Improving Teacher-Student Relationships: An Interpretive Approach to Policy Implementation

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ABSTRACT

Teacher-student relationships influence a range of student outcomes including affective, behavioral, and academic variables. The role of teacher-student relationships is of particular interest in education reform because it is an area where schools and districts have the ability to shape interventions. Yet, much of the reform in this area is externally driven and approached from an evidence-based framework. There is little insight into the unique obstacles, beliefs, and values in individual schools. Understanding this local context is essential for reform and change to occur. This study began by asking two key questions: What school-level political and normative factors do teachers identify as influencing the definition, formation, and maintenance of teacher-student relationships in secondary schools and how do teacher perspectives comport with the assumptions underlying the evidence-based tools used by the district to measure these constructs?

Through observations in two high schools, and interviews with teachers, principals, and district administrators, this study answered those two key research questions, providing nuanced perceptions and reactions from teachers and principals about the definition and role of teacher-student relationships, and the impact of school level programs and policies on these same relationships. The study also focused on how and why the district used an evidence-based tool in the district and school evaluation process.

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Both serve as a constant reminder to live fully and intentionally.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Across the United States educators and policymakers struggle to understand and explain the vast differences in achievement between schools, districts, and states. Historically, stakeholders identify a variable (or set of variables) that may impact achievement or success in school, and in turn, policymakers mandate a range of reforms to implement at the federal, state, and local levels. Through the 1980s and 1990s the United States shifted education reform efforts in the direction of outcomes-based education, focused on test scores and student achievement as the measure of academic success. The passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001 codified this move towards accountability, standards, and testing. The drive to increase accountability based on test scores, along with financial sanctions, led to a corresponding flood of reform initiatives. These efforts ranged from pre-packaged curriculum programs such as Reading First to comprehensive school reform efforts such as Success for All. Policymakers bombard schools with proposed solutions targeting a specific variable such as professional learning communities or technology initiatives. The 2009 federally sponsored Race to the Top program shifted the national focus to teacher evaluation and compensation systems, data-driven decision-making, turn-around schools, and the Common Core standards. Each of these reforms suggests a possible variable: standards, curriculum, leadership, teacher quality, or teacher evaluation that will be the lever for change and reform. Federal, state, and local policymakers dutifully implement one reform, and then the next, and hope for change.

Given this political and cultural context, policymakers want to capitalize on research that correlates positive school climate and better student outcomes. School climate is composed of many components including strong teacher-student relationships, which are separately associated with improved student engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004; Murdock, Anderman, & Hodge,

2007; Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011) and motivation (Cornelius-White, 2007; Wentzel, 1997; Wubbles & Breckelmans, 2005). Efforts to improve teacher-student relationships focus on a variable that schools may influence, and recent attempts to focus on and measure this have entered into the discourse on educational reform. Researchers (Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Hamre, & Pianta, 2010; Hamre & Pianta, 2001) assert that improving teacher-student interactions and relationships will improve student achievement outcomes as measured by standardized achievement assessments.

Efforts to define the constructs and measure teacher-student relationships produce data indicating variability between teachers and schools with regard to the quality of teacher-student relationships (Cornelius-White, 2007; Hafen, Allen, Mikami, Gregory, Hamre, & Pianta, 2012; Roorda et al., 2011). When schools and districts try to improve school climate and teacher-student relationships they often try to assess its presence, or lack thereof, using technical quantitative tools (e.g., rating scales or average scores across a school) based on research conducted using post-positivistic, scientifically-based research that emphasizes efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Using this data they prescribe new strategies and practices expecting the intended change to occur. Researchers, employing a post-positivistic research paradigm, define and measure teacher-student relationships, and policymakers who use this research frequently ignore the normative and political considerations involved in education reform (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Oakes, Quartz, Gong, Guiton, & Lipton, 1993). The technical approach to improving teacher-student relationships leaves school-level administrators and teachers aware of the problem, but without information that is useful in trying to change the relationships.

While there are alternative approaches that employ the interpretive research paradigm to researching and understanding education reform (Datnow et al., 2002; Hall & McGinty, 1997; Oakes et al., 1993), post-positivistic and technical-rational approaches remain dominant for researchers and policymakers, and therefore ubiquitous for practitioners. Most researchers work under the technical-rational assumptions in their examination of problems including studying teacher-student relationships as a mediating variable for achievement outcomes; as do policymakers who base their reform strategies on this incomplete, narrow perspective. This study examines how an interpretivist approach, employing conceptual frameworks of technical-normative-political reform and co-construction, to the study of improving the teacher-student relationships sheds light on the current policies and practices shaping this important area of reform.

Statement of Problem

Current research mostly examines teacher-student relationships from a post-positivistic, objectivist, external point of view by measuring and quantifying teacher-student relationships based on surveys and standardized classroom-level observations. For example, instruments like the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta & Hamre, 2009) use a classroom observation tool to measure teacher-student interactions. While these measures purport to be context-free and universal measures of constructs, because researchers construct them using post-positivistic research paradigms that are narrow and disposed toward technical efficiency, they may ignore local, cultural, and contextual factors and may not comport with teachers' actual definitions and experiences of teacher-student relationships.

For many political and organizational reasons (Cuban, 2008; Hess, 1999), districts, including the district identified for this study, are quick to adopt externally developed quantitative measures of constructs such as teacher-student relationships (like CLASS). While these quantitative approaches claim to measure climate and relationships, there is little ethnographic or qualitative examination of what these constructs mean to practicing teachers and how contextual factors such as school-level politics, culture, and norms influence the development of teacher-student relationships. The lack of research on the definition and process of teacher-student relationships from the teacher's lived experience hinders efforts to address variation in relationships. There is little insight into the unique obstacles, beliefs, and values in individual schools. Understanding this local context is essential for reform and change to occur. The more nuanced perceptions and reactions gathered from teachers about the definition of and role of teacher-student relationships provides critical, context-specific data to help school communities better understand why relationships are more or less positive in each school and what political and normative aspects policymakers and implementers need to consider when trying to improve teacher-student relationships.

Context of the Study

In the summer of 2010 Waverly (pseudonym for the identified district) adopted the CLASS model as a part of their district-wide program evaluation system. The tool scores teachers in three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Each of these domains is comprised of dimensions, indicators, and behavioral markers. Observers trained to use the tool observe teachers for 25 minute cycles and score teachers on the dimensions based on the presence of the behavioral markers listed on the tool. Waverly sponsored a cohort of employees trained by CLASS expert trainers to use the observation tool. During the first year

this cohort observed classrooms as a part of the program evaluation process for content-area departments. During 2011-2012 the same cohort observed all teachers in all the secondary schools using the CLASS tool. The district reported the results of these observations to the schools in the fall of 2012. The results included an average score for each school for each of the domains and dimensions compared with national and district scores. Waverly continues to use the observation tool for content area program evaluation. The data gathered for these evaluations is reported by level (elementary, middle, high) and not by school or teacher.

The instrument measures teacher-student interactions as defined by the researchers, but it does not investigate these relationships from the teacher's point of view, nor do they provide data on normative or political aspects of the school, teacher understanding of the relationships, or school-level factors that may also explain the quality of teacher-student relationships in a school. Teacher-student relationships occur within district and school contexts that may influence the nature and quality of those relationships. Standardized measurements used as an evaluation tool aimed to reform schools may miss the political and normative contexts of reform.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine how teachers in Waverly define and understand teacher-student relationships and their perceptions of how school-level factors associated with organization, culture, and politics influence these relationships. By providing political and normative context to the technical approach taken by Waverly, the study also investigated how teacher definitions of teacher-student relationships compare with the definitions embedded in the CLASS tool. Comparing the various approaches to measuring teacher-student

relationships provided an important step in the direction of understanding the role these technical, evidence-based tools play in school reform.

General Research Question

This study focused on exploring what is happening in teacher-student relationships, what actions teachers take and why, and what these relationships mean to teachers. The questions focus on relationships and their development in a specific school context, and teachers' perspective on how they construct meaning relative to these relationships (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The general research question for this study was: What school-level political and normative factors do teachers identify as influencing the definition, formation, and maintenance of teacher-student relationships in secondary schools in Waverly and how do teacher perspectives comport with the assumptions underlying the technical tools used by the district to measure these constructs?

Research Approach and Conceptual Framework

The study used an interpretive, multiple case study methodology (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1982) as the structure for collecting, analyzing, and presenting data. Oakes et al.'s, (1993) political-normative-technical reform lens and Datnow et al.'s (2002) co-construction framework provided the guiding conceptual framework for the study. Discussion of both frameworks follows in the Methodology chapter.

The following chapter highlights the research literature on student outcomes associated with teacher-student relationships and the different approaches to defining these relationships. A discussion of the studies that consider the influence of school-level (technical, political, and normative) factors on teacher-student relationships follows with an analysis of the

methodological weaknesses of the reviewed studies. Finally, the last section provides a more detailed review of interpretive approaches to policy implementation studies and critiques of the technical, evidence-based approach to school reform.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the research literature focuses on teacher-student relationships including the impact of school-level factors, and interpretive approaches to policy implementation. In the search for variables that impact student outcomes research indicates that the relationship between teachers and students is a critical component (e.g., Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Cornelius-White, 2005; Roorda et al., 2011). Teacher-student relationships, broadly defined, influence a range of student outcomes including affective, behavioral, and academic variables. The role of teacher-student relationships is of particular interest because it is an area where schools and districts have some influence and ability to shape interventions.

Why Teacher-Student Relationships Matter

Student Motivation

One area with significant research is the influence of teacher-student relationships on student motivation in school. Wentzel (1997) surveyed students in 6th and 8th grade and their perceptions of whether their 8th grade teachers cared. Even when controlling for past motivation, behavior, and psychological distress these perceptions explained, in part, changes in student motivation between the two grades. In Wubbels and Breckelmans' (2005) meta-analysis they found that all the included studies found a positive relationship between influence and proximity and affective outcomes (subject-specific motivation). Generally, the effects of teacher proximity (a cooperative classroom environment, leadership, structure) were stronger than teacher influence (dominance v. submission).

Cornelius-White's (2007) meta-analysis found that person-centered education, defined by nine independent variables (empathy, warmth, genuineness, non-directivity, higher order thinking, encouraging learning/challenge, and adapting to individual and social differences), had

large associations with student's motivation to learn, as well as, student satisfaction and student participation. Resnick et al. (2007) analyzed the Add Health data and found that school connectedness (influenced by perceived teacher caring and high expectations for performance) is a protective factor for adolescents and associated with lower emotional distress and other risky behaviors. Learner and Kruger (1997) found that strong attachments with teachers were related to more positive self-concept and, in turn, greater academic motivation.

Student Engagement

Teacher-student relationships can also impact student engagement. Engagement in school is an important variable because it can be a predictor of student achievement and behavior in school. In Klem and Connell's (2004) study they used measures of engagement from both the teacher and student perspective and paired this data with student records. Overall, they found that when students felt teachers created caring and structured learning environments with high expectations, students reported higher levels of engagement. Additionally, "middle school students were almost three times more likely to report engagement if they experienced highly supportive teachers" (p. 270).

In Murdock et al.'s (2000) study of 7th and 9th graders they measured the motivational context created by teachers by investigating levels of disrespect and criticism, encouragement, and long-term expectations for success. Students reported that there were lower levels of disrespect and criticism and more positive experiences with expectations in 9th grade than in 7th grade. Student academic self-concept related to these reports, but also the values students developed in high school about school in general.

Roorda et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis found that associations between teacher-student relationships and student engagement were substantial. In particular this review found that

affective teacher-student relationships were important and potentially more influential for secondary level students than primary level students. Additionally, the review found support for previous findings (Hamre & Pianta, 2001) that teacher-student relationships are more influential for students with low socio-economic status than students with high socio-economic status. The results also highlighted that negative teacher-student relationships were more detrimental for students that are academically at-risk than those students not identified as at-risk. There was less evidence to support differential associations based on ethnicity.

Hafen et al. (2011) surveyed high school students at the beginning of the year and the end of the year with questions about autonomy, teacher connection, and academic competence. They aggregated this data to create a measure of student perceptions of the classroom. The teachers also videotaped themselves and outside observers scored these lessons using the CLASS tool to measure observed student engagement. The researchers found that students with higher levels of perceived autonomy at the beginning of the year were more likely to report being engaged and were more likely to be observed as engaged at the end of the year. While students generally rated their autonomy as low across the 34 classrooms, the study does indicate that when autonomy is higher it predicts improved student engagement.

Related to student engagement is a student's attitude towards the subject matter. Midgley, Feldlaufer, and Eccles (1989) studied student's perceptions of teacher caring before entering junior high and afterwards. Students who had a positive rating of their math teacher in 6th grade and a negative rating in 7th grade had negative attitudes towards math in general. Those who went from negative to positive had a positive attitude towards math in general. The student's perception of their relationship with the teacher was related to the student's overall attitude towards math. Brewster and Bowen (2004) studied teacher-student and parent-student

relationships for Latino middle school students. They found that as student's perceptions of teacher support increased so did their perception of school meaningfulness.

Behavioral Outcomes

Teacher-student relationships can also impact behavioral outcomes including classroom behavior, discipline referrals, and attendance. Gregory and Ripski (2008) studied the relationship between high school teachers' approach to discipline and student reported defiant behavior. They found that teachers using a relational approach to discipline, a combination of providing positive reinforcement and showing care and attention to individual needs, had fewer students reporting defiant behavior in the class. One important mediating variable was high levels of student trust in the teachers' authority. Teachers who highlighted the importance of building relationships and knowing their students had students that rated them as very trustworthy. In turn, they also had lower rates of student defiance. Similarly, teachers with a relational approach to discipline also experienced more cooperative behavior from students. In her analysis of middle school students Murdock (1999) found that student's perceptions of teacher expectations, disinterest, and criticism related to behavior problems. Students who perceived more disinterest/criticism were more likely to have discipline issues in class.

Brewster and Bowen (2004) also found that increases in student perceptions of teacher support led to a decrease in levels of problem behavior for middle school Latino students. When considering teacher support, the influence of parent support on problem behavior was insignificant. In Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder's (2004) study of high school students they found that all groups of students (regardless of race or gender) were less likely to get into trouble at school when they had positive views of teachers. Additionally, Brewster and Bowen (2004) found that teacher support was an important factor contributing to student attendance.

