the school, pressure to consider group goals and activities, and social incorporation. Evaluating the relative strength of these dimensions is a valuable tool in understanding the values and beliefs that are characteristic of a specific context.

The study of two freshman academies builds on the current research of transition programs for ninth grade as well as emerging research on the two-factor construct of grit. For the purpose of this study, I relied on Duckworth's and Quinn's "two-factor" construct of grit (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p., 166). The factors of the of the construct include:

- Consistency of Interest
- Perseverance of Effort

The grid and group framework and the factors of grit are defined and expanded in Chapter Two. Important to note is the interrelationship of these elements as they develop in individuals and schools' organizational culture in supporting this development. The study of the freshman academy transition environments build on the current research of transition programs for ninth grade as well as emerging research on grit.

## Methodology

I chose to conduct a qualitative case study, because it is an appropriate complement to the constructivist epistemological perspective that guided this study. The phenomenon, or unit of analysis, studied in this case provided support for understanding student achievement at two Freshman Academies, but in order to do so, one must consider the context of the school organizational culture. Multiple variables were considered in this study as well as multiple

sources of evidence, thus providing the need to identify a theoretical framework, Douglas' (1982) grid and group, prior to data collection.

I used purposeful sampling to select two Freshman Academies from Northeastern Oklahoma. I collected data through administration of the grid and group survey to teachers and administrators at each school site, administration of the 8-item Grit-S scale to teachers and administrators at each school site, structured interviews of four teachers from each site, and structured interviews of one administrator from each site. Also, I collected data through observations, electronic communication, flyers, demographic reports, and school websites were examined for triangulation of data. Following data collection, I examined, coded, and analyzed the data by re-reading the documents, interview notes, observation notes, and interview transcripts to get an idea of overall themes and common patterns. Trustworthiness was ensured through establishing credibility, transferability, dependability and conformity by creating and using a table to verify all areas. Patton (2002) described the importance of triangulation, "Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective on the program" (p. 306).

## Significance of the Study

### To Practice

Practitioners are searching for options to address the high non-promotion rate for ninth grade. This research provides educators valuable information that may contribute to improved 4-year cohort graduation rates. Specifically, results of this study provided observations of two Ninth Grade Academies regarding the manifestation of grit in organizational culture and provided insight with these types of systems. The study also described types of school programs that contribute to the cultural experiences of the development of grit in first year ninth graders that

may have a positive impact, resulting in increasing promotion rates for freshmen, thereby impacting graduation rates.

**To Research**

This study contributed to the body of research and literature regarding the cultural manifestation of grit in ninth grade transition programs and provides insight concerning how this type of transition program may contribute to the development of grit in first year ninth graders. The body of research on ninth grade transition most often evaluates programs that target students identified as at-risk prior to starting high school rather than programs that target organizational culture of a Freshman Academy and its overall impact on the development of the factors of grit. This research extends the existing body of knowledge on transition programs and builds on the new non-cognitive construct of grit and by explaining how grit may support students in their quest for graduating high school.

**To Theory**

Grit is a relatively new non-cognitive trait researched by Dr. Angela Duckworth. This study contributed and extended the research of Dr. Duckworth. This study builds on the understanding of Freshman Academies as transition programs as well as identifying organizational cultural factors of this type of transition program that may contribute to developmental factors of grit in students. This study linked school culture to grit development in teachers and students.

## Definition of Terms

*Consistency of Interest (Passion)*: The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines passion as "a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something and a strong liking or desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept"[2] (www. Merriam-webster.com/dictionary/passion, 2015). The definition of grit includes not only the

tenacious pursuit of goals, but also a passionate pursuit. While passion is not the only element of grit, it has been referred to as the "lynchpin of grit" (Doskoch, 2005, p. 48).

*Conscientiousness* (*need for achievement*): Duckworth's (2007) definition of grit and conscientiousness overlap as it relates to a person's need for achievement. "The achievement-oriented person is one who works hard, tries to do a good job and completes a task at hand. The only part that differs and is distinct is the emphasis on long-term stamina versus short-term intensity" (p. 1089).

*Courage (managing fear of failure):* The definition of courage, as it relates to grit is intertwined with perseverance. The Merriam-Webster dictionary's definition is "the ability to do something you know is difficult or dangerous" (www. Merriam-webster.com/dictionary/courage, 2015). For one to persevere, one must manage fear of failure and embrace it as part of the process (Duckworth, 2007; Eisenberger & Leonard, 1980).

*Deliberate Practice:* Ericsson (2004) defined deliberate practice as "training activities most closely associated with consistent improvements in performance" (p. 172). Ericsson and Charness (1994) suggested that it is not only how hard you work, but also the way in which you work that ultimately impact your ability to excel. Importantly, the amount of time an individual must spend engaging in deliberate practice in order to achieve professional expertise requires in most cases, roughly ten years.

*Freshman Academy:* For the purpose of this study, a Freshman Academy is a school comprised totally of ninth grades students, in one building at one location on one campus. Freshman Academies are considered a transition program for students beginning their first year of high school. They are typically designed to provide ninth grade students the structure and supports for academic success (Bottoms, 2006; Fulco, 2009; Habeeb, 2013; Kerns, 2014; Lee & Ready, 2007; Leonard, 2011; MDRC, 2013; Park & Datnow, 2009; Seng, 2014).

*Goal Setting (long-term)*: A goal is "something that you are trying to do or achieve" (www. Merriam-webster.com/dictionary/goal setting, 2015). Goals that are set for an extended time frame are an important aspect of grit. Duckworth (2009) defined grit; "Grit entails the capacity to sustain both effort and interest in projects that take months or even longer to complete" (p. 166).

*Grit:* The definition formulated by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2006), will be used for the purpose of this study and is the following:

> Grit is the perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously towards challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; their advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course. (p. 4)

*Perseverance of effort:* Eisenberger and Leonard (1980) defined perseverance as the ability to persist and endure in the face of adversity. They suggested that perseverance influences an individual's course of action, the level of effort that they exhibit, and the endurance and resilience exhibited towards setbacks and failures that they may encounter along the way (Eisenberger & Leonard, 1980). Similarly, Stoltz (1997) defined perseverance as the ability to overcome adverse circumstances, and suggested that success is determined by the extent to which individuals persevere despite potentially insurmountable obstacles or adversities.

*Response to Interventions* (RtI): RtI refers to a tiered system of school structures and core curriculum offerings that support student engagement and success. These supports include things like technology access, differentiated course work, daily academic achievement time and weekly collaboration time in which teachers substantiate core curriculum, as well as focus on student needs. Supplemental supports provide a more focused approach to ensure student learning.

Finally, intensive support is given in the form of administrative involvement and regular progress monitoring for all students

*Transition:* Passing from one condition, place, etc. to another (Neufeldt, 1990). This study examined the transition of students in ninth grade who are participating in a transition program called a freshman academy, and another set of ninth grade students who are participating in a traditional high school.

## Limitations

Case study research by its very nature has a set of limitations to include generalizability, researcher bias, replicability, and researcher analytical ability.

1) Generalizability: This research study is bound to the specific context in which the study takes place. To overcome this limitation, a thick and rich description of the case is conveyed in hopes that the reader will be able to put themselves in the time and place of the study.
2) Researcher Bias: The very nature of the researcher participating as the instrument to gather data can affect the interpretation of data. I am a principal at a Freshman Academy and this may affect the study because of knowledge I have regarding ninth grade transition systems, as well as my strong desire for academic supports to help students achieve academic success. I understand the benefits of a variety of academic programs and I was cognizant to not allow my position to influence how I reviewed and analyzed the data I collected. I also view my position as a researcher in this environment as a positive factor, in that my understanding of ninth grade transition programs led to insights otherwise not obtained by a researcher new to this type of environment. I followed university and federal policy as well as qualitative research protocols.
3) Difficult to Replicate: The case study is bound by time, context, and participant

involvement and is difficult to replicate. This limitation can be overcome with practice, and study in inquiry skills and techniques. Patton (2002) contended that the "cardinal" principle with qualitative analysis, is keeping findings in context" (p. 563).

4) Researcher Analytical Skill: The interviewing skill of the researcher is another limitation regarding interviewing participants (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) asserted:

> An evaluator, or any interviewer, faces the challenge of making it possible for the person being interviewed to bring the interviewer into his or her world. The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (p. 341).

Data collection limitations of this study are addressed for each data collection technique in Chapter Three.

## Summary and Organization of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter I is the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and the identification of the four research questions. Case study methodology was used to better understand the role of two Freshman Academies' organizational culture in supporting the development of the factors of grit in ninth graders, as it is an appropriate complement to the constructionist epistemological perspective guiding the study. The theoretical framework informing this study is Douglas' (1982), grid and group to explore the cultures of each school and how the two factor construct of grit, developed by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2006 and 2007), is culturally manifested.

Chapter II provides an in depth review of the literature that aided in a better understanding of the research topic. Specifically the following topics are addressed: history of the dropout rate, importance of ninth grade, student transition, freshman academies, and effective and ineffective freshman academies. Finally, the literature review ends with a detailed

description of the factors of grit and why developing grit in schools organizational culture may support student's promotion to tenth grade and graduating high school.

Chapter III provides a detailed explanation of the research methods and procedures implemented in this study including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis techniques. Research considerations regarding bias and background are addressed. The chapter concludes with trustworthiness findings and the limitations of the study.

Chapter IV presents the research findings, data and description of the two sites selected for the study as well as detailed descriptions of all participants. The data collected through observations, artifacts, interviews, field notes, the grid and group survey, and the 8-item Grit-S scale are expounded in detail. Chapter V analyzes the data through the lens of the theoretical framework of grid and group.

Chapter VI completes the study with findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations. This chapter contains the significance of the study to practice, to research and to theory. Finally, recommendations for future research will be offered.

# CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contains a review of the literature related to the study. The first section of the review focuses on the issue of students who drop out and key topics include: (1) the issue of student dropouts as it relates to promotion rates for ninth graders; (2) the importance of ninth grade; (3) how transition affects students; and (4) the development of freshman academies as a ninth grade transition program. The second section reviews literature relating to freshman academies specifically; (1) evidence of successful freshman academies; and (2) disadvantages to freshman academies as a transition program. The third section describes the theoretical framework of grid and group to explore the cultural manifestation of grit in school systems. It is divided into subsections: (1) grid dimension; (2) group dimension; and (3) four environments of grid and group. The fourth section reveals literature regarding the importance of grit. It is divided into subsections; (1) definition of grit; (2) the grit scale; (3) grit as a construct; and (4) promoting grit in education. Finally, a brief summary is offered in the fifth section.

The goals of the review are: (1) to establish the need to keep students from dropping out; (2) to demonstrate that some ninth grade intervention programs are not effective; (3) to illustrate the importance of building "grit" in school culture during the transition to high school; and (4) to express the need for this study.

## The Issue of Student Dropouts

### Dropout Rate: History

School completion rates have grown continually during much of the past century from single digits at the turn of the 20th century, to "50% just after World War II, to 80% in the late 1970s" (Doll et al, 2013, p. 1). This dramatic rise in graduation rates coincided with educational changes, such as the standards movement in education, as well as social movements and cultural changes, including women's rights, civil rights, dual income families becoming the norm and the strong impact of inflation on the need for employment. It became important for all adults to have stable work, and school completion guaranteed a higher wage and opened doors to higher educational institutions. After 1970 there was a dip in graduation rates, as shown in the graph below, see Figure 1, created by U. S. News and World Report:

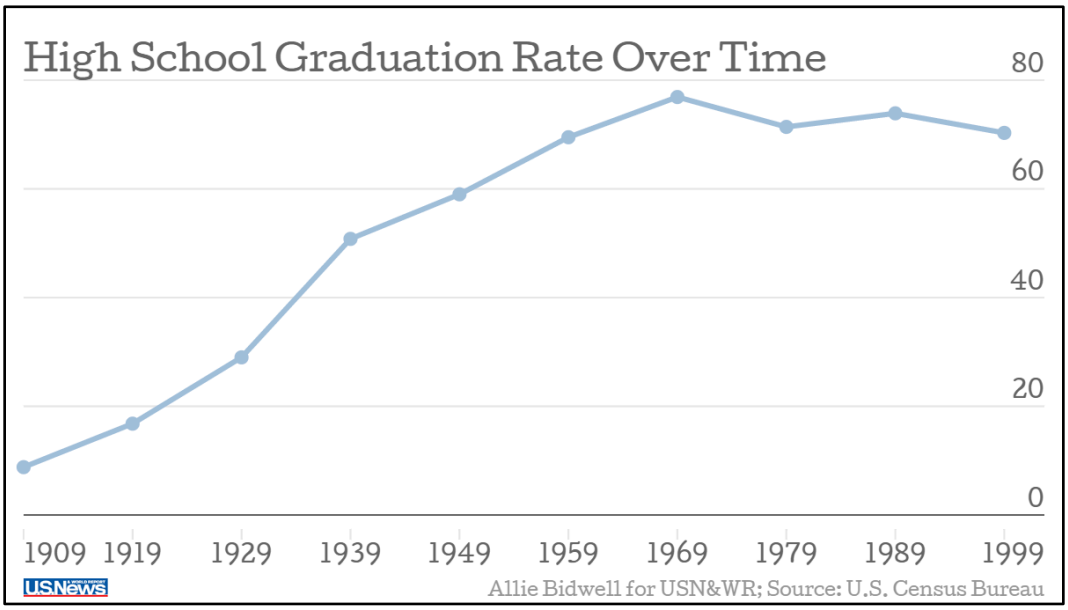



Figure 1

### The Problem

There have been numerous federally legislative educational reforms designed, in part, to ensure that students successfully transition from one grade level to another until graduation and

thereby decreasing high school dropout rates. For example, the initial goal, of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, was to increase standards, measure progress, increase parent involvement so all students would be academically proficient by 2014. The nation has been working since 2001 to achieve this goal and we've had some success, however; the dropout rate for high school students still remains alarmingly high.

Every year ("www.dosomething.org," 2015), over "1.2 million students drop out of high school in the United States, that's a student every 26 seconds – or 7,000 a day and about 25% of high school freshman fail to graduate from high school on time" ("11 Facts About High School," para. 2). Each high school dropout cost a state between "$3,000 and $6,000 per year" (Bottoms, 2006, p. 1). For the last 30 years, dropouts have earned about one-third less than their counter-parts who have graduated. Many of the problems associated with this are due to the inadequate preparation many students receive in elementary and middle school and the effects become most visible when students reach the ninth grade, where grade-level promotion is much harder due to increased requirements and higher expectations.

**Importance of Ninth Grade**

The ninth grade year is considered the most critical year for high school students and is often referred to as the "make or break" year (Bottoms, 2006, p. 1). The ninth grade year is the first time, many students must earn passing grades in core classes and satisfactory completion of these core classes is often required for graduation from high school (Fulk, 2003). These courses are generally some of the most rigorous a student has to take in high school and furthermore, they experience pressure to do well on high stakes standardized tests to earn a diploma (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). The accountability for high schools has increased since NCLB and the statistics generated from tracking the ninth grade year is concerning. Research shows that "ninth graders have the lowest grade point average, the most missed classes, the majority of failing

grades, and more misbehavior referrals than any other high school grade level (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996)" (McCullumore & Sparapani, 2010, p. 448). Ninth grade students, who struggle academically and are retained, have a greater risk of dropping out high school. Smink and Schargel (2004) asserted, "Poor academic performance linked to retention in one grade is the single strongest school-related predictor of dropping out. One report indicated that of every ten dropouts, nine had been retained at least one year" (p. 33). Achievement, typically does not improve after retention. Slavin and Madden (1989) found in a Youth and Transition study, "One grade retention increases the risk of dropping out by 40-50 percent, and more than one by 90 percent" (pp. 104-105).

Students are retained in the ninth grade generally due to their inability to pass their classes and earn the required number of credits to be promoted to tenth grade. In middle school, students get promoted to the next grade level regardless of whether or not they passed their classes. Promotion requirements change when entering high school, as students are expected to pass their core classes and as well as earn the required number of credits for promotion to tenth grade. Connell, Eccles, Kemple, and Legters (2006) explained the importance of the transition from ninth to tenth grade:

> Research suggests that the largest leak in the educational pipeline (that is, the point at which most students fail to move on) occurs in the transition from the ninth to the 10th grade. As many as 40 percent of students in urban high schools fail to get promoted from the ninth to the 10th grade on time, and fewer than 20 percent of those students recover from the failure and go on to graduate. (p. 3)

To control the "leak" and improve graduation rates, attention to ninth graders during this transitional year is key. The review of research on transition programs finds that students are less

likely to drop out of high school if they participate in programs that help them transition to high school (Mizelle, 1995).

**Students in Transition**

The studies presented in this section describe the difficulty faced by many students in the transition from middle school to high school, who ultimately struggle during their ninth grade year. This struggle prevents many students from being promoted to tenth grade. Transition is difficult for most students, and for some, it can be traumatic. A great deal of research has been conducted to study the nature of why these transitions are so difficult and what may be effective solutions.

The transition to ninth grade is a difficult time for many students, especially since it happens at the same time that students hit their turbulent teenage years (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). The need for teenagers to become independent happens at the same time that social pressures increase and school becomes more academically challenging. Students, who did not do well academically in middle school and had discipline problems, are at even greater risk as they transition to high school (Catterall, 1998). These students may be more prone to grade failure and school dropout, warranting the need of additional supports. Students anticipating making the transition from middle school to high school reported concerns about attending a new school and their concerned revolved around getting lost, getting to class on time, finding their lockers, dealing with crowded hallways and being teased or bullied by older students (Mizelle, 1995; Wells, 1996). Students also showed concern about receiving lower or failing grades (Mizelle & Mulins, 1997).

During this transitional period students may feel lost and unimportant due to the size of the high school. Often, several middle schools feed into one high school and the sheer size can be overwhelming to many students who are used to a smaller school atmosphere (Roderick, 1993).

Heterogeneity in the areas of race, ethnicity, and social diversity of the student body, causes some difficulty for students as well as the increased departmentalization and tracking that occurs in secondary schools (Byrk & Thum, 1989). Secondary schools are known for placing greater emphasis on competition among students and in ability grouping by offering on-level courses, honors courses, and advanced placement courses (Schumaker, 1998).

Another explanation, alluded to in the section above, for the difficulty of the transition into ninth grade is the increase in expectations and rigor of the curriculum. Bottoms (2006) explained in a recent study, "45 percent of dropouts reported that they entered high school unprepared for rigorous studies" (p. 1). The effects of this become most visible when students reach ninth grade, where grade-level promotion is more difficult due to increased requirements and higher expectations. Adolescents entering the ninth grade are still developing cognitively, causing a desire to take new risks. Often taking risks at such a young age includes an inability to adequately think about the short and long-term consequences (Price, 2005). This impulsive behavior often leads to major discipline issues in the ninth grade, which can lead to suspension from school and loss of instructional time. This further exacerbates the problems surrounding passing required courses.

Students in the lower grades tend to have a strong bond with their teachers and this is not generally the case once students reach high school. Secondary students are less likely to have personal relationships with their teachers (Mizelle, 1995; Wells, 1996). When students are engaged and motivated in the classroom, they are more successful in school. Students who are lacking in motivation or uninterested in school struggle even more during ninth grade, making the transition very difficult and puts them at greater risk of failure (Legers & Kerr, 2001).

Students' concerns change after making the transition. Students report that their courses are more difficult, they believe their teachers are stricter, the rules enforced more strictly, and

they feel it is more difficult to make friends (Scott et al., 1995; Wells, 1996). Rice (2001) conducted a study that drew on five years of data and identified specific institutional discontinuities as sources of problems for students as they go through transition. The two greatest concerns about climate where school safety and academic environment. Rice's (1997) basic premise is that: "Disruption causes distraction that can undermine academic progress" (p. 389).

Culture often plays a role in the level of student achievement. Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, and Sanchez (2000) found this transition is even more difficult for minority students. Minority students, with the exception of Asian and Pacific Islander students, were more likely to drop out of high school (Laird, Debell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007). Reyes et al. (2000) tracked a group of minority students from elementary school through high school. Subjects included 235 students from two schools in 8th grade, and 25 high schools. This group of minority students included both males and females. A control group matching the demographics was selected. Only six subjects maintained their Grade Point Average (GPA) during the transition to high school. By the end of the 12th grade, only 42 percent of their subjects were on track to graduate. They found that of the students that graduated, many showed a decrease in achievement during their transition to high school. Mizelle and Irvin (2000) stated, "The transition to high school has never been more treacherous nor the consequences more personally disastrous for so many" (p. 1). However, McIntosh and White (2006) offered hope. They claimed that the more positive transition activities put into place before the ninth grade year begins, and during the year, the more likely students are going to be successful in school. In a significant study conducted using 56 Georgia and Florida high schools, Hertzog and Morgan (1999) concluded that lower dropout rates and higher achievement rates exist for schools utilizing transition programs.

**Freshman Academies Provide Student Support**

There have been many different targeted programs and comprehensive reform strategies proposed to counter dropout predictors with the ninth grade year. In response to these predictors and the need to support ninth graders as they transition, Freshman Academies have been developed as one type of solution. A Freshman Academy is a transitional program in a school that provides supports to ninth graders. The Freshman Academy is sometimes referred to as a Ninth Grade Academy or Ninth Grade Center, however; for this paper I will use the name Freshman Academy. The intent of the Freshman Academy is to engage, motivate, and build the academic skills of ninth-graders to ensure promotion to tenth-grade and lay a foundation for continued advancement to graduation. There are several ways of implementing the Freshman Academy concepts, such as moving ninth graders to their own building, creating a space in the current high school where all ninth grade classrooms and lockers are in one area, or compartmentalizing within the high school by forming ninth grade teacher teams.

The Talent Development High School (TDHC) is a model created by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPR) at Johns Hopkins University, is used nationwide in more than 80 schools in 20 districts. The main components of the TDHS model include school restructuring, "Success Academies" for freshmen, and career academies in the upper grades. The model is designed to provide intensive and personalized academic and social supports to address the problems with lack of preparation for high school, skill gaps, weak engagement and low attendance that lead to failure and to dropping out. This model also provides time for teachers to work in collaborative teams, attend professional development and develop flexible and effective ways to support students' success. According to Connell et al. (2006), core features of the Talent Development Ninth Grade Success Academy include:

> Self-contained small learning communities, teacher teams with common planning times, intensive instructional focus on math and reading, strategic interventions in place for students, a culture of academic purpose and success, block scheduling, and professional supports for planning and implementation. (p. 11)

The program has been implemented most extensively in Philadelphia, and the ninth grade program is the most fully implemented and researched. Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) conducted a third-party evaluation. Shannon et al. (2005) found that the key results for first-time ninth grade students, according to the evaluation, were:

- Improved attendance for first time ninth graders
- Increased total number of credits earned by first-time ninth-grade students
- Produced substantial gains in academic course credits earned by first time ninth-grade students, especially the percentage of students earning a credit in algebra. (Double-dose courses in English and math and first-semester catch-up courses are strategies used);
- Improved overall promotion rate to the tenth grade. (p. 16)

High Schools that Work (HSTW) is a model to improve student performance in the ninth grade. According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), the following ways that this model seeks improvement includes five steps. First, early orientation and preparation in the middle grades that include ways to orient students to the high school experience and create a summer bridge program to bring at-risk students up to grade level. Second, a Freshman Academy should organize teachers into teams that plan instruction together, look at assignments, student work, and create common practices regarding exams. The Freshman Academy should also ensure the student-to-teacher ratio should be no higher than any other in high school and encourage the best teachers to teach ninth-grade courses. Third, special courses should be created for ninth-

graders that engage students in career exploration and projects that introduce students to a variety of educational opportunities. Fourth, adult mentors and advisors should provide guidance and support to incoming ninth-graders. Finally, a no-zero policy should be implemented that requires students to redo work to meet grade-level expectations and standards (Bottoms, 2006). "The HSTW model is based on the belief, that if students put forth the necessary effort they can achieve at higher levels and succeed in high school and beyond" (Bottoms, 2006, p. 3).

The First Things First model (FTF) is designed to meet the needs of all ninth grade students through heightened personalization and engaging, rigorous curricula and instruction. For the teachers, a professional learning community made up of individuals who hold themselves collectively responsible for ensuring the success of all students in their community. The critical constructs for this model are small learning communities; a family advocates system, and systematic instructional improvement. According to Connell et al. (2006), the results of the data after the third year of implementation of this model indicated that students were:

> 69 percent more likely to be absent less than one day per month and 34 percent less likely to fall to the levels of attendance that predict school failure and students were 1.4 times as likely to read at or above the proficient levels and nearly twice as likely to score at proficient levels on math assessments. (p. 33)

## Impact of Freshman Academies

While ninth grade transition programs have been created to increase promotion rates in the U.S., research indicates that it has had a positive effect in some instances and has been a disadvantage in other instances. This section will examine the effectiveness of the freshman academy. The models listed in the section above give specific credence to freshman academies and learning communities, often denoting small units situated within a large building (school within a school) have effectively transformed traditional high schools with low academic

performance and high dropout rates into highly successful model programs (Fleischman & Heppen, 2009). Advocates of the small learning community models include the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB, 2002), the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Cotton, 2001; NREL), and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (Dedmond, Brown, & LaFauci, 2006; NASSP).

A unique type of small high school learning community is the freshman academy, specifically designed to support new ninth grade student with the transition from middle school to high school. Freshman academies are created mainly to improve ninth grade attendance, academic performance, engagement in school and extracurricular activities, and increase promotion rates to tenth grade (Hinton, Warnke, & Wubbolding, 2011). In the 2005-2006 school year, 16.5% of the ninth grade students in San Antonio, Texas did not earn enough credits to be promoted to the tenth grade. This prompted school district officials to create and establish ninth-grade only schools across all of the school districts in the area (Honig & Coburn 2008). Several studies have been conducted regarding the effectiveness of the freshman academy and are reported in this section.

**Evidence of the Success of Freshman Academies**

Fulco (2009) researched three cohorts of freshman academy students and investigated the impact the freshman academy had on academic performance and engagement of each cohort. This comparison study also included an exploration of a one-to-one laptop initiative. Cohort one was comprised of 297 students and began ninth grade in the fall of 2005 in a traditional high school. This group took regular ninth grade courses, including English, social studies, and science classes, in a traditional high school setting. The cohort also took multi-grade classes and technology classes but no unique freshman curriculum. Cohort two, with 300 students, began the

ninth grade year in 2006 as the inaugural freshman academy class and cohort three, with 207 students, were issued laptops for their freshman academy experience.

When comparing cohort two, the freshman academy students, to cohort one, the traditional high school students, cohort two had greater positive outcomes than cohort one. Cohort two had higher grade point averages, better social studies performance, had a higher number of credits earned, and a lower percentage of failing courses. No distinctions emerged for the two groups on attendance or disciplinary referrals. The females in cohort two earned higher grade point averages in English, social studies and cumulatively, whereas the males had better attendance (Fulco, 2009).

Styron and Peasant (2010) examined the impact of freshman academies on the academic performance of a randomly chosen group of 50 students who attended freshman academies in comparison to a similar group of ninth graders who attended a traditional high school. Six schools with similar demographics from three different regions in the state were selected to be in the study. All six schools had a free and reduced lunch population of 60%. The traditional high schools had a minimum enrollment of 1,000 students and the freshman academies had a minimum enrollment of 350 students (Styron & Peasant, 2010). The freshman academies had block scheduling, team teaching, and professional learning communities. The academies were situated in separate facilities and ninth graders only attended elective classes with older students. The quantitative analysis focused on the student's performance on the standardized tests for algebra and biology.

The freshman academy students scored higher than the traditional high school students in Algebra I by more than 15 points on the subject area test and also scored nearly 25 points higher on the subject area Biology I test (Styron & Peasant, 2010). While their sample size was small and the outcome focused on only two subjects, algebra and biology, Styron and Peasant (2010)

interpreted their findings as evidence that freshman academies have the potential to close achievement gaps.

Kimball (2007) explored the impact of the North Carolina ninth grade academy on promoting resilience in new high school students. The conceptual framework was based on Henderson and Milstein's (2000) model of a resiliency building school, focusing on three components; providing students with care and support, establishing and communicating high expectations, and increasing social bonding. Kimball (2007) utilized data from the high school freshman class of 2005-2006 and examined attendance, promotion, and performance in relation to the students' socio-demographic profiles. The differences between the students attending the freshman academy transition program and those in the control group were insignificant on most measures with the exception of promotion rates to tenth grade (Kimball, 2007). Attending the freshman academy had a significant impact on the students' promotion to tenth grade, and this effect seemed to be more pronounced for Black students of both genders.

Samuelson (2011) compared outcomes of students who were part of a 9$^{th}$ grade academy during their freshman year with outcomes of students who were not part of the 9$^{th}$ grade academy during their freshman year in a western North Carolina high school. The outcomes included attendance, promotion rate to tenth grade on time, in-school suspension assignments, Algebra I end-of-course exam scores, and English I end-of-course exam scores. The data were collected over a four-year period, from 2007-2011. Independent samples t-tests and one-way Chi Square analysis were used to make comparisons for each outcome. Based on the findings of the study, the promotion rate of 9$^{th}$ grade students to 10$^{th}$ grade on time increased after the implementation of the ninth grade academy. Little difference was found in other outcomes of the study (Samuelson, 2011).

A common mission of many freshman academies is to promote positive relationships between teachers and students, as effective relationships aid students in adjusting to high school personally, academically, and socially (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; Felner et al., 2007). Methods of building relationships vary from school to school. One example is the freshman academy that was established in a suburban public secondary school in Boone County, Kentucky, which aimed to provide a successful transition into high school by establishing good close relationships between teachers and ninth graders (Felner, Seitsinger, Brand, Burns, & Bolton, 2007). The main theory that provided the framework for the implementation of this specific freshman academy was choice theory. This theory posits that behavior is more effectively modified through internal motivation rather than external control and by having positive relationships with students; this creates an environment that has a strong impact on the effectiveness and progression of a student (Woolley & Bowen, 2007). The traditional method of classroom management is replaced by regular discussions among teachers and students on how to address issues in order to create better working relationships that engender success, maturity, and improved perspectives in students (Felner et al., 2007). Results of this particular freshman academy demonstrated that ninth graders who attended this academy were more successful in the areas of attendance, discipline, and promotion than their peers who did not attend this type of freshman academy (Felner et al., 2007). In addition to better academic performance, improved attendance, and improved grade level promotion rates, schools that promoted small learning communities such as freshman academies saw a decrease in the incidence of negative behavior, including violence towards other students (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008). Participation in freshman academies also produced positive outcomes beyond high school. Data showed that in schools where freshman academies are offered and utilized, an increase in the number of graduating students who were heading to either two- or four-year colleges could be seen (Bernstein et al., 2008).

While ninth grade transition programs have been created to increase promotion rates in the U.S., some studies have also reported a few disadvantages of this setting. These disadvantages include issues between freshman academy teachers and teachers in higher grades, the perception of having two freshman years, and financial concerns about sustaining the freshman academy.