Achievement Outcomes

In general, most studies trying to link teacher-student relationships and achievement use motivation, engagement, and other behavioral outcomes as mediating variables. There are, however, a few studies that looked directly at the relationship between relationships and student achievement. Goodenow's (1993) study of middle school students found that levels of perceived teacher support predicted final grades in the student's English classes. Similarly, Wentzel (2002) found that teacher expectations predicted final grades in that specific subject for middle school students. All students in Crosnoe et al.'s (2004) study had higher grades when they had positive views of their teachers. Konishi, Hymel, Zumbo, and Li (2010) found that students with positive perceptions of their relationships with teachers demonstrated higher achievement in both math and reading. Murray and Malmgren (2005) conducted an intervention that examined the effects of a teacher-student relationship program on social, emotional, and academic measures. While the program did not indicate an impact on social or emotional measures there was a positive effect on the grade point average of participating students.

There is also some longitudinal research on the relationship between early teacher-student relationships and later behavioral and academic outcomes. While Hamre and Pianta (2001) found that "negativity in teacher–child relationships, marked by conflict and overdependency, emerged as a significant predictor of a wide range of academic and behavioral outcomes, even when controlling for other early indicators of these outcomes" (p. 634) the relationships tended to be stronger predictors of behavioral outcomes than academic outcomes.

In more recent work Allen et al. (2010) videotaped teachers of secondary students for 40 minutes and used the CLASS observation tool to assess teacher-student interactions during the

lesson. They measured student achievement using scores on the state standardized test. The findings from the study indicate that

> teachers' ability to establish a positive emotional climate, their sensitivity to student needs, and their structuring of their classroom and lessons in ways that recognize adolescents' needs for a sense of autonomy and control, for an active role in their learning, and for opportunities for peer interaction were all associated with higher relative student gains in achievement (p. 2).

Defining and Measuring Teacher-student Relationships

The robust literature on teacher-student relationships shows that they impact student outcomes in many ways but many of the studies define these relationships differently. Different studies analyze various components of the relationship, but whether researchers study caring, attachment, supportiveness, or expectations, all of these fall under the umbrella of teacher-student relationships. Understanding and defining these components of teacher-student relationships is essential to studying and measuring their impact on student outcomes.

Pianta (1999) uses general systems theory to explain the complex process of teacher-student relationships. In order to understand the behavior of individual parts of the system you have to consider those behaviors in relation to the whole and to the larger context. Interpersonal relationships including teacher-student relationships are dyadic and take time to develop. These relationships shape the behavior of both the individuals involved. The behaviors of both individuals, and each person's perceptions of the behaviors, comprise the relationship. The relationship is central to learning because it does impact behavior and motivation. Instruction and learning are social processes impacted by motivation and the wider context (family, school district, state government, etc.).

Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) used the communicative systems approach to analyze teacher-student relationships. According to this approach every form of communication has content. You cannot not communicate when in the presence of another person. In this study they focus on the student's perceptions of the teacher and what occurs in the classroom rather than the intentions of the teacher. Over time their mutual perceptions are confirmed and they evolve into patterns that then influence reactions.

Somewhat related are explanations of teacher-student relationships based on social-motivational theories such as the self-determination theory. In this case, children are motivated by their need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Teachers are able to help meet these needs by caring for students, providing structure, and giving them opportunities for autonomy (Roorda et al., 2011). Skinner and Belmont (1993) found that when these needs are met, students' engagement in learning will increase. These studies found that relatedness and involvement led to increased emotional security and were the most significant factors in increasing engagement in school. Connell and Welborn's (1991) self-system model states that experiencing support from teachers through structure, autonomy support, and involvement impacts engagement in school and ultimately school performance and commitment (as seen in test scores and attendance).

Alternatively, the classical humanistic approach to education emphasizes teacher empathy, unconditional positive regard, genuineness, non-directivity, and the encouragement of critical theory (Cornelius-White, 2007). Rogers (1969) described the relationship between the learner and facilitator that yields significant learning as one with genuine trust, empathy, and flexibility. An essential ingredient in learning was quality teacher-student relationships.

McCombs (2004) also highlighted the importance of relational practices such as having student-centered beliefs, respecting the views of students and adapting to differences amongst students.

Others explain teacher-student relationships using attachment theory. Attachment theory posits that "positive relationships between parents and children promote feelings of security in the child. Emotional security in turn is considered to be a necessary precondition for exploration of the environment" (Roorda et al., 2011, p. 494). Attachment is important in teaching and classroom environments because having a secure attachment allows the child to explore freely, but it is also the basis for socializing children. Children adopt the behavior and values of the adults to whom they are attached (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Not all teacher-student relationships are attachment-like because some relationships fulfill some of the characteristics and functions of attachment, but not all.

Pianta (1999) and Pianta, Nimetz, and Bennett (1997) explain through an extended attachment perspective that teachers can provide emotional security and a base for exploration of the learning environment and engagement in learning. In defining the teacher-student relationship from the extended attachment perspective, researchers compare measures of closeness, conflict, and dependency, with closeness being associated with positive teacher-student relationships (Roorda et al., 2011).

Noddings (1992) contributes to the teacher-student relationship literature with her discourse on caring and the importance of caring in the school setting. She defines caring as having four components: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Teachers need to model caring behavior for their students, create space for dialogue where knowledge, skills, and empathy are shared. Students need opportunities to practice caring behaviors and teachers need

to affirm and encourage the best in their students. These components make up a caring relationship between teachers and students.

Large meta-analyses (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011) of studies of the associations between teacher-student relationships and affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes include a wide range of variables. Some studies look holistically at teacher-student relationships while others look at select variables. For example Cornelius-White (2007) included studies using empathy, warmth, genuineness, non-directivity, higher order thinking, encouraging learning/challenge, and adapting to individual and social differences as independent variables. Roorda et al. (2011) used the keywords closeness, attachment, warmth, support, relatedness, involvement, affiliation, affection, affect, empathy, trust, sensitivity, responsive, like/liking, care/caring, conflict, neglect, rejection, dislike, negativity, anger, and concern to find studies to include in their meta-analysis. The range of descriptors here highlights one of the difficulties in measuring the influence of teacher-student relationships on student outcomes. Each of these individual variables yields results of interest but there is also a need for a more holistic definition of teacher-student relationships (Gehlbach, Brinkworth, & Harris, 2011).

A more holistic definition of teacher-student relationships also requires researchers to consider whose perspective is of interest (Gehlbach et al., 2011). Because the teacher-student relationship is dyadic it is important to understand the perceptions of both members of the relationship. Muller (2001) includes the perspective of both teachers and students in her study of the impact of teacher-student relationships on math achievement. Teacher's perceptions that students put in academic effort and student's perceptions of whether teachers cared had an important impact for students described as at-risk. Gehlbach et al. (2011) developed a new instrument that measures teacher-student relationships holistically by incorporating questions

that address the asymmetries in the relationship and a measure of positivity and negativity because the relationships could be positive, negative, neither, or both.

Wubbels and Brekelmans (2005) used another measure of teacher-student relationships based on the Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behavior (MITB) which uses two dimensions (influence and proximity) to explain eight types of teacher behavior: leading, helpful/friendly, understanding, student responsibility and freedom, uncertain, dissatisfied, admonishing, and strict. The Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) based on the MITB only elicits feedback from students on their perceptions of their current teacher.

School-level Factors (Technical, Normative, Political) Impacting Teacher-student Relationships

Teacher-student relationships are an important component in student learning and there continues to be variability between teachers and schools on measures of teacher-student relationships. Some of this variability is explained by interactions between individual teachers and students in the classroom, but school-level factors also account for variability in teacher-student relationships in and between schools.

One factor associated with positive teacher-student relationships is school size (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Gladden, 1998). In small schools it is easier for relationships to develop between teachers and students. There is also greater accountability for administrators, teachers, students, and parents to their goals and to one another (Lawrence, 2004). Ancess (2003) found that individuals are more accessible in small schools and students in the study consistently cited "the single factor most responsible for turning them around, from improving their self-confidence and academic performance, was their relationship with a teacher or administrator" (p. 29). McNeely, Nunnemaker, and Blum (2002) used a nationally representative study of secondary students and

found that students were more connected with their school when the size of the school was smaller. While school size, particularly on the secondary level, has been a focus of many current reform efforts, garnering funding from large scale foundations, size is not the only school-level factor needed to ensure positive teacher-student relationships in schools.

Hamre and Pianta (2006) suggest several school-level factors that influence teacher-student relationships, including increasing the amount of time that teachers and students spend together, for example, changing the daily schedule to increase time together. Ancess (2003) also found that teachers and students needed to have regular, planned, and unplanned time together. Raider-Roth's (2005) study of relationships found that redesigning the daily schedule to give students more time with teachers promoted improved teacher-student relationships. In this same vein, Bergin and Bergin (2009) recommend decreasing the number of transitions in the daily schedule so students have more continuous time with given teachers.

Another school-level factor beyond school size and class schedules is "providing for continuity of people and place" (Bergin & Bergin, 2009, p. 160). Examples include expanding the network of adults who are available to students (Hamre & Pianta, 2006), and developing an advisory system where teachers and students work together over a period of years to provide time and space for students and teachers to form better relationships (Ancess, 2003; Sullo, 2007). Noddings (1984) and McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones (2010) discuss the use of "looping" as a way to improve relationships by allowing for greater continuity in the teaching and learning experience. Additionally, Bergin and Bergin (2009) suggest keeping students in the same school building for a longer period of time to decrease transitions and allow teachers and students to maintain relationships for a longer period of time.

Other school-level factors that impact teacher-student relationships include those focused on school values and wide involvement in decision making. Battistich, Solomon, Watson, and Schaps (1997) found that opportunities for teacher and student influence in the community related to improved teacher-student relationships. Diero (1996) had similar findings citing school wide structures designed to help with group problem solving such as team teaching, parent-student-teacher conferences, and weekly staff meetings that related to improved relationships. Strong support from administrators for building and maintaining supportive relationships, including frequent contact with nurturing principals, and flexibility with teachers' schedules to increase time spent with students were important school-level factors. Modeling caring relationships from the top down (administrators to teachers) and developing disciplinary policies that "carry high expectations for students while fostering caring relationships" (Hamre & Pianta, 2006, p. 54) helped in the development of strong relationships in schools.

Teacher-student relationships are a critical component of school and classroom climate and have wide reaching influence on affective, behavioral and academic outcomes for students. There are many factors associated with the development of these relationships, but the role of school-level factors is often overlooked. District and school-level administrators can actively support the development of these important relationships by taking steps to address the school-level factors discussed above. Beyond school size, it is important for administrators and teachers to consider the impact of scheduling, teaching assignments, and school values and norms on the development of strong and positive teacher-student relationships.

Methodological Weaknesses

While each of these studies contributes to a broad base of knowledge about teacher-student relationships and why they matter in schools, most of the studies use a post-positivist approach in

an attempt to isolate the impact of relationships on different variables or to measure the quality/quantity of relationships in a school. Few of these studies provide context-specific information on how or why relationships were present. They indicate correlations between relationships and outcomes (engagement, achievement, etc.) but include little explanation of how or why. These studies have shortcomings that perhaps make them appear more rigorous but also perhaps less relevant or valid.

Specifically, the reviewed studies that use the CLASS observation tool attempt to isolate teacher-student relationships and classroom climate without consideration of school and classroom context (Allen et al., 2010; Hafen et al., 2012). These studies rely on a standardized assessment of classroom interactions and try to hold classroom and student variables constant in their analysis. The length of the teacher observations in these studies ranges from 15-40 minutes, and researchers use this single observation to broadly rate teacher-student interactions and draw conclusions about the impact of teacher-student interactions on student achievement and other outcome variables (Hafen et al., 2012). The generalizability of the results is questionable because the researchers ignore the daily rhythms of classrooms and the influence of the school environment which might impact the findings. Education interventions and reforms never occur in context-neutral settings so the results of this type of post-positivist research have limited applicability. These examples of post-positivist research seek statistically significant variables to generalize in other cases, but it is hard to prove that the lessons will apply to other cases given that the contexts will be different. In contrast, an interpretive approach to studying teacher-student relationships gathers rich information on the classroom and school context so the researcher can look at two similar cases and apply lessons from one to another (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Studies using the CLASS tool also attempt to separate human behavior from the meaning and purpose humans attach to their behavior. These studies and other post-positivist research try to isolate and exclude the human decision-making component of behavior rather than highlighting these human decisions. In the studies using CLASS, researchers do not consult with teachers for explanations or insight into their decision-making. On the other hand, an interpretive approach could be more successful in offering potential explanations for why and how behaviors or processes occur.

The CLASS tool also fails to consider the teacher perspective or the possibility of multiple perspectives or realities. For example, these studies hypothesize that certain teacher behaviors impact student outcomes and they try to summarize these behaviors in a 25 minute observation rather than seeking to understand the reality experienced by both teachers and students over the course of an entire school year. Alternatively, an interpretive approach would describe and interpret an experience or behavior based on the lived experiences and perspectives of the teachers and students. This approach goes beyond determining if a hypothesis is true or false and instead collects data that can help explain why (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Post-positivist research on teacher-student relationships has value, but interpretive approaches are an essential complement. Research focused on large populations provides data and findings with breadth while interpretive approaches offer more depth; "both approaches are necessary for a sound development of social science" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 87).

Interpretive Approaches to Policy Implementation in School Reform

Guba (1984; 1985) calls for and describes an interpretive approach to policy analysis. These articles highlight the importance of researchers specifying how they define policy and urge them to refrain from approaching the study of policy from the perspective of searching for

universal cause and effect assertions. There are, according to Guba (1984), a wide range of definitions of policy. Guba outlines eight possible definitions and discusses the impact of these definitions on the data, sources, methods, and outcomes of policy analysis. The eight different definitions of policy include policy as (a) an assertion of intents or goals; (b) the accumulated standing decisions of a governing body; (c) a guide to discretionary action; (d) a strategy undertaken to solve or ameliorate a problem; (e) a sanctioned behavior; (f) a norm of conduct characterized by consistency and regularity; (g) the output of the policymaking system; and (h) the effect of the policymaking and policy-implementing system as experienced by the client. Guba (1984) argues that the goal and purpose of the analysis should drive the definition of policy in any given study and the ethical analyst should clearly state the definition used in the study. For example, if the definition relates to the intentions or goals of the policy the results of the study will differ from one where the analyst defines policy as the experience of the client.