**Disadvantages of Freshman Academies**

A report was produced in June 2013, by MDRC and funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, about the implementation and impact of Ninth Grade Academies in Broward County, Florida. For twenty years, MDRC has conducted research on how to keep high school freshman engaged in school and on track for graduation. The goal of MDRC is to build knowledge and guide policy. Broward County school district began implementing freshman academies and these academies were self-contained learning communities for ninth-graders that operated as small schools within larger high schools, with their own administrative leaders, faculty, space, and team organization. "Of the 18 high schools in the district that tried to implement NGAs [Ninth Grade Academies], only 3 did so consistently well" (Legters, 2001, p. iii). Key findings in the report were that the focus was more on the physical structure and leadership of the academies. The initiative was strong at the outset, but was not sustained. There was cross-professional support for the professional learning communities but no technical or financial support for program implementation. Finally, there was trouble maintaining a dedicated ninth grade faculty and interdisciplinary teaming (Legters, 2001)

In the Fulco (2009) study, which was mentioned previously in the section regarding positive outcomes, there was an unexpected finding. The freshman academy was more academically advantageous for regular education students than special education students. Fulco (2009) noted that the freshman academy was designed to provide the required support to special

needs students as well as foster close relationships, but it fell short in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, with the exception of improved attendance. The study also noted that the laptop initiative, for students in cohort three, did not achieve the expected results. Students who were part of the freshman academy but not in the technology initiative, earned higher grades in English and social studies than those who were issued laptops (Fulco, 2009). It is possible that the freshman academy teachers were not prepared for teaching with the technology, which underscores the importance of professional development and collegial collaboration (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

The disadvantages of freshman academies outweighed the advantages in Sarasota County, Florida (Lee & Ready, 2007; Park & Datnow, 2009). School official felt that their students ended up having two freshmen years under this model; one in the freshman academy and one when they started the tenth through twelfth grade program (Park & Datnow, 2009). District leaders felt the program was not effective and decided to get rid of it the next year (Lee & Ready, 2007; Park & Datnow, 2009).

Habeeb (2009) posted on the Freshman Transition Network website the pros and cons of a freshman academy. According to Habeeb (2009), the disadvantages of creating a freshman academy include the following:

- Freshmen are not being trained how to fully navigate the difficult waters of high school because by being in the Academy they are being protected from some of them.
- The Academy model, depending on how strictly the students are segregated, can cause freshmen to have limited choices when it comes to elective offerings.
- The Academy model also often has the unintended effect of forcing all freshmen into one mold.

- A school's master schedule can only have so many parameters before it begins to get cluttered and unworkable. For the Freshmen Transition Program to work, it must be one of the top 2 or 3 priorities in a master schedule. An Academy can sometimes occupy too many available resources and make it difficult to work the master schedule for the rest of the school.
- It is very common for faculty members not part of the Freshman Transition Program to be skeptical of the attempt to meet the needs of freshmen. They are often afraid the freshmen will be babied and socially promoted. (para. 5)

It stands to reason, one factor that may address the issue of improving promotion and graduation rates is grit. Regarding ninth grade transition programs, for example, the school's cultural manifestation of grit may be a factor that influences promotion rates, thereby impacting graduation rates.

## Theoretical Framework

Mary Douglas' (1982, 1986) typology of grid and group is a framework that describes the dynamics of school culture and considers the forces that act on its members with regard to interconnected roles, rules and relationships. The grid and group matrix is designed to classify school culture and draw specific observations about the participants' values beliefs, and behaviors (Douglas, 1982, 1989, 1992; Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982; Harris, 2005; Thompson, Ellis, & Wildavsky, 1990). Grid is the degree to which individual choices, within a social system are constrained by role expectations, rules, and procedures. Group represents the degree to which people value group relationships and the extent to which they are dedicated to the larger social unit (Douglas, 1982).

**Grid Dimension**

Grid expresses the mode of control an organization holds on individuals and can be plotted on a continuum of strong to weak. For example, in strong-grid schools, complex rules regulate curriculum, teaching methods, and grading procedures, thus limiting the autonomy of faculty and staff who work in that environment. In weak-grid schools, teachers have freedom of choice in most areas of the educational process and rules and regulations are very few (Harris, 2005).

Strong-grid is further characterized by specifically defined expectations, role distinction, and the maintenance of an ordered environment. In strong-grid environments, teachers typically do not have a voice in selecting their own curriculum and textbooks. Due to explicit institutionalized classifications that regulate interactions and restrict options, central office or site administrators make many decisions without teacher input or involvement (Harris, 2005). The further up the grid continuum, the less autonomy teachers have, and although they may have a measure of self-governance in the refuge of their classroom, "even there they may be under the close scrutiny of authoritative superiors" (Harris, 2005, p. 35).

Weak-grid represents a social environment that promotes maximum autonomy, loosely defined roles, rules and responsibilities, few social distinctions, and decentralized power and authority (Harris, 2005). Individuals in this type of environment are open to competition and have no problem negotiating for their needs with each other or their superiors (Douglas, 1982). Teachers have the freedom to choose their own textbooks, curriculum, and teaching strategies.

The principal is considered an equal partner in the school system who has necessary leadership skills. Competition for individual success for both teacher and students is of great value (Harris, 2005). A graphic display of the grid dimensions is presented in Figure 2.

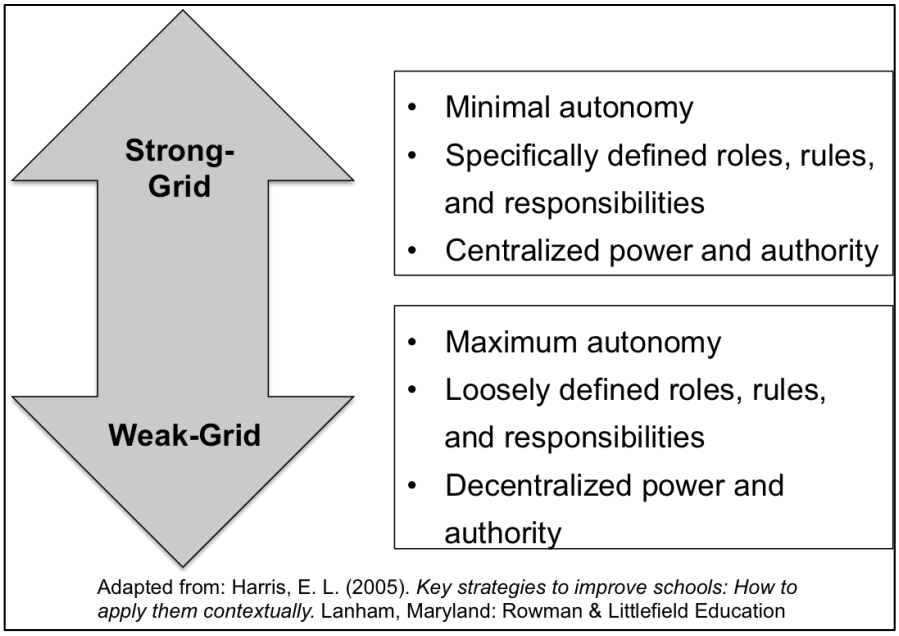



Figure 2: Grid Dimensions

**Group Dimension**

Douglas' (1982) typology represents group on the horizontal axis. Group is "the degree to which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unit" (Harris, 2005, p. 36). Group concerns the degree to which people commit not only to the social unit's membership but also to doing whatever it takes to maintain synergy. Group strength increases as members spend time doing things together socially and professionally and as they conform to and comply with group demands (Gross & Rayner, 1985; Spickard, 1989).

Like grid, group has a continuum of strong to weak. On the strong end of the continuum, individuals put the group before themselves. The survival of the group is more important than their individual needs or desires. Harris (2005) provided an example of an "extreme case of high group in that of a monastic or communal environment" (p. 36) where everyone was asked to give up all personal property and belongings and give it over to the group. Specific and strict criteria are required for admittance to the group. This same type of strong-group, although not as

extreme, can be found in the private school setting in which there are specific criteria and rules one must adhere to for admittance and longevity within the school system. The same thing can be seen in public school, with allegiance and implicit criteria for certain opportunities to play on sports teams and access to a particular school district by living in the exclusive neighborhood in that district in order to attend the school. Strong-group culture can be found in schools that are entrenched in norms and traditions that are passed from one generation to the next. "Community recreation and identification in this high-group setting are entwined with the academic, athletic, and social event at the school" (Harris, 2005, p. 38).

In weak-group environments, the individual's experience is not constrained by any external boundary or fundamental signs of assigned status (Douglas, 1982). Individual interests are more important than the interests of the collective arrangement of the group, allegiance to the larger group is limited and fluctuates, group ideals are abandoned and negotiated on their own behalf, and there is no support system to fall back on (Gross & Rayner, 1985; Harris, 2005; Lingenfelter, 1996;). In school culture, this typically reveals itself in lack of tradition, school loyalty is low, and the social system is in constant change due to high teacher and administrator turnover (Harris, 2005). Figure 3 represents the group continuum.

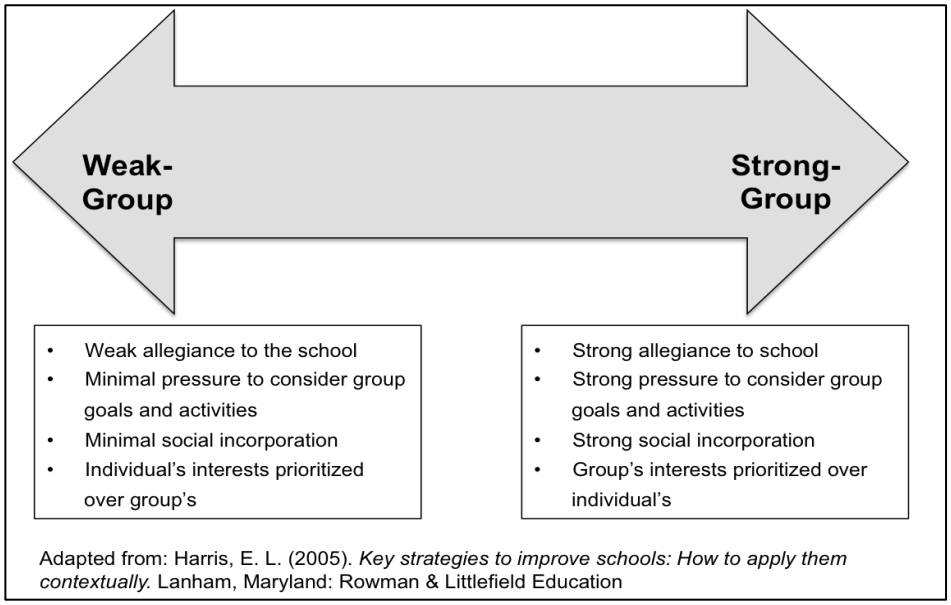





Figure 3: Group Dimensions

**Four Environments of Grid and Group**

When considering the high and low strengths of grid and group dimensions in school environments, four distinct environments emerge, as presented in Figure 4.

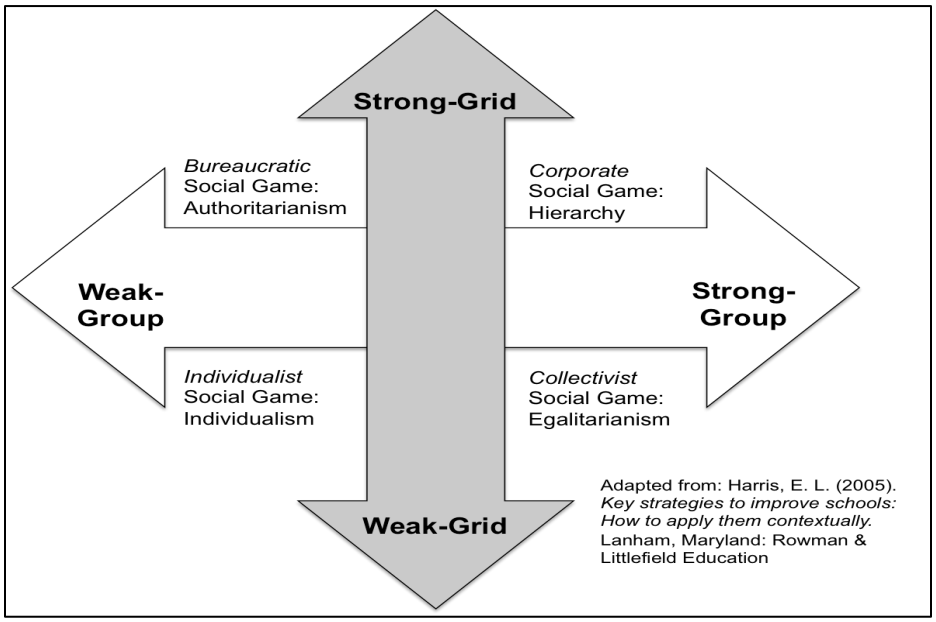



Figure 4: Grid and Group

**Grid and Group Quadrants**

Harris (2005), influenced by Lingenfelter's (1996) work regarding prevailing mindsets that influence the entire cultural environment, referred to these specific mindsets as "social games" because they provide a context for the characteristics of the social contributions people make while in a particular setting. Knowledge of these mindsets in a particular environment may provide insight as to how grit is manifested in a particular cultural setting. Grid and group typology is a fusing of the two continuums described above. Harris (2005) paired them together to create a framework of four distinct combinations: Individualist Environments (Weak-Grid/Weak-Group), Bureaucratic Environments (Strong-Grid/Weak-Group), Corporate Environments (Strong-Grid/Strong-Group), and Collectivist Environments (Weak-Grid/Strong-Group). Harris' (2005) four types as presented in Figure 4 are described in detail below:

Individualist Environments (Weak-Grid/Weak-Group)

- The social experience of the individual is not constrained by group rules or traditions
- Role status and rewards are competitive and based on merit
- There is little distinction between individual role statuses
- Long-term group survival is not important

Bureaucratic Environments (Strong-Grid/Weak-Group)

- In the extreme, the individual has no scope for personal transactions
- There is minimal personal autonomy for the individual
- Individual behavior is defined by role without ambiguity and is rewarded only in the context of the role
- Group survival is not important

Corporate Environments (Strong-Grid/Strong-Group)

- The social experience of the individual is constrained by the external boundary maintained by the group against outsiders
- The individual's identification is derived from group membership
- Individual behavior is subject to controls exercised in the name of the group
- A hierarchy pyramid of role levels exists with greater individual power at the top of the pyramid
- Group survival and perpetuation of tradition are of utmost importance

Collectivist Environments (Weak-Grid/Strong-Group)

- The individual's identification is derived from group membership
- Individual behavior is subject to controls exercised in the name of the group

- There are few formal specialized roles. Role status is competitive, yet because of high group influence, rules for status definitions and placement are more stable than in low group societies
- The perpetuation of corporate goals and group survival is important

This framework will enable analysis of specific characteristics that are, or may be, influenced by grid and group social considerations, and allow for identification of the quadrant that best fits a school's organizational culture. The framework is helpful to educators in explaining and describing the roles of educators and relationships in a school setting, understanding how they are structured, and interpreting how each member of the school engages in educational activities within the environment. As reported in Stanberry's (2001) dissertation, Douglas' typology has been applied to a number of studies by a number of scholars to understand technology policy, high-tech firms, career expectations, and higher education (Caulkins, 1997; Hendry, 1999; Lingenfelter, 1992; Schwarz & Thompson, 1990), but most significant to this study is the research done to understand work cultures (Mars & Nicod, 1984), and school culture (Harris, 1995, 2005).

## The Importance of Grit

### Defining Grit

The dictionary defines grit as "firmness of character; indomitable spirit; pluck" (www.Merriam-Webster/dictionary/grit, 2011). A gritty person is characterized as having "unyielding courage in the face of hardship or danger" (www.Merriam-Webster/dictionary/grit, 2011). This definition provides a basic understanding of grit and begins to show how gritty behavior can be recognized. The definition formulated by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2006):

> Grit is perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously towards challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; their advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course. (p. 4)

Duckworth et al. (2006) put forth the idea that some traits might be essential to success no matter what the domain. The researchers suggested that one personal quality shared by most prominent leaders in every field is grit. The development of their hypothesis that grit is essential to high achievement came about after interviews with professional bankers, painter, journalists, academicians, doctors, and lawyers. When questioned about what quality distinguishes star performers in their respective fields, these individuals cited grit as often as they did talent. While this might be the first time the construct of grit appears in the literature, constructs very similar can be found in literature dating back over a hundred years. In 1892, Galton (as cited in Doskoch, 2005) collected biographical information on judges, politicians, scientists, poets, musicians, painters, wrestlers, and other prominent individuals of the time. It was concluded that ability alone did not bring about success in the field. Galton (1892) stated that high achievers were blessed with "ability combined with zeal and with capacity for hard work" (p.33). For the purpose of this study, I will rely on Duckworth and Peterson's definition of grit.

## Grit

**The grit scale.** In building the case for grit as a legitimate, distinct construct, Duckworth and colleagues developed a self-report questionnaire called the Grit Scale, designed to be a stand-alone measure of grit. When Duckworth first introduced the construct in 2006, she argued, "Grit is distinct from traditionally measured facets of Big Five conscientiousness in its emphasis in stamina. In particular, grit entails the capacity to sustain both effort and interest in projects that

take months or even longer to complete" (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p.166). In order to measure grit, and to fully explore its impact, Duckworth and Peterson (2007) sought a measurement that met four basic criteria:

> Evidence of psychometric soundness, face validity for adolescents and adults pursuing goals in a variety of domains (e.g., not just work or school), low likelihood of ceiling effects in high-achieving populations, and most importantly, a precise fit with the construct of grit. (p. 1089)

Duckworth et al. (2007) developed the original 12-item, Grit-O, self-report questionnaire to measure the two- factor construct of grit. Duckworth and her colleagues undertook an investigation to create a more efficient tool to measure grit. The studies below represent their work in the validation of the Grit-S scale, which is an 8-item instrument to measure grit.

The first of these studies collected data on more than 1,500 adult participants aged twenty-five or older. Participants were asked to complete a twenty-seven-item questionnaire. The researcher based items on previous exploratory interviews from high achieving lawyers, business people, academics and other professionals. Items were rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me). Item total correlations, internal reliability coefficients, redundancy, simplicity of vocabulary, and factor analysis eliminated 15 items (Duckworth et al., 2006). The result was a 12-item Grit Scale (12GS). This became the researchers' measure of grit. The Participants were asked to indicate both how old they were and what level of education they had achieved: some high school, high school graduate, some college, Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree, or post college graduate degree (Duckworth & Peterson, 2007). These data points were then compared to participants' individual grit scores, and, as predicted, the more highly educated adults were grittier than their less educated peers (of equal age). In this study, success is defined as the level of education that individuals were able to achieve. It is important to

note, however, that while high levels of education are often associated with a general, broad definition of success, there are other, more specific measures of success, such as salary or position in the workplace hierarchy, that are not necessarily linked to the level of education that one obtains. Thus, while it may be the case that highly educated individuals are more successful than their less educated peers, it is by no means a certainty. Nevertheless, this study does provide evidence that gritty individuals tend to achieve more in the academic domain than those who are not gritty, and, as will be discussed in greater detail later, achievement in the academic domain is critical to one's ability to transition from middle school to ninth grade and eventually graduate from high school.

The purpose of the second study by Duckworth et al. (2006) was to test whether grit was associated with educational attainment and age. The 12GS was again used and 706 participants age 25 and older completed the scale. In addition, participants were asked to complete the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999), a 44-item questionnaire to measure personality and more specifically the following five traits: conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, and openness to experience. The researchers (Duckworth et al., 2006) found that grit was related to conscientiousness more than to neuroticism, agreeableness, extraversion, or openness to experience. The researchers also found that individuals who had only completed "some college" were lower in grit than any other group. Individuals who had earned either an Associate's degree or graduate degree were higher in grit than individuals with a Bachelor's degree (Duckworth et al., 2007).

A third study considered the association between grit and cumulative GPA while controlling for general mental ability or intelligence, as measured by SAT scores, at an elite undergraduate university. The results of this study demonstrated that gritty students outperformed their less gritty peers (Duckworth & Peterson, 2007). In this study success was defined as cumulative GPA, a relationship that was even stronger when SAT scores were held constant. "It

is interesting to note that grit was associated with lower SAT scores, suggesting that among elite undergraduates, smarter students may be slightly less gritty than their peers" (Duckworth & Peterson, 2007, p. 1093).

It is not surprising given the results of these studies that many institutions of higher education are beginning to rely more heavily on non-cognitive measures when making admissions decisions (Sedlacek, 2012). Organizations like the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which is known for its work on tests like the SAT and the GRE, among others, are beginning to explore the case for non-cognitive assessments, such as dependability and persistence (and even grit), because of their apparent importance to employers in industry (Kyllonen, 2005). Thus, there is growing interest, if not yet a full blown trend, towards using non-cognitive skills as predictors of success in the academic domain.

A fourth study expanded the scope beyond pure academic achievement by considering whether grit was predictive of cadet retention and GPA at West Point, the United States Military Academy. More than 1,200 freshman cadets completed the Grit Scale upon arrival at West Point in 2004 (Duckworth & Peterson, 2007). Data were compared to other data maintained by West Point, such as Whole Candidate Score (a weighted average of SAT scores, class rank, demonstrated leadership ability, and physical aptitude), which is used in their rigorous admissions process (Duckworth & Peterson, 2007). The results of the study revealed that grit predicted whether a candidate would survive his/her first summer as a cadet better than any other known predictor. Additionally, grit was predictive of both a cadet's first year GPA and his or her Military Performance Score, a combined measure of performance ratings and grades (Duckworth & Peterson, 2007). Importantly, the results of this study demonstrate that grit is predictive not only of success in a traditional academic environment, but also of success in a challenging environment in which success is defined not only in terms of pure academic performance but also in terms of physical ability, endurance, and leadership.

A fifth study was a replication and extension of Study 4 in which the researchers tested whether grit had incremental predictive validity for summer attrition over and beyond the BFI trait conscientiousness. Participants completed the 12GR and the 9-item conscientiousness subscale of the BFI (John & Srivastava, 1999). As in Study 2, grit and conscientiousness were highly related. Summer retention was predicted better by grit than by conscientiousness.

Duckworth et al.'s (2006) final study was a prospective, longitudinal investigation involving 175 finalists in the 2005 Scripps National Spelling bee. Participants ranged in age from 7 to 15 years old. In this study success was defined as how many rounds each competitor was able to complete in the competition. The results demonstrated that grittier spellers were more likely to engage in deliberate practice prior to the competition, which in turn made them more likely to reach later rounds in the bee (Duckworth & Peterson, 2007). The results of this study have significant implications for success as it has been shown, that deliberate practice often leads to expert performance and that expert performance is difficult to accomplish without deliberate practice to pave the way (Ericsson, 2004). Thus, if grit can predict, even to some extent, an individuals' willingness to engage in deliberate practice, it seems likely that it can also predict those who are likely to excel in other domains.

These six studies confirmed and validated the Grit-S questionnaire, and confirmatory factor analysis supported a two-factor structure of the Grit-S in which "Consistency of Interest and Perseverance of Effort both loaded on grit as a second-order latent factor. Both factors showed adequate internal consistency and were strongly intercorrelated, $r = .59$, $p < .001$" (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p. 172).

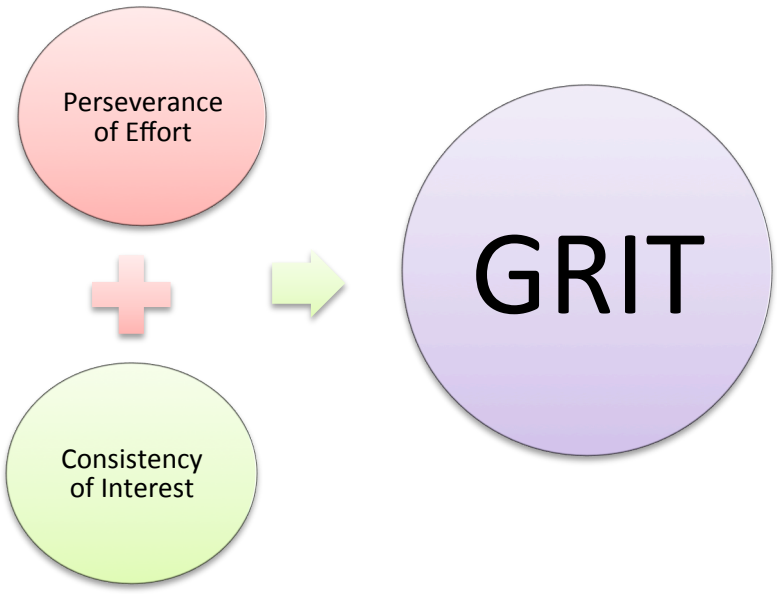
While these six studies demonstrate the predictive nature of grit, there are relatively few studies of this kind. Although increasing attention is being paid to the effects of non-cognitive

skills like grit on earnings and schooling outcomes, the importance of such skills in predicting academic success remains largely unexplored.

When considered collectively, the results of these studies seem to suggest that, at a minimum, it is possible that grit could be a predictor of success in the educational environment, cultivated and provided as a tool to help students as they transition through the educational arena. Certainly, further exploration of this issue is warranted.

**Grit: A Construct**

This study will use the two factors of Grit as identified by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, Kelly, and Quinn (2006, 2007, 2009), which include: perseverance of effort and consistency of interest, to help provide a thick rich description of how grit may be manifested in the culture of two freshman academies. The relationship of these factors is shown in Figure 5.




Visual relationship of the interrelationship of the factors of grit. Adapted from the journal article, "Development and Validation of the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S)" by Duckworth & Quinn (2009, p., 166). As cited from the Journal of Personality Assessment, 91(2), 166-174, 2009.

Figure 5: Two-Factor Construct of Grit

The factors of grit appear throughout the literature and will be used as a foundation for exploring ways that these factors make themselves evident in the cultural environments of two freshman academies. Understanding the factors of grit will help answer the central questions of this study, which are: How is grit manifested in the systems of two freshman academies? And how do the cultural experiences of a ninth grade transition program support the factors of grit in first year ninth graders? The two factors of grit are explained in detail in the following sections:

**Perseverance of Effort**

The single most common element and the most commonly used synonym of grit is perseverance. While much of the literature on perseverance has focused on the persistence of beliefs, thoughts, and attitudes, there has been a recent focus on behavioral persistence, such as action or work performance (Eisenberger, 1992; Eisenberger & Leonard, 1980). This subset of literature is most relevant to the present analysis given the intent to explore how grit and perseverance may be used as a predictor of academic success as a first year ninth grader in a freshman academy. Eisenberger and Leonard (1992) defined perseverance as one's tendency to persist and endure in the face of adversity. They suggested that perseverance influences individuals' course of action, the level of effort that they exhibit, and the endurance and resilience exhibited towards setbacks and failures that they may encounter along the way (Eisenberger & Leonard 1992). Similarly, Stolz (1997) defined perseverance as the perceived ability to overcome adverse circumstances, and suggests that success is determined by the extent to which individuals persevere despite potentially insurmountable obstacles or adversities. In order to persevere, and individual cannot be easily subdued or overcome and must relentlessly pursue his/her desired objective.

Many people assume that superior intelligence or ability is a key to success. But more than three decades of research show that an overemphasis on intellect or talent – and the

implication that such traits are innate and fixed – leaves people vulnerable to failure, fearful of challenges, and unmotivated to learn (Emelianov, 2008). In the past, intelligence has been widely accepted as an effective predictor of achievement (Hartigan & Wigdor, 1989). However, when Terman and Oden (1947) conducted a longitudinal study of mentally gifted children, it was found that there were only small differences between the IQ scores of the most accomplished over the least accomplished. The researchers discovered that perseverance, self-confidence, and integration toward goals were more predictive than IQ of whether mentally gifted children grew up to be accomplished lawyers or doctors (Terman & Oden, 1947). In current national policy, there is increasing attention on 21st –century competencies, which encompass a range of noncognitive factors, including grit. Also, "persistence" is now part of the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology, 2013).

**Consistency of Interest**

Passion is one of the key elements of grit. The definition of grit includes not only the tenacious pursuit of goals, but also a passionate pursuit. While passion is not the only element of grit, it has been referred to as "lynchpin of grit" (Doskoch, 2005, p. 48). Unlike in decades past in which employees were encouraged to leave their passion and emotions at home, there has been increasing attention paid to employees' emotions or emotional intelligence (Barsade & Gibson, 2007). Emotional intelligence is defined as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). A person's emotional intelligence can have a greater impact on individual and group performance than traditional measures like IQ. There are countless examples of high-IQ individuals who failed to achieve success n life because they lacked self-discipline, and individuals with low-IQs who achieved great success by virtue of sheer persistence (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001).

Truly gritty individuals demonstrate not only a rare single-mindedness in pursuit of their goals, but also a distinct passion for the goals they choose to pursue. As Doskoch (2005) pointed out, it is the fervor that might just be the "cornerstone" of grit (p. 5). In certain circumstances, it may be the case that passion fuels the perseverance. However, it is important to note that while passion and perseverance are often intimately connected, it is not always the case that passion precedes grit. In some cases, passion for a particular subject can develop over time, as a result of persistent dedication to the subject matter. Often the most intriguing and beguiling aspects of a complex discipline, such as chess or engineering, become apparent only after deep immersion (Doskoch, 2005). In other cases, a passion for challenges or a desire to test one's limits may fuel an individual's perseverance and encourage him/her to doggedly pursue a long-term objective, in spite of the difficulty of the task. Endurance athletes provide a good example of this as some of them spend months or even years training for a marathon or triathlon, not so much because they love the act of running, swimming, and biking long distances but rather because they want the personal satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that accompany such undertakings (Doskoch, 2005).

**Deliberate Practice.** Hard work does not always lead to success. While hard work is likely a key ingredient for success, there must be other ingredients that pay beyond just the some of time that one devotes to the pursuit of a singular objective. Ericsson and Charness (1994) suggested that it is not only how hard you work, but also the way in which you work that ultimately impact your ability to excel. Specifically, they suggested that deliberate practice, defined as "those training activities that were most closely associated with consistent improvements in performance," is what sets expert performers apart from their less proficient peers (Ericsson, 2004, p. S72). Importantly, the amount of time an individual must spend engaging in deliberate practice in order to achieve professional expertise requires, in most cases, roughly ten years. As Ericsson (2004) pointed out, "This ten-year rule of required engagement in

domain-related activities is the most compelling evidence for the necessity of experience to attain high levels of performance" (p. S72). How much time a protégé engaged in deliberate practice was a more reliable predictor of world-class performance than innate talent or inborn ability (Ericsson, 2004). Ericsson (2004) went on to explain that deliberate efforts to increase one's performance beyond its current level involve problem solving and finding better methods of performing the task at hand. Engaging in practice activities with the explicit goal of improving some aspect of the performance is and essential part of deliberate practice. Along the these same lines, Ericsson and Charness (1994) noted that "more plausible loci of individual differences are factors that predispose individuals towards engaging in deliberate practice and enable them to sustain high levels of practice for many years" (p. 744). Most recently, Gladwell (2008), in his book "Outliers", describes successful people, such as Bill Gates and the Beatles, who were able to acquire large amounts of deliberate practice towards their particular interest. According to Gladwell (2008), "researchers have settled on what they believe is the magic number for true expertise: ten thousand hours" (p. 40).

Duckworth (2010) connected deliberate practice to grit by suggesting that grittier individuals are more likely to engage in deliberate practice. It seems that having high levels of grit is one of the things that enables individuals to actively engage in deliberate practice (Duckworth, 2010). Whereas individuals who are only moderately gritty may choose to engage in easier, more immediately rewarding forms of practice, such as those that warrant regular, positive reinforcement. A gritty individual tends to persevere in spite of the fact that deliberate practice is rated as more effortful and less pleasing than other, less effective kinds of preparation. When gritty individuals engage in deliberate practice, they reap the myriad of benefits associated with it, and tend to be more successful as a result.

**Promoting Grit in Education**

A recent brief was published by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education Technology in February 2013 titled, "Promoting Grit, Tenacity, and Perseverance: Critical Factors for Success in the 21st Century". This one hundred-page brief provided recommendations in order to answer the following question:

> How can we best prepare children and adolescents to thrive in the 21st century – an era of achievement gaps that must be closed for the benefit of everyone in society, rapidly evolving technology, demanding and collaborative STEM knowledge work, changing workforce needs and economic volatility? (U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology, 2013, p. v)

This report explored the possibility that grit, tenacity and perseverance can be malleable and teachable, and discusses the potential of the factors to significantly increase student success. This is one of several recent reports where the concept of teaching and promoting grit in education it is gaining recognition. Denise Clark Pope, in her 2001 book, "Doing School: How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed-Out, Materialistic, and Miseducated Students," provided research on of how middle class students were being pushed so hard to get into top-tier universities that their high school years were filled with intense stress, and they were not being adequately prepared for a thriving adulthood. In an April 2012 address by John Easton, Director of the Department of Education's Institute of Educational Sciences stated, "A concern of national importance is to bring noncognitive factors back to the front burner of education" (U.S Department of Education, 2013, p. 4).

People from across various disciplines are making great headway in understanding what these noncognitive factors are, how they operate and what it might take to incorporate them into schooling. There is reason to believe that noncognitive traits such as grit, tenacity, and

perseverance are teachable and transferrable and that learning environments can be built with contextual supports to promote these qualities (U.S Department of Education, 2013).

In just the last few years research in the noncognitive traits of grit and perseverance help provide for an understanding of these traits and best practices to promote them in setting up learning environments, designing curriculum and providing teacher professional development. Private foundations have initiated programs intended to push the frontiers of theory, measurement, and practice around these factors. Foundations have funded comprehensive research literature reviews on academic tenacity (Dweck, Walton, & Cohen, 2011), the role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance (Farrington et al., 2012), and the landscape of student academic mindset interventions (Snipes, Facsali, & Stoker, 2012). In the summer of 2012, the National Research Council released a report entitled "Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century" (NRC, 2012). This report pointed to three broad domains of competence: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Grit was one of the traits in the center of the intrapersonal domain, which involved "the capacity to manage one's behavior and emotions to achieve one's goals" (p. Sum-3). NRC also gave a series of recommendations for how to move this work forward in research, policy, and practice.

Authors of the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics have acknowledged the fundamental need for perseverance in conceptual learning. It has been incorporated in the practice standard: "Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them." This standard also stated that students "monitor and evaluate their progress and change course if necessary." The standard is consistent with the findings in math education literature hat one of the most important features of teaching that consistently facilitate students' conceptual understanding is "students struggle with important mathematics" (Hiebert & Grouws, 2009, p. 387).

**Methods to measure grit in education.** Self-Report is perhaps the most popular method and widely used measurement approach for noncognitive factors. This report has already discussed Duckworth et al.'s (2007) validated self-report Grit-S scale measure as one model. Dweck, Chiu, and Hong's (1995) scale is used to assess an individual's implicit Theory of Intelligence as fixed or subject to growth efforts. There are also some commercial products such as the VIA Character Strengths Inventory (http://www.viacharacter.org) and the Clifton Strengths Finder (http://www.strengthsfinder.com) can be used to help individuals identify core enduring strengths, of which grit is one of many (U.S Department of Education, 2013).

Informant reports are those made by someone other than the student. Typically, teachers, parents, or observers do this. Teachers are in a unique position to provide important feedback regarding student's grit because of ongoing frequent interactions in the classroom. Some schools around the country are already beginning to promote these noncognitive traits in a variety of ways. The KIPP schools are providing student with a "character" report card. This report card, developed with the help of Angela Duckworth, includes the following qualities of grit: "finishes whatever he or she begins, tries very hard even after experiencing failure, and works independently with focus" (U.S Department of Education, 2013, p. 39). This was developed to provide explicit teacher feedback to help students gauge their level of grit with respect to specific criteria and to open up conversation with students, teachers, and parents.

School records, which include grades, standardized test scores, attendance, dropping-out, discipline problems, and social services used, are another source of data regarding students' perseverance and grit. Data from school records provides possibilities for rich longitudinal analyses of educational impacts, as well as informing early warning systems that can be used to identify students who are not managing to persevere in the face of all the challenges of schooling (U.S Department of Education Office of Technology, 2013).

Behavioral task performance measures are the broad set of methods used to capture behaviors consistent with perseverance. It is associated with emotional experiences, physical movements or facial expressions, physiological responses, and thoughts that students do in response to a particular challenge. Some new methods for measuring behavioral task performance (U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology, 2012, p.9):

- Educational data mining (EDM) develops methods and applies techniques form statistics, machine learning, and data mining to analyze data collected during teaching and learning. EDM tests learning theories and informs educational practice.
- Learning Analytics applies techniques from information science, sociology, psychology, statistics, machine learning, and data mining to analyze data collected during education administration and services, teaching, and learning. Learning analytics creates applications that directly influence educational practice.
- Affective computing is the study and development of systems and devices that can recognize, interpret, process, and simulate aspects of human affect. Emotional or physiological variables can be used to enrich the understanding and usefulness of behavioral indicators. Discrete emotions particularly relevant to reactions to challenge, such as interest, frustration, anxiety, and boredom, may be measured through analysis of facial expressions, EEG brain wave patterns, skin conductance, heart rate variability, posture, and eye tracking.

**Programs and models for learning environments to promote grit.** "While the consensus across the literature is that there is still a need for empirical evidence that grit can be taught as a transferable competency, there are a wide range of programs and approaches that are already showing promise and positive results in this area" (U.S. Department of Education Office of Technology, 2013, p. 49). An examination of 50 programs across the age span and types of learning environments by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Technology in 2013,

produced the following five basic conceptual clusters of types of programs that may be used to promote grit: (1) School readiness programs that address executive functions, (2) Interventions that address mindsets, learning strategies, and resilience, (3) Alternative school models and school-level reform approaches, (4) Informal learning programs, and (5) Digital learning environments, online resources, and tools for teachers (p. 50). This study will specifically investigate the third model, which is the alternative school model and school-level reform. This model is an approach that promotes grit and perseverance by targeting a restructuring of organization and climate of school to provide students with a more supportive learning environment, specifically during their time of transition into high school. Hammond (2002) discusses ten principles for redesigning high schools with a "small school" model that works. These principles can also be used to design smaller learning communities within larger schools. These principles include (1) personalization of instruction, (2) continuous relationships with teachers over time, (3) high standards and performance-based assessment, (4) authentic curriculum that focuses on deep understanding and connections to students' lives, (5) pedagogy adapted to individual learning needs, (6) multicultural and anti-racist teaching to support belonging for all students in the school community, (7) knowledgeable and skilled teachers, (8) opportunities for teacher for collaborative planning and professional development, (9) connections to the family and community, and (10) democratic decision-making such that all stakeholders have a voice in governance. The freshman academy transition model I intend to study encompasses this school reform program that promotes the traits of grit and perseverance.

## Chapter Two Summary

Chapter two presented an in depth view of the literature to establish the need for this study. First, this review described the research regarding high school students who dropout and the importance of the ninth grade year. The reason the ninth grade year is so important is because it is a transition year in to high school and many students struggle with this transition. Reasons

for the struggle included size of the school, increased academic rigor, higher expectations, increased social pressures, and lack of relationships with their teachers. Next, research regarding various transition programs for providing support to ninth graders was presented. Programs included, freshman academies using the Talent Development High School model, the High Schools that Work model, and First Things First model. Some of these models showed success and some did not. Research indicates transition programs that focus on ninth graders by placing them in Freshman Academies should also include ways to make high schools a more nurturing environment; standardize the expectations so students and teachers both know what to look for; equip students with the "mind-set" they need to learn and be successful; create classroom cultures where rigor and excellence is expected; teach students organizational and time management strategies; foster effective parent-teacher contact; provide on-going professional development for teachers; recognize freshmen for their efforts; preemptively and proactively provide academic mindset intervention services for students who fall behind (Habeeb, 2013). In just the last few years, research in the non-cognitive traits of grit and perseverance help provide for an understanding of academic mindsets that contribute to academic success. This research provides an understanding of these traits, as well as, best practices to promote them in schools. Private foundations have initiated programs intended to push the frontiers of theory, measurement, and practice around these factors. Foundations have funded comprehensive research literature reviews on academic tenacity (Dweck, Walton, & Cohen, 2011), the role of non-cognitive factors in shaping school performance (Farrington et al., 2012), and the landscape of student academic mindset interventions (Facsali, Snipes, & Soker, 2012). The chapter concluded by establishing grid and group as the theoretical framework to identify the cultural characteristics of schools and provide a lens to view the systems when exploring factors that may contribute to the manifestation of grit in each environment, identifying the importance of girt, defining grit as a construct, and the significance of promoting grit in education.

# CHAPTER III

# METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology and data collection procedures used in this study. The selection of methodology and procedures were based on the type of study pursued. This study features close interactions with human subjects and their perceptions of specific situations, processes, and occurrences, therefore; qualitative inquiry was the most appropriate design.

Qualitative research allows for categories and themes to develop and emerge throughout the data collection process. Interviews, observations and document collection were utilized to allow the researcher to develop a "picture" of the participants' experiences and perceptions. These experiences and perceptions were then analyzed to form descriptions of a specific situational phenomenon, known as a case study (Patton, 2002).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the cultural manifestation of grit in two freshman academy environments and describe factors of grit that support student success. The ninth grade year is considered the most critical year for high school students.

The review of the research on transition programs finds that students are less likely to drop out of high school if they participate in programs that help with the transition to high school (Mizelle, 1995; Connell, Eccles, Kemple, & Legters, 2006; Bottoms, 2006; Fulk, 2003; McCallumore & Sparapini, 2010; Fritzer & Herbst, 1996; Smink & Schargel, 2004).

## Research Questions

A qualitative case study was conducted and the goal was to obtain a deeper understanding of what experiences would contribute to building grit in first year ninth graders. The following central questions and subsequent research questions guided this study:

Central Question: How was grit manifested in the culture of these systems? How did the cultural experiences of a ninth grade transition program support the factors of grit in first year ninth graders?

1) How did grid and group explain the cultural manifestation of grit in each of these schools?
2) What were teacher perceptions about the types of school programs or other school factors that contributed to the development of grit in these schools?
3) What were the teacher perceptions about their roles in the development of grit in these schools?
4) What other finding in the data were relevant to this study?

## Research Design

### Epistemology

Epistemology deals with knowledge and how we as human beings come to "know" and how we acquire knowledge. The epistemological perspective of this research study is social constructivism. Creswell (2013) asserts with constructivism, "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences –

meanings directed toward certain objects or things" (p. 24). We come to know through our interactions and the meanings are constructed as we engage with the world we are interpreting (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Schwandt, 2007). This case study involved engaging in the world of two freshman academies and explored the experiences of ninth graders and observed cultural factors in each school's environment that support the factors of grit, thus laying the foundation for promotion to tenth grade and eventually graduation from high school.

**Qualitative Paradigm**

Case study methodology was used, as it is an appropriate complement to the constructionist epistemological perspective guiding this study. Creswell (2014) provided a technical definition of case studies:

> Case studies are a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (p. 258).

The phenomenon, or unit of analysis, studied in this case provided support for understanding student achievement at two Freshman Academies, but in order to do so, one must consider the context of the school organizational culture. Each school's location, organizational structure, size of enrollment, physical structure, and demographics were considered in this study as well as multiple sources of evidence, thus provided the need to identify a theoretical framework prior to data collection.

## Methodological Procedures

### Participant Selection

I used purposive sampling to select school sites and participants. Schools were selected based on location in northeast Oklahoma, organizational structure, demographics, size of the school, physical location of each building in relation to their high school, and the fact that both sites prescribed to the Freshman Academy transition model. I selected Prairie View Freshman Academy and Riverside Freshman Academy because they are considered successful schools. They both scored a B on the state report card and both schools have over a 95% student attendance rate (www.schoolreportcard.org/) for school year 2015.

Participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study, similarity in grit scores and subject matter taught. Creswell (2014) explained that purposeful sampling "is to purposefully select participants who will best help them understand the research problem and the research questions" (p. 245). For the study, two freshman academies, an assistant principal at each school, and a total of eight teachers, four from each school site, were selected. Teachers with similar grit scores and a variety of teaching subject including, Oklahoma history, special education, biology, math, and English were sought. Information from both viewpoints of the assistant principals and the teachers at each Freshman Academy were important in providing valuable information to form the whole picture of the organizational culture of each school. The population of this study focused on educators who teach ninth grade as well as the assistant principal of each school site. Patton (2002) described opportunistic or emergent sampling as, "Following new leads during fieldwork; taking advantage of the unexpected; flexibility" (p. 244). I took advantage of this type of sampling, because there was no knowledge of who will have the best understanding of the organizational culture and factors that support the construct of grit in school culture.

**Data Collection**

Data collection occurred in the "natural setting", identified by Creswell (2014) as a characteristic of qualitative inquiry (p. 185). Within this natural setting, data were collected through observations, interviews, documents, surveys, audio-visual materials, and website information (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) explained that none of these data collection sources was better than another, but it was important to collect data from a variety of sources. The identification of strengths and weaknesses of each data collection method served to strengthen the study (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2014).

**Surveys.** Two surveys were used as sources of data. The first survey, Douglas' (1982) 24-question grid and group, was used to identify the types of culture at each school site. This survey was administered to all faculty and administrators at each school site and answers were given on a continuum with a range from one to eight. The first 12 pairs of statements on the grid and group survey represent the grid considerations. The remaining 12 pairs of statements represent the group considerations. For each question participants chose the statement that best represented their school. On the continuum, from one to eight, participants marked the bubble that best represented the degree to which the statement applied to their school. The grid score was calculated by dividing the sum of the grid consideration responses by 12. The group score was calculated by dividing the sum of the group consideration responses by 12. These scores were plotted on the grid and group graph to determine the cultural typology of each school site selected (Harris, 2005).

The second survey was the Grit-S scale, which is an 8-item survey and answers were given on a Likert scale with a range from one to five. The Grit-S scale, developed by Dr. Angel Duckworth provides information about the "grittiness" of individuals. Confirmatory factor analysis supported a two-factor structure of the Grit-S in which "Consistency of Interest and

Perseverance of Effort both loaded on grit as a second-order latent factor. Both factors showed adequate internal consistency and were strongly intercorrelated, $r = .59$, $p < .001$" (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p. 172). This survey was administered to all faculty and administrators at each school site and answers were given on a Likert scale with a range from one to five.

For questions 2, 4, 7 and 8 the following points were assigned:

5 = Very much like me

4 = Mostly like me

3 = Somewhat like me

2 = Not much like me

1 = Not like me at all

For questions 1, 3, 5 and 6 the following points were assigned:

1 = Very much like me

2 = Mostly like me

3 = Somewhat like me

4 = Not much like me

5 = Not like me at all

To determine the score for each participant, points for each question were added and then divide by eight. The maximum score on the scale is "5 (extremely gritty), and the lowest score on the scale is 1 (not at all gritty)" (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p. 166-174).

**Observations.** Data were collected through multiple visits to each school site. Observational data included a variety of activities, events, and settings. Observational data were recorded through detailed field notes, audio recordings, and pictures. Elements of organizational culture that support student achievement and the factors of grit that were not present were identified and observed. Patton (2002) referred to these types of observations as "observing what does not happen" (p. 295). Visiting the school site in its natural setting and observing the culture in action provided the strengths of these observations, whereas viewing the organizational culture through my perspective was a weakness since my presence may have produced biased interactions and responses.

**Interviews.** Data were collected through interviews. Interviews were conducted with two assistant principals, one at each freshman academy and four teachers at each site. Creswell (2014) describes the advantages of interviews as being "useful when participants cannot be directly observed, participants can provide historical information, and allows the researcher control over the line of questioning" (p. 190). Each interview was conducted one-on-one and face-to-face, and was recorded with an audio recorder. Open-ended questions were utilized in an effort to illicit detailed opinions and responses. The interview technique used is called a "focused interview" described by Yin (2009) as, "the interviews may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but [the interviewer is] more likely to be following a set of questions derived from case study protocol" (p. 107). While conducting the interviews, notes were taken regarding the interviewees non-verbal cues and to help describe the setting in which the interviews took place. The interviews were transcribed as quickly as possible immediately following each interview and a field log was kept to record details related to my observations during the interviews. A detailed journal was kept to record my own thoughts, feelings, experiences, and perceptions throughout the research process. All interviews were digitally recorded. Listening to the direct accounts and perceptions of participants was a major strength to

the interviews and this study, while the limitation for collecting data through interviews was the bias that may occur due to the interviewers presence.

**Documents.** Data were collected through documents located on each district's website such as the mission statement and school site information. Other documents were collected such as; electronic communication, handouts in the front office, newsletters, and any other sources that helped explain the school's organizational culture and describe programs, academic interventions, academic remediations and other activities that support the factors of grit. The Oklahoma State Department of Education's information system was used to collect data about each school's demographics, race, gender, grades, student's prior academic achievement, A-F report card scores, attendance, and stakeholder volunteer hours. A potential limitation to this type of data collection was that information might be missing, outdated or not accurate. There are major advantages to this type of data collection and Creswell (2014) effectively summarizes these:

- Enables a researcher to obtain the language and words of the participants
- Can be accessed at a time convenient to the researcher-an unobtrusive source of information
- Represents data which is thoughtful in that participants have given attention to compiling them
- As written evidence, it saves a researcher time and expense of transcribing (p. 192).

**Audio Visual Materials.** Photographs, video recordings, computer messages, website pictures, and sounds of each school site were collected. Data that represented artifacts that contribute to organizational culture and factors of grit were also collected. Strengths of this data collection method included its unobtrusive nature and it provided a way to directly share the reality of the participants. The limitations of this type of data collection included the possible misinterpretation of the meaning of each artifact.

**Data Analysis**

In general, "Data analysis is the intent to make sense out of the text and image data and involves segmenting and taking the data apart (like peeling back the layers of an onion) as well as putting it back together" (Creswell, 2014, p. 194). Every effort was made to represent the data collected in the analysis. The analysis began the moment I start collecting data. Data analysis was a continual process throughout the entire time of the study. It included continual cycle of reflection, analyzing interviews, observations, and writing notes.

Creswell (2014) suggested following these six steps: organize and prepare the data, read through the data, code the data, generate themes and descriptions, represent findings, and interpret meaning.

**Organize, prepare, and read data.** All data were organized in chronological order using digital resources and a binder to hold "hard copies". Organizing and preparing the data involved the transcription of interviews, the typing of field notes, and scanning documents collected. By doing my own transcribing, constant reflection on the information in the interviews was possible. To have a clear understanding and full knowledge of the study, I read through the data multiple times.

**Code data.** Data were coded using all of the approaches described by Creswell (2014), "(a) develop codes *only* on the basis of the emerging information collected from participants, (b) use predetermined codes and then fit the data to them, or (c) use some combination of predetermined and emerging codes" (p. 197). Creswell (2014), describes "Tesch's eight steps in the coding processes" as the most common:

- Get a sense of the whole. Read all the transcription carefully
- Pick one document (i.e., one interview). Go through it asking yourself, "What is this about?" Write thoughts in the margin

- Cluster together similar topics
- Take the list of topics and abbreviate as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text
- Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories
- Make final decision of codes and alphabetize
- Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis
- If necessary, recode your existing data (p. 197).

**Generate themes or categories.** Following the coding process, data were organized into certain clusters of common significance. The clusters were separated into common themes that emerged. Creswell (2009) explained, "[Themes] should display multiple perspectives from individuals and be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence" (p. 189). These categories described the context, setting, participants, and interactions among participants in this study.

**Convey findings and interpret meanings.** Findings of the study are conveyed in a narrative format utilizing charts and tables. The narrative approach includes a full description of the participants in the study, a chronology of events exploring organizational culture in two freshman academies, its impact in manifesting grit in school culture and how that impacts ninth grade students, and a detailed description of the themes (Creswell, 2009). Charts and tables are provided as a visual aid intended to assist in interpreting the data.

## Researcher Role

### Researcher Bias

I have been an educator for over 13 years and am in the middle of my ninth year as an administrator. I am currently a principal, at a Freshman Academy, in a large suburban school

district in Oklahoma. Our school has 1,300 students with over eighty faculty members and we currently provide a wide range of academic supports for our students. Our students are divided into five, smaller learning cohorts, in which a group of eight teachers share a cohort. Each cohort contains approximately 260 students. This affected the study because of my knowledge of academic intervention programs and my strong desire for the academic supports to help students achieve academic success. I understand the benefits of a variety of academic programs and I was cognizant to not let that influence how I reviewed and analyzed the data I collected. I followed university and federal policy as well as qualitative research protocols.

**Ethical Considerations**

In order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, ethical considerations regarding data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation were employed.

**Data collection ethics.** There are many ethical considerations to be addressed in qualitative research. Creswell (2015) asserts, "first and foremost, the researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the informant(s)" (p. 208). In order to do so, the following safeguards, as prescribed by Creswell (2014), were employed: (1) an informed consent and confidentiality form was utilized to inform the participants of their rights throughout the research process, (2) an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the university, (3) a letter was written to each superintendent and principal of the selected school sites asking for permission to gain access to each site to conduct the study, (4) disruptions were limited at the research site by carefully selecting observation times that best fit participants' needs, (5) the mutual benefits between researcher and participants were ensured through offering the participants and school sites copies of transcripts, findings of the study, and the final document, (6) the confidentiality of all data collected was ensured , and (7) interview protocol procedures were closely followed regarding neutrality. Participants were not led to any conclusions during the interview.

**Data analysis and interpretation ethics**. Ethics regarding data analysis and interpretation included assigning pseudonyms, securing data collected, and ensuring accurate interpretations of data collected (Creswell, 2015). In order to protect the anonymity of the school district, school site, and participants, pseudonyms were assigned for all participants in the study. Information gathered during the data collection phase was kept secure, either in my possession or in a locked file cabinet in my home. In order to interpret the meanings of artifacts and data correctly, member checks and staff conversations were utilized.

## Trustworthiness of Findings

To establish trustworthiness of findings, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend, in a qualitative case study, the following four criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### Credibility

To ensure credibility in this study, the following techniques recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were implemented: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, member checks, purposeful sampling, and triangulation. Prolonged engagement at the site allowed me to build trust, develop rapport, and obtain accurate data. Persistent observation allowed me to obtain in-depth data and allowed me to further understand the true organizational structure and culture of the school. I took advantage of the relationship I had with my graduate school classmates and asked my fellow students to assist me with peer debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined peer debriefing as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit with the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). Member checks were also conducted, with participants being provided copies of the interview transcripts in order to verify accuracy. Follow-up emails and text messages were sent, as necessary, to clarify

answers provided during the interviews. The material was triangulated by gathering information from teachers, assistant principals, district websites, and observational data of assistant principals and teachers. All of this information was used to get a more complete understanding of the role of school organizational culture in supporting factors of grit in their system. Yin (2009) described triangulation further, "A major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence" (pp. 114-115). There are limitations to each type of data collection, and using the triangulation approach to collecting data minimized the limitations.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the ability of the study's results to be applicable to another setting. A good way to ensure transferability is to provide a "thick description" which is a technique described by Creswell (2014, p. 201). This description should transport the reader to the setting and provide an element of a shared experience. It was my task to thoroughly describe the setting, context, participants, research design, and results so that the reader can best determine the applicability of this study to their setting.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability refers to the ability of the study to be replicated or repeated, and confirmability refers to the degree to which my findings would be consistent with another person's interpretation of the findings. To meet these requirements, all documents, notes, transcripts, recorded interviews, and observations were readily available for an audit. My approach to research was transparent, specifically noting any changes made as the study progressed. Table 1 provides trustworthiness criteria and examples.

Table 1
*Trustworthiness Criteria and Examples*

| **Credibility** | | |
|---|---|---|
| ***Criteria/Technique*** | ***Result*** | ***Examples*** |
| Prolonged engagement | • Build trust<br>• Develop rapport<br>• Build relationships<br>• Obtain wide scope of data<br>• Obtain accurate data | In the field from September 2016 to December 2016; follow-up communication occurred in December; avenues of communication: emails, appointments, face-to-face, and telephone calls. |
| Persistent Observation | • Obtain in-depth data<br>• Obtain accurate data<br>• Sort relevancies from irrelevancies | Observation of participants during regular school day activities, faculty meetings, team meetings; Observation of school culture each time I visited the school sites |
| Triangulation | • Verify data | Multiple sources of data: interviews, observations, document, websites, and email |
| Peer debriefing | • An additional perspective and guidance from a trusted source | Gathered feedback on interview questions; discussed and helped other doctoral students in the process of writing this dissertation |
| Member checking | • Verify documentation and conclusions | The participants received copies of the transcripts and final paper to verify accuracy, especially about the conclusions drawn from the study, and provide any important missing information and/or to schedule a follow-up meeting |
| Purposive sampling | • Site selection will provide a good venue for observing the role of organizational culture in building grit | Purposeful in the selection of site based on the number of students enrolled, demographics, and the type of site. |
| **Transferability** | | |
| ***Criteria/Technique*** | ***Result*** | ***Examples*** |
| Referential adequacy | • Provided a comprehensive picture of the program | Gathered information from websites, district materials, school communication pieces, |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | State Department of Education |
| Thick description | • Provided a data base for transferability judgment<br>• Provided a vicarious experience for the reader | History of each site and current academic programs in place for students; education experience of the participants and overall observations regarding the role of school culture; portraits of the school |

| **Dependability/Conformability** | | |
|---|---|---|
| ***Criteria/Technique*** | ***Result*** | ***Examples*** |
| Access to an audit trail | • Allowed auditor to determine trustworthiness of study | Interview guides, notes, documents, note cards, word clouds, Google spreadsheets of In-Vivo coding, peer debriefing notes, email exchanges between participants and myself, etc. are readily available for an audit |

## Summary

Chapter Three provided an in depth review of the methodology that was used. In addition to explaining my role in the research process, potential areas of researcher bias were addressed due to my background and personal experience as a principal at a freshman academy. The trustworthiness guidelines are clearly defined and valid and credible examples were provided.

# CHAPTER IV

## PRESENTATION OF THE CASE

Chapter Four presents data collected throughout this study. The purpose of this study was to explore the cultural manifestation of grit in two freshman academy environments and describe factors of grit that support student success. In order to set the stage for understanding the cultural environments of each freshman academy, it is important get an overview of each of the respective school districts. The chapter begins by describing the profile of each school district, the district's mission and vision, the district's initiatives and programs, and then narrows to tell the stories of the two school sites selected. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documents from two northeast Oklahoma freshman academies, Prairie View and Riverside.

### Prairie View Public Schools

#### District and Community Profile

Prairie View Public Schools is a suburban school district in northeast Oklahoma. The 2016 – 2017 school year began with close to 11,500 students. Information about the school district's profile is in Table F1 as reported on the State Department of Oklahoma's website

(www.schoolreportcard.org/) for school year 2015. The district area comprises forty square miles directly adjacent to the city. The school district has nine school sites; three early childhood through fourth grade elementary schools, two fifth and sixth grade school sites, one middle school, one Freshman Academy, one alternative school, and one high school. The district serves over 1,877 students with special needs and approximately 1,171 students identified as English Language Learners (ELL).

The district has a reputation for excellence in everything they do and is known for the quality of their schools and community. The district also has the reputation for having students who come from affluent families, however; 37% of the students in the district qualify for free or reduced meals.

The community has seen tremendous growth over the past sixteen years. In the year 2000, the population of Prairie View, according to the U.S. Census bureau, was 9,614 and it is now 20,182, indicating that it has doubled in size. The School district has had to keep up with growth by approving bond a $120 million bond in 2014 and another $11 million bond in 2016.

**District Mission and Vision**

The mission of Prairie View public schools, according to the district's website is, "inspired by a tradition of excellence, is committed to the shared responsibility of preparing all learners for productive, responsible citizenship in and ever-changing world." (Prairie View website, 2016). The district created three broad goals that it hopes to accomplish within three years. These goals are published on the district's website and they are:

- Goal 1: Achieve Excellence in the Five "A"s: Academics, Activities, Attitude, the Arts, and Athletics
- Goal 2: Focus on Fiscal Stability

- Goal 3: Realize a Vision for Tomorrow (Prairie View website, November, 2016).

Action statements are provided after each goal and are also broad in nature. The districts board of education approved the mission and goals on August 1st, 2016. The district has also created "aim statements" for each content area.

**District Initiatives and Programs**

Prairie View district initiatives and programs that potentially have the most impact on student learning, include going one-to-one with chromebooks, integrating a new learning management system called Canvas, using Google apps for education for document and work creation, and the development of collaboration days.

Collaboration days were developed by the school district to provide time for teachers to meet during the school day. The Prairie View Instructional Calendar includes six days on which students arrive at school later than the normal time. These are called District Collaboration Days. This time is set aside for teachers to work together to identify common instructional needs, brainstorming solutions that meet the needs of students at multiple grade levels and in multiple content areas. The late-start collaboration days provide time for teachers to study student work, discuss proven strategies, and integrate best practices into classroom instruction. The district has a program in place to support teachers with instructional strategies and curriculum alignment. This support comes in the form of Curriculum Resource Instructors or commonly referred to as "CRIs".

The district also offers virtual school, which entails students taking classes in a hybrid environment that is a mixture of the traditional classroom and the Internet. Students are assigned to online courses in the Virtual Center with an instructor during a specific class period. Under teacher supervision, either in person or online, students use educational software to complete assignments, supplemented by in-class instruction and outside coursework.

Finally, an initiative that is unique to Prairie View Public Schools is their Chinese Initiative. The aim of the Chinese Initiative is to provide educational opportunities, promote mutual cultural and language literacy, and build positive relationships among students, staff and all communities. The goals of Prairie View Public Schools' Chinese program are to educate students about China and its culture, to teach students the Mandarin Chinese language, to breakdown stereotypes, to foster the exchange of ideas, and to teach adaptability and sensitivity.

## Prairie View Freshman Academy

### Participant Profiles

Interview participants for this study included four teachers and one administrator from Prairie View Freshman Academy. Participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study, the subject they taught, and grit score. The grit score for all participants ranged between 2.88 and 4.75. The grit scale ranges from 1 (low grit) to 5 (high grit).

**Gabriel Albright.** Gabriel Albright is an Oklahoma History teacher in her 9th year of teaching. She earned a Master's degree in History and originally wanted to do work in public history, such as teaching through historic homes, historic architecture and museum work. Ms. Albright was not able to secure employment in that field immediately out of college and ended up working a "normal job" (G. Albright, interview, September 28, 2016). Shortly thereafter, she and her husband started a family and she decided to stay home with her children for ten years. During this time she "came to understand the role of a teacher" (G. Albright, interview, September 28, 2016), in her own children's lives. She, like many others perceived teaching in a negative way and did not see it as a professional thing to do, however; after raising her own kids and maturing, she got "tired and fed up with people griping about public schools and what was wrong with them, and said, 'I'm going to do something about it" (G. Albright, interview, September 28,

2016). She decided to go back to school to get her teaching degree. She is certified to teach both English and Social Studies. All of her children attended Prairie View Public Schools.