Beyond the policy definition problem, Guba (1985) outlines other weaknesses of post-positivist approaches to policy analysis that over-rely on scientific defensibility, underappreciate the uncertainty of human behavior, and potentially disenfranchise the groups affected by policies (p. 15). Given these concerns, Guba (1985) describes three levels of policy: policy-in-intention which includes framing, drafting, and legislating policy; policy-in-implementation which focuses on carrying out particular programs in the name of policy; and policy-in-experience which focuses on those who receive or benefit from the policy. All these levels of policy occur in a context that already exists and will continue to exist after the policy ends or changes. Guba (1985) questions post-positivistic policy analysis that tries to answer the question, “What is the result of a policy?” because the question does not define the policy or the policy level, nor does it take into consideration the values and context inherent in policymaking.

In one interpretive approach, Hall and McGinty (1997) examined how the Missouri Department of Education used an advisory committee to design a career ladder program for teachers based on skeletal legislation. The advisory committee met over the course of a year to determine the purpose of the career ladder and to design a framework for local school districts. In their analysis of this policy process, Hall and McGinty (1997) explained how policy is made after state legislatures pass a law, how policy action in different sites and phases has consequences for future activity, and how policy is linked between sites and phases. Through this study they also developed their transformation of intentions framework for studying policy implementation with implications for a more cohesive approach to policy research that accounts for context, power, resources, linkages, and conventions.

Oakes et al. (1993) also used an interpretive approach to analyze an education reform effort to improve middle schools. They argued that the technical and structural aspects of middle school reform would not result in substantive reform unless policymakers and district leaders also considered the necessary normative and political changes. The study specifically outlines the political and normative changes needed to accompany each of the technical aspects of middle school reform so it can be successful. Additionally, they offer broad suggestions for improving the implementation of education reform including taking a comprehensive approach, building communities of inquiry, encouraging constructive conflict, and providing scaffolding for changing schools.

Datnow et al. (2002) explored "what happens when school design reforms go to scale" (p. 2). They examined how and why districts and schools implement and scale-up externally-developed reform models such as Success for All, AVID (Achievement Via Individual Achievement), and Core Knowledge. They found that reform implementation is not a linear

process and it is highly dependent on context. Specifically, they found that power and political relationships shaped the adoption and implementation process, local practitioners adapted the reforms to the cultural and political constraints of their setting, and the success or failure of the reforms was a "joint accomplishment of multiple actors…existing within a particular set of cultural, structural, and political arrangements" (p. 141).

Summary

Policymakers generally approach education reform from a technical perspective with a focus on strategies and structures without considering local normative and political perspectives. Efforts to improve teacher-student relationships are no different. We also know that researchers can define and understand the teacher-student relationship construct from many different perspectives, the researcher's perspective, the district administrator's perspective, the principal's perspective, the teacher's perspective or the students' perspective. These relationships (defined broadly) are an important variable, positively associated with a range of student outcomes such as motivation, engagement, behavior, and achievement. While these relationships constitute a variable that schools could directly impact, there is little research on the school-level factors that influence their development and maintenance. When districts adopt a technical approach to improving teacher-student relationships they may adopt an externally derived framework for examining and measuring these relationships that are context-free and perhaps irrelevant to the local situation. These approaches do not adequately consider the local context or the political and normative factors that influence these relationships. There is limited research on how teachers define teacher-student relationships; how teachers define and make sense of school-level factors that may influence these relationships; and how externally derived measures of teacher-student relationships comport with teachers' actual lived experiences.

This study addressed these problems by identifying the school-level political and normative factors that teachers identified as influencing the definition, formation, and maintenance of teacher-student relationships in secondary schools in Waverly. Additionally, it addressed the following specific research questions:

1. How do teachers define teacher-student relationships?
2. From the perspectives of teachers and principals, how do school-level factors influence teacher definitions of teacher-student relationships?
3. According to teachers and principals, what school-level factors influence the process of teacher-student relationships?
4. How do the teacher definitions of teacher-student relationships compare with the definitions embedded in the CLASS tool?
5. How is the CLASS tool used in the district and school evaluation process?

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

Rationale for an Interpretive Design

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers define and make sense of teacher-student relationships and to understand from their perspectives how school-level factors associated with organization, culture, and politics influence these relationships. By including the political and normative contexts to the technical approach taken by districts, the study also examined how teacher definitions of teacher-student relationships compared with the definitions embedded in the evidence-based CLASS model. These research questions attended to the complexity of teacher-student relationships and sought to understand how teachers interpret the quality of their interactions with students. These questions were, therefore, best answered by using an interpretive, qualitative, multiple case study methodology as the research framework. These methods that are "pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.2) allowed the voices of teachers to uncover key knowledge about the development and presence of teacher-student relationships in schools. The following chapter discusses the methodological assumptions and research design.

Methodological Assumptions

Research paradigm. The design of any study is grounded in the assumptions of the researcher about the nature of existence (ontology) and the nature of knowledge building (epistemology). These assumptions, in turn, influence the methodology of the study. From the interpretive perspective the world is comprised of multiple realities that are socially and experientially constructed, and dependent on the individual people who make meaning of their experiences in particular contexts. Truth is subjective and the researcher seeks the meaning

making perspective of the individual experience. The researcher "tries to understand the social world as it is (status quo) from the perspective of individual experience, hence an interest in subjective world views" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 46) and an interpretation of how people act in their environment. When the researcher and the participants interact they create knowledge.

These assumptions influence the methodology pursued in the study. In an interpretive approach the methodology requires dialogue and interaction between the investigator and the subjects to create individual constructions. The researcher interprets, compares, and contrasts the constructions to come to a consensus construction that is more informed than previous ideas (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The interpretive approach informs this study, as the primary goal was an understanding of the individual experiences teachers have with developing and sustaining teacher-student relationships in their schools. These experiences are not universal and differ between individuals and schools.

Interpretive approaches to research attempt to understand what is happening in the social world and what meaning subjects give to their actions. According to Erickson (1986), they also try to understand how those actions are situated in the setting as a whole (classroom, building, district) and how it compares with other ways of organizing life. There are many reasons the field of education benefits from research that asks these questions. Erickson (1986) cites several reasons including illuminating the invisibility of everyday life, the need for specific understanding of concrete details of practice, the need to consider the local meanings of actions for the people involved, and the need for comparative understanding of different social settings (beyond the local setting). The underlying assumptions of an interpretive approach lead to research that:

> Entails immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for study, values and seeks to discover participants' perspectives on their worlds, views inquiry as an interactive process between the research and the participants, is both descriptive and analytic, and relies on people's words and observable behavior as the primary data. (Marshall & Rossman, 2003, p. 7)

The evidence-based approach to school reform highlights research that purports to be context-neutral and predictive, yet context is essential to understanding why positive relationships develop in some instances while negative relationships are the norm in others. Relationships are complex and take place as a part of everyday life which includes, the classroom context but also external factors, such as resources, the principal, and school norms. Rather than trying to control an experience by selecting a random sample or standardizing the variables, the interpretive approach looks at the social world holistically and tries to describe and interpret what the researcher observes (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The interactions of teachers and students are significantly influenced by the context in which they occur, so it is particularly important to study these relationships in their specific natural setting. The researcher can observe and seek to understand the complexities of the relationships from the perspective of the teachers while also taking into account the influence of the school environment. Systematically studying people's lived experiences in the field rather than in a laboratory is central to this research approach (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

From the interpretive point of view the individual takes action based on their interpretations of meaning. A teacher's understanding or interpretation of "teacher-student relationships" influences the actions they will take towards a given student or group of students. Individual and school cultures create ways of sharing systems of meaning that shape the way

individuals make meaning of different terms, situations, and experiences (Erickson, 1986). While these cultures are influential, interpretive approaches also assume that even within the same culture two people will make meaning in different ways and take different action based on their own interpretation. In this approach actions are always open to reinterpretation and change, and even though two teachers may work in the same building or district there are differences in their classrooms and ways of being (Erickson, 1986).

This study involved an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences with the meaning of teacher-student relationships and how those experiences compare with data collected in a technical fashion that tries to quantify relationships and climate. An implicit assumption of this study is that an external, technical approach to measuring and improving teacher-student relationships does not typically value the knowledge, skills, and experience teachers have with building and sustaining these relationships. This knowledge should, in fact, be an important component of school and district policy on strengthening relationships and an interpretive approach allowed the researcher to explore if and why district policy was at odds with the knowledge and practice of teachers (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The exploratory nature of the research questions stressed the importance of the teacher perspective and how teachers' make meaning from their experiences.

Interpretive research also requires reflection and sensitivity on the part of the researcher. While the research paradigm guides the work from the beginning, the researcher often changes and refines it throughout the research process highlighting the emergent and iterative nature of qualitative research. The data collection and analysis process was not linear, but rather as the researcher learned more about the project and reflected on the knowledge gained, she considered future questions and ideas that moved the study forward (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This research

valued the particular and sought to understand a specific situation rather than relying on generalizations and predictive theory, in order to uncover important knowledge about how human processes, such as the development of relationships, unfold.

Throughout the research process the goal of the researcher was to describe, analyze, and interpret the data. This approach allowed for deep insight into the studied process and an understanding of what occurred and why it occurred. This was a different research goal than traditional post-positivist approaches to studying education which Erickson (1986) characterizes as "searches for general characteristics of the analytically generalized effective teacher" (p. 130). The interpretive approach does not seek a universally true set of attributes that can be applied to all teachers in all schools, but rather an understanding of relationships that occur in specific, concrete circumstances with a specific teacher and specific students.

By interpreting the lived experiences of the teachers with regards to teacher-student relationships, the researcher made meaning of what she learned about teacher experiences, the factors that influenced these relationships in different contexts and how these observations compared with established technical approaches to defining and measuring relationships. This allowed for finding "*concrete universals,* arrived at by studying a specific case in great detail and then comparing it with other cases studied in equally great detail" (Erickson, 1986, p. 130).

Finally, interpretive approaches to research (Datnow et al., 2002; Guba, 1985; Hall & McGinty, 1997; Oakes et al., 1993;) use multiple methods to understand people and their interactions, rather than relying on only one type of data to draw conclusions. The words and observable behaviors of teachers and students provided the data the researcher analyzed and interpreted. This study includes the voices of teachers in the discussion of how and why teachers

and students develop and sustain relationships. The research questions asked about what was happening in the schools with regards to relationships and the meaning that teachers made about these relationships and the school-level factors that influenced them.

Conceptual framework. Over time, when education reform efforts fail to impact student outcomes, policymakers identify the next key variable and begin reform efforts anew. One reason for this cycle is that policymakers typically approach reform efforts from a technical or rational perspective and ignore the political and normative considerations that are essential for successful reform (Datnow et al., 2002). Two conceptual frameworks act as sensitizing devices in this study of education reform and teachers' sense making of teacher-student relationships: the transformation of policy intentions (Hall & McGinty, 1997) and the technical-political-normative perspectives as outlined by Oakes et al. (1993) and Datnow et al. (2002).

Technical-rational perspective on school reform. The technical-rational approach to education reform benefits from the prominence of scientific realism which dominated the evaluation of social programs beginning with the 1960s Great Society reforms (House, 1991). The influence of scientific realism persists in education today with a stark emphasis on scientifically-based or evidence-based reforms. No Child Left Behind promoted evidence-based reform, highlighting randomized, controlled, experimental design studies as the highly preferred, if not required standard for education research and practice. Policymakers criticized previous education research as lacking in quality and relevance and the pendulum swung towards prioritizing reforms justified by empirical evidence that "proved" effectiveness (Biesta, 2007).

The focus on evidence-based research and reforms persists despite critiques from some policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. Criticisms of this approach to research and reform

include concerns about the appropriateness of comparing "evidence" in medicine and education; the positivistic assumptions that discount context and lead to a narrow conception of research; and the top-down, managerial approach to education improvement it promotes (Biesta, 2007). Additionally, an over-reliance on evidence-based research restricts "the scope of decision making to questions about effectivity and effectiveness but that also restricts the opportunities for participation in educational decision-making" (Biesta, 2007, p. 6). Researchers, working under the assumptions of randomization and controlled environments, and practitioners, living with the realities of schools and students, find themselves divided and disconnected. This divide can lead to researcher developed programs and tools aimed at efficient measurement and data use, but divorced from the experiences of actual practitioners and not valid in terms of accessing the experiences and meaning perspectives of teachers.

Despite these critiques, the technical approach, advocated by proponents of evidence-based research, is the most commonly accepted approach to examining and evaluating school reforms (Datnow et al., 2002). Datnow et al. (2002) describes the technical approach to school reform as one which relies heavily on classic management theory and utilizes primarily psychometric methods. Implementation of reform through this lens is largely seen as unidirectional with policymakers and outside designers prescribing changes in structures, strategies, and knowledge for districts and schools while practitioners are the passive receivers of information. In this approach there is an emphasis on measuring the fidelity of implementation and if the reform efforts fail, the implementers (local educators) are often seen as the problem. This approach to reform largely discounts context and sees "local variation in implementation as problematic, or as a dilemma rather than as inevitable – that is, a natural, normal routine feature of everyday life in schools" (Datnow et al., 2002, p. 42).

On the other hand the critiques of evidence-based reform and research bring into relief the problems with the approach (Biesta, 2007; Datnow et al., 2002; Oakes et al., 1993). Recent research from socio-cultural perspectives asserts that reform of any system is "complex, value-laden, and politically loaded" (Oakes et al., 1993, p. 461) and the failure to take this into consideration may, in fact, explain the failure of many reform efforts. As long as policymakers, at the national, state, and school district levels only apply technical/rational approaches without considering the cultures and norms of individual schools and districts, reform will not succeed.