**Dan Brickman.** Dan Brickman has been teaching for fifteen years and was a former athlete and football coach. He currently teaches both personal financial literacy and Oklahoma History at Prairie View Freshman Academy. He has a bachelor's degree in secondary education and started out teaching in the town where he graduated high school. He left that position to "chase the almighty dollar" (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016) at a school in Texas, however; after just one year realized that he was not suited to the culture of the school. It was an affluent suburban school and there was a lot of pressure placed on teachers to help students achieve academically on the state mandated tests. Mr. Brickman left Texas and moved back to Oklahoma thinking he would return to and teach in his hometown. He instead was hired at Prairie View Freshman Academy and has been there for eleven years. When I asked if Prairie View feels like home now, Mr. Brickman responded by saying, "Yes. Yes. I now, you know, bleed [school colors]" (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016).

**Julie Rogers.** Julie Rogers has been at Prairie View Freshman Academy sixteen out of the seventeen years it has been open. She graduated college with a bachelor's degree in elementary education and began her career as a pre-school teacher and a before and after school caregiver. One of her students in the after-care program was in a special education program and his guardians began sharing with Ms. Roberts the strategies that were being used to help this student. Ms. Roberts was so moved by the experience that it motivated her to become certified in Special Education so she could help students who struggle. Her husband is a graduate of Prairie View High School and they live in the school district. She felt that Prairie View Public Schools is the place to be "if you like teaching with kind of that small-town school feel, but still in a large school district with a good reputation" (J. Rogers, interview, September 28, 2016). Ms. Rogers teaches four different special education classes at Prairie View Freshman Academy and they are;

English Language Arts essential skills, English Language Arts lab, Oklahoma History essential skills, and study skills.

**Audrey Smith.** Audrey Smith graduated with a bachelor's degree in secondary education with an emphasis in Biology. She had intended to go to veterinary school, but discovered that she enjoyed teaching. She has been a Biology teacher for eleven years and the last six have been spent teaching at the Prairie View Freshman Academy. She currently teaches both, Pre-Advanced Placement Biology and on-level Biology, and involved with Student Council. When I asked her why she chose Biology as her particular area of interest she explained that her main goal in teaching is "science literacy, which is big in the news right now, making sure that the public is scientifically literate and can make informed choices regarding science and how we vote" (A. Smith, interview, October 5, 2016). She has taught sixth grade and ninth through twelfth. Ms. Smith's classroom is a state-of-the-art science lab. The district has a dedicated building specifically for math and science instruction.

**Frank Edwards.** Frank Edwards is beginning his third year as assistant principal at Prairie View Freshman Academy. Prior to being an administrator he was a social studies teacher, basketball and tennis coach. Mr. Edwards has always valued education as evidenced by his graduating high school as valedictorian of his class. He attended Northeastern State University and initially majored in marketing. He recounted the time when he remembered sitting in an accounting class and kind of looking around and thinking, "I don't know that I want, to do – spend the rest of my life in a cubicle somewhere crunching numbers" (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016). So, he realized when looking back on his life the people who had been most influential were his parents, folks in the church, teachers, and coaches. The woman, who would later become his wife, was majoring in education and she also had an influence on his decision to become an educator. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in History and taught and coached for several years. He felt that he could better serve students and that he could have a

bigger impact if he were an administrator. The opportunity for greater influence is what led him to pursue a Master's degree in administration. Mr. Edwards is the only assistant principal at Prairie View and he is responsible for the discipline and instructional leadership of 850 students. See Table 2 for Prairie View participant profile summary.

Table 2

*Participant Profile Summary – Prairie View: School Selection based on size, location, and demographic data. Participant selection based on willingness to participate in study, grit score, and subject matter taught.*

| Name | Position | Years of Experience | Years at Riverside | College Major | Additional Responsibilities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gabriel Albright | Teacher: Ok. History and Personal Financial Literacy | 9 | 5 | History | NA |
| Dan Brickman | Teacher: Ok. History and Personal Financial Literacy | 15 | 11 | Secondary Education Social Studies | Coach |
| Julie Rogers | Teacher: Special Ed. English & Social Studies | 17 | 16 | Elementary Education | NA |
| Audrey Smith | Teacher: Biology | 11 | 6 | Secondary Education Biology | Student Council |
| Frank Edwards | Administrator: Assistant Principal | 8 | 3 | History | NA |

**History**

Prairie View Freshman Academy opened its doors in the fall of 1999 in order to give the ninth grade students a "better chance at success" (www.tulsaworld.com/archives). The district passed a bond issue to build a new seventh and eighth grade center, in another location, and this move allowed that building to be used as the new Freshman Academy. As part of the bond issue, $3 million was spent on refurbishing and adding on to the old building to provide additional classroom space. The Freshman Academy is considered part of the high school with ninth graders having their own building. The intention was not to "isolate ninth graders from the high school program, but to provide a safety net and an opportunity to focus on a crucial time in the development of this special age group" (www.tulsaworld.com/archives). Most of the classes are held in the Freshman Academy building for ninth-graders, which is on the central campus and close to the high school. This location allows students, who may need more advanced classes, to be able to walk over to the high school for those classes. The Freshman Academy and the high school are on the same schedule, which allows for participation in the high school athletic program. In the fall of 1999, when the building opened, teachers from the high school who taught ninth grade courses as, well as those who asked to be transferred, made up the faculty. The idea was to provide a smaller learning environment for freshmen as they navigate the world of becoming a high school student. The district's focus on excellence, high expectations, and the "Five A's – academics, activities, arts, athletics, and attitude", as represented in the annual report, are evident in the culture of the Prairie View Freshman Academy. These expectations provide a focus for the school and are talked about by teachers and administrators.

The Prairie View Freshman Academy is a 1:1 school with every student being issued a chromebook before school starts. They are in their third full year using instructional technology in the classroom and use Canvas as the learning management system and Google Apps for Education to create documents to support learning.

**School Setting**

The district is only 40 square miles with the central campus located in the middle of the town and is surrounded by older homes and a traditional main street, just two blocks away. The school district has one huge middle school that feeds approximately 850 students each year into the Freshman Academy. The Freshman Academy employs one head principal, one assistant principal, two counselors, 33 teachers, and five support staff to serve these students. The student population consists of 63% White, 12% Hispanic, 10% Asian, 8% Native American, and 8% Black. Approximately 16.5% of students qualify for special education services, 10.2% are students identified as English Language Learners, and 37% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

The Freshman Academy is part of Prairie View high school and contributed to scoring a B- (82) on the A-F report card released by the Oklahoma State Department of education for the 2015-2016 school year. Schools are awarded up to ten bonus points on factors such as cohort graduation rate, advanced course work, college entrance exam, eighth grade cohort rate, EOI performance and year-to-year growth. Prairie View High School received 8 out of 10 possible bonus points due to low performing eighth grade cohort rate of 83%, and a low End of Instruction exam (EOI) performance score of 79%.

**Physical structure.** The Prairie View Freshman Academy is a one-story dark yellow brick building, with a green metal roof, on the north side of the central campus of the high school. It sits in the shadow of the new, multi-story math and science building and the high school athletic facility. The building is in good condition considering its age. Even though the building sits on the central campus it does not have the same color scheme as the other buildings. The newer buildings are red brick with maroon colored metal roofing. The building has had many uses over the years from an elementary school, to a middle school, and its current use as a

Freshman Academy. The outside perimeter doors leading into the building remain unlocked because students transition back and forth to the high school during each passing period. Visitors entering the building could, potentially enter through any exterior door. The main entrance to the building is not easily identifiable, as it faces the interior of the campus, rather than the street that surrounds the perimeter of the campus. The entrance leads visitors into a small foyer and a second set of metal double doors that open into the interior of the school (see Appendix F). Visitors are not funneled into a main office area, but rather to a window where they check in. The visitor's must use their driver's license to sign in on a secure automated system that conducts a quick background check. A nametag with a photo image is printed for the visitors to wear throughout the building. The system is used intermittently and not all visitors are checked. There is a main office and it is located immediately to the left as visitors enter into the interior of the school. It is identified with a small sign just above the double door entry into the office suite. Located inside this office are the head principal's office, the assistant principal's office, and the desk of the administrative assistant that they share, a receptionist counter, and a conference room. After checking in at the window, visitors walk into a beautiful open commons area with a 30-foot ceiling and tall windows and plenty of natural light. Just pass the commons area is a long hallway intersected by two parallel hallways creating a double crossed t-shape layout for the school. The media center is to the left along one of the shorter hallways creating the cross section of the "T". Just behind the principal's office suite is the teacher's lounge and workroom. The media center along with the lounge is the main area for teacher gatherings and meetings.

There is no cafeteria in the building and all students on the central campus eat at one main cafeteria. Currently, a new cafeteria is under construction so, all students eat lunch in a practice gym in which tables are set up and taken down each day to allow students to be fed during the day and the facilitates to be used in the afternoon and evenings for athletics (see Appendix G).

Teachers are strategically placed in the building based on the subject that is taught, in other words, there is a science hallway, a social studies and foreign language hallway, an English hallway, a math hallway, and elective are dispersed throughout the building. There are also four teachers, two math and two science, who are located in the Math and Science building. This arrangement allows for informal collaboration among teachers who teach the same subject. An example of the layout is shown in Figure 6.

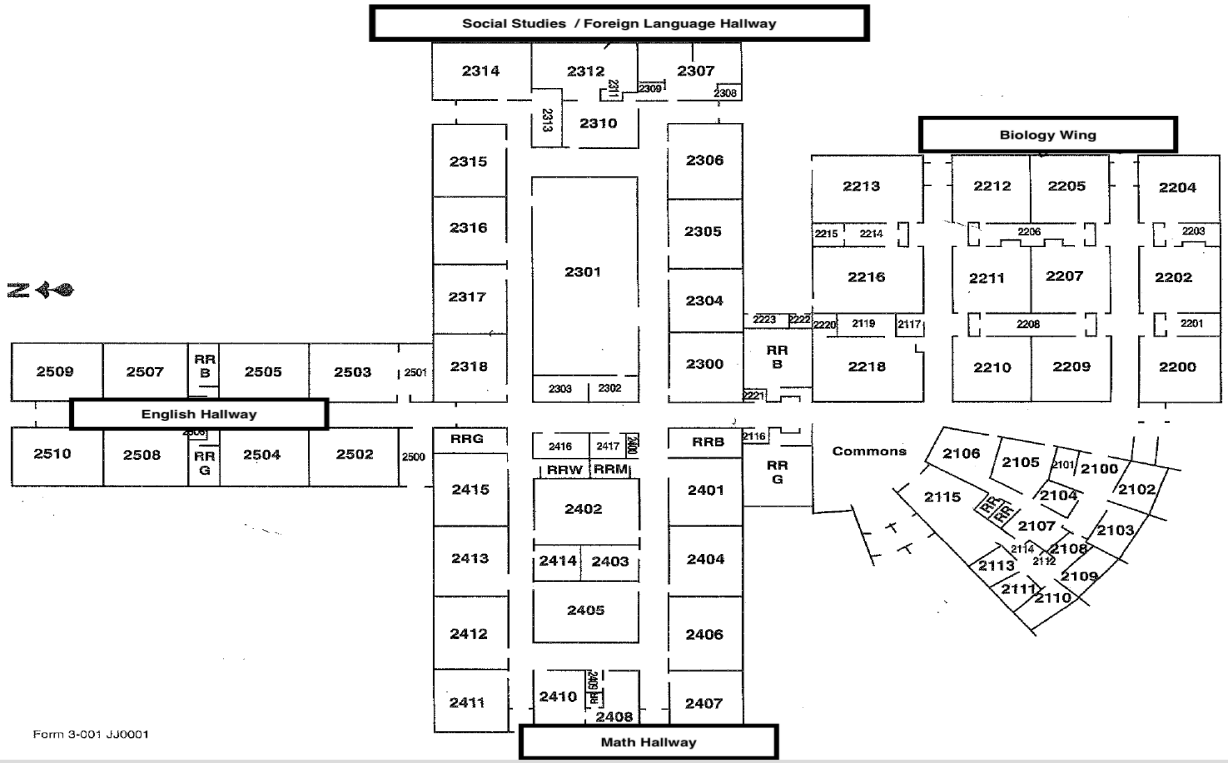



*Figure 6.* Architectural floor plan of Prairie View Freshman Academy showing the physical placement of teacher's classrooms according to the subject that is taught (F. Edwards, provided following interview, September 28, 2016).

**Meeting structure.** The Prairie View Freshman Academy teachers attend a monthly faculty meeting, generally on the first Friday of each month. Department meetings differ, depending on the department, facilitator, and Curriculum Resource Instructor who lead them, but most meet one to two times per month. Each school year the district schedules two official professional development days and two collaboration days. There are usually multiple

professional learning community (PLC) and professional development (PD) meetings being held at any given time, but an administrator initiates those or teacher when they feel led to hold meetings, and there is no formal schedule in place. There are collaboration days each year in which school starts later for students and this time is embedded and set aside for teachers to collaborate and share best practices with regard to instruction. Other meetings include parent meetings, IEP meetings, special education staffing meetings, as well as teacher evaluation conferences.

**School and team structure.** Prairie View Freshman Academy serves ninth grade students in a traditional high school setting. The school uses a hybrid bell schedule that is a combination of a six period day, for three days each week and a block schedule two days a week. The six period class schedule is on Monday, Tuesday and Friday with two lunch periods. Wednesdays and Thursdays are reserved for block scheduling, with three class periods and an advisory period. The advisory period is designed to help students academically and to provide specific lessons to help freshmen be successful in high school. All ninth graders are required to take four core classes in math, science, social studies, English, and two electives. Teachers are also willing to tutor students before or after school as needed. There is also a program called [Team mascot] Accept No Zeros (TANZ), which is an academic intervention time designed to help students who have fallen behind. The idea of TANZ is that students have an opportunity to make up missing assignments, quizzes, or tests.

Prairie View's leadership team consists of one head principal and one assistant principal. The head principal and assistant principal share instructional leadership responsibilities with regard to facilitating team meetings and faculty meetings. The assistant principal, Mr. Frank Edwards, who participated in the study, is responsible for all of the discipline for 850 ninth graders. Both administrators are pursuing their doctorate degrees in education. There are two counselors, who share the counseling responsibilities and split their portion of the students by

alphabet. One counselor has students with last names beginning with the letters A-K and the other counselor has students with last names beginning with the letters L-Z.

**High Expectations**

High expectations are the mantra and focus of the Prairie View Freshman Academy and high expectations start at the top with the Superintendent. As I was observing the traffic flow in and out of the main office, the Superintendent of Prairie View walked in with at smile on her face and greeted everyone in the office. She knew everyone by name and all present seemed to be very relaxed and respond positively to the interaction. The principal came out and greeted the superintendent and the interaction was informal and relaxed. As they walked out into the hallway, I asked one of the secretaries about the Superintendent, and she said she comes to the school often and knows everyone very well. The Five A's: Academics, Activities, Attitude, the Arts, and Athletics, are referred to on the districts website, the annual report, and several times during the interview process, by administrators and teachers. It is the number one goal in the district to achieve excellence in these five areas. This expectation for excellence is embedded in the culture and language of the community of educators at Prairie View. A commitment to excellence was evident in the way that the superintendent carried herself and how those around her responded to her presence.

Mr. Edwards, the assistant principal, also believes high expectations start at the top, with regard to the Freshman Academy as he describes below when asked to describe the characteristics of the school environment that motivates students to work hard:

> I think it starts at the top. I think it's from the opening day message with [the principal] coming on and giving the daily announcements and saying, "Hey, remember what we're about, have an excellent day today, do your best," those kind of just positive things at the beginning of the day. And then those are things we talk about in faculty meetings and in

> just common gatherings of teachers. We make sure that we're encouraging students to do their best. (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016).

At the beginning of the day, passing periods, lunch, and the end of the day, the principals are in the hallways, greeting and talking to students. During one passing period, Mr. Edwards, stopped a student and said to him, "Glad you're here today, have a great day, and make sure you get to class on time" (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016). He described this interaction as being very common for himself, the head principal and the faculty.

When I asked Mr. Edwards to describe ways that students at Prairie View are encouraged to complete what they begin, he said, "Conversations that we have one on one, and it goes back to that expectation of excellence" (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016). He went on to say that "we do expect a lot of our students and we don't, you know, we don't really apologize for that and it is this sense of everybody is trying to improve and everybody is about being the best we can be (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016).

When asked to describe characteristics of the school environment that motivates students to work hard, Mr. Brickman and Ms. Rogers both agreed that extracurricular activities are a motivating factor that keeps kids connected at school. Ms. Rogers stated, "competitiveness here is for the students that want to do well, that being competitive is just the Prairie View nature" (J. Rogers, interview, September 28, 2016). Ms. Smith added that it is an expectation of excellence; she stated, "we have these expectations from everybody that kind of pulls everybody up a little bit and these high expectations trickle from the superintendent down" (A. Smith, interview, October 5, 2016). Ms. Smith teaches Biology. Her classroom is in the new math and science building and students from the Freshman Academy walk across the parking lot to reach the building. She elaborated further by stating, "I feel like they have expectations on us to constantly be improving ourselves through help from the administrators and CRIs" (A. Smith, interview, October 5, 2016).

She goes on to say that "they are also communicating the fact that, you know, at Prairie View, we expect excellence and we talk about the five A's" (A. Smith, interview, October 5, 2016).

Mr. Brickman, when asked to describe the characteristics of the school environment that influences student achievement, described his perception of how the district communicates high expectations for students:

> Extremely high expectations, you know, is the big thing. We're going to help you and do all we can, here's everything that we're doing to try to help them succeed, but I'm not going to change my expectations of the kids. What we do is we have high expectations for the kids, but we work hard to help your kids achieve those high expectations. And, so every single person in Prairie View, I mean, I don't care who it is, you know, the janitor to the superintendent to whoever, I mean, the school board, whatever, they want those high expectations, here's all the steps that we're going to do to try to help kids have success (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016).

There also seems to be a perception of expectations from parents for students to be successful. When asked what motivates students your school, there were varying responses that ranged from parent expectations, getting into a good college, and competition with their peers. Ms. Albright says that what she hears most from students is "parent expectations" (G. Albright, interview, September 28, 2016).

**Support**

The administrators at Prairie View Freshman Academy are intentional with regard to the support they provide their teachers. The administrative team works in conjunction with the Curriculum Resource Instructors (CRIs) to provide feedback and support to inform teachers' instructional practices. Mr. Edwards, the assistant principal, describes the CRIs as "having a dual relationship" with the building principals in working with the teachers when asked about how

Prairie View cultivates opportunities for teacher to improve instructional practice. The administrative team is seen as "very supportive" by their teachers as noted by Dan Brickman, a social studies teacher, when asked the same question (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016).

Sometimes students get sidetracked from projects and assignments in school and Mr. Edwards believes that sometimes, "students don't have the structure of supports they need from mom and dad or from home" and it is up to the school to fill in those gaps of support whenever possible (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016). He described some ways that Prairie View cultivates opportunities for students to improve their academic skills. These include, the AVID program, tutoring at student's request, the placement of students, who have missing assignments that need to be completed into [school mascot] Accept No Zeros (TANZ), and providing advisory time twice a week.

When asked to describe characteristics of the school environment that influence student achievement, Mr. Edwards described support from the community in passing the bond issue to build the math and science building, to build the new gym, which is right next to the Freshman Academy, and to provide every ninth grader with a chromebook, as something that influences the culture of the school when asked to describe characteristics of the school environment that influences student achievement. He stated, "kids know whenever they come on this campus that there's an investment, and that the community and everybody around them wants them to do well" (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016). .

Many students struggle with the ninth grade year and the Prairie View teachers believe some of the struggle is attributed to family dynamics as described by Ms. Albright, "some parents are focused on survival and are not able to provide the basic needs for students to be successful in school" (G. Albright, interview, September 28, 2016). Another aspect that sidetracks students is the need to fit in. Ms. Smith, a biology teacher responded to the question this way, "I think, at

this level, social things come into play because they are going through adolescence, and we know that one of the number one priorities in adolescence is social friendships and fitting in" (A. Smith, interview, October 5, 2016). Interestingly enough, Prairie View Freshman Academy is one-to-one with every single student having his or her own chromebook and access to technology. The very thing that is designed to create more student engagement in the classroom has also become one of the biggest distractions, as noted by Mr. Brickman; "students have the world at their fingertips, which means they have the world at their fingertips" (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016).

To overcome these struggles, the teachers at Prairie View provide a variety of supports to help students proceed toward curriculum goals. These support include making curriculum worthwhile and engaging, using chromebooks, setting goals, and involving parents as much as possible. Mr. Brickman described goal setting this way when asked to describe factors that may help students proceed toward curriculum goals in the school:

> We have to be clear with our kids from the beginning and have clear goals and it is something that we reiterate on a daily and weekly basis. Here's the big picture thing that we're trying to achieve, and here's why we're doing what we're doing (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016).

When asked how the school cultivates opportunities for students to improve their academic skills, all teachers were able to describe the programs offered at Prairie View these included; AVID, which is advancement via individual determination; tutoring, which is offered before and after school; TANZ, which is [school mascot] accepts no zeros and is a time where students can go and work on missing assignments; the advisory period twice a week; and finally, alternative school for students who need more intense support. Teachers also described student engagement opportunities that improved academic skills and these included; Chromebooks and

Canvas, which is a device with a learning management system that allows students to store all of their curriculum resources on it; and clubs, curricular and non-curricular.

**Collaboration**

Mr. Edward's role, with regard to impacting student learning, is to facilitate and ensure that the Prairie View collaboration days are used effectively to support teachers' instructional practices. Mr. Edwards views this time as not only a way for teachers to improve their practice, but also a way for teachers to come together as a team and enhance the culture of the school. He understands that it is important to keep teachers motivated and inspired. "If you've got demoralized teachers, the classroom instruction isn't going to be good" (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016).

The school has six collaboration days a year and this is a time when teachers meet to discuss best practice for the classroom, learn new instructional strategies, and connect and share ideas. When asked what her perceptions were of how the school cultivates opportunities for teacher to improve instructional skills, Ms. Smith responded, "when we have collaboration days a lot of time we share what's happening in everybody's classroom and we get ideas off of each other". When asked the same question, Ms. Rogers simply stated, "I have to say that we do have a lot of professional development and collaboration", when asked the same question (J. Rogers, interview, September 28, 2016).

When asked to describe ways that the school contributes to the well being of others, the word team and collaboration was used often. There is a *Student Intervention Team* (SIT) that meets and collaborates to discuss students who are struggling. When a teacher sees a student who might need extra support, the student is referred to the SIT team (G. Albright, interview, September 28, 2016). Teachers also meet informally to discuss students they have in common. When asked to describe strategies she uses when students want to give up, Ms. Rogers stated that

she "tries to get to know students and find out what they like and that it takes a team of all of us working together," when asked to describe strategies she uses when students want to give up (J. Rogers, interview, September 28, 2016).

**Relationships**

Teachers and administrators at Prairie View Freshman Academy believes strongly in building relationships with students and working hard as individual teachers to build those relationships. There are is no formal "teaming" of teachers or designated small learning communities within the school structure; however, teachers work informally to closely monitor and take care of students and make appropriate recommendations to counselors for additional supports.

The administrative team makes a point to talk to students in the hallway and walk with them to class as they ask students about what they will be learning that day. When Mr. Edwards was asked what may help students proceed toward their curriculum goals in school, he said, "I think the number one thing for me, and I think it's honestly the best thing we do here at the Freshman Academy in [Prairie View], is just relationships" (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016). Mr. Edwards thinks very highly of his staff and described them as "a really nurturing, caring group who stress relationships a lot" (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016). Mr. Edwards thinks that the intentional focus on building relationships with students gets [students] to "buy in" because they know they have an adult in the building who cares about them. When asked what the most important role of a teacher is, Mr. Edwards responded with, "to know that students are cared for and that they are valued, they can add value to their communities and to their world" (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016).

Mr. Edwards works on building relationships with students when they are in his office for disciplinary reasons. He takes that opportunity to discuss grades, academic progress, and any

other issues that may be barriers for that student's success. Describing the ways that Prairie View contributes to the well-being of others, Mr. Edwards stated:

> I hope that we're viewed as relational leaders and that we care about teachers in their practice, but also their families and them as individuals. We try to value the autonomy of the teacher then getting input and trying to allow teachers to have a say in that whole process and what they feel like the students need and, ultimately, being more concerned about the well being of the students and the teachers versus, you know, we have to get to this number and it has to look like this and that type of thing (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016).

When the bell rings and passing period begins, teachers are in the hallways supervising and talking to students. Ms. Rogers recognized the importance of relationships when she responded to the question, describe characteristics of the school environment that influences student achievement with, "the teachers are always in the hall and students can build relationships with them" (J. Rogers, interview, September 28, 2016).

When asked what the most important role of a teacher and how your work as a teacher is connected with your core values, Ms. Albright responded, "I think everybody should know that a human being is worthy of respect" (G. Albright, interview, September 28, 2016). "I value people and I value opinions", said Ms. Smith. She also indicated that she wants to ensure that her students know that about her and that she communicates value of others through her words and actions in the classroom (A. Smith, interview, October 5, 2016).

The teachers at Prairie View described how their role impacts student learning in the classroom. Ms. Albright wants to make learning fun and empower students. Mr. Brickman believes interaction with students is important and that modeling good behavior is critical to the development of students. Ms. Smith wants to also set a good example and demonstrate passion

for her subject. Ms. Rogers said it best and encompasses the overall view of the teachers when she stated, “if they like you, then they will do work. Students need to know somebody likes them and is rooting for them in school” (J. Rogers, interview, September 28, 2016).

Teachers indicated that One of the biggest challenges is to build a relationship with students who are struggling. The overarching theme is that these teachers are not going to give up on students when they begin to struggle. When asked what she does when she ahs an uncooperative student, Ms. Albright responded, “you are worth more than this, you can do better than this, I see your potential even if you don’t, I’m not giving up on you”, when asked what she does when she has an uncooperative students. Mr. Brickman stated, “we spend a whole lot of time with that individual kid” and he indicated that he would work with that student until the very last day of the semester (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016). Ms. Rogers works with students and will do whatever she has to do get through. Finally, Ms. Smith sums it up when she stated, “invest in them, and show them that, number one, I care about them as a person” (A. Smith, interview, October 5, 2016).

## Riverside Public Schools

### District and Community Profile

Riverside Public Schools (RPS) is a suburban/urban school district in Northeast Oklahoma. The 2016 – 2017 school year began with 18,636 students, as published in September 2016, in the “Quick Facts” guide. The information in Table H1 from the Oklahoma State Department of Education website (www.schoolreportcard.org/), provides a brief overview of the district’s profile for school year 2015.

The district is comprised of 27 school sites including four early childhood centers, 14

elementary schools, five middle schools, one freshman academy, one high school, one alternative academy, and one Margaret Hudson program. The district serves approximately 2,400 students with special needs and maintains a comprehensive screening and multidisciplinary referral, evaluation, and eligibility process for the identification of children with suspected disabilities.

The district comprises over 105 square miles with a town population that has grown to over 104,000. Riverside is noted for low crime, good schools, quality development, and excellent transportation access to surrounding areas. Additionally, the community still holds large undeveloped tracts of land adjacent to a major expressway and turnpike, which offer prime sites for commercial, office, retail, and industrial development. The Riverside community has grown 38.3% within the last fifteen years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). With this huge growth, the community responded by passing a $370 million, twelve year, bond issue to meet the demands of the current and future growth. According to 2015 state department of education district profile data, the average income per household was $78,668, per capita income was $29,498, and average property values are shown at $44,028. According to the district profile, 93% of the residents, aged 25 and over have graduated from high school, and 29% of the same population has at least a bachelor's degree.

Community is an important component of Riverside Public Schools. Through various volunteer and business partnerships, RPS is committed to reaching out to local citizens to create a network of partnerships in order to find resources to support the schools. Communication is accomplished through a variety of resources available today: website, social media, various publications, and newsletters. The school district also supports a huge United Way campaign and food-drive to support the local Community food bank.

**District Mission and Vision**

Riverside has a set of beliefs that guide the decision-making and operation of the school district. These beliefs, taken from the district's website include the following:

> In utilizing 21st Century technology in achieving academic success; All students will be college or career ready; Community beliefs and values are paramount to the development of our children; In a culture of collaboration and respect for internal and external stakeholders; In fostering an atmosphere of employee engagement and open communication; In community partnerships; In a culture of excellence that demonstrates trust, professionalism, integrity and character; In providing quality student opportunities; In promoting an environment which recognizes and celebrates successes; Diversity enriches our learning environment; We are responsible for building upon the rich history we have inherited (Riverside website, November, 2016).

The district's mission statement, also included on the website, is to educate, equip and empower a community of learners by providing dynamic learning opportunities, which enable all students to be successful" and the vision statement is, "Riverside Public Schools…Educating Today – Leading Tomorrow" (Riverside website, November, 2016). The Riverside school district created a strategic plan in 2012 that reflected the mission and vision of the district in the six pillars of strategic importance. These pillars are: teaching and learning, human resources, funding and finance, facilities, co-curricular, and communications.

Faculty indicate that the faculty culture has undergone a positive change due to new leadership in the district. The Superintendent "took the reigns" in 2009 and "raised the bar" with regard to learner outcomes and increased expectations for instruction. With the increase in expectations, the district provided meaningful professional opportunities for faculty and administrators.

**District Initiatives and Programs**

The mantra for the Riverside School District is "100%, Literacy, Engagement, and Graduation" (Riverside website, November, 2016), and the district has programs designed to improve in these areas. With regard to literacy and numeracy, the Riverside district provides instructional specialists in five areas; math, science, English, social studies, and technology. These instructional specialists, along with rich professional development opportunities, provide resources for teachers to improve instructional strategies to promote greater student achievement.

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a tiered, systematic approach to supporting all students to enable them to learn at high levels. This tiered approach starts with academic interventions in the classroom, small group intervention, and finally to one-on-one supports for all students who need it. The special programs, designed to close the learning gaps, include Reading Recovery for elementary, and Read180 and Accelerated Math for secondary students.

Increasing curricular engagement opportunities for students is another RPS initiative. In an effort to increase engagement in the classroom, Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) curriculum has been integrated into elementary classrooms, Gateway to Technology curriculum has been implemented at the middle school level, and finally, Project Lead the Way curriculum has been implemented at the high school level.

One of the biggest district initiatives is that it has also gone one-to-one (1:1) at the ninth through twelfth grade level by providing every student with a chromebook. The district is using the Canvas learning management system and Google apps for education as the creation tool for students.

Finally, the Riverside school district made a huge commitment to student achievement by adding weekly, embedded collaboration days for teachers. This time is called, *Late Start Wednesdays* and provides time for teachers to meet with their professional learning community

(PLC) to look at student data to develop plans for academic interventions for students who are not learning.