Interpretive approaches to education reform and policy implementation. The way researchers approach policy on educational reform has an impact on the definition of the research problem and the conduct of that research. Analysis of policy implementation in any field depends on the definitions of policy and the underlying assumptions used by the analyst. Guba (1984) asserts that the study of social programs has traditionally been approached from a post-positivist, rationalist perspective. He provides a critique of this research perspective, a perspective that comports with the assumptions of the evidence-based school reform movement. Guba asserts that another research perspective, the interpretive research perspective, may be a more appropriate approach to understanding policy and policy implementation. He argues that policies (in-intention, in-implementation, and in-experience) are value-based and socially constructed. Specific interactions in specific settings influence implementation of and experience with policies so that outcomes will necessarily differ depending on the context (over time and space). Hence, Guba provides a description of multiple definitions of the concept of policy to demonstrate that definitions directly impact the data collected, sources used, and outcomes found in a policy analysis (see Literature Review). He argues that since policy is a construct open to

multiple definitions and interpretations, researchers should examine it with a perspective beyond that of the technical, rational, or post-positivist paradigm.

In one such interpretive approach to policy implementation, Hall and McGinty (1997) define policies as "vehicles for the realization of intentions" (p. 441). This theoretical perspective views the policy process as the transformation of intentions, and offers a lens for understanding how power, conventions, and organizational context impact policy. In this framework, intentions are the goals and purposes that motivate various actors to take action. Intentions differ, to include process intentions which are related to advancing the policy process, and content intentions which are specific to the product of the policy. Collective and subgroup interests also impact the policy process and the transformation of intentions. Group consensus and coordination characterize collective interests while conflict and resistance can characterize subgroup (or individual) interests. The policy process happens across time and space and is dependent on power and the ability to mobilize resources. The process also relies on conventions which are the "taken-for-granted ways of understanding, communicating, and doing" (p. 442) that help with efficiency but can limit alternatives. This framework views policy as the transformation of multiple intentions in an "ambiguous, multifaceted, complex, interactive, and dynamic process" (p. 442).

Oakes et al. (1993) take another interpretive approach and analyze reform efforts through technical, normative, and political perspectives. These perspectives:

> Allow us to examine traditional school practices in the context of the beliefs, values, relationships, and power allocations that keep them in place and permit us to consider

> how proposed curricular, organizational, and classroom changes challenge seldom-questioned regularities of school cultures (Oakes et al., 1993, p. 463).

In this framework the technical perspective considers the structures, strategies, and knowledge required by the reform. Reform efforts typically focus on some aspect of knowledge about teaching and learning and how this impacts practices and structures in schools.

An alternative perspective on the same reform would focus on the normative changes required by the school community to implement the reform. In many cases reforms require "a moral foundation that departs significantly from the foundations of current school practice" (Oakes et al., 1993, p. 468). When schools implement reform without changes in norms the new structures, strategies, and knowledge may lead to compliance but not reform or change of existing practices. The political perspective on reform reveals that attention to norms and techniques is critical but insufficient if reform efforts do not address questions of power, resources, and authority. Reform often requires changes in who has the power to make decisions, who gains and loses resources, and who forms coalitions. The process of reform includes decisions about goals, power, participation, and resources – all of which are highly political and "these processes require persuasion, deliberation, and compromise" (Oakes et al., 1993, p. 472).

Similarly, Datnow et al.'s (2002) co-construction perspective on educational reform is also another interpretive alternative to the technical approach, based in socio-cultural theory and employing multiple (often qualitative) methods. Viewing reform through this co-construction lens, local educators and reformers work collaboratively to construct change, and implementation is multidirectional (Datnow et al., 2002). When reform fails or succeeds there is recognition of the role of local circumstances. This interpretive approach relies on the

assumption that "understanding the local politics and social norms that permeate the walls of schools can lead to a better understanding of why educators act the way they do in the face of reform" (Datnow et al., 2002, p. 44).

When analyzed through these lenses it is clear that reform is complicated, rarely sequential, and multi-layered. Successful school reform requires consideration of technical, as well as, normative and political considerations (Oakes et al., 1993; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000). Most policymakers, however, approach school reform from a technical perspective despite the fact that education reform research consistently finds that implementation varies due to local circumstances (Datnow et al., 2002). Policymakers design the policies, channel resources to the districts and schools, offer rewards and consequences, and then local administrators make structural and procedural changes at the district and school-level. Administrators and teachers are then held accountable for the impact of these technical changes on student outcomes. This narrative does not realistically capture how reform works. The process is less rational and technical and in fact depends heavily on local context, relationships, and opportunities (Oakes, 2000, p. 574). The co-construction approach and the technical-political-normative perspectives lens provided the guiding conceptual framework for this study.

Research Design: Multiple Case Study

The research design connects the research paradigm with the skills, assumptions and methods for collecting and analyzing data needed for research in the empirical world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study used a multiple site, implementation case study design that served as an overall strategy to frame the study and give it boundaries and analytic focus (Marshall & Rossman, 1993; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1982).

Case studies seek to understand a larger phenomenon by intensely examining, describing, and analyzing a bounded system (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1988; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Yin (1994) defines a case study as an investigation of a phenomenon, in context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear. Additionally, a case study deals with a situation where there are many variables of interest so the researcher relies on many sources of evidence. The definition of the case study design also includes a broader discussion of its characteristics. Merriam (1988) highlights the key properties of a case study as particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. In being particularistic the design focuses on a particular situation, event, or phenomenon and can be useful in solving practical problems (such as why or how relationships develop differently in some schools compared with others). The descriptive nature of case study design illustrates the complexity in a situation and presents different perspectives, which gives the design a heuristic quality that helps illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, a case study design is inductive as the "generalizations, concepts, and hypotheses emerge from an examination of the data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 13) rather than from predetermined hypotheses. These characteristics lead to a design that is complex and multilayered.

These characteristics undergird the strengths of the case study design. When a researcher's interest is in describing and understanding a complex process, interpretation of a process, or discovery and insight into a process, the case study design is appropriate. Case studies rely on a variety of techniques for data gathering and the researcher immerses herself in the case setting in order to provide "thick description" (Stake, 1995, p. 39). Merriam (1988) cites a strength of the design as the ability to investigate complex social interactions that are situated in real-life settings to produce a rich description of a phenomenon. The case study, in

turn, is useful for generating hypotheses because it offers insight into a phenomenon that may expand the readers' experience and understanding. These hypotheses can then inform future research by suggesting other avenues to pursue. Ultimately, they assist in moving the field forward, and in education specifically, the new understandings can affect practice.

The case study design was appropriate for this study for several reasons. The research questions focused on how teachers make sense of teacher-student relationships within a particular school and district context and the school-level factors that played a role within those contexts. These "how" questions were best answered by employing a case study design that described "reality in terms of what it naturally is" (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 43). This study also focused on studying a contemporary process but the researcher could not (and did not want to) manipulate any of the relevant behaviors. Neither an historical analysis nor an experimental design is appropriate given the research questions (Yin, 1994).

These case studies of teachers' meaning making of teacher-student relationships are both descriptive and interpretive. Descriptive because they provide a detailed account of relationships from the teachers' perspective in two schools, but also interpretive as the researcher used the data to interpret and theorize about the qualities of teacher-student relationships in two high schools in Waverly. These case studies offer examples with depth. While there are many large scale studies that examine teacher-student relationships and their influence on a host of variables (motivation, engagement, behavior, etc.), there are few that provide in-depth examination about how these important relationships develop and persist over time in different buildings. The research illuminates the context-dependent nature of teacher-student relationships over time. To understand how teacher-student relationships develop and how teachers sustain them at the school-level, the researcher provides thick description that offers insight and detail into the

process. These case studies are significant because they highlight, in detail, the ways teachers perceive these relationships, which are a potentially important lever in larger school reform efforts.

Multiple Case Studies

Stake (2000) focuses on three types of case studies. The intrinsic case study is done because the researcher wants an understanding of that specific case rather than because the case is representative of other cases or will illustrate a particular phenomenon. Alternatively, a researcher undertakes an instrumental case study to provide insight into a larger issue. The case serves to inform our understanding of something else. When a researcher studies a number of cases in order to understand a phenomenon, Stake identifies it is as a collective case study. This is an instrumental case study extended to multiple cases. The researcher selects the cases to better understand a larger set of cases.

Collective case study or multiple case study design offers the opportunity for cross-case analysis for comparison purposes. It is essential that each case have a specific purpose within the overall study. There is integrity for each case, but this design then allows for an analysis of commonalities and differences between each of the cases. Yin (1994) highlights the importance of using "replication logic" (p. 45) in a multiple case study design rather than a "sampling logic" (p. 45). The researcher should select each case because it either "(a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) produces contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)" (p. 46). The first step was to develop a working hypothesis and the researcher selected cases on that basis. The analysis includes both the individual cases and the cross-case conclusions.

For this study, the extant CLASS data collected in Waverly showed some limited variation in teacher-student relationships between the high schools in the district, but not enough to base site selection on that data. The multiple case study design allowed the researcher to investigate whether there were convergent or divergent experiences with teacher-student relationships depending on school context. This study offered a unique opportunity to ask: when the district-level context is similar, how do variations in school contexts impact teacher-meaning making of the phenomenon.

Working hypothesis. The working hypothesis was that school-level factors influence teachers' lived experience with teacher-student relationships and technical-rational approaches to defining and measuring relationships and climate do not accurately reflect teachers' experiences.

Unit of study. The initial research questions informed the definition of the unit of analysis (Yin, 1994). Different units of analysis require different research designs and data collection strategies. In this study the primary unit of analysis was teacher-student relationships within a school context. The researcher gathered information about each individual case (school) for comparison in the multiple case study.

Site selection. Case selection is a key decision in the research process. Defining the case is a process of deciding "what it is you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study" (Patton, 1980, p. 100). The researcher's theoretical assumptions and conceptual framework influence this decision. Marshall and Rossman (1999) outline the criteria for ideal site selection as one where:

- entry is possible;
- there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest are present;

- the researcher is likely to best be able to build trusting relations with the participants; and
- data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured. (p. 69)

This particular study examined teacher's perspectives on teacher-student relationships in two high schools in Waverly. These sites met Marshall and Rossman's (1999) criteria because they offered access and the researcher built trusting relationships with the participants in the study (convenience sampling). The researcher began with the following criteria for selecting cases:

- whether there is a school-wide focus on relationships;
- diversity of teacher experiences with relationships;
- previous school experience in trying to address relationships;
- principal willingness to participate

The researcher began the selection process for the case studies by emailing all of the high school principals in Waverly. Two principals indicated a willingness to have their school participate in the study. Since only two schools demonstrated a willingness to participate, the researcher was not able to differentiate on the other three criteria. The researcher addresses all three of the other criteria in the Findings chapter. Studying two high schools allowed for in-depth analysis of each case, as well as an analysis of cross-school variation within the context of a single district. By including two schools the researcher was able to contrast teacher experiences in different sites and analyze similarities and differences between school-level factors impacting teacher-student relationships.

As mentioned, Waverly invested in the use of the CLASS observation system as a program evaluation and data tool. The district reported the data collected during the 2011-2012

school year by school and the results included a mean score and standard deviation for each school for each of the domains and dimensions compared with national and district scores. Principals also received boxplots with comparisons between schools on each of the identified domains. For the high schools in Waverly there was limited variation in the ratings on the emotional support domain. The mean scores for emotional support by school ranged from 5.3 to 5.9 (1-7 scale) and the standard deviation ranged from 0.5 to 1.0 There was slightly more variation on the specific dimensions measured within the emotional support domain. The mean scores for positive climate ranged from 5.4 to 6.0; mean scores for negative climate ranged from 1.1 to 1.5 (this is a reversed question with lower scores indicating better climate); and mean scores for teacher sensitivity ranged from 5.0 to 5.7. Administrators in each building have this school-level data but there is no current district-wide approach for using the data. There was not enough variation in these preliminary results to use them as a basis for site selection, but the researcher utilized the data by asking principals about the results in the interviews.

Sampling plan for within-case participants/events. In qualitative case study research purposive sampling assumes the researcher wants to "discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most" (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). The goal of this type of sampling is not to get an average experience but rather to select a sample that will offer a range of experiences or views. There can be an emphasis on sampling based on attributes, but Stake (2000) comments that while "balance and variety are important; opportunity to learn is of primary importance" (p. 447). In order to meet these criteria and illustrate and maximize different perspectives on teacher-student relationships this study employed an iterative sampling method to identify teacher participants for interviews and observations in each school (Creswell, 2005). The researcher continued to interview teachers

until she achieved saturation (no new themes or information evolved from the data). The criteria the researcher used to sample and select the teachers for interviews and observations was:

- Grade level
- Content area
- Willingness to participate

These criteria produced a sample of teachers with a range of perspectives on teacher-student relationships, a range of experience with teacher-student relationships (i.e., roles in the building; years teaching experience), and a range of approaches to developing teacher-student relationships. The sampling goal was variety rather than representativeness.

The researcher contacted teachers via email with a study description and asked for their consent to participate. During subsequent interviews with teachers, the researcher asked for recommendations from the teachers on other colleagues that could offer different perspectives on the above issues. The researcher contacted these teachers for interviews as well.

Researcher's role. In a qualitative case study the researcher "is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data" (Merriam, 1988, p. 36). The skills needed to collect and analyze data for qualitative case study research are somewhat unique and different relative to the skills needed for quantitative research. The conceptual framework and the data collection design determine the role chosen by the researcher to access participants' meaning making perspectives. The role of the researcher varies along several dimensions. The degree of involvement in research can differ greatly along a continuum from co-participation to spectator (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In this study, the researcher took an overt role as an observer who observed and interviewed, but did not broadly participate. Marshall and Rossman (1999) also discuss

"revealedness" (p. 80) as another factor influencing the role of the researcher. This continuum ranges from full disclosure to complete secrecy. In this study the researcher erred on the side of more disclosure and participants had knowledge of the purpose of the study.

Yin (1994) cites the ability to ask good questions, listen well, be flexible, have a solid understanding of the issues being studied, and a lack of bias about preconceived theories as important skills for researchers using a case study design. Merriam (1988) adds a tolerance for ambiguity, sensitivity, and good communication skills as needed skills. In addition to these skills the qualitative researcher must disclose their positionality and conduct their research in an ethical manner.

> In qualitative research the personal biography of the researcher is critical as she speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective. The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that he or she then examines in specific ways (methodology, analysis). (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 28)

From the conceptual framework to the data collection and analysis, the background and experiences of the researcher influence the research. Disclosing personal interests in the study, previous experiences, and other factors that may have an impact on the study or the participants is an important component of the final report.