## Riverside Freshman Academy

### Participant Profiles

Participants for this study included four teachers and one assistant principal from Riverside Freshman Academy.

**Karen Lawford.** Karen Lawford teaches two types of math classes at Riverside Freshman Academy. She teaches Principles of Algebra, a pre-algebra class, and Geometry. Prior to becoming a teacher, Ms. Lawford served in the air force as a hospital administrator. When she moved to Oklahoma, she went to college and earned a business degree. She is the only teacher in her family and the second person to graduate from college. While in college, she realized how much she liked math. After college, she wanted a profession that would fit in with her school age kids so she could "be there" for them, so she became alternatively certified to teach math. She has been teaching for seven years and is currently in her third year at Riverside Freshman Academy. Ms. Lawford has been at the school since its inception. Ms. Lawford is captain of one of the school's interdisciplinary teams in which she coordinates and facilitates academic interventions and peer tutoring for the cohort of students on that team.

**Casey Walters.** Casey Walters is currently teaching on level English and Pre-AP English at Riverside Freshman Academy. She has a Masters in Business Administration, and this is her fourth year of teaching. It has always been her dream to become a teacher, and she became alternatively certified in 2010. Her first year of teaching was at the ninth and tenth grade center at Riverside Public Schools, prior to the opening of the new Riverside Freshman Academy. Ms. Walters had been teaching an English class for students who struggle with reading and did not want to continue in that position for a second year. Ms. Walters then went to teach in her

hometown for one year. She returned to Riverside Freshman Academy, where she said it "feels like home" (C. Walters, interview, September 20, 2016). Ms. Walters is on the Riverside school district's strategic planning committee for instruction and curriculum and also serves on the Riverside Freshman Academy's Pre-AP committee.

**Kourtney Brown.** When Kourtney Brown started college, she wanted to be a television news reporter and then realized "that you have to work long hours and not get paid very much" (K. Brown, interview, September 20, 2016). Ms. Brown was good at math and tutored people in college and realized she could be a teacher. She had very good math teachers in high school that influenced her and made it a point to have a relationship with her. Ms. Brown explained, "When you have a good relationship with a good math teacher, then you can, you know, sometimes when things get hard, you can depend on the relationship over the content" (K. Brown, interview, September 26, 2016). Ms. Brown has been a math teacher for thirteen years and teaches Algebra I and Focus Math. Focus Math is an additional math support designed to help students remediate skills and build skills in math. This class takes place during the Academic Achievement period that all ninth grade students at Riverside are required to take. Ms. Brown lives close to Riverside

**Selma Gibbs.** Selma Gibbs is a veteran educator with over 32 years of experience, all of which is in the Riverside Public School District. She has a bachelor's degree and a double major in learning disabilities and mental retardation. When asked why she went into the field of Special Educations she said, "my heart is for students who struggle" (S. Gibbs, interview, September 27, 2016). She can remember, even when she was in high school, "there were those kids that always struggled, and I couldn't do anything about it. But my heart went out to them" (S. Gibbs, interview, September 27, 2016). Ms. Gibbs has "always wanted to work with the students that struggled, the students that needed that extra help" (S. Gibbs, interview, September 27, 2016). Ms. Gibbs is a special education co-teacher for English Language Arts. This means she is in a classroom with a general education teacher, and they are team teaching, supporting both student

with special needs and regular education students. Ms. Gibbs is also the Special Education department chair and has served in that role for several years. She lives in the district and both of her children attended and graduated from Riverside Public Schools.

**John Cannon.** John Cannon is currently one of two assistant principals at Riverside Freshman Academy. He is responsible for the discipline and instructional leadership of students with the last names in the first half of the alphabet, A –K, which is approximately 650 students. Mr. Cannon has a Bachelor's degree in secondary social studies education and a Master's degree in administration. Mr. Cannon is a third generation educator and started his career as a social studies teacher and coach. He later served as assistant principal and principal of a large urban district before coming to Riverside Public Schools as an assistant principal at the high school. Mr. Cannon was asked to move to the Riverside Freshman Academy as an assistant principal because of his leadership ability and strength since the school district cut one of the assistant principal positions due to the state's budget shortfall. Mr. Brannon also serves on the district's principals' advisory committee and is also the Riverside Freshman Academy's site coordinator for the Focus Reading program and Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) program. See Table 3 for Riverside participant profile summary.

Table 3
*Participant Profile Summary – Riverside: School Selection based on size, location, and demographic data. Participant selection based on willingness to participate in study, grit score, and subject matter taught.*

| Name | Position | Years of Experience | Years at Riverside | College Major | Additional Responsibilities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Karen Lawford | Teacher: Geometry and Principles of Algebra | 7 | 3 | Business | Interdisciplinary team captain. |
| Casey Waters | Teacher: on-level and PAP English | 4 | 2 | Business | Pre-AP committee and District Strategic Planning Committee |
| Kourtney Brown | Math Teacher: Algebra I & Focus Math | 13 | 3 | Math Education | Technology Support Instructor, Interdisciplinary Team captain, Math |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Dept. Chair |
| Selma Gibbs | Teacher: Special Ed. English Co-Teacher | 32 | 3 | Special Education | Special Education Department Chair |
| John Cannon | Administrator: Assistant Principal | 22 | 1 | Social Studies | Focus Reading Coordinator |

**History**

The Riverside Freshman Academy opened in the fall of 2014 as part of the district's long-range plan to reconfigure the high school. Prior to the school opening, the district had two Intermediate High Schools comprised of ninth and tenth grade students and one High School with eleventh and twelfth grades students. The district's stakeholders wanted to continue the tradition of having one high school to increase student engagement and create a culture of unity and collaboration. As a result, the district closed one of the intermediate high schools, moved all the tenth graders to the main high school campus, and turned the other intermediate high school into the Freshman Academy for all ninth graders in the district. This was a two-year process and consisted of moving over eighty teachers to either the newly created Freshman Academy or the High School campus.

The Riverside Freshman Academy faculty is comprised of a blend of newly hired teachers and teachers from each of the intermediate high schools. Five middle schools feed into the Freshman Academy. The school was designed to provide a foundation of courses and consistency in curriculum to help students achieve academic success as they progress through high school. "The Freshman Academy is set up to help students achieve academic success by providing rigorous instruction, relevant curriculum, and a positive relationship-building culture" (Freshman Academy brochure, November 15, 2016). The school is guided by the district's motto and has adapted it to fit the specific mission of the school, which is to make sure that every student gets promoted to the tenth grade. The motto used by Riverside Freshman Academy is

"Literacy, Engagement, and 100% Promotion...every student, every day!" (Freshman Academy brochure, November 15, 2016). This common goal provides the academic focus for the school. The Riverside motto, "We Are One," is designed to build unity and can be seen throughout the building posted on the walls, written on school posters, and worn on t-shirt by teachers. The motto is also posted on the school's webpage, social media accounts, and vocalized every day during the school announcements. The Freshman Academy is in its third year and has already established annual student engagement events such as: the wrist-band selfie picture contest, a culminating event after the first week of school; the fall and spring pep assemblies; the penny-wars fundraiser; the black-tie ball; and Freshman Fest, an end of year celebration. Annual teacher events include the back-to-school fun night, the faculty picture, perfect attendance incentive, and the four awards (light bulb, anchor, hammer, smiley-face) passed on by teachers at monthly faculty meetings.

Riverside's principal is passionate about technology and agreed, in the second year of the school being open, to pilot a district technology initiative that would provide a chromebook to every student. This 1:1 pilot provided a roadmap regarding professional development, distribution, and instructional application for other secondary sites in the district and provided the Freshman Academy an opportunity to lead the district in learning instructional technology. The Freshman Academy uses Canvas as the learning management system and Google apps for education as the creation tool for students and teachers. This initiative also opened the door for the creation of Open Education Resource (OER) textbooks, open source digital textbooks created by a team of teachers in each subject area. The Riverside Freshman Academy teachers were part of the original team that created the digital textbooks that students are currently using for most or all of their classes.

**School Setting**

Riverside Freshman Academy is located on the south side of town and is approximately five miles from the High School, which is located on the north side of town. The Freshman Academy sits on the edge of the rural part of town and is adjacent to a middle-income neighborhood, churches and an open field. The school district consists of 105 square miles, and almost all ninth graders that live in the district will attend the Freshman Academy. The exception are students with special needs that go directly to the high school upon completion of middle school, students who attend the virtual school program, and students who attend the alternative academy. There are approximately 1,300 students, and the student population consists of 62.75% White, 11.81% Hispanic or Latino, 8% Native American, 8.76 % two or more races, 5.38% Black, 3% Asian, and .16% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Nearly 14% of the students in the school are classified as needing special education services. Five percent of the students are classified as Limited English Proficiency, and 46% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

High attendance rates, at 94%, a dropout rate of less than 5% and 88% of students participating in advanced coursework contributed to Riverside scoring a B+ (89.25) on the A-F report cards released by the Oklahoma State Department of Education for the 2015-2016 school year. Schools are awarded up to ten bonus points on factors such as attendance rate, dropout rate, and advanced coursework, and Riverside received all ten bonus points. While Riverside's overall student growth grade received a 90, their overall bottom quartile growth grade received a 73. Riverside Freshman Academy missed making an A on the state report card by a margin of just .25 points.

**Physical structure.** The Riverside Freshman Academy is a physically appealing, large two-story structure and is kept in very good condition given the age of the building. The building

was originally used as one of the intermediate high schools. With the considerable growth of the district over the years, additions have been made to the building, and each addition has its own architectural differences (see Appendix H). Outside perimeter doors leading into the building remain locked and secured throughout the school day. Visitors entering the building must enter through the front doors of the school, which lead into a foyer area. Once inside the foyer area, there is a second set of doors that lead directly into the building. These doors remain locked all day for security and force patrons to enter the front office for check-in. The visitors must use their driver's license to sign in on a secure automated system that conducts a quick background check. A nametag with a photo image is printed for the visitor to wear throughout the building. Located inside this office are the head principal's office, the principal's secretary, and the registrar.

After exiting the front office, there is a long, narrow hallway, and immediately to the right is an office suite for the financial secretary, the teacher supervisor, and the student services secretary. Just past this office is the stairwell leading up to the media center and chromebook helpdesk called "Chromedesk." Walking down the hallway further to the left is another office suite comprised of the two assistant principals, two student services secretaries and three counselors. Just across the hallway from this office suite is the nurse's office. The nurse's office and assistant principals' office suite are lined interior glass windows to provide visibility in and out of these office suites into the school building and hallway. Continuing down the long hallway, the next door on the right leads into the teacher's workroom, a conference room, and the teacher's lounge. This is the main area for parent meetings, teacher gatherings, and administrative meetings. At the end of this long hallway, a set of double doors lead into the huge cafeteria as well as cross perpendicularly with another long hallway that stretches from one end of the building to the other (see Appendix I).

Teams are located throughout the rest of the building into their own areas. Teachers who

are on the same team have their classrooms located next to each other. This arrangement allows students to travel easily within their team and provides opportunities for informal collaboration of teachers on each team. Elective classrooms are dispersed throughout the building. An example of the layout is shown in Figure 7 and Figure 8.

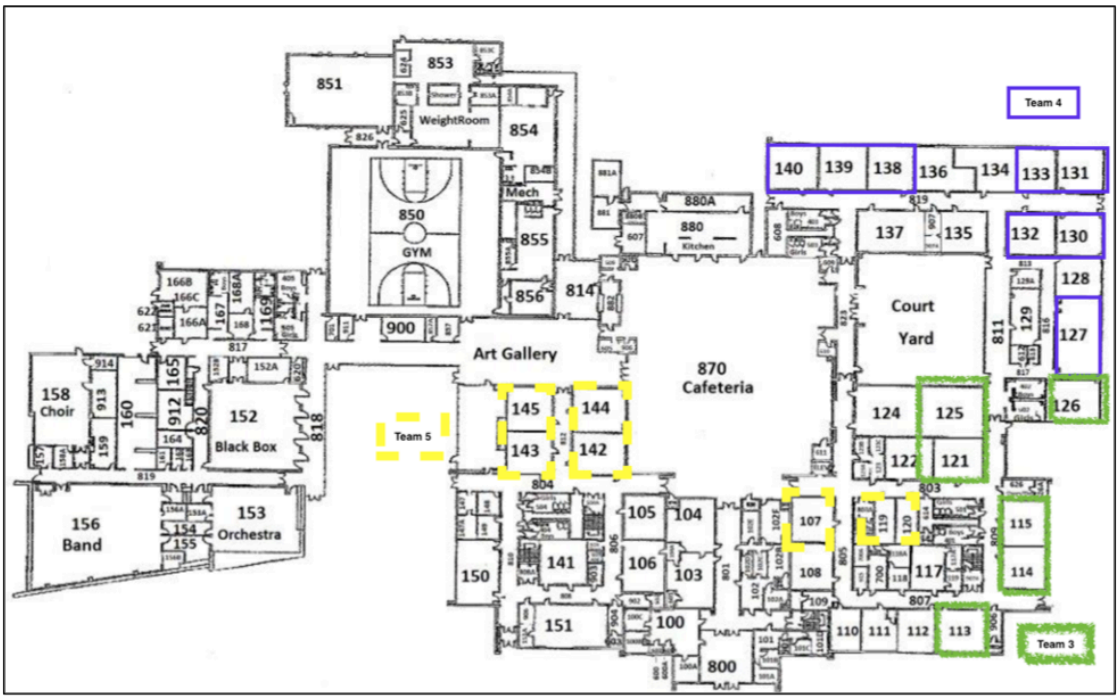



*Figure 7*. This is an architectural plan of the first floor of Riverside Freshman Academy. The colored areas represent the placement of the teachers' classrooms that are on the five different teams. (Riverside Public Schools, December 20, 2016).

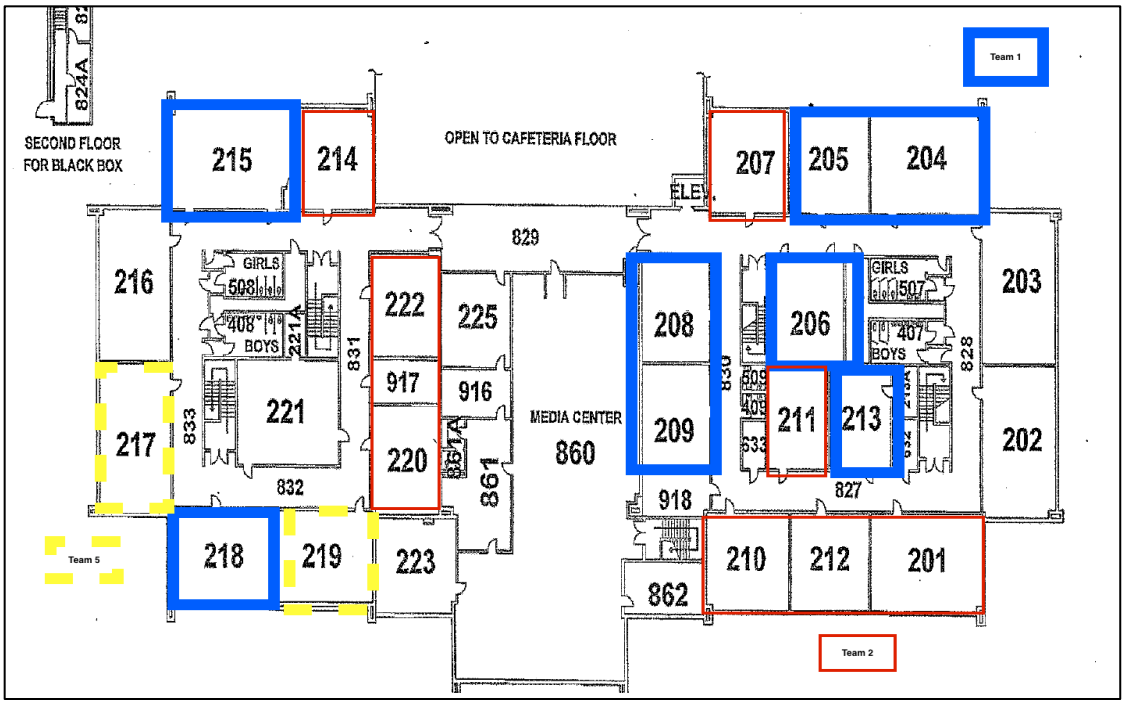



*Figure 8*. This is an architectural plan of the second floor of Riverside Freshman Academy. The colored areas represent the placement of the teachers' classrooms that are on the five different teams. (Riverside Public Schools, December 20, 2016).

Hallways in the building are narrow considering the number of students that travel through them each day. There are also only two sets of stairs on each end of the building creating congestion during each passing period. In an effort to alleviate some of the congestion, the stairwells are "one-way."

**Meeting structure. .** The Riverside Freshman Academy teachers are expected to meet twice a week, once with their subject area PLC and once with their interdisciplinary PLC. These meeting times are embedded into the school day. All teachers who teach a core subject share a common planning period and meet weekly on a designated day. This collaborative meeting is designed to focus on curriculum interventions and enrichments, looking at student data, creating common formative assessments, and sharing best practices for instruction. The district has also provided another meeting time, every Wednesday morning before school. Each Wednesday,

school starts thirty minutes later to allow for this meeting time and is called *Late Start Wednesday*. This is the day that teachers meet with their interdisciplinary team to focus specifically on students they share who are struggling. During these meetings, teachers decide on appropriate RtI strategies and interventions. Administrators and counselors are present during these meetings. A child study team called *Freshman on Track* comprised of administrators, counselors, school psychologist, behavior specialist, school nurse, title VII teacher, and an outside counselor meet weekly to discuss and share ideas regarding how to help the school's most at-risk students.

Monthly faculty meetings take place in the media center and two sessions are offered, one in the morning and one in the afternoon to ensure that all teachers are able to attend. Teacher recognition and dissemination of information regarding upcoming activities and events is the focus of this meeting. The principal also meets monthly with a curriculum leadership team to share ideas make school decisions regarding curriculum. Other meetings that are not on a weekly or monthly schedule include parent meetings, teacher evaluation pre-conference or post-conference meetings, and staffing meetings to discuss students who are on individual education plans.

**School and team structure.** Riverside subscribes to the idea of small learning communities by employing teaming in order to serve the academic needs of 1,300 ninth graders. The use of small learning communities is traditionally thought of as a middle school concept (Connell et al., 2006). There are five interdisciplinary teams with approximately 260 students per team. There are eight teachers per team who teach four core subjects to include: math (principles of algebra, algebra I, geometry), English, social studies (Oklahoma history), and science (physical science, biology). In addition to the core subjects, students are able to choose two electives consisting of a foreign language, computers, physical education, art, drama, band, orchestra, choir, social studies electives, careers, keyboarding, personal financial literacy, introduction to

law, introduction to manufacturing, introduction to engineering, office support, and Chromedesk helpdesk. A key component of support for students is the course, built into the day for all students, called *academic achievement*. This course is designed to encourage and support daily reading, as well as provide time for academic intervention, enrichment, clubs, and weekly Freshman Success lessons. In addition, there is a tiered response to intervention (RtI) that is systematic and progressively more targeted to address student needs. As part of this tiered support system, teachers meet weekly to substantiate core curriculum in professional learning communities (PLC), discuss specific student interventions and needs, and assign students to specific intervention and remediation programs such as Focus math, math lab, Saturday school, and zeros aren't permitted (ZAP). The Focus math program provides an additional math support, during the day, to students who are struggling and progress is monitored regularly.

Riversides leadership team consists of one head principal, two assistant principals, and a teacher who is interning in the role of dean of students. The head principal and assistant principals share instructional leadership responsibilities with regard to facilitating PLC meetings, interdisciplinary team meetings, faculty meetings, and the RtI reading and math programs. The assistant principal, Mr. John Cannon, who participated in the study, is responsible for the discipline of half of the ninth graders, which are approximately 650 students. Students are divided by alphabet, and Mr. Cannon has the first half of the alphabet, A through K. The principal and one of the other assistant principals are pursuing their doctorate degrees in education. There are three counselors, who share the counseling responsibilities and split their portion of the students by alphabet and is divided by last name A-F, G-O, and P-Z.

**High Expectations**

Evidence suggests that expectations of excellence start at the top with the superintendent. The superintendent of Riverside wants to excel in all areas, from academics, athletics,

technology, to plant operations, with the primary focus on academics. The district's mantra is "100% Literacy, Engagement, and Graduation," and this mantra is found "front and center" in the Riverside Freshman Academy brochure (Freshman Academy brochure, November 15, 2016).

The head principal and her team set high expectations of excellence for everyone in the school. Procedures and systems are in place to ensure consistency and quality. For example, when one enters the school, there is a specific check-in procedure to enter the school building. This procedure is followed with diligence. I observed the front office secretary asking every guest to show an id and enter information into lobby guard to determine whether or not there were legal issues that might result in a guest not being able to enter the building or be around students. An office aide then escorts all guests to the appropriate place. The administrators of Riverside lead by example. Administrators attending a variety of meetings demonstrate the expectation and importance of all the programs and structures in place to promote student learning. All administrators were observed attending PLC meetings, interdisciplinary team meetings, RtI meetings, and professional development meetings. Their presence sends the message of importance and sets the expectation of accountability. All administrators are in the hallways at the beginning of the day, passing periods, lunch, and the end of the day, greeting students and making sure everyone is getting to class on time and meeting school expectations. There are posters on the walls in every area of the school that explicitly describe the expectations of behavior for each area. There is a poster for cafeteria expectations, hallway expectations, arrival and departure expectations, bathroom expectations, and classroom expectations. These posters represent the positive behavior and support strategies of the schools.

Mr. Cannon, the assistant principal, when asked about his role and how that can impact student learning, knows that he sets expectations when he responded, "we impact student learning though just about ever decision that we make, whether it's who's teaching a class, what period a student is taking a class, or what teacher a student has in class" (J. Cannon, interview, October 18,

2016). When asked what about the role of the school, Mr. Cannon indicated that he believes the "role of the school is do develop well-rounded, well-educated students who are prepared to become well-rounded citizens" (J. Cannon, interview, October 18, 2016).

The teachers at Riverside have high expectations of themselves as well as the students when it comes to behavior and student learning. When Ms. Gibbs, a special education English teacher, was asked to describe characteristics of the school environment that influences student achievement she responded:

> I think that when students walk into a clean building, the building's been taken care of, the trash is picked up, the trash is swept up, the bathrooms are clean, the classrooms are clean, that just sends a signal of respect. I'm in a place that cares about me (S. Gibbs, interview, September 27, 2016).

When asked the same question, Ms. Waters, an English teacher, stated, "the school allows students to take ownership [of learning], which sends the signal that students are trusted and valued, (C. Waters, interview, September 20, 2016). Riverside teachers know that students are going to face obstacles when it comes to student learning; however, there is an expectation that students can overcome these academic obstacles with the help of their teachers. When asked about how students overcome obstacles, Ms. Brown, a math teacher said, "I have to build their confidence, they can do it. Expressing to students who are struggling, 'I knew you could do that.' So, it's using every kind of tool that you have" (K. Brown, interview, September 26, 2016). Ms. Lawford, a math teacher, is appreciative of the Academic Achievement period built into the school day because it allows her to bring students in to her classroom during the school day providing them an opportunity. Riverside Freshman Academy, expects every student to get the academic support they need during the school day, and this is evident in the fact that every single student is enrolled in the Academic Achievement class.

**Support**

Riverside school district offers a variety of supports for teachers to improve their instructional practice, such as professional development days, conferences, and instructional specialists who are experts in their content areas. The instructional specialists work collaboratively with building administrators to provide instructional supports to teachers. The instructional specialists visit the Riverside Freshman Academy's PLC meetings twice a month. Sitting in these meetings, I observed a collegial environment and outstanding professional conversation around teaching strategies, best practice, content standards, construction of common formative assessments and data review and interpretation. When asked how your school cultivates opportunities for teacher to improve their instructional skills, Mr. Cannon, shared, "we have a variety of PD [professional development] days called choose your own adventure day, we have instructional specialists, and we also provide opportunities for teachers to go into classrooms of their peers to observe (J. Cannon, interview, October 18, 2016). Ms. Gibbs likes the "lunch and learns," where teachers can share ideas during lunch time. She also expressed appreciation for the "choose your own adventure day" as well (S. Gibbs, interview, September 27, 2016). Riverside Freshman Academy is a 1:1 school, which means every student has a chromebook. Ms. Lawford, a math teacher, likes the support she receives from the instructional specialist as well as the technology specialist, because it allows her to use the technology tools she learns about immediately in her classroom. (S. Lawford, interview, September 19, 2016).

Riverside offers a systematic approach to support students. Mr. Cannon, the assistant principal, when asked to describe factors that may help students progress towards curriculum goals in the school, explained, "we offer an academic achievement class, a math remediation program called focus math, and a Read 180 curriculum as an English class for our students who struggle with reading" (J. Cannon, interview, October 18, 2016). He also noted, "we have a really good support system of teachers in the building. The adult mentors that have shown the

example or shown that they believe in the students" (J. Cannon, interview, October 18, 2016). Ms. Gibbs, pointed out the same programs as supports, but also noted the importance of "one-on-one help" and just "kids knowing there's an adult in their life in that school building that does care, a connection with a teacher" (S. Gibbs, interview, September 27, 2016). She also noted the positive interventions and rewards for effort such as the STAR Parties for math students and the R1 Parties for English students can help motivates students. Ms. Lawford noted the supports above, but also mentioned how technology is being used to support student needs when she stated:

> We have so many opportunities to provide them with help like the chromebooks. The chromebooks, using the learning management system has given them the ability to access tools and work at their own pace, which give me the opportunity to focus on that kid who's struggling (K. Lawford, interview, September 19, 2016).

Ms. Waters views the chromebooks as a positive influence with regard to supporting student learning and the fact that students have access to their textbooks, instructional resources, and that most of their assignments are online. When asked how the school cultivates opportunities for students to improve their academic skills, she said, "they get immediate feedback, which they love, then they know whether or not they need to go home and work on something that they were struggling with or if they can be excited about their hard work paying off" (C. Waters, interview, September 20, 2016).

**Collaboration**

Riverside subscribes to the idea of small learning communities by employing teaming in order to serve the academic needs of 1300 ninth graders. There are five interdisciplinary teams with approximately 260 students per team. These interdisciplinary teams of teachers meet weekly during the embedded collaboration time on Wednesdays to discuss students they share. They

collaborate together to find ways to help students academically, socially, and emotionally. Mr. Cannon's role, with regard to student achievement, is to ensure that the district's embedded collaboration days are being used with fidelity and the content area PLCs are meeting regularly. I observed Mr. Cannon attending a science PLC meeting, and in this meeting, the teachers were very collaborative, working to create a common formative assessment for Biology. All Team members contributed ideas freely and without fear. The environment was friendly with plenty of laughter, yet team members were able to stay focused on the task at hand. Mr. Cannon, was there to support them and provide resources if needed. All of the teachers reported that PLCs were a time for them to collaborate with their peers. When asked how the school cultivates opportunities for teachers to improve their instructional skills, Ms. Waters stated, "with PLCs, we get time to collaborate with our whole entire department, share ideas, tell what works and doesn't work, and kind of modify and work together" (C. Waters, interview, September 20, 2016). Riverside Freshman Academy is a close-knit group of teachers. This closeness is expressed by Ms. Waters, "as a staff, we feel like we're all a family, I think that they [students] kind of feel like it's a family environment for them as well because it's like all of us just surrounding them like their moms and dads" when asked to describe characteristics of the school environment that motivates students to work hard (C. Waters, interview, September 20, 2016).

**Relationships**

Teaming allows teachers to build relationships with students quickly, and this is important to Riverside since students are only there one year before moving on to the high school. These relationships are a primary focus for administrators and teachers at Riverside. Last year and this year, every single adult in the building selected one student to mentor throughout the school year. This was done in order to build relationships with students who struggle. When asked what the reasons are that students get sidetracked from projects or assignments in school, Mr. Cannon, believes, "they don't have organizational skills and are not sure how to keep track of

all of the classes" (J. Cannon, interview, October 18, 2016). Ms. Brown and Ms. Waters responded that sometimes it's friends, peer pressure, or stuff going on at home. Ms. Gibbs says, "I think so many of our kids just have so much going on in their personal life where there's not enough support and education isn't valued in the home" (S. Gibbs, September 27, 2016).

To overcome these factors, the teachers at Riverside have a strong belief that relationships with students are essential to student learning. When asked to describe factors that may help students proceed towards curriculum goals in the school, Ms. Waters stated:

> I think getting involved with the students, showing them that you care, I'll just have that one-on-one conversation then they start opening up and talking to me about things. And then, we just kind of form that bond to where they trust me (C. Waters, interview, September 20, 2016).

Ms. Brown adds, "I want my class to be a place where kids want to come. I want them, if they were going to have to buy a ticket [choice in teachers], they'd want to buy a ticket to my class" (K. Brown, interview, September 26, 2016). When asked about perceptions of how the school cultivates opportunities for students to improve their academic skills, Ms. Brown talks about the idea of relationships again, "kids can email their teachers using their chromebooks or they line up when they come see me during AA [academic achievement] for extra help. And, that's part of building relationships with them, knowing that I will be there" (K. Brown, interview, September 26, 2016). When asked what is the most important role of a teacher, Ms. Gibbs said, "my most important role is to be a model adult in this child's life, to be an adult in this child's life that cares about them, wants them to succeed, be a good citizen and a good influence" (S. Gibbs, interview, September 27, 2016). Ms. Lawford stated, "I just try to be supportive in and out of the classroom. Just let them know we're human" (K. Lawford, interview, September 19, 2016). Ms. Brown again focuses on relationships when she reported, "If you can build relationships with your students,

then they care more about what you teach, but building that early, I think, makes a big difference in how your classroom works. I want them [students] to know that I care" (K. Brown, interview, September 26, 2016).

A key motivation for teachers at Riverside to build relationship with students is to help students overcome obstacles they may face during their first year of high school. When asked, how students overcome obstacles to achieve academically in school, Ms. Waters stated:

> They form a relationship with one of their teachers that they trust, I think that one teacher can have a huge influence on how well that student does overall because they're willing to work hard for that teacher and do whatever they ask them to do" (C. Waters, interview, September 20, 2016).

## Summary

Chapter IV presented the current profile of each district and begins by describing the current state and profile of each school district, each district's mission and vision, each district's initiatives and programs, and then narrows to tell the stories of the two Freshman Academies selected. Chapter V analyzes the two cases in reference to the literature reviewed, Douglas' (1982) Grid and Group typology, and Duckworth's (2007) construct of grit. The analysis will explore the perceptions of teachers with regard to their role in the development of grit. Additionally, Chapter V provides teacher perceptions of school programs or other school factors that contribute to the development of grit.

# CHAPTER V

## ANALYSIS OF DATA

The previous chapter presented case studies of the Prairie View Freshman Academy and the Riverside Freshman Academy developed from data collected through a variety of sources including interviews, observations, school tours, documents, artifacts, and school website information. The purpose of this study is to explore the cultural manifestation of grit in two freshman academy environments and describe factors of grit that support student success. For this study, the grid and group matrix is used as the theoretical framework to explore the cultures of each school and to explain how the construct of grit is culturally manifested in each school. Two survey questionnaires were used as preliminary, but not exclusive, data sources in this study to assist in determining the grid and group category and overall grit score for each site studied. The Grit-S scale questionnaire (see Appendix A) is an 8-item survey in which answers are given on a Likert scale with a range from one to five. This survey was developed by Angela Duckworth (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) and provides information on the "grittiness" of individuals. Harris' (2005) 24-question grid and group questionnaire (see Appendix B) was also used for this study and was originally developed based on the anthropological framework for organizational culture provided by Mary Douglas (1982). The first 12 pairs of statements on the grid and group survey represent the grid considerations, and the remaining 12 pairs of statements represent the group considerations. On the continuum, from one to eight, participants marked the bubble that

represented the degree to which the statement best applied to their school site. The grid score was calculated by dividing the sum of the grid consideration responses by 12. The group score was calculated by dividing the sum of the group consideration responses by 12. These scores were plotted on the grid and group graph to determine the cultural typology of each school site selected (Harris, 2005).

The results of each questionnaire will be discussed first for each freshman academy in order for the reader to gain an awareness of the initial, approximate grid and group cultural typology of each school as well as an understanding of the overall grittiness of each school site. Following the survey results, this chapter provides analysis of these cases with regard to Duckworth's (2016) four psychological assets that promote the development of grit, as it relates to the organizational environment of each school: interest (teacher/student school passion); practice (routine school activities); purpose (school vision, mission, and goals); and hope (optimism, opportunities).

## Prairie View Freshman Academy

### Grid & Group Questionnaire Results

A total of 29 out of 37 (78 percent) Prairie View faculty members answered the 24-question survey. The principal sent the initial email request on my behalf to faculty members. Additionally she sent two follow-up emails requesting for faculty members, who had not yet responded, to provide an opportunity to complete the questionnaire.

**Grid questions.** There were a total of 29 participants responding to 12 pairs of grid consideration questions. This means a total of 348 responses are produced. There were 192 responses that selected a five or greater on the continuum, for a total of 55% of the participants answering in a way that indicated strong-grid. A total of 156 responses selected a four or less on

the continuum, for a total of 45% of the responses indicating weak-grid. The questions that most clearly indicated strong-grid included:

Item #7: Teachers obtain instructional resources through administrative allotment/allocation.

Item #10: Hiring decisions are centralized/controlled by administrator.

Item #11: Class schedules are determined through institutional rules/routines.

There was a strong perception of weak-grid on the following items:

Item #5: Individual teachers have full autonomy in selecting instructional methods/strategies.

Item #6: Students are encouraged to participate in and take ownership of their education

Item #9: Individual teachers are motivated by intrinsic/self-defined interests.

**Group questions.** There were a total of 29 participants responding to 12 pairs of group consideration questions. This means a total of 348 responses are produced. There were 211 responses that selected a five or greater on the continuum, for a total of 61% of the participants answering in a way that indicated strong group. A total of 137 responses selected a four or less on the continuum, for a total of 39% of the responses indicating weak group. The questions that most clearly indicated strong-group included:

Item #10: Educators and students have much allegiance/loyalty to the school.

Item #11: Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are clear/communal with much accountability.

There was strong perception of weak-group only on item #1: Instructional activities are initiated/planned by individual teachers working alone.

It is important to note that the dimensions of the grid and group in this typology are on a continuum. Of the twelve group questions from Prairie View questionnaire responses, two were strongly high group, five were moderately low group, and five were in the upper center of the continuum. Thus, based on the questionnaire, the grid and group category for the Prairie View Freshman Academy was Corporate (strong-grid, strong-group). A graph of each faculty member's response is shown in Figure 9.

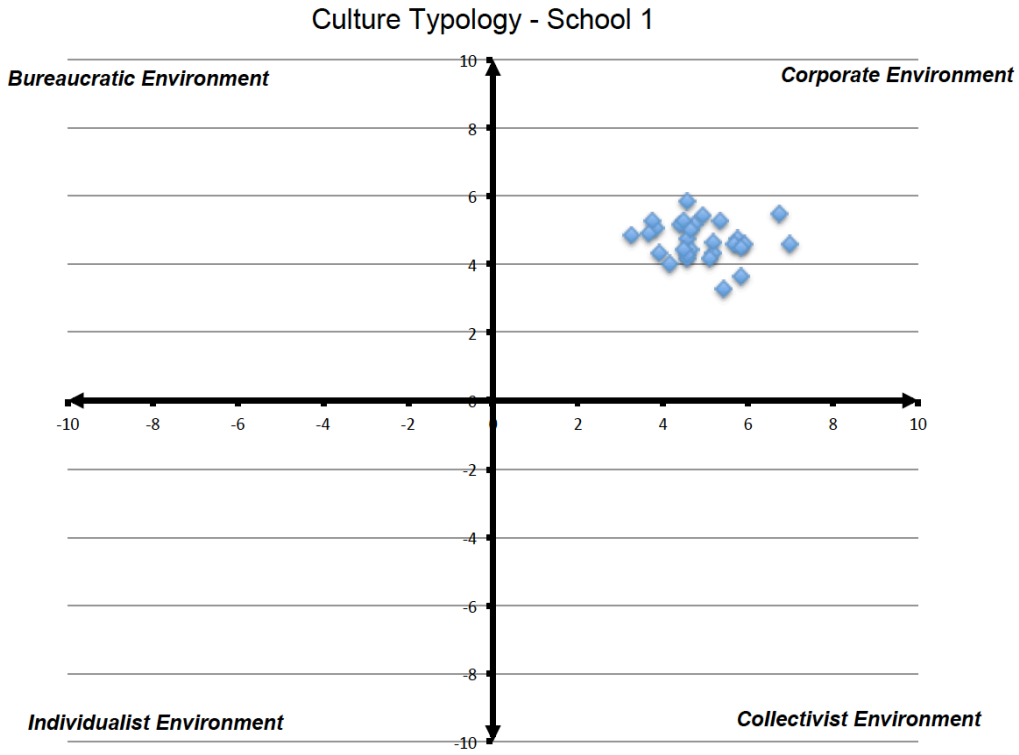



*Figure 9.* Grid & Group graph representing the cultural typology quadrant in which the Prairie View Freshman Academy lies based on faculty survey responses. (Created by M. Coates, December 4, 2016).

**Grit-S Scale Questionnaire Results**

A total of 25 out of 37 (68 percent) Prairie View faculty members answered the questionnaire. The principal sent the initial email request on my behalf to faculty members. This email included links to both, the grid and group questionnaire and the grit-s scale questionnaire. Additionally she sent two follow-up emails requesting that faculty members, who had not yet responded, to please complete the questionnaire.

The Grit-S scale questionnaire consisted of eight questions, with survey answers given on a Likert scale with a range from 1to 5. For questions 2, 4, 7 and 8 the points are assigned from 5 (Very much like me) to 1 (Not like me at all). For questions 1, 3, 5 and 6 points were assigned in the reverse order, with 1 representing (Very much like me) to 5 (Not like me at all). To determine the score for each participant, points for each question were added and then the sum, divide by eight. The maximum score on the scale is "5 (extremely gritty), and the lowest score on the scale is 1 (not at all gritty)" (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p. 166-174). This self-report questionnaire is designed to be a stand-alone measure of grit, which "entails the capacity to sustain both effort and interest in projects that take months or even long to complete" (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p. 166).

The lowest individual grit score for the Prairie View Freshman Academy faculty was (1.88) and the highest individual grit score was (4.75). In averaging the 25 grit scores collected, Prairie View Freshman Academy has a grit score of (3.77), see Figure 10.

*Figure 10.* Prairie View grit score represented on a scale of 1(low grit) to 5 (high grit). (Created by M. Coates, December 23, 2016).

## Teacher and Administrator Perceptions – Prairie View

### Interest (Teacher/Student School Passion)

Research shows that people are more satisfied with their jobs and perform better when they do something that fits their personal interests (Duckworth, 2016).

**Grid considerations.** In strong-grid environments there is little autonomy, specifically defined roles, rules and responsibilities, and power and authority is centralized. In order to maintain teacher and student satisfaction at Prairie View, a typical corporate (strong-grid) environment, programs, roles and structures are in place to support the interests of both teachers and students.

Prairie View Freshman Academy is typical of a corporate (strong grid) environment with a principal that has been granted power and authority by the school district to run, oversee, and maintain the school. The principal of Prairie View employs distinctive clout due to her position, but also because she is seen as a "super supportive" (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016) administrator who works to provide resources to teachers in collaboration with the districts *curriculum resource instructors* (CRIs). This support and collaboration is important in helping teachers maintain their interest in the profession as well as their students. The roles of curriculum resource instructors are specifically defined, which is a distinction of a high grid environment but, they are seen as a valuable resource to teachers' professional development. I often heard the phrases, "they are really key" and "they help us a lot", indicating the importance of their role in supporting teachers.

Prairie View Freshman Academy is 1:1, which means every student is provided a chromebook. The district uses Google apps for education and the Canvas learning management system to provide students with the tools to engage with instructional technology in the

classroom. This technology tool is designed to promote an interest and passion for learning for both students and teachers. Canvas also provides opportunities for students to receive immediate feedback and know where they stand at all times with regard to their grades. This resource is seen as both a positive and a negative aspect by teachers as most acknowledged the benefits of being one-to-one; however, very thing that is designed to create more engagement in the classroom has also become one of the greatest distractions, as evidenced in the statement, "students have the world at their fingertips, which means they have the world at their fingertips" (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016).

**Group considerations.** In strong group environments there is strong allegiance to the school, pressure to consider group goals and activities, and social incorporation. The goal is to "perpetuate the life of and allegiance to the whole school rather than its individual members" (Harris, 2005, p. 37). When I asked the participants of the study their perception of why it is difficult for students to maintain an interest in school, the overwhelming response was that some students struggle just to get their basic needs, such as food, clothing and shelter met; students feel overwhelmed and cannot keep up with the work; lack of choice; and a distraction with technology. There is quite a bit of pressure and expectation from the entire community to be successful. I heard the statements, "our parents push us", "parent expectation", "competitive to be successful", and "peer pressure to be successful", which indicate an expectation and pressure to conform to group goals. There is also pride in being part of this school system, and teachers and students willingly participate in activities such as professional development opportunities for teachers or social activities like clubs for students.

**Practice (Routine School Activities)**

To get better or improve at a skill, it is not just about quantity of time on task but quality of time on task (Duckworth, 2016). Engaging in practice activities with the explicit goal of

improving some aspect of the performance is and essential part of deliberate practice. Duckworth (2010) connected deliberate practice to grit by suggesting that grittier individuals are more likely to engage in deliberate practice.

**Grid considerations.** The way a person practices is key to continuous improvement and success, "gritty people do more deliberate practice" (Duckworth, 2016, p. 131). In a strong grid culture, the opportunities to practice routine labor activities are organized around specifically designed structures and roles. This is evident in Prairie View's *Collaboration days*, which are board of education approved days, offered six times a year. The bell schedule is adjusted each time there is a collaboration day so that teachers report at their scheduled contract time, but students arrive later and have a shorter than normal day. These collaboration days were mentioned by everyone involved in the study as a way that the school cultivates opportunities for teachers to improve their instructional skills. Audrey Smith noted, "when we have collaboration days, a lot of time we share what's happening in everybody's classroom and we get ideas off of each other" (A. Smith, interview, October 5, 2016).

Teachers also noted that there are several programs in place to support students, and these programs motivate them to stay engaged in school. These programs include, AVID, the alternative school, tutoring, [school mascot] accepts no zeros (TANZ), student advisory time, and the 1:1 program.

**Group considerations.** Typical of strong group environments, there is a lot of pressure to conform to the high expectations of the school. All participants mentioned that they provide before and after school tutoring for students, but that it is also an expectation. The advisory time, twice a week, seems to also be viewed as a key component in the school for students to practice their academic skills. This is also seen as an opportunity for teachers to build relationships with students. The strong group conformity and the desire to consider the group's goals, which is

academic excellence for students, overrides individual interest by teachers. This is evident in the fact that no teacher mentioned dissatisfaction with providing tutoring before or after school for students, or helping students during advisory time. Ms. Smith stated, "you go above and beyond the basics and I think that's kind of who they look for when they hire people" (A. Smith, interview, October 5, 2016).

**Purpose (School Vision, Mission, and Goals)**

"Purpose is the intention to contribute to the well-being of others" (Duckworth, 2016) and for most educators it is having a connection with a child and impacting their lives (p. 146).

**Grid considerations.** In a corporate culture (strong grid) such as Prairie View, the vision, mission, and goals of the school district have a huge impact on the roles and responsibilities of teachers as well as their perception of their role in the classroom. The district has communicated three over-arching goals: achieve excellence in the five A's - Academics, Activities, Attitude, the Arts, and Athletics; focus on fiscal stability; and realize a vision for tomorrow (Prairie View website, November, 2016). These goals set the tone and intention for the district, even though most participants did not articulate what they were. Teachers understand their role as a teacher as it relates to the nuts and bolts operation of the school, curriculum, supervision, and classroom management. This seems to coincide with the strong grid typology. However; when I asked teachers, "What is the most important role of a teacher?" not a single participant answered with the list of items above. Most responded altruistically, with statements such as, "teaching students to think", "facilitator", "to make sure students know they are valued", and "to enjoy learning". When I asked, "What is the most important role of the school?" the response was singular and the same for all, "to create good citizens".

**Group considerations.** When I asked participants to describe ways that the school contributes to the well being of others, the overall sentiment was to provide activities for students

"so, everybody feels like they have a place" (A. Smith, interview, October 5, 2016). Mr. Edwards, the assistant principal, responded:

> " I hope that we're viewed as relational leaders and that we care about [teachers] in their practice, but also their families and their –just them as individuals. We try to value the autonomy of the teacher, then getting input and trying to allow [the] teacher to have a say in that whole process and what they feel like the students need, and ultimately, being more concerned about the well being of the students and the teachers versus, you know, we have to get this number and it has to look like this and that type of thing" (F. Edwards, interview, September 28, 2016).

Strong group alignment and a belief in incorporating the care for everyone in the school, as noted above, is what, in turn leads to strong allegiance to the school.

**Hope (Optimism, Opportunities)**

Hope is the "resolve to make tomorrow better" (Duckworth, 2016) and to have the mindset to overcome obstacles, setbacks, and failures (p. 169).

**Grid considerations.** In strong grid cultures there is minimal autonomy, and this holds true for the school site and teachers at Prairie View Freshman Academy with regard to the their role in curriculum, textbook selection, school schedules, lunch schedules, supervision, and discipline. At Prairie View there are a few options for student who struggle academically; however, there are not many options for students who are struggling behaviorally. When a student misbehaves, the options are detention, in-school suspension, and out of school suspension. Ms. Smith felt, "this is an area that the school could improve upon because suspension for a student who is already struggling may put them further behind" (A. Smith, interview, October 5, 2016). There are other programs for students who may not make it in a

traditional school setting such as, alternative school, Tulsa Tech, and even counseling services.

Teachers do have more autonomy when it comes to the culture of their own classrooms to provide opportunities and hope for students who struggle academically. Teachers are able to support students in multiple ways in their classroom such as, providing alternate assignments, giving many opportunities to complete assignments, show how much they care for students and provide positive encouragement and reinforcement. All of the participants believed that with hard work and encouragement, their students could achieve academically. This type of mindset helps students maintain hope that they can be successful in school.

**Group considerations.** Prairie View Freshman Academy has strong group culture and all students, teachers, administrators, and community seem to have an extremely strong allegiance to their school district. Teacher turnover is low and most teachers and their families live in the community. There is a strong community expectation for success and the mind-set around this expectation is, that it is okay and even expected, that students and teachers will have to work hard to achieve their goals academically as well as athletically. This is evident in the way teachers hold each other accountable and hold students accountable. Mr. Brickman says, "you don't focus on the results, you focus on the process, and the results will take care of themselves" (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016). Over and over again during the interview process, the phrases, "it's an expectation", "expected to do well", "pride in being a [school mascot]", "work harder", and "healthy struggle" were repeated by participants and is part of the cultural pressure to consider these as the groups goals. Teacher teams work together to discuss ways to help students achieve. These teams are not formally organized, and it is not a requirement by the school that they meet to talk about students; however, teachers meet because they want to help students achieve academically in their school.

**Riverside Freshman Academy**

**Grid & Group Questionnaire Results**

A total of 49 out of 80 (61 percent) Riverside faculty members answered the questionnaire. I, the principal, sent the initial email request with links to both of the surveys. The faculty was given time to complete the surveys during a beginning of the year professional development training for Canvas, our learning management system. After the training was completed, the leaders of each session allowed teachers extra time to complete the surveys. Additionally, I sent two follow-up emails inviting faculty members, who had not yet responded, the opportunity to complete the questionnaires.

**Grid questions.** There were a total of 49 participants responding to 12 pairs of grid consideration questions. This means a total of 588 responses are produced. There were 350 responses that selected a five or greater on the continuum, for a total of 60% of the participants answering in a way that indicated strong-grid. A total of 238 responses selected a four or less on the continuum, for a total of 40% of the responses indicating weak-grid. The questions that most clearly indicated strong-grid included:

Item #2: Roles are specialized/explicit job descriptions.

Item #10: Hiring decisions are centralized/controlled by administrator.

Item #11: Class schedules are determined through institutional rules/routines.

There was a strong perception of weak-grid on the following items:

Item #5: Individual teachers have full autonomy in selecting instructional methods/strategies.

Item #6: Students are encouraged to participate in and take ownership of their education

Item #9: Individual teachers are motivated by intrinsic/self-defined interests.

**Group questions.** There were a total of 49 participants responding to 12 pairs of group consideration questions. This means a total of 588 responses are produced. There were 460 responses that selected a five or greater on the continuum, for a total of 78% of the participants answering in a way that indicated strong group. A total of 128 responses selected a four or less on the continuum, for a total of 22% of the responses indicating weak group. The questions that most clearly indicated strong-group included:

Item #7: Curricular goals are generated collaboratively

Item #11: Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are clear/communal with much accountability.

There was mild perception of weak-group only on item #5: Teaching performance is evaluated according to individual teacher goals, priorities, and criteria. The dimensions of the grid and group in this typology are on a continuum. Of the twelve group questions from Riverside questionnaire responses, two were strongly strong-group, eight were in the moderately strong-group, and two were in the moderate group. There were no extremely low responses on the continuum. Thus, based on the questionnaire, the grid and group category for the Riverside Freshman Academy was Corporate (Strong-grid, Strong-group). A graph of each faculty member's responses is shown in Figure 11.

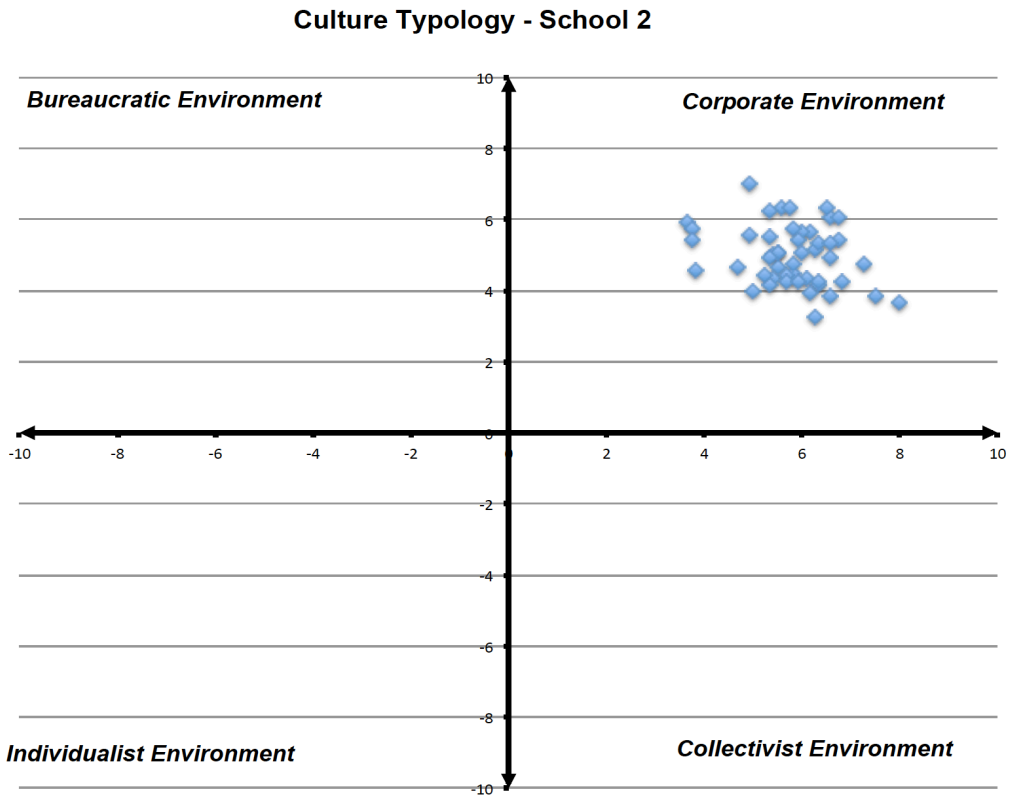



*Figure 11.* Grid & Group graph representing the cultural typology quadrant in which the Riverside Freshman Academy lies based on faculty survey responses. (Created by M. Coates, December 23, 2016).

**Grit-S Scale Questionnaire Results**

A total of 51 out of 80 (64 percent) Riverside faculty members answered the questionnaire. I sent the initial email request to faculty members. This email included links to both, the grid and group questionnaire and the grit-s scale questionnaire. Additionally I sent two follow-up emails providing faculty members, who had not yet responded, an opportunity complete the questionnaire.

The Grit-S scale questionnaire consisted of eight questions, with survey answers given on a Likert scale with a range from 1to 5. For questions 2, 4, 7 and 8 the points are assigned from 5 (Very much like me) to 1 (Not like me at all). For questions 1, 3, 5 and 6 points were assigned in the reverse order, with 1 representing (Very much like me) to 5 (Not like me at all). To determine the score for each participant, points for each question were added and then the sum,

divide by eight. The maximum score on the scale is "5 (extremely gritty), and the lowest score on the scale is 1 (not at all gritty)" (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p. 166-174). This self-report questionnaire is designed to be a stand-alone measure of grit, which "entails the capacity to sustain both effort and interest in projects that take months or even long to complete" (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p. 166).

The lowest individual grit score for the Riverside Freshman Academy faculty was (.63) due to the fact that the survey was started by this individual and not completed, obviously showing a lack of grit. The highest individual grit score was (4.75). In averaging the 51 grit scores collected, Riverside Freshman Academy has a grit score of (3.74) as shown in Figure 12. .If the incomplete survey were to be omitted from the data, the Riverside Freshman Academy would have a grit score of (3.8).

Figure 12. Riverside grit score represented on a scale of 1(low grit) to 5 (high grit). (Created by M. Coates, December 23, 2016).

## Teacher and Administrator Perceptions - Riverside

### Interest (Teacher/Student School Passion)

Research shows that people are more satisfied with their jobs and perform better when they do something that fits their personal interest (Duckworth, 2016, p. 97).

**Grid considerations.** Typical of a high grid environment, Riverside Freshman Academy has a principal that was selected by the Superintendent to "open" the Freshman Academy for the

district and create a transition program for students as they enter high school. The Riverside Freshman Academy employees the small learning community concept called teaming. Cohorts of approximately 260 students are on each team and an interdisciplinary team of teachers including all of the core subjects for math, science, social studies, and English, share this cohort. In high grid cultures there are specified rules, roles and responsibilities. The teaming concept is very structured, and responsibilities for teachers are explicitly expressed. By design, the interdisciplinary teams of teachers' classrooms are located in close proximity to each other and the teachers on each team are expected to meet each week to discuss the students on their teams. The school also employees the professional learning community (PLC) concept and expects teachers to meet once a week with colleagues who teach the same subject. Meeting times are built into the school day and are part of the master schedule. The systematic approach and design is in place to support teachers as they work to create lessons and develop strategies to support students in their quest for academic success.

There is a class period built into the school day for every single student called Academic Achievement (AA) and is designed to promote literacy, provide character lessons, provide a time for club meetings, homework help, and academic intervention and enrichments. This class period is valuable and is evident by the fact that every participant in the study mentioned this class period as a factor that helps students proceed toward curriculum goals at Riverside.

The school is also in its second year of a 1:1 initiative, in which all ninth grade students have been given chromebooks to use in and out of school. The school also uses Google apps for education and the Canvas learning management system. The chromebooks and instructional technology are in place to promote student engagement and facilitate an interest and passion for learning for both teachers and students. One teacher said that "sometimes we will use technology, different games online to build enthusiasm in class" (K. Brown, interview, September 26, 2016).

**Group considerations.** In cultures with a strong group there is allegiance to the school and pressure to consider group goals. This type of allegiance can be seen at Riverside in which every Wednesday is *team* day which means that each team in the school wears their specially designed team t-shirt. The principal has encouraged this by allowing teachers to wear jeans on Wednesday, if they wear their team t-shirt. Students wear their team t-shirts as well and are encouraged to participate in team competitions and activities throughout the school year. Along with the allegiance and identification to their teams, teachers and students are heard often saying the school motto *We Are One.* The entire school on a daily basis, following the pledge of allegiance and moment of silence, hears this motto. The connection with the school and with their team creates a strong group bond. When I asked, "what motivates students in your school," I heard the phrases "motivated by grades," "one-on-one time," "success in class," "positive connection," "praise and rewarded for effort," indicating a strong consideration for the needs of the students in the school versus the individual needs of the teachers.

**Practice (Routine School Activities)**

To get better or improve at a skill, it is not just about quantity of time on task but quality of time on task (Duckworth, 2016).

**Grid considerations.** In a high grid culture, there is minimal autonomy and specifically defined roles, rules and responsibilities. With regard to practice and routine school activities that support academic success, Riverside Freshman Academy has a systematic response to intervention (RtI) to support students who are struggling. Within this RtI structure there are very defined roles and responsibilities. Duckworth (2007), in her examination of gritty individuals, discovered that practice must be deliberate and of good quality in order for skills to improve. The Riverside Freshman Academy has several programs in place that are very deliberate in the opportunity for practice for both students and teachers. These programs include: Focus Reading, a

program that uses the Read180 curriculum to support struggling readers; Focus Math, a program that uses Accelerated Math in combination with homework help to support students who struggle in math; zeros aren't permitted (ZAP), an after school homework/tutoring program; Saturday school, a two hour time block on Saturday morning for students to work on their assignments; and Academic Achievement class, designed to be the first line of support for student who are struggling academically. Teachers' perception of these supports as being beneficial are evident by comments such as, "so many supports," "opportunity to focus on a kid who's struggling," "access to tools," and "increases success."

Teachers also expressed the opportunity to improve their instructional skill by attending, the district professional development days, the built in *lunch and learn* time every other week, (PLC) time that is built into the master schedule, and continuous curriculum refinement and improvement with district level instructional specialist.

**Group considerations.** Typical of a high group culture, the goals of the group out weight the needs of the individual, as expressed by Ms. Walters, "with PLCs, we get to collaborate with our entire department, share ideas, tell what works and doesn't work, and kind of modify and work together" (C. Walters, interview, September 20, 2016). Within the PLCs at Riverside, there is pressure from the group to conform to the district's desire to create common formative assessments in order to track data to determine if students are meeting learning targets. The pressure to conform to the group's goals is typical of high group cultures. There is strong social incorporation, which is also typical of a high group culture, in the identification of belonging to one of the interdisciplinary teams. The teacher teams have competed together in competitions, held celebrations and parties, and socialized together outside of school.

There are twenty-two different school sponsored and student led clubs at Riverside, which allows students to practice and improve skills through social outlets, during the *Academic*

*Achievement* class period, which is during the school day. This social incorporation is another indicator of a high group culture and the assistant Principal, Mr. Cannon, also noted, "we use the AA time to celebrate student progress by holding STAR Parties [Focus Math] and R1 Parties [Focus Reading]" (J. Cannon, interview, October 18, 2016).

**Purpose (School Vision, Mission, and Goals)**

"Purpose is the intention to contribute to the well-being of others" (Duckworth, 2016) and for most educators it is having a connection with a child and impacting their lives (p. 146).

**Grid considerations.** In taking corporate (high grid) cultures into consideration when looking at an organizations purpose, which is one of the psychological assets of grit, it is typical for a school district to adopt a vision statement, a mission statement, and goals to provide direction for the school district. It is no different for Riverside Public Schools. The district's mission statement, "to educate, equip and empower a community of learners by providing dynamic learning opportunities, which enable all student to be successful" and vision statement, "Riverside Public schools…Educating Today – Leading Tomorrow" are on the districts website; however, no participant referred to those statements for instructional direction. The district motto, "Literacy, Engagement, 100% Graduation", was referred to by all participants and seemed to provide a clearer instructional purpose for teachers; however, when participants were asked, "what is the most important role of a school", the overwhelming response was to prepare our students to be "well-rounded citizens". Teachers understand their roles, as it relates to the operational side of school, curriculum alignment, instructional pedagogy, classroom management, and supervision responsibilities. These roles are defined by very specific guidelines and rules, which is typical of corporate (high grid) cultures; however, these participants have articulated a greater purpose. This "means you can go from job to career to calling – all without changing your occupation" (Duckworth, 2016, p. 152).

**Group Considerations.** When participants were asked how the school contributed to the well being of others, all responded with phrases, "teach to be well-rounded people," "to be kind," "to feel safe," "help take care of students," "willing to help others," "modeling, kind, positive behavior," and "take care of our kids like they are our own." The Riverside Freshman Academy teachers expressed a deeper purpose that is more relational based, rather than academically based. In a high group culture, the needs of the group are more important than the needs of the individual and are evident in the phrases above. The Riverside teachers, as a group, want to teach students to "become good citizens" (S. Gibbs, interview, September 27, 2016) and view this as their primary role.

Relationship building is considered a primary focus for teachers at Riverside Freshman Academy and this is accomplished through one-on-one conversations with students to build "trust, understanding, and respect" (K. Lawford, interview, September 19, 2016). Building these relationships allows teachers to provide for the social, emotional and academic needs of Riverside students.

**Hope (Optimism, Opportunities)**

Hope is the "resolve to make tomorrow better" (Duckworth, 2016) and to have the mindset to overcome obstacles, setbacks, and failures (p. 169).

**Grid considerations.** In corporate (high grid) cultures, hope is manifested in these environments through opportunities and optimism. The Riverside Freshman Academy provides opportunities for students to succeed, by establishing clearly defined programs, procedures and systems to support students' academic, social, and emotional needs. These include academic supports such as, the Academic Achievement period, Saturday School, and Zeros Aren't Permitted (ZAP). The school also provides positive behavior supports such as the positive behavior intervention strategies (PBIS) reward system, exemption days for good grades and good

attendance, perfect attendance rewards, and student of the month rewards. For students who are having a hard time behaving appropriately at school the following supports are in place: detention, in-school placement, suspension, long-term in-school placement, virtual school, Freshman on Track (child study) referral, and one-on-one support by counselors and/or behavior specialist, "we try to find every last possible resource we can use to keep them on our campus" (J. Cannon, interview, October 18, 2016). All of the opportunities for support mentioned above are very systematic and targeted, which is typical of high grid cultures. The opportunities are in place to keep students in school and provide hope for a path toward graduation.