Access. Entry into the study sites required permission and invitation from both formal and informal gatekeepers (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The researcher obtained formal permission from the school district by applying through the Office of Planning and Evaluation. The researcher then contacted the high school principals and selected the two sites. For the two

selected sites the researcher contacted all of the teachers by email asking for participants. Each individual teacher interviewed and observed for the study gave informed consent to participate in the study. The researcher was open and clear about the use of information and access to information from the beginning of the study. This helped create an atmosphere of trust and rapport. With the teachers and principals interviewed and observed at the school level the researcher was clear about who had access to notes and observations and how the researcher referred to them in the final report (Erickson, 1986). The research is confidential. The researcher used numbers to mask the identities of the participants and shared no raw data with administrators. The researcher modified the final report to protect the identities of the participants as much as possible. The researcher owns the raw data.

Data collection methods. Qualitative research relies on using multiple methods or techniques to gather information (Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000; Yin, 1994). The range of techniques is broad, encompassing different forms of observation, interviewing, document review, historical analysis, narrative inquiry, kinesics, and proxemics (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Using these techniques the researcher is able to describe and explain the complexity and depth of the process or structure they study. Qualitative research techniques require activity on the part of the researcher who analyzes and interprets data as they gather it (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher collected data for this study using three different techniques. The primary technique was in-depth interviews with high school principals, district administrators, and teachers in each building. The researcher supplemented this data with classroom observations of the teacher participants, and document review (e.g., school profiles, strategic plans, climate surveys, CLASS data).

Interviews. The researcher and the participants used the in-depth interviews to co-construct meaning about teacher-student relationships and the school-level factors that influenced them. These interviews used a semi-structured format that allowed the "participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest [to] unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108). This technique has many strengths including gathering a large amount of data, uncovering participants' perspectives, and providing an opportunity to describe complex interactions. The researcher addressed potential weaknesses such as dependence on a small group of people for participation and honesty by building trusting relationships with participants, designing strong interview guides, and actively listening (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In-depth interviews with the selected teachers were the primary technique in this study because the research questions focus on the teacher's perspective on teacher-student relationships and how teachers interact with their school environment in the development of these relationships.

Interviews allow the researcher to access an insider or emic perspective on the process or phenomenon under study. Since case studies typically focus on human interactions, data collection focuses on those reporting information and making meaning of their experiences. Interviews are a method for accessing information that cannot be observed; "we cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world" (Patton, 1980, p. 196). Interviews allow the researcher to delve deeper and clarify activity derived from observational field notes and to explain the meaning of documents collected.

This study used a semi-structured interview format where the researcher had a list of questions and topics to explore but the researcher did not determine the exact order and wording in advance. This was appropriate because the researcher wanted certain information from all the

participants, but also respected the belief that different individuals make meaning and define the world in their own way (Merriam, 1988). The topics addressed in all the interviews included defining the nature and qualities of teacher-student relationships, as well as, the school-level factors that influenced them. The questions also incorporated dimensions of the CLASS tool to prompt discussion. Other topics focused on technical, normative, political considerations (structures, knowledge, resources, expectations, power, etc.), as well as, intentions (collective and individual), conventions, and processes (Hall & McGinty, 1997; Oakes et al., 1993).

Teacher Interviews. As mentioned in the participant section above, the researcher sampled teachers from the two sites and interviewed each teacher once, for approximately one hour. The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol for consistency and relevancy across interviewees. The researcher asked teachers questions about the topics outlined above. In addition, the researcher presented teachers with the components of the Emotional Support Domain of the CLASS observation tool itself and asked questions about its validity and use. The teacher interview protocol is found in Appendix A. In total the researcher interviewed 14 teachers with experience teaching in all four high school grades and across nine subject areas.

Interviews with principals and district administrators. Interviews with experts may be valuable if they are well-informed or influential (Rossman & Rallis, 1993). While access to these individuals can be challenging they can also offer insight into decision-making and priorities. For this study there were several influential individuals who were able to provide important data and context for the study. The researcher interviewed three central office instructional leaders and two high school principals. The interviews focused on these stakeholders' perceptions of, and the district's priorities towards, teacher-student relationships and the CLASS observation tool.

The researcher audio-recorded all of the interviews and took notes during the interviews. The researcher then transcribed the audio recordings and changed the names on the transcript to an identifying number.

Observations. Observations at both of the school sites complemented the data collected via interviews. As Marshall and Rossman (1999) explain "observation is a fundamental and highly important method in all qualitative inquiry: It is used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings" (p. 107). It is an excellent method for recording data on nonverbal communication and behavior and can help the researcher better understand the broader context and setting. Observation is an important complement to interviews as "an investigator can get underneath the labels and concepts used in either documents or discussions and observe a phenomenon directly" (Yin, 1982, p. 49). Some observation is formal while other times it is more casual during a site visit. The observations provide additional information that helps to check the validity of other data and facilitates triangulation (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1988).

Using observation as a data collection method requires consideration of what to observe, the relationship between the observed and the observer, and how to record the information. In selecting what to observe it is essential to remember that a researcher cannot observe everything, but Merriam (1988) suggests elements to observe including the setting, the participants, activities and interactions, the frequency and duration of interactions and situations, and the subtle factors such as nonverbal communication and what does not happen. The relationship between the observer and observed varies along a continuum from complete participant to complete observer. In most cases the researcher falls somewhere in between these two poles and acts as a "researcher participant" (Merriam, 1988, p. 93) but a choice must be made about the stance that

will be most useful for the study. Through the course of the study, as the researcher becomes more familiar with the site, their stance may shift towards participation. An important consideration in observation is the extent to which the observer's presence changes the situation. It is impossible to know if this is always, sometimes, or never the case, but the researcher must be cognizant of the influence they may have and account for it accordingly (Merriam, 1988). Recording data during an observation depends on the extent of researcher participation and timing. Freshly recorded data written in an easy to read format facilitates analysis at later stages in the study.

In this study, data collected via observations complemented interview data. The researcher observed each teacher who agreed to an observation (12 teachers) for one class period (approximately one hour). The researcher scheduled the observations with the teachers, finding mutually agreed upon times that worked for the teacher. The observation protocol (See Appendix B) included all the dimensions of the CLASS observation tool for the emotional support domain. This structured the observation and allowed the researcher to make comparisons based on teacher reactions to the tool during the interviews. The researcher did not "score" the teacher based on the observation protocol but rather looked for evidence of the behavioral markers and sought to verify comments and observations made by teachers during the interviews. The researcher took additional notes on observed school-level factors, mentioned by teachers during the interviews as influencing teacher-student relationships.

During the observations, the researcher wrote field notes (Emerson, Fitz, and Shaw, 2011). These field notes focused on the topics cited above and were emergent to describe activity in thick, rich description (Geertz, 1973). The researcher transformed the field notes into observational write-ups that included low-level and high-level inferences, methodological notes,

and theoretical notations. The purpose of the write-ups was to capture action in perpetuity for later data analysis.

Document review. In a case study design documents such as agendas, proposals, articles, and letters, are most useful "to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, 1994, p. 81). Reviewing documents can provide the researcher details about events or conflicts mentioned by other sources, as well as, helping with validity and triangulation. Document review in a policy implementation study allows the researcher to access information about a past process including different perspectives and reactions to key events (Yin, 1982). Similar to observations this data can provide context, but unlike observations and interviews this data is generally easier to manipulate and categorize for analysis. It is also an unobtrusive method for gathering data (Rossman & Marshall, 1999).

For the study proposed here, the researcher reviewed both district-wide as well as school-specific documents. Waverly references teacher-student relationships in many documents from the strategic plan to teacher and principal job descriptions. At each individual school the researcher reviewed teacher handbooks, mission statements, and other relevant documents.

Data analysis strategy and procedures. In qualitative research data collection, analysis, and reporting is interactive and simultaneous (Merriam, 1988; Rossman & Marshall, 1993; Yin, 1994). While the process is challenging, having a general analytic strategy to approaching the data is essential. Yin (1994) suggests that data analysis should follow the theoretical propositions and literature review that led to the initiation of the case study. These underlying propositions shaped the research questions, design, and data collection and can help to focus attention on certain data.

In this study the researcher analyzed the data using the conceptual frameworks described above, particularly the co-construction model (Datnow et al., 2002) and the technical-political-normative lens (Oakes et al., 1993). These propositions broadly guided the data analysis "which is the process of making sense of one's data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 127) and an "interpretive act [that] brings meaning to those data and displays that meaning to the reader" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 153). Yin (1982) outlines the analytic process for implementation case studies including:

> A pre-analysis step, a piecing together of the 'facts' of the implementation experience, a merging of the evidence from various sources, an aggregating of single-site experiences (for the multiple-site studies), and most important, a testing of alternative explanations" (p. 51).

In a multiple case study the analysis is done in two steps: with-in case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) describes this process:

> For the *within-case analysis*, each case is first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself. Data are gathered so the researcher can learn as much about the contextual variables as possible that might have a bearing on the case...Once the analysis of each case is completed, *cross-case analysis* begins. A qualitative, inductive, multi-case study seeks to build abstractions across cases. (pp. 194-195)

Within-case analysis. The researcher began with analysis of each individual case. Preliminary analysis happened immediately after collecting the data. The researcher used a system to organize and document the data including all researcher field notes, documents, and

transcribed interviews. This organization of the data was a part of the pre-analysis that occurred throughout the data collection process.

Once the researcher organized and initially reviewed the data, she began searching for patterns, categories, and classification schemes. The frameworks outlined above (co-construction model and technical-normative-political considerations) informed the generation of categories and patterns. The categories for analysis using these frameworks included themes related to conditions of activity, processes of activity around teacher-student relationships including attention to the actors involved, their interests and intentions, and resources and power. Other themes focused on the structural and cultural conditions existing at the district and school-levels pertaining to the meaning of teacher-student relationships and evaluation. The presence of patterns and themes depended in part on their frequency, because while "sometimes we will find significant meaning in a single instance…usually the important meanings will come from reappearance over and over" (Stake, 1995, p. 78).

The researcher then began to piece together major events, activities, and ideas to create a set of categories (Yin, 1982). In implementation case studies outlining a topical sequence is "a significant analytic step because it allows the researchers to establish the basis for some causal inferences" (Yin, 1982, p. 53). In this study, the researcher began by organizing the data for each case topically using categories that reflected the research questions and conceptual frameworks (categories outlined above). The researcher coded the data based on teachers' definitions of teacher-student relationships and their perspectives on the influence of school-level factors (technical-political-normative). The researcher also coded the data using the definitions related to teacher-student relationships embedded in the CLASS tool for comparative purposes. The development of these categories and the coding process helped the researcher merge evidence

from the various sources: interviews, observations, and review of documents. An analytic comparison of the findings from the different sources (Yin, 1982) was necessary to then begin generating assertions about what was true in each of the sites.

Generating assertions is an inductive task. The researcher generated assertions throughout the data collection process. She then reviewed the data to "establish an evidentiary warrant for the assertions one wishes to make" (Erickson, 1986, p. 146). During within-case analysis this was done separately for each case by continuously reviewing and comparing the data to find confirming and disconfirming evidence. The strongest assertions were those that had the most evidence from the most sources (Erickson, 1986). Yin (1982) also offers that assertions "should identify a causal sequence that covers the relevant facts of the implementation experience" (p. 57). Throughout the analysis process the goal was to develop assertions and try to find support for them while remaining open to the idea that there could be other explanations.

Cross-case analysis. After considering each case on its own, with particular attention to the influence of context, the researcher began the cross case analysis attempting "to build a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases, even though the cases will vary in their details" (Yin, 1994, p. 112). The researcher used similar strategies in the cross-case analysis as those used for within-case analysis to generate and test assertions by "attending to the pattern of results and determining the degree to which the pattern matches that predicted by the explanation" (Yin, 1982, p. 61). The cross-case analysis helped the researcher determine if teachers have convergent or divergent experiences with teacher-student relationships depending on their school context, and offered possible explanations for why this happens given the same district context.

Validation strategies. A researcher approaches the validity of research differently depending on the underlying assumptions, conceptual framework, and research design. Merriam (1988) explains internal validity as whether the findings match reality and Yin (1994) goes further by defining internal validity as when a researcher is trying to explain that certain conditions lead to other conditions unrelated to spurious relationships. In this case the goal of the researcher is to demonstrate that the perspectives described in the case study are honest and the researcher's interpretation matches with reality.

An interpretive approach to a case study design using qualitative research methods also considers external validity differently than post-positivist experimental designs. In post-positivist research external validity examines whether the study's findings are replicable and generalizable to some universe represented by the sample. Interpretive research has a different set of assumptions about validity. An interpretive, qualitative case study design does not try to statistically generalize from a sample to a population but instead uses analytical generalization which tries to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory (Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). Interpretive case studies do not pursue reproductability and replicability, rather focusing on the internal validity of the phenomenon captured as it assumes human behavior and meaning depends on context. An explicit goal of interpretive case study designs is not to divorce human behavior from context but rather to describe and explain the behavior based on how each individual experiences it. Qualitative research repeated in the same situation would necessarily provide different interpretations depending on the individual's experience (Merriam, 1988).

Interpretive researchers address these questions of validity (internal and external) and reliability by using a number of different strategies. Merriam (1988) cites six strategies to ensure

internal validity: triangulation; member checks; long term observation or repeat observations of the same phenomenon over time; peer examination; participatory modes of research; and outlining the researcher's biases and theoretical assumptions at the beginning of the study. Replication logic with multiple case studies addresses external validity as well as providing thick description so the reader can generalize and make comparisons (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). The researcher establishes reliability in this study by triangulation, explaining researcher positionality, and use of case study protocols (Yin, 1994) which allows the researcher to present her methods in detail so the study could theoretically be replicated.

This study uses triangulation, a case study protocol, and an explanation of researcher positionality to address concerns about validity and reliability. Stake (2000) states that triangulation can reduce the chance of misinterpretation on the part of the researcher. By gathering data using multiple methods from multiple perspectives, the researcher can clarify meaning. The process helps verify whether an interpretation or observation may repeat but also the different ways participants perceive the issue. In the study proposed here, triangulation of data will happen by using different sources (teachers, administrators, central office administrators) and different methods (interviews, observations, document review). For example, the researcher will triangulate data collected from teachers during interviews with observations, interviews with administrators, document review, and interviews with other teachers.