Another grid consideration is that the participants at Riverside demonstrate care and respect to students through the cleanliness and maintenance of the building itself. Ms. Gibbs thinks, "when the students walk into a clean building, the building's been taken care of, the trash is picked up, the floors are swept up, the bathrooms are clean, the classrooms are clean, that just sends a signal of respect" (S. Gibbs, interview, September 27, 2016).

**Group considerations.** In a corporate (high group) school culture, there is strong allegiance to the school, strong pressure to consider group goals and activities, strong social incorporation, and the groups interest are prioritized over the individuals. At Riverside Freshman Academy, a strong allegiance to the school is developed because of the team approach and the purposeful intention of teachers to build relationships with students. This team approach creates an atmosphere of support that provides opportunities for students to overcome obstacles, "someone at school has walked side by side with them to help them overcome it, either because of a team approach or an adult in the school has helped them" (S. Gibbs, interview, September 27, 2016). I often heard phrases, "we're not giving," "don't have a choice," "you can do this," "never giving up," and "little bit of struggle now, great reward later," as a description of how the participants handled students who struggled. Through constant "prodding" and "positive

reinforcement", teachers at Riverside Freshman Academy demonstrate a belief to their students that they can be successful.

## Summary

Information presented and analyzed in this chapter was collected through interviews, observations, document reviews, artifacts, and school website information. This information is analyzed through the lens of the grid and group matrix, originally developed by Mary Douglas (1982) and further developed by Harris (2005), as a framework to explore the cultural manifestation of the construct of grit in each school environment. The exploration of the manifestation of grit utilized the four psychological assets that promote the development of grit espoused by Duckworth (2016). As they relate to the organizational environment, these psychological assets include: interest, practice, purpose, and hope. Through analyzing the two school sites selected, similarities and differences emerged regarding the manifestations of grit at each site, see Table 4.

Table 4

*Data Analysis of Grid & Group and Grit Summary*

| **Grit: Psychological Assets** | | **Prairie View Freshman Academy** Grit-S Score = 3.77 Culture = Corporate | **Riverside Freshman Academy** Grit-S Score = 3.74 Culture = Corporate |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Strong- Grid Considerations** | **Interest** (Teacher/Student Passion) | Principal, Curriculum Resource Instructors, 1:1, Google, Canvas | Professional Learning Communities, Interdisciplinary teams, 1:1, Google, Canvas |
| | **Practice** (Routine School Activities) | Collaboration Days, AVID, Alternative School, TANZ, Advisory Time, 1:1 | Focus Math, Focus Reading, Academic Achievement Period, ZAP, Teaming, Clubs, Professional Development, Instructional Specialist |
| | **Purpose** (School Vision, | Expectation of Excellence – 5 A's, Create Citizens | Literacy, Engagement, 100% Graduation, Well-Rounded Citizens |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Mission, Goals) | | |
| | **Hope**<br><br>(Optimism, Opportunities) | Alternative School, Tulsa Tech, Counseling Services, Alternate Assignments, Positive encouragement and reinforcement | Academic Achievement Period, Saturday School, ZAP, Freshman on Track, PBIS, School Building is well taken care of |
| | | | |
| **Strong-Group Considerations** | **Interest** (Teacher/Student Passion) | Community Expectations, Pride, Professional Development, Clubs | Teaming, Relationships, Positive connections |
| | **Practice**<br><br>(Routine School Activities) | High Expectations, Tutoring, Advisory Time | Clubs, Teaming, Lunch & Learns, PLCs, Academic Achievement Period |
| | **Purpose**<br><br>(School Vision, Mission, Goals) | Relational leaders, Care for everyone | Relationships, Role Models |
| | **Hope**<br><br>(Optimism, Opportunities) | Expectation to do well, Hard work, Accountability, | Team approach, Build Relationships, Belief that all students can be successful |

Chapter VI presents findings of the study through answering the study's research questions. Implications for research, theory, and practice are addressed and recommendations for future research are offered

# CHAPTER VI

## FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the cultural manifestation of grit in two freshman academy environments and to describe factors of grit that support student success. Using the lens of Douglas' (1982) grid and group typology, the non-cognitive construct of grit was explored at each site using the four psychological assets of grit espoused by Duckworth (2016): interest (teacher/student passion); practice (routine school activities); purpose (school vision, mission, and goals); and hope (optimism and opportunities). These psychological assets are components of the two main factors that comprise the construct of grit, which are consistency of interest and perseverance of effort.

Data analysis and data collection occurred throughout the research process. Triangulation of data was accomplished by seeking multiple sources, such as questionnaire responses, documents, interview transcripts, observation field notes, purposive sampling, and rich description. Peer debriefing from colleagues and member checks from participants in the study were also utilized as a strategy for triangulation. New information, which resulted from their consultation, was integrated into the study as warranted.

Chapter VI presents findings of the study through answering the research questions. Conclusions are drawn from the findings and implications for research, theory, and practice are

addressed. Finally, recommendations for future research are offered followed by a summary of the study.

## FINDINGS

The following central question and consequent research questions guided the study:

Central Question: How is grit manifested in the culture of these systems? How do the cultural experiences of a ninth grade transition program support the factors of grit?

1) How does grid and group explain the cultural manifestation of grit in each of these schools?
2) What are teacher perceptions about the types of school programs or other school factors that contribute to the development of grit in these schools?
3) What are the teacher perceptions about their roles in the development of grit in these schools?
4) What other finding in the data are relevant to this study?

Based on the cases presented in Chapter IV and the data analyzed in Chapter V, these research questions are answered below.

### Research Question One: How did grid and group explain the cultural manifestation of grit in each of these schools?

Douglas' (1982) grid and group typology was beneficial in explaining the cultural manifestation of grit by providing a contextual lens to view how interest, practice, purpose, and hope were revealed in each Freshman Academy environment. The schools were similar in their grid and group makeup and nearly the same with regard to grit scores. The grid and group category that best describes the context for both school sites is a corporate (strong-grid/strong-group) environment. The Grit-S scale scores for each site were also very similar; a (3.77) grit

score for Prairie View Freshman Academy and Riverside Freshman Academy with a grit score of (3.74), on a scale of 1 (low grit) to 5 (high grit). Placing Duckworth's (2007) construct of grit in the context of two similar school cultures revealed there where many similarities and few differences in how grit was manifested in the culture of the two Freshman Academies studied.

By examining the grid dimensions of each school the similarities and differences of how the psychological assets of grit were manifested with regard to teacher and administrator roles, organization and structure of the school, and school programs could be explained. Looking through the cultural lens of strong-grid, the psychological assets of grit, interest, practice, purpose and hope emerged:

- Interest – The curriculum resource instructors, teaming, and professional learning communities supported teacher interest. Teachers' perception of what most engaged students was technology.
- Practice – Collaboration days, teaming, professional learning communities, and instructional specialist were the primary activities for teachers to practice instructional strategies. Teachers' perception of the primary activities for students to practice was AVID, alternative school, advisory time, technology, programs to support math and reading, and curricular clubs.
- Purpose – High expectations, literacy, engagement, graduation, and to create citizens were the primary goals of teachers.
- Hope – Teachers' perceptions of services that provided hope for students were the alternative school, Tulsa Tech, counseling, advisory time, and Saturday School. Teachers believed that positive reinforcement, encouragement, the child study group, and keeping the building clean were primary ways that they provided hope for students.

By examining the group dimensions of each school, similarities and differences of how grit was manifested in teacher goals, stakeholder expectations, collaboration, and stakeholder relationships could be explained. Looking through the cultural lens of strong-group, the psychological assets of grit, interest, practice, purpose and hope emerged in following ways:

- Interest – Community expectations, school pride, teaming, and student relationships were the primary sources of group interest for teachers. Clubs were seen as the primary source of social incorporation for students.
- Practice – Tutoring, advisory time, clubs, and teaming were the primary activities viewed by teachers as important for student success.
- Purpose – The primary goal for teachers was to build relationships and be role models for students.
- Hope – The expectation to do well, work hard, to be held accountable, to be part of a team, belief that all students can learn, and build relationships with students are the primary views that provide optimism and opportunities for students and teachers to develop a strong allegiance to school and each other.

Question one offered insight into the overarching research question by providing explanation for how grit was manifested in the culture of each school. Table J1 (Appendix J) summarizes the similarities and differences between Prairie View Freshman Academy and Riverside Freshman Academy that can be explained by Douglas' Grid and Group Theory.

**Research Question Two: What were teacher perceptions about the types of school programs or other school factors that contribute to the development of grit in these schools?**

Prairie View and Riverside are two Freshman Academies in the same district. Prairie View is smaller and more established with it being in existence for nearly seventeen years. Riverside has over 500 more students than Prairie View and first opened its doors 2 ½ years ago.

While different in size and age, both school sites share the same grid and group classification and have very similar grit scores. Below is a discussion regarding teacher perceptions of the types of programs at each school site that contribute to the development of grit.

**Prairie View.** According to the teachers at Prairie View, the programs that contribute to grit are:

- The 1:1 program in which every student in the school is issued a chromebook, has access to Google apps for education, and uses Canvas as the learning management system to integrate the course content;
- Tulsa Tech, as it gives students an option and something to strive for;
- AVID, which is the advancement via individual determination program and its philosophy is to hold students accountable to the highest standards, provide academic support and students will rise to the challenge;
- Alternative School, which is on the central campus and provides options for students who are not successful in the traditional school setting;
- Advisory Time, which is a time set aside twice a week for students to get extra academic support as needed;
- Clubs to get student involved.
- Additionally, all participants perceived that tutoring was essential for student success and provided by all teachers. The tutoring is not a formal program, but seems to be an unspoken expectation.
- The other factor that resonated through the entire study was the expectation of excellence with phrases such as, “it’s just expected here”, “that’s what we do, it’s a mindset”, is an indication of the deeply embedded view.

**Riverside.** When identifying factors that contribute to the development of grit at Riverside Freshman Academy, routine school activities and programs that allow students to practice their skills are to be considered. Teachers' perceptions of the types of programs that allow for deliberate practice include:

- Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which are collaborative teams of teachers from each subject area;
- Teaming, which are teams of teachers from all four core subjects collaborating and sharing the same cohort of students;
- 1:1 program, in which every single ninth grader is provided a chromebook, Google apps for education and Canvas, along with Open Educational Resource (OER) online textbooks, and access to other technology tools;
- Focus Math, a program designed to target and support students who struggle in math; Focus Reading, a program designed to close the reading gap and get students back to reading at grade level;
- Academic Achievement period, a class period built in to the master schedule that students attend daily for academic intervention, enrichment, or homework help;
- Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), this program is designed to provide positive rewards and incentives for good behavior;
- Zeros Aren't Permitted (ZAP), an after school academic placement for students to make-up their assignments; and Clubs, in which Riverside has twenty-two different clubs specifically for ninth graders.

The programs listed above are those that are seen as ways the school builds grit for students. The school also provides opportunities to build teacher grit. An important factor that contributed to the development of grit was embedded professional development. Riverside

teachers believe that professional development is important in helping to promote and maintain interest in their subject area. Interest in their subject matter and keeping up with instructional strategies enhances the classroom environment, which translates to better instruction and more student engagement in the classroom. Riverside Freshman Academy offers professional development over a variety of topics every other Wednesday during lunch, and every Wednesday, the Riverside school district provides embedded teacher collaboration, in which school starts later for students to allow teacher time to meet before school starts. This time is set-aside for teachers to meet to share ideas with regard to academic and student interventions, best practices in the classroom, and look at data to track student progress. This reserved time helps provide for continued practice, provides opportunities for improvement, is a district mission, and helps maintain interest, all of which support the psychological assets of grit development.

The similarities between Prairie View and Riverside include the following:

- Both schools are 1:1, meaning every student has a chromebook, access to Google, and used Canvas as the learning management tool.
- For teachers, both schools have embedded collaboration days and professional development opportunities.
- Prairie View and Riverside have programs for students that build grit, such as numerous club offerings, advisory time, programs to make up school assignments, and an alternative school.

Prairie View and Riverside also have differences in school programs that build grit. For example:

- Prairie View has a school program that Riverside does not have called AVID, which is the advancement via individual determination program with a philosophy of high standards and accountability.

- Riverside offers several programs that are more intentional and systematic with regard to supporting students. These programs include teaming of student and teachers into cohorts, focus math and focus reading, and positive behavior intervention strategies (PBIS).
- One important difference in programs is that Riverside has a very robust, systematic professional learning community (PLC) program for teachers. This program provides strong, tier I, academic support for student interventions to inform instruction. For a complete illustration of teacher perceptions with regard to school programs that build grit, see Table J2 (Appendix J).

**Research Question Three: What were teachers' perceptions about their roles in the development of grit in these schools?**

**Prairie View.** The overwhelming response to teacher involvement with regard to grit development was to help students adjust to "the freshman struggle" and maintain high expectations as noted, "we do expect a lot of our students and we don't—you know, we don't really apologize for that" (F. Edwards, interview, September, 28, 2016). Teachers help students adjust to the struggle of high school by showing that they care through strong relationships with a variety of people. There is "community of care" (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016) in which different people are checking in on students to ensure their success. The other aspect of grit development is to maintain students' interest in the classrooms by making learning fun and empowering them to take ownership of their education. There is an expectation at Prairie View to work hard. Teachers work hard, hold each other accountable and model this behavior for their students. Duckworth (2016) noted, "When everyone is striving for excellence, its just what you do. It's no big deal. It becomes a habit" (pp. 246-247). After 17 years, it has become a habit to strive for excellence and achieve at high levels at Prairie View Freshman Academy.

**Riverside.** Teachers at Riverside Freshman Academy view their roles in the development of grit as a role model and relationship builder that never gives up on a student, and has a mindset that all students can succeed. Ms. Brown has a very good understanding of her role as a teacher and how that role can impact the development of grit through her intentional decision to build relationships with her students early, beginning on the first day of school. She noted, "If you can build relationships with your students then they care more about what you teach—we always spend time talking about what's important to them" (K. Brown, interview, September 26, 2016). Teachers who are "psychologically wise" (Duckworth, 2016) can make a difference in the lives of their students (p. 218). I repeatedly heard phrases, "build relationships," "emotional support," "good influence," "build trust," "never give up," which are indicative of hope, purpose and interest, the psychological assets needed to build grit. Dan Chambliss, a sociologist featured in Duckworth's (2016) recent book, concluded that "the easy way [to build grit] is to use conformity – the basic human drive to fit in – because if you're around a lot people who are gritty, you're going to act grittier" (as cited in Duckworth, 2016 p. 247). This basic principle has a lot to do with the influence Riverside teachers have with regard to their role in the development of grit.

With regard to their role in the development of grit, both Prairie View and Riverside teachers indicated that building relationships with students is primary and important to the development of grit. Relationships create positive connections, which in turn support interest, purpose, and hope for students; all of which are psychological assets of grit.

Prairie View and Riverside teachers also have differences in the perceptions of their roles as teachers and how these roles contribute to the development of grit. Prairie View teachers believe their primary role is to maintain the community's, district's, and school's high expectations of excellence in everything they do. This is evident in the way it is embedded in the culture and language of the teachers. Riverside teachers also have expectations of learning, but these expectations are imbedded in their roles in ensuring students attend academic intervention

supports, their fidelity in participating in the teaming process, their belief all students can learn, and that they view themselves as role models for students. Table J2 (Appendix J) provides an illustration of teacher perceptions with regard to their role in the development of grit.

**Research Question Four: What other findings in the data were relevant to this study?**

Outside of school programs and teacher roles, other realities existed in the study that should be considered when understanding how grit was manifested at Prairie View and Nation.

**Administrator Role**. Administrators have a prominent role in shaping school culture that best supports the development of grit. Both Prairie View and Riverside provide an administrative structure of programs and systems of support that are part of the overall district. Implementation of these programs and systems of support allows for a certain level of grit development to occur. For example, teams, PLCs, RtI, and Embedded Collaboration are district initiatives of Riverside. Prairie View's district initiatives include CRIs, Embedded Collaboration, and Advisory Time. These programs encourage high expectations, collaboration, and a culture of relationships. Administrators implement these district-wide programs and initiatives and then are given the opportunity to add their own personal touch. The principal at Prairie View has been an administrator at that site for over sixteen years, so her understanding of the expectations of the district has allowed her to influence and transform the culture of the school over time. The teachers of Prairie View consistently commented on how supportive their principal is, as noted by Mr. Brickman's comment, "our principal is super supportive" (D. Brickman, interview, October 12, 2016).

The principal at Riverside had the opportunity to open the Freshman Academy two years ago and incorporate the expected district initiatives and programs. The challenge for the Riverside principal was bringing together an inherited staff from two other sites. Regarding the shaping of this type of culture, Deal and Peterson (1999) stated, "These complex entities do not develop

overnight. In schools, for example, they are shaped by the ways principals, teachers and key people reinforce, nurture, or transform underlying norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions" (p. 4). The sustainability of the programs and initiative at Riverside will determine whether or not Riverside Freshman Academy will continue to develop grit in ninth graders.

**Central Question: How was grit manifested in the culture of these systems? How did the cultural experiences of a ninth grade transition program support the factors of grit?**

Duckworth et al. (2006) put forth the idea that some traits might be essential to success no matter what the domain. This study explored the two-factor construct of Grit as identified by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, Kelly, and Quinn (2006, 2007, 2009), which include perseverance of effort and consistency of interest. Within these two factors there are psychological assets related to an organizations environment that Duckworth (2016) has determined to be important to the development of grit. These assets include: interest (teacher/student school passion); practice (routine school activities); purpose (school vision, mission, and goals); and hope (optimism, opportunities).

**Grit – Consistency of Interest**

**Interest (teacher/student school passion).** Research shows that people are more satisfied with their jobs and perform better when they do something that fits their personal interests (Duckworth, 2016, p. 97). The development of grit manifested in the culture of both schools, in regard to supporting teacher interest and student interest.

Prairie View's culture is embedded with the high expectations of stakeholders and pride in their school district. Interest and passion is maintained for teachers through the supports of the administrators in conjunction with the curriculum resource instructors. Regarding students, interest and passion are supported by the 1:1 initiative and engagement opportunities in club activities.

Riverside's culture also has high expectations. Teaming of students and teachers helps make connections and build relationships. With these relationships, teachers are able to tap into the interest of students and provide appropriate academic supports for students. To maintain interest and passion for education, Riverside has a strong Professional Learning Community (PLC) program. This program provides time for teachers to collaborate on best practices for instruction and build relationships with each other. For maintaining student interest, Riverside is also 1:1 with technology and offers a variety of clubs to keep students connected and engaged at school.

**Purpose (school vision, mission, and goals)**. "Purpose is the intention to contribute to the well-being of others" (Duckworth, 2016) and for most educators, it is having a connection with a child and impacting their lives (p. 146). Prairie View and Riverside teachers and administrators perceive the primary purpose and responsibility of schools are to produce educated, productive, well-rounded citizens. Prairie View has a stronger cultural expectation of excellence than Riverside. This is evident in the mission statement of the school, "Expectation of Excellence," and with participant phrases such as, "it's just expected here" and "that's what we do, it's a mindset," is an indication of the deeply embedded cultural value. Riverside and Prairie View both have a culture of care in their schools and a belief that being relational leaders, building relationships, and being role models is the primary purpose and role of educators.

**Grit – Perseverance of Effort**

**Practice (routine school activities)**. To get better or improve at a skill, it is not just about quantity of time on task, but quality of time on task (Duckworth, 2016). Practice is an important component of grit, and this was manifested in the culture of both schools. Prairie View and Riverside have both built practice opportunities for teachers and students into their school year and school day. Both districts provided embedded collaboration days in order to allow time

for teachers to discuss curriculum, best practices for the classroom, and improve instructional strategies. Prairie View offered time for collaboration six times per year, whereas Riverside offered this every Wednesday morning for the entire school year. Both schools also provided time for students to make up their work, tutoring, and academic intervention time built into the bell schedule. Riverside goes a step beyond Prairie View with Response to Intervention (RtI) programs embedded in the master schedule to remediate and support students who are struggling with math and reading.

**Hope (optimism, opportunities)**. Hope is the "resolve to make tomorrow better" (Duckworth, 2016) and to have the mindset to overcome obstacles, setbacks, and failures (p. 169). The ability to overcome obstacles does not come naturally to all students. Sometimes students have to be allowed to struggle with support from their teacher.

Prairie View's culture of high expectations to do well, to work hard, to hold each other accountable, and take pride in their school creates an environment in which students and teachers do not want to let each other down. Duckworth (2016) noted, "When everyone is striving for excellence, it's just what you do" (175). Along with this expectation, Prairie View also supports students through positive encouragement and positive reinforcement to provide hope and a sense of optimism for students.

Riverside Freshman Academy has high expectations, that manifests in the belief that all students can learn, and teachers place an expectation upon themselves to ensure they are doing everything they can to help students achieve academically. To ensure student success, the culture at Riverside has a strong focus on building relationships. Through relationships, teachers can provide support and positive reinforcement to help students overcome obstacles. This is evident in the Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS) program and through artifacts on the walls throughout the school. It is also noted in the language used repeatedly by the participants in the

study. I heard the phrases, “build relationships,” “emotional support,” “good influence,” “build trust,” “never give up,” which are indicative of hope, purpose and interest, the psychological assets needed to build grit.

### Ninth Grade Transition

Prairie View and Riverside have an understanding of how tough the ninth grade year can be. This is why they have dedicated a site in each district just for freshman. This allows ninth graders to be insulated so they can acquire the skills needed for success in high school. Prairie View Freshman Academy and Riverside Freshman Academy are considered successful schools. They both scored a B on the state report card and both schools have over a 95% student attendance rate (www.schoolreportcard.org/) for school year 2015.

The cultural experiences of Prairie View and Riverside that support the factors of grit are high expectations, collaboration, supports, and relationships. Prairie View and Riverside do this by providing programs and system of supports for students to motivate, engage, and build academic skill, as well as programs in place for teacher to continue to develop their instructional skills.

## Conclusions

The findings above indicate that there are some similarities and some differences in how grit was manifested in the culture of Prairie View and Riverside. The data indicate that not all faculty members were familiar with construct of grit. This could be because it is a relatively new construct, and they have not had experience, training, or exposure to the construct. Although the participants did not have knowledge of grit and the psychological assets, in both schools it was evident that the components of grit were being manifested in their cultures through high expectations, collaboration, support, and relationships. This is done through a variety of programs and structures within both schools.

In this study, programs that contributed to the development of grit were those that allowed opportunities for students to be engaged with technology, their peers, and their teachers, as well as programs that provided time for academic supports. Teachers at both schools viewed their roles as important in motivating students through high expectations, promoting systems of support, and building relationships with students. This study demonstrated and portrayed two schools that have different school programs; however, grit was manifested in both schools despite their programmatic differences. For example, at Prairie View, because of their longevity as a freshman academy, high expectations, from community and school stakeholders have been embedded in their culture for more than sixteen years. This is the primary way grit is manifested in their school. Riverside Freshman Academy, with its relatively short time in existence as a school, had an intentional focus on building relationships with students, much of which was directed by school leadership, and was the primary avenue for grit development. One conclusion, based on these illustrations, suggests that grit can be shaped and developed in different ways and different programs.

The similarities between Prairie View and Riverside, with regard to school programs that contribute to the development of grit, are 1:1, embedded collaboration days, and professional development opportunities for teachers. For students, Prairie View and Riverside have programs that build grit, such as numerous club offerings, advisory time, programs to make up school assignments, and an alternative school.

Prairie View and Riverside have differences in school programs that build grit. Prairie View has a school program that Riverside does not have, called AVID, and Riverside offers several programs that are more intentional and systematic with regard to supporting students. These programs include teaming, focus math, focus reading, and positive behavior intervention strategies (PBIS). One important difference in programs is that Riverside has a very robust, systematic professional learning community (PLC) plan for teachers.

The similarities between Prairie View and Riverside teacher perceptions, with regard to their role in the development of grit, are both schools' teachers believe that building relationships with students is primary and important to the development of grit with regard to creating positive connections which, in turn, support interest, purpose, and hope for students. All of which, are psychological assets of grit.

Prairie View and Riverside teachers also have differences in the perceptions of their roles as teachers and how these roles contribute to the development of grit. Prairie View teachers believe their primary role is to maintain the community's, district's, and school's high expectations of excellence in everything they do. Riverside teachers also have expectations of learning, but these expectations are wrapped around their roles with regard to ensuring students attend academic supports, fidelity in participating in the teaming process, belief all students can learn, and their view of themselves as role models.

Douglas' (1982) typology of grid and group proved to be a useful framework in the determination of the type of school culture that was dominant at the two schools. It provided the context that facilitated the description of grit and how it was manifested at the two schools. The triangulation of data from different sources and placing Duckworth's (2016) construct of grit and the associated psychological assets within the school cultures revealed a unique understanding and manifestation of the construct. Whereas not all of the psychological assets (interest, practice, purpose, hope) were observed in the same way, they were observed within both school cultures.

In conclusion, the findings from this study indicate that the development of grit is possible within a freshman transition program and is manifested in programs and supports for teachers and students in a culture of high expectations, collaboration, supports for students and teachers, and an environment where relationship building is a priority.

## Implications

The findings from this study have implications for research, theory, and practice. These implications and applications cannot be generalized but may possibly be transferrable based on likeness of a similar context. Examples of these implications are offered below.

### Implications for Research

This research extends the existing body of knowledge on ninth grade transition programs and builds on the body of research with regard to the non-cognitive construct of grit and how this may support students in their quest for graduating high school. The largest leak in the "educational pipe-line" occurs in the ninth grade when students fail to get promoted to the 10th (Connell, 2006). Due to the failure rates of ninth graders, determining ways to support students during their ninth grade year has been a topic of research for many years.

Duckworth's (2007) non-cognitive construct of grit is becoming increasingly popular and is beginning to be used as tool to predict student success. Understanding the manifestation of grit in the context of Freshman Academy cultures can add significantly to the body of research on grit. Although the findings of this research are context specific and are not generalizable, they can provide insight to the study of similar cases. Additionally, because grit in Freshman Academy settings is relatively unknown, this study can open the door for further research in this educational context.

### Implications for Theory

Using Douglas' (1982) grid and group framework as the lens to explain the contextual manifestation of grit adds to the body of literature of grit because this theoretical framework has not been previously used to explain grit. Grit is a relatively new non-cognitive trait, and this study contributes and extends the research of Duckworth (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly,

2007). Additionally, this study builds on the understanding of Freshman Academies as transition programs, as well as identifies organizational cultural factors of this type of transition program that contribute to the developmental factors of grit in school culture. This study showed the interconnectivity and interrelationship of the grid and group framework and grit. The theory was also useful in demonstrating and explaining both similarities and differences in school programs, as well as teachers' roles in supporting the development of grit.

**Implications for Practice**

This study is significant and serves to enlighten teachers and school leaders on the importance of grit and how to apply it contextually for increased promotion rates for ninth graders, specifically in Freshman Academy environments. As the study revealed, both schools had the same grit score (Duckworth, 2007) and cultural typology as determined by the grid and group assessment tool (Harris, 2005), and being able to understand the culture of the two schools served a pivotal role in the contextual application of grit. With the current concerns about failure rates among ninth grade students and federal accountability mandates, the findings from this study may prove useful in the following ways:

- **Promotion of Grit in the Learning Environment.** Several productive cultural practices were identified in this study and may help educators provide deliberate supports that fit within the context of their organizational environments, these include: adults should show they care about students; educators should have high expectations that all students will be capable of achieving their goals; praise should be directed at effort; failure should be framed as an act of learning; students should multiple opportunities to improve their work; the learning environment should include technology that is adaptive and responsive to student's needs; schools should have structures and programs in place to provide supports that are free of distraction to help students with their work, and schools should

provide academic activities and opportunities for students to connect to their own interests, values, and goals.

- **Faculty Recruitment and Selection.** Having an understanding of the characteristics of grit may help administrators recruit and select teachers that are going to support and enhance the environment. Basically, hiring gritty teachers will make the culture of the school grittier.
- **Teacher Education**. Adding the study of grit into the curriculum of undergraduate teacher programs could serve to inform teachers of strategies they can use in their classrooms upon graduation. This would serve to support specific classroom strategies as well as cultural practices for organizational systems as a whole. As new information is discovered, it is important to provide systematic on-going professional development to learn about grit, but also to provide opportunities to maintain teacher interest and passion, which in turn continues to build grit.
- **Freshman Academy Design** The information from this study could be useful to districts, principals, and teachers with regard to specific systematic structures in designing Freshman Academies such as, the concept of teaming, professional learning communities (PLCs), embedded collaboration time, professional development, and academic advisory periods. According to a report by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology (2014), "it is the responsibility of the educational community to design learning environments that promote factors, such as grit, so students are prepared to meet 21st –century challenges" (p. v.).
- **Improved Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates.** Many students encounter failure during their first semester in high school, even though their middle school performance showed no indication of academic problems (Pharris-Ciureg, Hirschman & Willhoft, 2011). Ninth grade students who struggle academically and are retained have a greater

risk of dropping out of high school. Smink and Schargel (2004) assert, "Poor academic performance linked to retention in one grade is the single strongest school-related predictor of dropping out. One report indicated that of every ten dropouts, nine had been retained at least one year" (p. 33). By understanding the factors in a school environment that promote grit, educators can begin developing those characteristics in school culture to support academic achievement for students, specifically ninth graders; thus, catching them before they begin to fail.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The following recommendations for further research are provided as possible extensions of this research study. This study, through a qualitative approach, examined how grit was manifested in two Freshman Academy environments. This same study could be applied to other school districts with different demographics, grade levels, or school design to observe the manifestation of grit in a different context. In this study, the cultural typologies of both of the schools were the same, which was corporate (strong-grid/strong-group). The manifestation of grit was evident in both school sites in very similar ways. A study doing a comparison between two different types of cultural typologies, and how grit is manifested within the different cultures, is needed.

This study relied on the interview responses of four teachers and one administrator for each school. To gather more perspectives, a future study could include more participants for a greater comprehensive picture of the school.

A quantitative study could be developed to examine the relationship between student grit at a freshman academy and student performance on the ACT Explore tests. This study would investigate whether a freshman academy transition program influences the building of non-cognitive factors that comprise the construct of grit that support student success. The

independent variable (IV) would be grit, as measured by the Duckworth and Quinn's (2009), 8-item Grit-S scale. The dependent variable (DV) would be student performance on the ACT explore tests. The explore test has four parts measuring knowledge in math, English, reading and science. This predictive, correlational (*r*) study would answer whether or not there is a relationship between the predictability of grit and the Explore tests and also the strength of the relationship.

## Summary

Freshman Academies have been developed to support students in their first year of high school. This transition year has been known to be difficult for many ninth graders as research shows that many ninth grade students who struggle academically and are retained have a greater risk of dropping out high school (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996)" (McCullumore & Sparapani, 2010, p. 448). Recent research suggests that "grit," the disposition to pursue long-term goals with sustained interest and effort over time, is a significant predictor of academic achievement (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007). School cultures that promote grit may influence promotion rates, thereby impacting graduation rates.

Chapter II reviewed the literature and described the research regarding high school students who dropout; the importance of the ninth grade year; transition programs (Freshman Academies) for providing support to ninth graders; and the factors of the new non-cognitive construct called grit. Many ninth grade transition programs were implemented; however, some were not successful in providing supports ninth graders need, which reveals the need and purpose of this study. The chapter concluded by establishing grid and group as the theoretical framework to identify the cultural characteristics of schools and provide a lens to view the systems when exploring factors that may contribute to the manifestation of grit in each environment.