The researcher developed a case study protocol prior to entering the field to account for each step in the research process, potentially making it replicable (Yin, 1994). This protocol included an overview of the project, field procedures, case study questions, and a guide for the case study report. The researcher also clearly stated her assumptions, beliefs, and biases at the outset of the study and in the final report.

Reporting format. The case study report is the final step after completing both the within-case and cross-case analysis. The goal of the report is to explain the generated assertions and display the evidence for them. The findings chapter includes a section for each case with a narrative that describes and analyzes the individual case using particular description, general description, and interpretive commentary (Erickson, 1986). The report also includes a section detailing the cross-case analysis and results (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Yin (1982) specifically states that enumeration of the data from individual sites is preferable for policy implementation case studies with multiple sites.

Limitations of the study. This research focused on only two schools in one school district therefore the results are not generalizable in the post-positivist sense. This multiple site case study does however, provide data and insight on teachers' perspectives on teacher-student relationships and school-level factors in this division at the high school level. Other limitations include limited access to teachers with a range of grade-level experience in one school and possible hesitation on the part of some subjects to speak candidly given the school and district climate around teacher-student relationships and their measurement. A final limitation is that the researcher is a staff member in one of the research sites. The researcher addressed each of these possible limitations through the research design and disclosure of researcher positionality.

Researcher as instrument. The researcher acts an instrument in qualitative research. The researcher in this study taught at the secondary level for seven years and is an employee in Waverly. She is now an administrator at one of the selected school sites. Before teaching, the researcher worked in education policy and developed an interest in the intersection of policy, research, and practice. Teacher-student relationships influenced her own teaching and learning experiences, so she focused her research in that area. While she had some pre-existing

knowledge of district-level context, she was unaware of the CLASS model prior to beginning the study. Her experience as an employee in Waverly made access to other administrators and teachers feasible. The researcher did not directly supervise any of the teachers that participated in the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study focused on two key questions: What school-level political and normative factors do teachers identify as influencing the definition, formation, and maintenance of teacher-student relationships in secondary schools and how do teacher perspectives comport with the assumptions underlying the evidence-based tools used by the district to measure these constructs (CLASS)? Through observations in two high schools, and interviews with teachers, principals, and district administrators, this study answered those two key research questions, providing data from teachers and principals about the definition and role of teacher-student relationships, and the impact of school level programs and policies on these same relationships. Additionally, the study answered the following research questions:

1. How do teachers define teacher-student relationships?
2. From the perspectives of teachers and principals, how do school-level factors influence teacher definitions of teacher-student relationships?
3. According to teachers and principals, what school-level factors influence the process of teacher-student relationships?
4. How do the teacher definitions of teacher-student relationships compare with the definitions embedded in the CLASS tool?
5. How is the CLASS tool being used in the district and school evaluation process?

The study used Datnow et al.'s (2002) co-construction perspective as well as Oakes et al.'s (1993) technical, normative, and political considerations to describe and analyze the adoption and use of the CLASS observation tool in Waverly. The data indicates a limited role for the

evidence-based CLASS model in its ability to impact instruction, and specifically teacher-student relationships, in the studied district.

Datnow et al. (2002) explain variation in implementation of school reform models through the co-construction perspective. This lens offers an alternative to the traditional technical-rational approach and views local variation as inevitable. Implementation is a multidirectional process that requires sensitivity to local context. In this approach reforms are adapted and "co-constructed" by educators at the local level based on the structural and cultural conditions of the district and schools. This perspective posits that "educational reforms have changed to adapt to schools more often than schools have adapted to accommodate educational reforms" (Datnow, p. 39).

During the four years Waverly administrators used the CLASS model, educators at the district and school levels adapted, modified, and ignored the model for three main reasons: district-level structural and cultural conditions; established school-specific programs and processes that already address climate and emotional support; and a disconnect between CLASS and the beliefs and values of teachers. The structural and cultural conditions at the district-level influenced adoption and implementation. The district conditions that had the largest impact on implementation were: the Department of Instruction leading the adoption of CLASS alone, no mandate for use at the school level, no link with the teacher evaluation system, and many competing priorities at the district level. These conditions led district level administrators to limit use of the CLASS model to the program evaluation process. These conditions in Waverly created an environment where district administrators adapted and modified the CLASS model to such an extent that it ultimately became a largely symbolic policy with minimal impact on classroom instruction.

Additionally, the presence of established school-specific programs and processes that specifically addressed providing emotional support and developing teacher-student relationships led teachers and principals to ignore and passively resist use of the CLASS model at the school level. Each school has school-specific programs and norms in place that encouraged providing emotional support for students (teacher-student relationships) and that fit with the structural and cultural conditions of their individual schools. The incongruence between the CLASS tool, which ignores school-level context, and the successful school-specific programs that were already in place contributed to passive resistance and lack of use of CLASS at the school level.

Finally, the beliefs of the school-based educators (principals and teachers) conflicted with some aspects of the CLASS model. The educators had common definitions of teacher-student relationships and their benefits, and the content of the CLASS model generally aligned with their definitions and beliefs about providing emotional support for students. The conflict centered on the observation process and the lack of feedback to teachers. While the model offers the possibility of feedback to teachers, the district-level administrators adapted the process and eliminated the individual teacher feedback. Teachers believed that the specific cultural and structural conditions of their school influenced how they experienced the development of teacher- student relationships, yet the CLASS model was not sensitive to these conditions. Teachers' believed the CLASS model had construct validity but they did not believe that the model was reliable for measuring emotional support and teacher-student relationships. This disconnect between teachers' lived experiences and practice with teacher-student relationships and the CLASS model further limited its impact on teaching practices at the high school level in Waverly.

As with any reform, the local context in Waverly directly shaped the modifications and adaptations administrators and teachers made to the CLASS tool. This chapter outlines each of these aspects (see Table 1), beginning with a description of the district and the initial adoption of CLASS. A discussion of the cultural and structural conditions at the district level that impacted implementation activity follows. Descriptive case studies of the two high schools and their school-specific programs and processes highlight some of the reasons the principals and teachers passively resisted or ignored the model. Finally, a discussion of teachers' beliefs about teacher-student relationships and the CLASS model illustrates the disconnect that ultimately limited use and implementation at the school level.

Table 1

Use of the CLASS Model in Waverly: Co-construction Perspective

	Conditions	Adaptations/Consequences
Definitions	Local context defined broadly as being comprised of conditions including the school's history of dealing with change, the population served by the community, school and community norms, school, district, and state policies, and ideologies about teaching, learning, race, class, and gender (Datnow et al., 2002).	Co-construction perspective: educators modify reform models to better suit their needs. Sometimes the adaptations enhance the reform, other times the adaptations threaten the intensity or success of the model (Datnow et al., 2002).
District level cultural & structural conditions	• Department of Instruction adopted CLASS alone • No mandate for use at the school level • No link with teacher evaluation • Many competing priorities	• Changes in CLASS model: Less observation cycles; No feedback to teachers • Limited use to program evaluation • Limited impact on instruction • Resulted in CLASS being a largely symbolic policy
Established school-specific programs and processes	• School philosophy • Norms for decision-making • School processes (TA, time outside of class, ABCD)	• Differences in school context but CLASS is not flexible relative to school specific conditions • Lack of knowledge and trust in CLASS at the school level • Ignoring/passive resistance

		• School level educators do not use the CLASS tool to improve teacher-student relationships
Educators' beliefs	• Common beliefs and definitions of teacher-student relationships • Content of CLASS model aligned with teacher definitions and beliefs • CLASS process did not align with teacher definitions or beliefs (lacked reliability)	• CLASS model (as adapted at the district level) did not resonate with teacher experiences • Continued use of school-based processes to promote teacher-student relationships/emotional support rather than CLASS

District-Level Cultural and Structural Conditions

This section answers the question: How is the CLASS tool used in the district and school evaluation process? The local conditions in Waverly contributed to an environment where district policymakers adopted the CLASS model and then modified it in significant ways. This made adoption of the CLASS model a largely symbolic policy with minimal impact on classroom instruction.

Background

Waverly is a high-achieving and successful school district as measured by virtually any standard (graduation rates, SOL scores, AP participation, community surveys). The district has 22 elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, and seven other programs. There is a strong emphasis on high-quality instruction as well as closing the achievement gap, and providing instruction that meets the needs of the whole child (District Strategic Plan, 2011). The district is organized administratively with eight departments including the Department of Instruction which develops curriculum and implements and evaluates the instructional program.

(District Document, n.d.) Within the Department of Instruction there are supervisors for each of the content areas.

In 1999 Waverly began conducting evaluations of its instructional programs. In 2007 the School Board adopted a new policy and set of procedures related to program evaluation. The School Board and Superintendent revised the program evaluation system "to spur continuous improvement, ensure the effective use of resources to achieve the system's goals, facilitate sound and effective decision making, and hold staff, schools, departments, programs, and the school system accountable for their contributions to the achievement of these aims." (District Document, 2007, p. 1). As a part of this process Waverly stipulates a six year evaluation cycle for each instructional department or program (e.g. mathematics, social studies, special education) separate from evaluation of teachers and schools. Department of Instruction staff (supervisors and teacher specialists) is responsible for conducting the evaluation while Planning and Evaluation staff facilitate the evaluation process and develop evaluation standards.

Adoption of the CLASS model. The administrators in the Department of Instruction search for tools to help with program evaluation led to the eventual adoption of the CLASS model in Waverly. The revised program evaluation policies require measuring "the degree of implementation" of a given program or service so the Department of Instruction began discussing how to measure quality instruction. As one administrator stated about those years, "Ten different departments used ten different methods for evaluating teacher effectiveness. The poor elementary teachers were being bombarded if they were teaching six different subjects with different opinions that may have meant the same thing" (District Administrator 3, Interview, May 9, 2014). Another administrator agreed that the impetus for adopting CLASS came about because "Math is looking at this, Science is looking at this, and how can we as the Department of

Instruction have a unified voice about what is good instruction and can't we have one measure that speaks to what is quality instruction" (District Administrator 1, Interview, April 8, 2014)? After a year of discussion, the Department of Instruction could not come to consensus.

When these administrators returned to the table in 2009 they developed a unit template that received agreement from all the program supervisors, but they found that "a teacher still looks at it and says I can't plan like this for every lesson. That's ridiculous" (District Administrator 1, Interview, April 8, 2014). Eventually the Department of Instruction staff agreed on a pared down version of the unit plan, but felt there was still a need for a universal observation tool. Each discipline brought different tools to the table for discussion including the CLASS instrument. In group discussions about which tool to use, the goal was to find a "universal thing we can speak to about quality instruction that crosses content and grade level and it would be great if it was nationally normed so that we can compare ourselves to someone else" (District Administrator 1, Interview, April 8, 2014). Over the course of two more years the committee discarded many instruments, tried to create their own, and eventually agreed that the CLASS instrument incorporated the majority of the elements the supervisors had in their content-specific tools. One district administrator described CLASS as having "the overall big picture that gets at culturally responsive teaching, looking at differentiation, all those things that we know are important" (District Administrator 1, Interview, April 8, 2014). The district adopted the model in 2010 for use in program evaluation. The following section describes the model.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an "evidence-based approach to defining and measuring effective interactions in classrooms" (Pianta, Hamre, & Mintz, 2012, p. 1). The researchers that developed the CLASS model state that the measure is "based on an extensive literature review as well as on scales used

in large-scale classroom observation studies" (Pianta et al., 2012, p.1). The CLASS tool measures interactions in three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Within each of these domains there are multiple dimensions, for example the dimensions for emotional support are positive climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for adolescent perspective (See Table 2). The developers of the CLASS model designed it to measure interactions across grade levels and content areas, and there are different tools developed for the different age levels (pre-school, elementary, secondary). The domains are the same for all the tools but some dimensions are different there is specific guidance on how to score differently for the different age levels.

Table 2

CLASS Domains and Dimensions

Domains	Emotional support	Classroom organization	Instructional support
Dimensions	Regard for adolescent perspective	Behavior management	Instructional learning formats
	Teacher sensitivity	Productivity	Content understanding
	Positive climate	Negative climate	Analysis and inquiry
			Quality of feedback
			Instructional dialogue

The focus of this study is the emotional support domain and there are three dimensions for this domain: positive climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for adolescent perspective. The model defines each dimension as the following:

> *Positive climate:* the enjoyment and emotional connection that teachers have with students, as well as the nature of peer interactions.

Teacher sensitivity: the level of teachers' responsiveness to the academic and social/emotional needs and levels of individual students.

Regard for Adolescent Perspectives: the degree to which teachers meet and capitalize upon the social and developmental needs and goals of adolescents for decision-making and autonomy, relevance, having their opinions valued, and meaningful interactions with peers (Pianta et al., 2012, p. 2).

Each of these dimensions has a number of associated indicators. The indicators for positive climate are: relationships, positive affect, positive communications, and respect. The indicators for teacher sensitivity are: awareness, responsiveness to academic and social/emotional needs and cues, effectiveness in addressing problems, student comfort. The indicators for regard for adolescent perspective are: flexibility and adolescent focus, connections to current life, support for autonomy and leadership, meaningful peer interactions. The measure then defines each of these indicators by "specific, observable behavioral markers that provide clear examples of how teacher-student interactions can be assessed in the classroom" (Observation Manual, p. 15). For example, the respect indicator has the following behavioral markers: respectful language; use of each other's names; warm, calm voice; listening to each other; and cooperation (See Table 3).