Chapter III described the qualitative case study methodology selected for this study. Two

Freshman Academies were chosen based on their organizational structure, size and demographics. Data collection occurred during the first semester of the 2016-2017 school year and included observations, interviews of four teachers and one administrator from each site, document reviews, grid and group questionnaire completion, Grit-S scale questionnaire completion, artifacts from each school site, and website information. I observed faculty meetings, team meetings, PLC meetings, the teacher's lounge, daily lunch operation, and the environment of each school. Collected data were analyzed using the methods of triangulation (Yin, 2009).

The epistemological perspective guiding this research study is social constructivism. We come to know through our interactions and the meanings are constructed as we engage with the world we are interpreting (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Schwandt, 2007). In this study administrators, teachers, students, and community through interactions with one another constructed meaning. Mary Douglas' grid and group analysis (1982) provided a typology for understanding and classifying school culture and drew specific observations about the participant's values, beliefs, and behaviors (Harris, 2005), thus enabling the exploration of the manifestation of the two-factor construct of grit.

Chapter IV presented the profiles of the two school sites beginning with an overview of each school district then narrowed to tell the stories of the two Freshman Academies selected. This was accomplished by describing the interactions among these groups using thick, rich description. Chapter V analyzed these interactions through the lens of Douglas' (1982) Grid and Group typology, and Duckworth's (2007) construct of grit. The exploration of the manifestation of grit utilized the four psychological assets that promote the development of grit espoused by Duckworth (2016). As they relate to the organizational environment, these psychological assets include: interest, practice, purpose, and hope. The analysis explored the perceptions of teachers with regard to their role in the development of grit, as well as school programs or other school factors that contribute to the development of grit. Findings confirmed that the grid and group

framework was beneficial in explaining the manifestation of grit from the context of the cultural typology of each school site and provided a lens to explore how interest, practice, purpose, and hope, the psychological assets of grit were revealed in each environment. Findings revealed the types of school programs and teacher perceptions about their role in the development of grit in their respective environments.

Chapter VI concluded with implications for research, theory, and practice and recommendations for future research.

**Researcher Comments**

I was surprised how difficult it was be to be a researcher in my own building and to discover how bias could play such a strong role. I worked diligently to separate my duties as principal and researcher by discretely making observations, by not discussing the study with my faculty, by not working on the writing of this dissertation at school, and by not including any new information I discovered in our faculty professional development time, discussions, or literature.

It is interesting to note that the schools selected for this study both had the same cultural typology, grit score, state report card grade of a "B", and the manifestation of grit in similar ways, which would seem to some as not proving to provide good data for this study; however, it seems to confirm, while not generalizable, that learning environments that provide these types of programs, caring teachers, and technology may be conducive to developing grit in students. What is powerful about this is that "culture has the power to shape our identity. Over time and under the right circumstances, the norms and values of the group to which we belong become our own"(Duckworth, 2016, p. 247).

Despite the evidence that the development of non-cognitive factors, such as grit, can support student success, high schools in the United States are not well designed to enhance the development of these factors (Duckworth, 2007). The largest leak in the "educational pipe-line"

occurs in the ninth grade when students fail to get promoted to the 10th (Connell, 2006). The ninth grade year is considered the most critical year for high school students and the review of the research on the ninth grade year finds that students are less likely to drop out of high school if they participate in programs that help with the transition to high school (Mizelle, 1995; Connell, Eccles, Kemple, & Legters, 2006; Bottoms, 2006; Fulk, 2003; McCallumore & Sparapini, 2010; Fritzer & Herbst, 1996; Smink & Sschargel, 2004).

It stands to reason, given the evidence of the influence of grit on student success (Duckworth, 2007) that the lack of success in decreasing freshman retention rates may be due to freshman academy programs that fail to promote the development of non-cognitive factors, primarily grit, in their school culture. Cultures that foster grit may influence promotion rates, thereby impacting graduation rates.

At the time of writing this dissertation, the educational environment in Oklahoma continues to lack fiscal stability as illustrated by our ever increasing budget shortfall, and is driving some educators to other states or completely out of the profession. District leaders, principals, and teachers are definitely going to need "grit" to overcome the obstacles, setbacks and failures with regard to education in Oklahoma. It seems that Oklahoma educators are among the "grittiest" in the nation as we continue to stay focused on what really matters…our students

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

**Short Grit Scale**

*Directions for taking the Grit Scale: Please respond to the following 8 items. Be honest – there are no right or wrong answers!*

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.*
   - ❑ Very much like me
   - ❑ Mostly like me
   - ❑ Somewhat like me
   - ❑ Not much like me
   - ❑ Not like me at all

2. Setbacks don't discourage me.
   - ❑ Very much like me
   - ❑ Mostly like me
   - ❑ Somewhat like me
   - ❑ Not much like me
   - ❑ Not like me at all

3. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.*
   - ❑ Very much like me
   - ❑ Mostly like me
   - ❑ Somewhat like me
   - ❑ Not much like me
   - ❑ Not like me at all

4. I am a hard worker.
   - ❑ Very much like me
   - ❑ Mostly like me
   - ❑ Somewhat like me
   - ❑ Not much like me
   - ❑ Not like me at all

5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.*
   - ❑ Very much like me
   - ❑ Mostly like me
   - ❑ Somewhat like me
   - ❑ Not much like me
   - ❑ Not like me at all

6. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.*
   - ❑ Very much like me
   - ❑ Mostly like me
   - ❑ Somewhat like me
   - ❑ Not much like me
   - ❑ Not like me at all

7. I finish whatever I begin.
   - ❑ Very much like me
   - ❑ Mostly like me
   - ❑ Somewhat like me
   - ❑ Not much like me
   - ❑ Not like me at all

8. I am diligent.
   - ❑ Very much like me
   - ❑ Mostly like me
   - ❑ Somewhat like me
   - ❑ Not much like me
   - ❑ Not like me at all

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Scoring:

1. For questions 2, 4, 7 and 8 assign the following points:
   5 = Very much like me
   4 = Mostly like me
   3 = Somewhat like me
   2 = Not much like me
   1 = Not like me at all

2. For questions 1, 3, 5 and 6 assign the following points:
   1 = Very much like me
   2 = Mostly like me
   3 = Somewhat like me
   4 = Not much like me
   5 = Not like me at all

Add up all the points and divide by 8. The maximum score on this scale is 5 (extremely gritty), and the lowest score on this scale is 1 (not at all gritty).

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**Grit Scale citation**

Duckworth, A.L, & Quinn, P.D. (2009). Development and validation of the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S). *Journal of Personality Assessment, 91,* 166-174. http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/images/Duckworth%20and%20Quinn.pdf

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APPENDIX B

Grid and Group Questionnaire

## Grid Consideration

Instructions

While completing the instrument, keep in mind the unit of analysis marked above. That is, keep in mind one and only one unit of analysis for all items. For example, you may focus on one specific committee or work group, a class or grade level, an entire school site, or an entire district or school system.

- Choose the statement that you think *best* represents the unit of analysis under study and
- On the continuum, mark the bubble that represents the degree to which the statement best applies to the unit of analysis under study.

The numbers on the continuum are numbered 1 through 8. Numbers 1 and 8 represent the extreme poles of the continuum. The intermediate numbers (2-7) provide a continuous scale between the extremes.

Check only one bubble for each item. (Note: In statements below, the term administrator refers to administration at any level, including principal, assistant principal, counselor, or anyone assigned with formal administrative responsibility and title).

Q1

| | decentralized/ nonhierarchical 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | centralized/ hierarchical 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Authority structures are: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q2

| | nonspecialized/ no explicit job description 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | specialized/ explicit job descriptions 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Roles are: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q3

| | full autonomy in textbook selection 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | no autonomy in textbook selection 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individual teachers have: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q4

| | full autonomy in generating educational goals for their classrooms 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | no autonomy in generating educational goals for their classrooms 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individual teachers have: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q5

| | full autonomy in selecting instructional methods/ strategies 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | no autonomy in selecting instructional methods/ strategies 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individual teachers have: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q6

| | encouraged to take ownership of their education 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | discouraged from taking ownership of their education 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students are: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q7

| | individual competition/ negotiation 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | administrative allotment/ allocation 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers obtain instructional resources (i.e. technology, manipulatives, materials, and tools) through: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q8

| | individualized for each student 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | individualized for each student 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instruction is: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q9

| | intrinsic/ self-defined interests 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | extrinsic/ institutional rewards 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individual teachers are motivated by: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q10

| | decentralized/ controlled by teachers 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | centralized/ controlled by administrator(s) 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hiring decisions are: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q11

| | individual teacher negotiation 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | institutional rules/ routines 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Class schedules are determined through: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q12

| | few/ implicit | | | | | | | numerous/ explicit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rules and procedures are: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Sum of grid scores: ${gr://SC_2311KiWUmX8WOQR/Score}

Average of grid scores (sum/12): ${gr://SC_2311KiWUmX8WOQR/WeightedMean}

**Group Consideration**

Q13

| | educators working independently 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | educators working collaboratively 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instructional activities are initiated/planned by: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q14

| | separate activities 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | incorporated activities 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Educators' socialization and work are: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q15

| | the individual 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | the group 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extrinsic rewards primarily benefit: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q16

| | individual goals/ interests 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | group goals/ interests 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching and learning are planned/organized around: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q17

| | individual goals, priorities, and criteria 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | group goals, priorities, and criteria 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching performance is evaluated according to: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q18

| | in isolation toward goals and objectives 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | collaboratively toward goals and objectives 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Members work: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q19

| | individually 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | collaboratively 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Curricular goals are generated: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q20

| | individual, informal networks 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | corporate, formal networks 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Communication flows primarily through: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q21

| | individually 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | collaboratively 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instructional resources are controlled/owned: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q22

| | no allegiance/ loyalty to the school 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | much allegiance/ loyalty to the school 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Educators and students have: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q23

| | ambiguous/ fragmented with no accountability 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | clear/ communal with much accountability 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q24

| | privately by factions or independent verdict 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | corporately by consensus or group approval 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Most decisions are made: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Sum of group scores: ${gr://SC_8dEahnvHQ876tdb/Score}

Average of group scores: ${gr://SC_8dEahnvHQ876tdb/WeightedMean}

Powered by Qualtrics

Appendix C

**SURVEY INFORMATION FORM**

**Project Title**

Integrating Factors of Grit in School Culture: Case Studies of Two Freshman Academies

**Investigator**

Margaret M. Coates

Bachelor of Science Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, Tulsa University, Tulsa, Oklahoma 1988

Master of Science in Athletic Administration, Tulsa University, Tulsa, Oklahoma 1990

Doctoral Candidate, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the cultural manifestation of grit in two freshman academy environments and describe factors of grit, passion and perseverance for long term goals, which support student success. Therefore, you will be asked to participate in two confidential online surveys. The first is a grid and group survey to determine the typology of the culture of the school site and the second survey is the Grit-S scale.

**Procedures**

All teachers and administrators will be asked to participate in these confidential online surveys. The researcher also currently serves as the principal at one of the Freshman Academies where the research is taking place. All participation is completely voluntary and you can remove yourself at any time without repercussions. Participation is strictly voluntary without coercion or any penalty. In no way will any participation, non-participation or any views shared during the research have any bearing upon your employment status or employment review. Following the conclusion of the research process, all documentation will be destroyed.

**Risks of Participation**

There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

**Benefits**

There are no benefits to the participants in this research other than contributing to the research concerning school culture. This research will provide practitioners with information that may contribute to improved 4-year cohort graduation rates and will describe types of school programs that contribute to the cultural experiences of the development of grit in first year ninth graders. This study will contribute to the body of research



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and literature regarding ninth grade transition programs and will build and extend the body of knowledge on the new non-cognitive construct of grit and how this may support students in their quest for graduating High School.

**Confidentiality**

All survey information will be kept confidential throughout the process. Only my advisor, Dr. Ed Harris, will have full access to all survey data. I will only know the identity of the four teachers who volunteer to interview. Following the conclusion of the research process, all identifiers will be removed from the documentation. All research information, survey results will be kept on a password-protected computer for a period of two years. Survey data will be reported in the aggregate.

**Compensation**

None

**Contacts**

Margaret M. Coates
2808 E. 27th Pl.
Tulsa, OK 74114
(918) 519-6342
[redacted]

Dr. Ed Harris (Advisor)
310 Willard Hall
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK 74078
(405) 744-9445
ed.harris@okstate.edu

Your suggestions and concerns are important to us. Please contact me or my advisor with any questions. For information on subjects' rights, contact Dr. Hugh Crethar, IRB Chair, 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or send email to irb@okstate.edu.

**Participant Rights**

As a participant in this research, you are entitled to know the nature of my research. You are free to decline to participate and you are free to stop the interview or withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty, prejudice or consequence of any kind. Feel free to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the research and the methods I am using.

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Appendix D

**Email Script to Teachers and Staff**

My name is Dr. Ed Harris. I am a professor at Oklahoma State University and I have been approved to use your school for a research project concerning the manifestation of grit in school culture, specifically with Freshman Academies. Your school has been selected because of its size, demographics and because you educate primarily ninth grade students. I have been give permission from _____(Curriculum Director) and _____ (Principal) to request your input. Please understand your participation is completely voluntary and there will be no repercussions from your decision to participate or not participate. Since Margaret Coates, who is conducting the research, also currently serves as the principal of a Freshman Academy, where the research is taking place, please be assured that all participation is completely voluntary and you can remove yourself at any time without repercussions. Participation is strictly voluntary without coercion or any penalty. In no way will any participation, non-participation or any views shared during the research have any bearing upon your employment status or employment review.

Below are links to two online surveys. One will be used to help assess your school's culture and the other will be used to collect data regarding grit. Completion of these surveys should not take more than 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey results will be collected through Oklahoma State University in a secure manner and will be kept confidential.

I also need to interview four members of your school staff. If you are willing to volunteer to participate in individual interviews, or would like more information about the interview process, please respond to this email, otherwise no response is necessary. All interview participants will be given pseudonyms for anonymity and all data and information collected will be kept secure and confidential.

Once again, your participation is completely voluntary and there will be no repercussions from your decision to participate or not participate.

Link to Surveys

Thank you for your consideration and any help you are willing to provide.



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Appendix E

**INTERVIEWEE INFORMED CONSENT**

**Project Title**

Integrating Factors of Grit in School Culture: Case Studies of Two Freshman Academies

**Investigator**

Margaret M. Coates

Bachelor of Science Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, Tulsa University, Tulsa, Oklahoma 1988

Master of Science in Athletic Administration, Tulsa University, Tulsa, Oklahoma 1990

Doctoral Candidate, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the cultural manifestation of grit in two freshman academy environments and describe factors of grit, passion and perseverance for long term goals, which support student success. Therefore, you will be interviewed in relation to study mentioned above. You are asked to participate in one interview and will be approximately 60 minutes in length.

**Procedures:**

Four teachers from each school site and one administrator will be invited to participate in interview. An interview protocol will be used with the interview questions being scripted and prepared to be as neutral and open ended as possible. You will be informed beforehand that interviews will be recorded for accuracy. You will be reminded before the interviews begin. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, and information will be provided to all participants through the signed informed consent forms approved by the IRB. I will explain to you that you can stop the interview at any point. All interviews will be transcribed verbatim as a naturalized transcription. Each participant will be shown transcripts of the interviews in order to verify and ensure that all interview information was captured correctly. Audio recording will be transcribed verbatim and all audio recordings will be destroyed as soon as the transcription is completed.

**Risks of Participation:**

There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

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APPENDIX F

Prairie View – Photos of entrance and hallway

Table F2
*Prairie View Public Schools District Profile*

| **Community Characteristics** | | **Student Programs** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Socioeconomic Data** | | Students identified as Gifted/Talented | 16.3% |
| Caucasian | 63% | Students in Special Education | 16.5% |
| Black | 8% | Students as English Language | 10.2% |
| Asian | 10% | **Classroom Teachers, Prof. Support, School & District** | |
| Hispanic | 12% | Number of Teachers | 652.8 |
| Native American | 8% | Teachers w/ Advanced Degrees | 24.5% |
| Avg. property value per ADM | $66,259 | Average years experience | 11.3 |
| Eligibility for free or reduced lunch | 37% | School and District Administrators | 42 |
| **US Census Data** | | **Budget/Finance** | |
| District Population | 67,421 | Size of 2014-2015 general fund | 72,565,356 |
| Avg. household income | $100,014 | Net Assessed Valuation | 704,000,000 |
| **Highest Ed. level for Adults 25+** | | Final State Aid Allocation | 36,100,000 |
| College Degree | 50% | Local & County Revenues | 63.9% |
| HS Diploma w/o College Degree | 45% | State Revenue | 31% |
| Less than 12th grade education | 5% | Federal Revenue | 5.2% |
| | | Total $/ADM | $7,687 |
| **Preparation, Motivation and Parental Support** | | **Academic and Student Performance** | |
| Avg. # of DAYS ABSENT per | 9.1 | Avg. HS Curriculum – Total units | 115.5 |
| Mobility Rate (Incoming Students) | 5% | 3rd Grade Reading Tests – Proficient & Above | 92% |
| KG – 3rd Gr. receiving reading remediation | 23% | End of Instruction Exams – All 7 tests district scored: | Scores above state average |
| Parents attending at least 1 | 84% | Senior Graduation Rate | 96.5% |
| Patrons' Volunteer Hours per Student | 22.9 | 4-Year Dropout Rate (class of 2015) | 6.1% |
| **Grade Organization, District Area & Enrollment** | | Avg. GPA of HS Seniors | 3.2 |
| Early Childhood Offered | Yes | Avg. ACT Score | 23.2 |
| Elementary Schools | 5 | HS Graduates Completing Regents' College-bound Curriculum | 90% |
| Middle School/Junior High | 1 | | |
| Freshman Academy | 1 | | |
| Alternative School | 1 | | |
| High School | 1 | | |
| Enrollment (ADM) | 11,376 | | |
| District Area | 40 sq. miles | | |

APPENDIX G

Prairie View – photos of construction and gym being used as a cafeteria

APPENDIX H

Riverside – Photos of the outside of the school building

Table H1

*Riverside Public Schools District Profile*

| **Community Characteristics** | | **Student Programs** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Socioeconomic Data** | | Students identified as | 19.1% |
| Caucasian | 73% | Students in Special | 13.9% |
| Black | 5% | Students as English | 4.3% |
| Asian | 3% | **Classroom Teachers, Prof. Support, School &** | |
| Hispanic | 11% | Number of Teachers | 1,73.9 |
| Native American | 8% | Teachers w/ Advanced | 19.2% |
| Avg. property value per | $44,028 | Average years experience | 11.1 |
| Eligibility for free or | 41% | School and District | 73.1 |
| **US Census Data** | | **Budget/Finance** | |
| District Population | 102,786 | Size of 2015-2016 general | $115,000,000 |
| Avg. household income | $78,668 | 15-16 Net Assessed | $799,994,008 |
| **Highest Ed. level for** | | 15-16 Final State Aid | $47,206,847 |
| College Degree | 29% | 14-15 Local & County | 46.9% |
| HS Diploma w/o College | 64% | 14-15 State Revenue | 46% |
| Less than 12th grade | 7% | 14-15 Federal Revenue | 7.1% |
| | | 14-15 Total $/ADM | $7,104 |
| **Preparation, Motivation and Parental Support** | | **Academic and Student Performance** | |
| Avg. # of DAYS ABSENT | 9.6 | Avg. HS Curriculum – Total | 98.5 |
| Mobility Rate (Incoming Students) | 9% | 3rd Grade Reading Tests – Proficient & Above | 87% |
| KG – 3rd Gr. receiving reading remediation | 39% | End of Instruction Exams – All 7 tests district scored: | At or below state average |
| Parents attending at least 1 Parent/Teacher Conf. | 70% | Senior Graduation Rate | 97.6% |
| Patrons' Volunteer Hours | 3.3 | 4-Year Dropout Rate (class | 2.5% |
| **Grade Organization, District Area & Enrollment** | | Avg. GPA of HS Seniors | 2.9 |
| Early Childhood Offered | Yes | Avg. ACT Score | 21.9 |
| Elementary Schools | 18 | HS Graduates Completing Regents' College-bound Curriculum | 77.8% |
| Middle School/Junior High | 5 | | |
| Freshman Academy | 1 | | |
| Margaret Hudson Program | 1 | | |
| Alternative Academy | 1 | | |
| High School | 1 | | |
| Enrollment (ADM) | 18,364 | | |
| District Area | 105 sq. mi | | |

APPENDIX I

Riverside – Photos of the entrance and hallway

APPENDIX J

Table J1

*Similarities and Differences of the Manifestation of Grit Between Prairie View Freshman Academy and Riverside Freshman Academy*

| **Grit:**<br><br>**Psychological Assets** | | **Prairie View Freshman Academy**<br><br>Grit-S Score = 3.77<br><br>(Corporate) | **Riverside Freshman Academy**<br><br>Grit-S Score = 3.74<br><br>(Corporate) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Strong Grid Considerations** | **Interest**<br>(Teacher/Student Passion) | Principal and curriculum resource instructors (CRI) are seen as primary sources of supporting curriculum interest<br><br>1:1/Google/Canvas is primary tool to maintain student engagement | Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and interdisciplinary teams are seen as primary sources supporting curriculum and student interest.<br><br>1:1/Google/Canvas is primary tool to maintain student engagement |
| | **Practice**<br><br>(Routine School Activities) | Collaboration days are primary teacher activity to practice instructional strategies<br><br>AVID, Alternative school, TANZ, Advisory time, and 1:1 are primary student activities to practice academic skills | Teacher Teaming, Professional development days, and instructional specialist are viewed as primary teacher activities to practice instructional strategies<br><br>Focus Math, Focus Reading, Academic Achievement period, ZAP, and clubs are primary student activities to practice academic skills |
| | **Purpose**<br><br>(School Vision, Mission, Goals) | Expectation of Excellence – 5 A's (academics, activities, arts, athletics, & attitude) and to create citizens are the primary purpose and goals of teachers | Literacy, Engagement, 100% Graduation and to produce well-rounded citizens are the primary purpose and goals of teachers |
| | **Hope**<br><br>(Optimism, Opportunities) | Alternative school, Tulsa Tech, and counseling are viewed as the primary services to provide hope for students<br><br>Alternate assignments, positive encouragement, and Positive Reinforcement are primary ways teachers provide hope to students | Academic Achievement period, Saturday school, ZAP, and PBIS are primary services to provide hope for students<br><br>Academic Achievement period, freshman on track child study group, and providing a School building that is well taken care of are primary was teachers provide hope to |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | students |
| | | | |
| **Strong Group Considerations** | **Interest** (Teacher/Student Passion) | Community expectations, school pride are primary sources of group interest for students and teachers<br><br>Professional development for teachers and clubs for students are primary sources of social incorporation | Teaming, relationships with students, and positive connections with students are primary sources of group interest for teachers |
| | **Practice**<br><br>(Routine School Activities) | Tutoring and advisory time are practice activities that are considered group priorities for students to attend<br><br>High Expectations for students is considered a strong social incorporation for teachers | Clubs, Teaming, and the Academic Achievement period are primary activities viewed by the group as important for student success<br><br>Lunch & Learns professional development and PLCs are primary group activities considered important for teacher success |
| | **Purpose**<br><br>(School Vision, Mission, Goals) | Being relational leaders and showing care for everyone are the primary purpose and goals for teachers | Building relationships and being role models are the primary purpose and goals for teachers |
| | **Hope**<br><br>(Optimism, Opportunities) | The expectation to do well, to work hard, and be held accountable are primary views that provide optimism and opportunities to teachers and students based on a strong allegiance to the school | The Team approach is considered a strong group activity to build relationships between teachers and students<br><br>The belief that all students can be successful is group norm that has become internalized by most teachers |

Table J2
*Similarities and Differences of Teacher Perceptions of the Development of Grit Between Prairie View Freshman Academy and Riverside Freshman Academy with Regard to School Programs and Teachers' Role*

| **Grit:**<br><br>**Psychological Assets** | | **Teacher Perceptions**<br><br>**Prairie View Freshman Academy**<br><br>Grit-S Score = 3.77<br><br>(Corporate) | **Teacher Perceptions**<br><br>**Riverside Freshman Academy**<br><br>Grit-S Score = 3.74<br><br>(Corporate) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **School Programs and Other Factors** | **Interest**<br>(Teacher/Student Passion) | Prairie View does not have a formal PLC program. Teachers meet informally as needed. | Riverside has a systematic *Professional Learning Community (PLC)* program, in which teachers meet weekly to create common assessments, review student data, and determine appropriate intervention and enrichments for students. These programs are perceived as a primary source of supporting curriculum and student interest, which in turn leads to the development of grit. |
| | | The *1:1 program* utilizing *chromebooks with Google and Canvas* as an instructional tool is seen as a primary program for developing consistency of interest. | The *1:1 program* along with the utilization of *chromebooks, Google, and Canvas* is viewed as a primary program for providing feedback, engaging students, and enhancing instructional practices supporting student and teacher interest. |
| | | Student *clubs* are a primary way that helps students maintain an interest in school, which is important to grit development. | The twenty-two student *clubs,* specifically for 9th graders are viewed as necessary to enhance student engagement and help students maintain an interest in school, which is important for the development of grit. |
| | | *Professional development* opportunities are offered, but are informal gatherings with no set schedule or topics. | Embedded *professional development*, called *Lunch and Learns*, is program that teachers expressed was important to maintaining interest and passion in education |
| | **Practice**<br><br>(Routine School | *Embedded Collaboration* days are viewed as a primary program that helps to enhance instructional effectiveness and | *Late Start Wednesdays*, embedded collaboration days is seen as an important program to help enhance instructional |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Activities) | support student learning. This is a teacher activity to practice instructional strategies.<br><br>Prairie View does not employ teaming for their students.<br><br>*AVID*, which is the advancement via individual determination program and its philosophy is to hold students accountable to the highest standards, and provide academic supports. With these high expectations and supports, this program provides critical components to the development of grit<br><br>*[School Mascot] Accept No Zeros (TANZ), and Advisory Time*, built into the schedule 2x per week are perceived as important to academic practice, which is an important aspect of grit development.<br><br>Prairie View does not offer any type of built-in or systematic remedial math or reading program. | effectiveness and provide support for student learning.<br><br>*Teaming* of students and teachers, which into learning cohorts, is perceived as a program that is incorporated into the basic structure of the school to create smaller learning communities. This enables teachers to collaborate about students who are struggling.<br><br>Riverside does not have an AVID program for students.<br><br>*Zeros Aren't Permitted (ZAP) is* perceived as an important program to develop academic practice, which is a component of grit development. Riverside offers an advisory period called Academic Achievement, which is a similar to the advisory period; however, the psychological asset that connects this program to grit is hope.<br><br>*Focus Math and Focus Reading* are programs designed for students to remediate skills and are viewed as primary ways for students to practice skills and get support, which are important components of grit development. |
| | **Purpose**<br><br>(School Vision, Mission, Goals) | Prairie View's motto, Expectation of Excellence - 5 A's (academics, activities, arts, athletics, & attitude) and to create citizens are the primary purpose and goals of teachers | The Riverside motto of Literacy, Engagement, 100% Graduation and to produce well-rounded citizens are the primary purpose and goals of teachers |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Hope**<br><br>(Optimism, Opportunities) | Prairie View provides an Advisory Time, 2x per week and is viewed as important to academic practice, rather than hope.<br><br>The Prairie View Alternative school is a program to help students who are struggling and provides hope for students who have not been successful in a traditional high school setting.<br><br>Prairie View does not have a formal program to encourage positive behavior in school. It is simply expected and encouraged by all stakeholders | *Academic Achievement* period, which is built into the daily bell schedule is an important program to develop academic practice, which provides the hope of success for students.<br><br>Riverside Alternative school is considered a program to provide hope of academic success to students who struggle with school. A limited number of students are accepted into this program.<br><br>*Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS)* is perceived by teachers as a way to set high expectations and reward positive behavior in the school and is viewed as a program to develop hope in students, which is one of the psychological assets of grit |
| | | | |
| **Teachers' Role** | **Interest**<br>(Teacher/Student Passion) | At Prairie View, teachers understand their role is to *meet community expectations and build school pride*, which enhances school connectedness for students<br><br>Prairie View teachers and administrators work to *build relationships* with students and view themselves as relational leaders | While Riverside teachers understand that the community has an expectation of the school, this is not their primary motivation to be effective in the classroom<br><br>At Riverside, *teaming, relationships* with students, and *positive connections* are considered the primary role of teachers in creating engagement opportunities at school |
| | **Practice**<br><br>(Routine School Activities) | *High Expectations* for students to attend tutoring and advisory time are is considered a strong social incorporation for teachers and part of their role in student achievement | *Academic Achievement* period, which is built into the daily bell schedule is an important routine school activity to develop academic practice, which viewed by the teachers as a primary source of support for student success and it is their role to *ensure students meet the expectations* of the program |
| | **Purpose**<br><br>(School Vision, | Being relational leaders and showing care for everyone are the primary purpose and | Building relationships is the number one focus and role expressed by Riverside |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Mission, Goals) | goals for teachers at Prairie View when relating it to purpose<br><br>The teachers also strongly believe their overarching role as it relates to society, is to create good citizens | teachers. Riverside teachers believe nothing in the classroom can be accomplished without good relationships with students<br><br>Riverside teachers also believe their roles as teachers is not only to educates students, but to also produce well-rounded citizens |
| | **Hope**<br><br>(Optimism, Opportunities) | Prairie View teachers also believe their role is to set *high expectations*, make learning fun, and empower students to take ownership of their own learning. The expectation of excellence is embedded in the school culture from the top down as well as the community.<br><br>Prairie View teachers know they are role models, but this is not a primary focus or motivation for them in the classroom<br><br>Prairie View teachers believe their role is to have high expectation of students to do well, to work hard, and be held accountable | Riverside teachers have high expectations for students, but perceive their primary role as teachers is to build relationships with students<br><br>Riverside teachers believe their role is to model productive, positive adult behavior and work ethic for students<br><br>Riverside teachers have a strong belief that *all students can learn.* This belief is group norm that has become internalized by most teachers and provides an optimistic outlook for students to emulate |

VITA

Margaret Marie Coates

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: INTEGRATING FACTORS OF GRIT IN SCHOOL CULTURE: CASE STUDIES OF TWO FRESHMAN ACADEMIES

Major Field: Educational Leadership – School Administration

Biographical:

Education:
Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in your major at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 2017.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Athletic Administration at The University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1990.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Health, Physical Education and Recreation at The University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1988.

Experience:

- Riverside Public Schools 2012 – Present
  - Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Ed. Present
  - Principal-Freshman Academy 2014-2017
  - Principal-Centennial Middle School 2012-2014
- Owasso Public Schools 2002 – 2012
  - Assistant Principal – Mid. HS 2007-2012
  - Geometry Teacher – Mid. HS 2002-2007
    - Math Dept. Chair
    - Assistant Basketball/Track/XC Coach

Professional Memberships:
CCOSA – Cooperative Council of Oklahoma School Administrators
NASSP – National Association of Secondary School Principals
NISL – National Institute of School Leaders: Executive Leadership Academy