Table 3

Positive Climate Dimension

Indicators	Relationships	Positive affect	Positive communications	Respect
Behavioral markers	Physical proximity	Smiling	Positive comments	Respectful language
	Shared positive affect	Laughter	Positive expectations	Use of each other's names
	Social conversation	Enthusiasm		Listening to each other
	Peer interactions			Warm, calm voice
				Cooperation

Table 4

Teacher Sensitivity Dimension

Indicators	Awareness	Responsiveness to academic and social and emotional needs and cues	Effectiveness in addressing problems	Student comfort
Behavioral markers	Checks in with students	Individualized support	Student issues and questions resolved	Seek support and guidance
	Anticipates problems	Reassurance and assistance	Follow up	Take risks
	Notices difficulties	Adjusts pacing/wait time as needed		Participate freely
		Re-engagement		
		Acknowledgement of emotions and out-of-class factors		
		Timely response		

Table 5

Regard for Adolescent Perspective Dimension

Indicators	Flexibility and adolescent focus	Connections to current life	Support for autonomy and leadership	Meaningful peer interactions
Behavioral Markers	Encourages student ideas and opinions	Connects content to adolescent life	Relaxed structure for movement	Peer sharing and group work
	Follows students' leads	Communicates usefulness	Chances for leadership	
	Shows flexibility		Gives students responsibility	
			Allows choice	

Using the Secondary CLASS measure to observe a classroom requires the observer to "derive a score for each dimension based upon the degree to which certain behavioral, emotional, and physical markers are present and indicative of the extent to which that dimension is characteristic of that classroom" (Pianta et al., 2012, p. 7). The observers learn to score by participating in a two-day training, taking a certification exam, and then renewing that certification annually.

Each observation consists of cycles of 25 minutes with 15 minutes for observation and note-taking and 10 minutes for recording codes. The manual for the Secondary CLASS measure states that the observer should conduct a minimum of four cycles. The manual also states that observers can adapt the procedures but any adaptation should consider that "maximizing the number of observations will increase reliability of measurement" (Observation Manual, p. 7). During the training, the facilitator provides information to the observers on how to remain objective, keep the cycles independent, and keep the dimensions independent. After the observing portion of the cycle, the observer gives a score for each dimension using a seven-point scale. The manual provides descriptions of low, mid, and high for each dimension and during the training the facilitator encourages observers to reference the manual continuously during scoring in order to make "standardized judgments."

The creators of the CLASS model founded Teachstone (commercial developer of the model) in 2008 and began training observers and selling their resources through this company. As of August 2013 they tout over 21,000 trained CLASS observers and six million children reached by the CLASS system. The company timeline references federal legislation in 2007 that required measurement of teacher-student interactions as part of the Office of Head Start program monitoring as an impetus for the creation of Teachstone. Teachstone describes its overall

approach as "learn, measure, and improve." For the "learn" and "measure" aspects they offer training on the CLASS measure itself and the various domains, dimensions, and indicators. With regards to the "improve" aspect they offer many different tools and professional development opportunities so that educators can use the scores from observations to improve teacher interactions with students. Each of these different tools is a separate option for a school or district to pursue. For example, there are online video libraries as well as trainings on feedback strategies and how to use the video libraries effectively.

Current use of the CLASS model in Waverly. The developers of the CLASS model designed it as a large-scale, generic process for measuring interactions between students and teachers and providing feedback to teachers. Yet, the Department of Instruction in Waverly adopted the model for a more narrow purpose, as its universal observation tool for district-driven program evaluation. One of the School Board's intentions for program evaluation is to focus on evaluating the program rather than individual teachers. Currently, each evaluation measures the "degree of implementation" of a program, in part, by using the CLASS instrument to observe teacher-student interactions. Waverly touts CLASS as a model that "provides a common lens and language focused on classroom interactions that encourage student learning" (ELA Program Evaluation, p. 23). For the purposes of program evaluation, the district uses the CLASS tool across all grade levels and all content areas, but they also allow each department or program to use their own content-specific observation checklist. Each evaluation cites results from CLASS observations, as well as, the content-specific observation checklists.

The Waverly administrators adapted the CLASS model, designed by Teachstone and outlined above, to fit with the goals of their program evaluation process (i.e., measuring the degree of implementation of each program area such as mathematics, social studies, language

arts). The district pays Teachstone to train a cadre of current administrators and retired teachers to observe classroom teachers using the CLASS instrument. During the program evaluation process these observers come into each classroom for a 30 minute observation (less than the four cycles suggested in the CLASS model). Then district-level administrators use the data from the observations for the program evaluation report, reporting scores by grade level (elementary, middle, high) with no data reported by teacher or school. Individual teachers and building principals get no feedback from the observation through the program evaluation process. Outside of the program evaluation process, the district did observe all secondary teachers using this instrument one time in 2012 and reported the data by school. Principals received a report with average scores for the building across each domain and dimension.

While Waverly primarily uses the CLASS tool for program evaluation some curriculum supervisors use it to inform professional development for teachers across the grade levels. One supervisor explained that she used the data collected using the CLASS tool during program evaluation to meet with different groups of teachers for professional development. Using this data she was able to highlight areas of strength where teachers across the school level (i.e. middle school) were successful on CLASS defined dimensions such as teacher sensitivity. She would ask teachers what strategies they used that might explain the high scores in that area. In similar workshops she honed in on dimensions where teachers consistently scored in the low range, for example, feedback to students. The supervisors used the CLASS data to spur conversation about how to improve in these areas (District Administrator 2, Interview, April 25, 2014).

District administrators shared examples of elementary schools in Waverly using the CLASS tool as a follow up to another district-mandated professional development around

cultural competency. While CLASS does not necessarily measure cultural competency, there is overlap between the dimensions and some of the practices promoted by the Waverly cultural competency initiative. A district administrator shared that in one Waverly elementary school, the school administrators used the data collected from the CLASS observations to choose a specific dimension as the professional development focus for the year. They agreed that "feedback to students" was an area that would have an impact on student achievement. The staff, with support from central office, "spent 15 hours unpacking, actually coming up with shared vocabulary, looking at videos from the library and actually talking about what feedback looks like in a classroom" (District Administrator 3, Interview, May 9, 2014). This administrator explained that there are no secondary schools in the district using the data in this way.

The decision to limit the use of CLASS to the program evaluation process and adapt aspects of the model was due, in part, to the following district-level conditions: the Department of Instruction led the adoption of CLASS alone; there was no mandate for use at the school level; there was no link with the teacher evaluation system; and there were many competing priorities at the district level. A discussion of each of these conditions follows.

Department of Instruction drove adoption. By design, the Department of Instruction takes a district-wide view of curriculum and instruction. The supervisors in that department work with teachers PK-12 in all schools across all the curriculum areas. The drive to find a single tool to measure program implementation and teacher effectiveness for program evaluation stemmed from their desire for uniformity within the Department of Instruction. The supervisors wanted one tool that would uniformly measure high quality instruction across grade levels and content areas. They also wanted a tool that would provide common vocabulary related to observing teachers and developing professional development. One supervisor described the adoption of the

tool as “CLASS gave that unifying tool that we can, in other words, we can all speak the same language” (District Administrator 2, Interview, April 25, 2014). All of the district-level administrators described the adoption of CLASS as an initiative driven by the Department of Instruction rather than the Superintendent or the School Board. They reported that it was not a top down initiative from upper management but rather the supervisors stated that in adopting CLASS for program evaluation “there was a lot of buy-in. I certainly bought into that because I felt the need to have a common language and find a way to unify criteria” (District Administrator 2, Interview, April 25, 2014). Another district-level administrator explained that supervisors hoped the search for and adoption of CLASS would help them organize and design the professional development they did with teachers (District Administrator 3, Interview, May 9, 2014). One supervisor explained that there was an increasing amount of school-based professional development relative to content-specific professional development. School-based administrators (principals and assistant principals) are largely responsible for selecting and supervising the school-oriented professional development rather than the curriculum supervisors at the central office level. As a result the supervisors wanted to use this new tool to collect data to inform the limited professional development opportunities they still conducted (District Administrator 2, Interview, April 25, 2014).

The motivation to adopt the CLASS model came from the Department of Instruction and while there was agreement and interest at that level, there was not commensurate interest at the secondary school level. Program evaluation is an integral part of the evaluation process for central office supervisors of curriculum areas, but school-based educators are relatively removed from the process. While there was a strong interest in adopting a uniform tool for measuring high quality instruction at the Department of Instruction level there was not the same interest in

"uniformity" communicated by teachers or principals at the secondary level. Since school based educators have limited knowledge of or interest in program evaluation, this translated into limited interest in the CLASS model. There was also a lack of explicit and sustained communication about CLASS to secondary administrators and teachers that constrained its use. As one administrator commented:

> It's just we have, what's ironic about it is that the instrument itself is very unifying and very crystal clear but the fact is that it's not centrally mandated that now we have this data and you're going to be using it to inform instruction. That would be great data for a PLC where everyone has the same language because it's not used in an evaluation for you know, for purposes of continuing contract or anything but just real growth. But I don't think anyone has taken the lead in saying this is how it's going to be used (District Administrator 2, Interview, April 25, 2014).

Because there was not buy-in at the school level (or even a major attempt at buy-in) the district limited the use of CLASS to program evaluation. In practice this meant limiting the observation cycle to 30 minutes, not providing feedback to individual teachers, and keeping all data analysis at the program (math, world language, social studies etc.) level. So while curriculum supervisors saw a need for a uniform model for measuring instruction, they did not have the ability to mandate its use beyond the activities they had direct control over (program evaluation and some professional development).

No mandate for use at the school level. While the Department of Instruction adopted the CLASS model with the intention of improving teaching and learning through the program evaluation process, the influence of the tool and the data collected using the tool is limited, in

part because there was no specific mandate from the School Board, Superintendent, or Department of Instruction on how or why schools should use the model. The district did not use the tool as intended by the developers, and did not require use of the model or the data collected through the CLASS observations at the school level.

At the district level, administrators believe they use the CLASS model well. For example, one supervisor explained that the tool was valuable for her because of "the growth I saw in my own…observations and the feedback I can give" (District Administrator 2, Interview, April 25, 2014). These district-level administrators also felt that at the Department of Instruction level when "you develop that common understanding, when you use the data, then it makes sense to share what you're doing because now it's not about me and my content area. I think it just transferred the ownership of the observations" (District Administrator 2, Interview, April 25, 2014) and helped them to collaborate on supporting effective teaching. Yet, they all agreed that when there is not buy-in and knowledge at the teacher or school level the tool cannot have an impact on instruction. According to at least one administrator; the lack of information at the school level was concerning for central office administrators because:

> It [CLASS data] gives me good information about the programs, but what happens is I could have the best information in the world but if the schools are not on the same page with me helping teachers grow, so there's no communication, so we could be sending teachers, not the wrong message, but too many messages that don't really match (District Administrator 2, Interview, April 25, 2014).

Central office administrators were not clear on how schools were using the CLASS data.

> I don't know where the schools are, I don't know what they use. How they use it. But I think if we only use it for program evaluation and don't have a clear plan of how this could be used, I don't think we have the best utilization (District Administrator 2, Interview, April 25, 2014).

One administrator explained why she thought school level administrators and teachers were not using the CLASS data.

> Right now most of the data is being used for program evaluation. I think that it goes back to the original statement that I made. Administrators would use it differently if they knew how to use it and I'm not sure there's been enough professional development focused on how you can use the CLASS, particularly in a PLC environment. So I don't know that administrators are using it in the way it could be used (District Administrator 3, Interview, May 9, 2014).

In general each of the central office administrators felt the limited use of the CLASS data was "a missed opportunity" for the district to improve teaching and student learning. The selection of CLASS as the tool used for program evaluation happened at the district level and as a result it is only administrators at the district level using the data, with little knowledge held by school level administrators and teachers. Central office administrators offered several possible explanations for why the district is not requiring use of CLASS data or setting an expectation that administrators use it at the school level.

> It's very expensive to have the people being trained and so I don't know, I don't think there is sort of a CLASS lite so and so I think that's part of it. Do you really have the human power to go and do these observations that are time consuming? To do the

> training to put the data together? To gather the data? So that process seems to be complicated so that may be why it was selected just to do program evaluation (District Administrator 2, Interview, April 25, 2014).

Additionally, another administrator commented that:

> They [school based administrators] haven't had enough training. They have had opportunities through AC and that's, we were talking about structural problems before this but that's a structural issue as well, because they go to these sit and get meetings and the expectation is that it trickles down. A lot of times that information doesn't trickle down the way it's supposed to. So if we were to design a professional development module to make anything we decide is important for teaching and learning there need to be components, we need to figure out of the existing time, how we focus, how everybody gets the same message and you can't share the same message if you've only heard it once and that's been our model in this district. You're going to go to a professional development and you're going to do turn around training and everything's going to be lovely. Two to 15 hours does not make a person who can troubleshoot any new initiative (District Administrator 3, Interview, May 9, 2014).

The financial costs of providing the professional development as well as the many competing priorities and initiatives in the district influenced how Waverly used the CLASS tool and ultimately its limited impact on instruction. As one administrator commented, "what we're doing is creating technical solutions, we're addressing symptoms and not the root of the problem" (District Administrator 3, Interview, May 9, 2014). There was no mandate from the School

Board or the Superintendent and as a result secondary schools did not adopt the CLASS model in a meaningful way.

No link with teacher evaluation. Another structural condition that influenced how administrators adapted and used CLASS in Waverly was the fact that CLASS was not linked with the teacher evaluation system. District level administrators highlighted the fact that the observations were not linked in any way to the official teacher evaluation system. A notice to the Waverly teachers, observed with the CLASS tool for program evaluation purposes in the 2013-2014 school year, stated that "teachers will not be observed by anyone who is responsible for their personnel evaluations" (District Document, 2014). Teachers' had a varied reaction to whether Waverly should use the CLASS model for teacher evaluation purposes. Overall, most teachers voiced concern about the one time use of the instrument. All but one teacher said they would not want it used for evaluation purposes given the way Waverly currently uses the tool. Those same teachers suggested that if the district used the tool differently, it could be a useful component of teacher evaluation. Specifically, teachers offered that increased teacher familiarity with the tool, increased frequency of observations, increased feedback to teachers, and observer training were necessary for the tool to be valuable in evaluating teachers.

Principals also did not want the CLASS instrument to be a part of teacher evaluation. One principal echoed the teachers' concern that teacher evaluation should be more sustained than a one-time observation. Another principal described his hesitancy to use the tool for evaluation purposes by saying "they're trying to put in a box this very multi-dimensional construct that is good instruction and good pedagogy and positive connection and trust and those things just can't be checked off on a sheet" (Principal 1, Interview, March 26, 2014). After viewing the indicators another school leader commented that:

> On a given day a teacher may demonstrate a number of those or may not. That alone wouldn't tell me. You may be observing more of that behavior just because you're in the room than is typically there so you have to know over time. In the school I would know who has good relationships with students and who less so but I'll tell you it's very few who have less so and that's important. So important but so I could go in on a given day and they may not be smiling, they may not be doing something that lends itself to that but I wouldn't necessarily conclude dour disposition" (Principal 2, Interview, April 2, 2014).

While teachers and principals did not want to use CLASS as a part of the teacher evaluation system, if the district had linked the model more explicitly to the teacher evaluation system teachers would know more about the model and the model may have had some impact at the school level. Additionally, the district adopted the CLASS model at a time when there were several other instructional priorities competing for the attention and time of school-based educators.

Competing priorities. Currently, the national reform climate drives districts to constantly improve and show growth on many measures. As a result, district administrators propose and adopt new solutions to raise achievement for targeted populations each year. Educators at all levels commented that Waverly had many different instructional priorities and initiatives at the district level. When asked whether improving relationships was a priority for Waverly, one administrator commented, "I think right now we are on kind of overload in terms of what's important." She continued by saying that with regards to prioritizing teacher-student relationships, "it's really woven in as a component in certain ways in all of this work but it's not this, you will form relationships with your kids, because I think we know that happens in different ways for different people" (District Administrator 1, Interview, April 8, 2014). Other

supervisors also commented that improving relationships was a priority but that priority is poorly communicated to teachers and staff and doesn't actually materialize in part because "we don't measure teacher relationships as much" (District Administrator 2, Interview, April 25, 2014).

Principals echoed this sentiment. When asked the same question about whether improving teacher-student relationships was a priority for the district, one building level administrator stated:

> I would not say that's the case. I know it's the case here (School 1). I know [School 2] really states that is one of their priorities. I don't think, it is certainly not the opposite, but I don't hear when I go to various administrative meetings with the Superintendent or all the administrators, connections, positive relationships is not often on the agenda (Principal 1, Interview, March 26, 2014).

Another principal responded when asked the same question by saying:

> I'm sure that they send those messages out but that's not where I get my drive…it is important to me so I'm not waiting for a cue from there. I don't know if that's, I'm sure they send out messages on that but I'm not necessarily in sync with it (Principal 2, Interview, April 2, 2014).

Likewise only two teachers felt strongly that teacher-student relationships were a priority for the district. Most teachers said they did not know if teacher-student relationships were a priority for the district or said there was rhetoric about relationships but little action beyond the rhetoric. One of the teachers who felt strongly that relationships were a priority stated:

> You can just see it. Even in the little diagram they did this year with the puzzle pieces coming together, I think relationships is in that. It is very much in the fiber of Waverly. You can see it in the fact that there are all these trainings like the YYY trainings, and the diversity talks… There's an expectation of cultural acceptance and being able to work with diverse families. It's very much embedded in every aspect I feel like, like it's not just something you hear about from counseling but the instruction department talks about it. It is definitely well embedded in Waverly (Teacher 9, Interview, December 4, 2013).

On the other end of the spectrum a teacher responded to the question by saying:

> On paper maybe, but the very fact that I've never participated in professional development is an indicator that it's not. To me if it's a priority then I would have participated in some professional development over my almost 20-year career. But I haven't. So perhaps on paper it is or in rhetoric it is but in reality they probably leave that to the individual schools and the individual principals (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014).

The environment described by administrators and teachers in Waverly, where there were already many different initiatives and projects contributed to the Department of Instruction's sense that they could not use the CLASS model as intended by the developers. It was also easier for teachers and principals to ignore the particular program given the many others in place at the same time.

Adaptations and Consequences

Each of these conditions contributed to the decision made by the Department of Instruction to use CLASS to address the narrow goal of improving the program evaluation of

subject-specific departments. Rather than offering or mandating another tool for schools to use, the district administrators adapted and modified the tool to meet the current program evaluation demands at the Department of Instruction level. Given many competing priorities, the drive to adopt the model coming only from the district level administrators, and no link to teacher evaluation or a specific mandate for the use of CLASS at the school level, the adopters moved forward by limiting the use of the model to the projects and processes they directly managed.

While the developers of the CLASS model created a process to provide feedback to teachers on instructional and emotional support in the classroom, Waverly adapted the model and decided to use it differently. As one district administrator stated "we understand that we're losing a really powerful tool there but we do want to keep it separate from teacher evaluation" (District Administrator 1, Interview, April 8, 2014). As a result Waverly does not use the CLASS instrument to evaluate teachers or schools and gives no individual feedback from the observations to teachers or principals. The interviews with teachers and principals in this study indicate that high school teachers and principals know very little about the CLASS instrument or how district-level administrators use it. In using the CLASS model only to measure teacher-student interactions and providing no feedback loop to the individual teacher the district dilutes the model and limits its usefulness. District level educators are aware they are not using the model as intended. They tout the achievement gains cited by Teachstone, yet the structural and cultural conditions of the district caused them to modify the CLASS model, so there is no viable connection with student achievement. The disconnect between the goal of improving instruction and the instrument selected to achieve that goal indicates that in Waverly use of the CLASS model is largely symbolic. District administrators felt pressure to measure and prove the effectiveness of given interventions, so they purchased this model to provide data on classroom

interactions (related to instruction). In the end, the way they used the model could not possibly produce changes in teacher behaviors or student learning.

Established Context-specific Programs and Processes

This section answers the following research questions: From the perspectives of teachers and principals, how do school-level factors influence teacher definitions of teacher-student relationships? And, according to teachers and principals, what school-level factors influence the process of teacher-student relationships? Schools in Waverly have the latitude to create and implement school-based programs related to many different aspects of teaching and learning. While there are some similarities between the high schools in the district there are also differences in academic focus, school culture, and the population served. One similarity between the two high schools included in the study was a common definition and understanding of teacher-student relationships and their benefits. While this provided a common foundation between the schools, the different conditions in each school led to the development of various programs and processes to support and promote teacher-student relationships. The district allows for this kind of variation, but did not consider the distinctive school cultures and programs when trying to use CLASS as a uniform measure of classrooms interactions across schools.

All of the school-based educators stressed the importance of teacher-student relationships and both schools have established programs and processes that highlight improving climate and developing relationships more broadly. The supports that are in place in both schools are school-wide and allow for variation based on subject, age, and teacher. Each school takes a different approach to fostering a climate that promotes relationships, but both believe it has an impact at the classroom level. The following brief case studies of the two schools describe the existing

programs and processes related to school climate and teacher-student relationships and highlight the unique cultural and structural conditions of the school communities that led to the establishment of their programs and processes. These programs and processes are hallmarks of each school, yet the CLASS model does not take into account context-specific programs or processes developed in different schools, and does not consider the ways in which whole-school culture influences classroom interactions. This ignorance of school-specific context contributed to CLASS being largely ignored at the school level.

Case 1: School X.

Background. School X is located in a medium sized school district in the mid-Atlantic. It is a public secondary program for students in grades 6-12. The district uses a lottery system to admit students from throughout the school district. Currently, the school serves a population of 650 students: 8% Asian, 5% Black, 20% Latino, 61% White, and 6 % Multiple. Approximately 18% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. While the majority of students come to the school through the lottery, there is also a special countywide program for students with Asperger's and a program for 18-22 year old students learning English as a second language. There is one principal, two assistant principals, and a teaching faculty of 51 teachers.

Waverly founded School X in 1971 as an alternative high school for students in the district. It merged with an alternative middle school in 1978 and moved to the current location as a 7-12 school. When the district adopted a middle school program, they added a 6th grade as well. The school describes itself as:

> Designed to provide our students with more control over their education than traditional comprehensive schools permit. We prize self-motivation and self-discipline in our

> students, for we know that these characteristics are vital for success here. We also work hard to inculcate these habits in our students, incrementally increasing freedom and expectations of responsibility through the grades (School Document).

The primary way the school provides students with more control over their education is by giving them choice in three general areas: self-governance (use of time and personal behavior), self-directed learning (educational goals) and school-wide governance. Decision-making at the school level is done through a weekly Town Meeting where students, teachers, and administrators all have an equal say. Academically, School X has high AP participation rates and high pass rates on the state standardized tests.

Cultural and political conditions. Teachers at School X universally agreed that positive teacher-student relationships are a priority at the school and many indicated that they are the main priority for School X staff. The teachers gave many examples of how School X communicates the primacy of relationships to them (as teachers) and to the students. Some prioritization of relationships is structural and other ways are more cultural and philosophical.

School Philosophy. Several teachers pointed directly to the overarching philosophy of the school in describing the role of teacher-student relationships at School X. One stated that "the crux of the whole school is the teacher-student relationship" (Teacher 1, Interview, October 19, 2013). Another teacher described teacher-student relationships as: "very much a part of the point of School X" (Teacher 9, Interview, December 4, 2013), while another directly cited the philosophy of the school saying "I think it goes back to the pre-stated goals" (Teacher 1, Interview, October 19, 2013). One teacher's description captured the pervasiveness of the culture:

> I definitely feel like when you come to School X you step back like 10 or 20 years in terms of culture. In terms of relationships and culture, it's different, it's definitely from an earlier time but it's the good things if you know what I mean. Less fear and less over control and hyper sensitivity. It's more open (Teacher 9, Interview, December 4, 2013).

School X's school profile and other public documents discuss teacher-student relationships largely in the context of the Teacher Advisory (TA) program. Teachers report, however, that messages from the school administration to teachers and parents regarding relationships are numerous. Teachers explained that one of the main messages communicated to new parents was the school's goal of helping each student find an adult in the building they could connect with. Teachers felt the communication from administrators was consistent and constant.

> I feel like every time Principal Jones writes an email it's there. I don't know or every time he talks there is something about the philosophy of School X whether it's a letter he's sending to parents or whatever I feel like it's always in there somewhere that we really value relationships between teachers and students and students and students (Teacher 4, Interview, November 5, 2013).

Other teachers and the principal described an open door policy as a part of the school culture that promotes positive teacher-student relationships. Students do not have a class scheduled for every period of the day, so when teachers have a planning period it is common to find students spending time in the classrooms of those teachers. Sometimes teachers explained that students came during this time for academic help but often students would come to talk about other matters or just read a book on a couch in the room. One teacher described it as:

> A culture at large which says have a pantry of food, or have coffee. There's this permeating culture of relaxation. It is uncommon for a principal to have a slew of guitars in his office where students are able to go in and out and pick up a guitar and play. That's a given here (Teacher 1, Interview, October 19, 2013).

Throughout the interviews, teachers spoke about an overarching expectation that teachers would strive to develop positive relationships with their students. Close relationships are the norm as is spending time outside of class with students. To foster positive relationships and help students find an adult in the building they can trust, the school uses the TA system. When asked how the school prioritizes positive teacher-student relationships many teachers pointed to this TA system and the time dedicated to it in the weekly school schedule, "there are two times per week in which we have teacher advisory sessions which is intended for us to grow with our kids" (Teacher 1, Interview, October 19, 2013). In describing teacher-student relationships at the school, many teachers focused on this time spent outside of the classroom rather than talking about what happens during their individual classes.

Learning the Norms. There are a variety of ways School X communicates its emphasis on developing positive teacher-student relationships. From as early on as the hiring committee, there are intentional messages communicated about the importance of teacher-student relationships. The principal explained that students are on the hiring committees and "they're some of the best judges of whether a teacher coming in is someone who is going to engage in relationships beyond what they're doing in Physics" (Principal 1, Interview, March 26, 2014). He also outlined the impact of having students on the hiring committees: "because we typically have more students on our committees than administrators and teachers, there is a signal right then to

a person that's applying" (Principal 1, Interview, March 26, 2014). Another teacher relayed that in his experience:

> The culture of this school established that [importance of teacher-student relationships] as early as the hiring process. This is who we are and the teacher-student relationship component is important to us and so if that isn't a part of your vocabulary as a teacher then maybe this isn't the place for you (Teacher 1, Interview, October 19, 2013).

Conversations with colleagues were another main way teachers learned about school norms related to teacher-student relationships. Teachers that were new to School X learned from colleagues who answered questions and allowed the new teachers to observe them informally. Teachers talked about benefitting from other teachers who were direct in sharing examples of what they do with their students and helping to problem-solve different situations. Several teachers mentioned the importance of "other teachers who went out of their way to make sure I was exposed to what was going on" (Teacher 2, Interview, October 24, 2013). Observation of colleagues and the general school culture also helped inculcate the norms related to teacher-student relationships. One teacher who has been at School X only two years commented that:

> In general, everybody here, you can kind of see it, it is very apparent that things are different here. From the beginning you see the kids running up to teachers and hugging them and things like that so it's very obvious from the beginning that there's a closer relationship (Teacher 9, Interview, December 4, 2013).

Likewise, another teacher explained that just walking down the hall would give cues and signals about the expectations around relationships: "anytime I pop into another teacher's classroom

there is a kid there" (Teacher 3, Interview, October 24, 2013). Those informal observations help teachers learn more about the culture of School X relative to connecting with students.

Students were the other major influence on how teachers at School X learned about relationships and school norms. Almost every teacher commented on the proactive role students take in helping teachers learn about the school: "the kids are very interested in making sure new teachers know what's going on" (Teacher 2, Interview, October 24, 2013). One teacher talked about a group of students in one of her classes her first year who "reached out really intentionally and modeled it for me." In her experience the students:

> Did a good job of modeling what it feels like to be inclusive and to be caring and to be these tenets of School X and they did it towards me as a teacher which I expect would not be as easy to do at another school where you're new, because I was new at the other school and it was not that way (Teacher 8, Interview, November 20, 2013).

The students taking on a role as ambassadors of school culture was a mostly positive experience for teachers. Most talked about students engaging new teachers in conversation and making sure things were going well for the teachers. One veteran teacher did comment on the importance of teachers discerning the difference between "do what we do" rather than "do what we say" when learning from students.

Self-governance. With self-governance as one of the guiding principles, School X distributes power and decision-making control differently than in other schools. School documents describe self-governance at School X as self-regulation of personal behavior as well as self-governance of the school as a whole. The school operates on a system where students and teachers have wide latitude to make personal decisions about where and how to spend their time,

or how to organize and facilitate instruction. There are many examples of how this philosophy influences day-to-day decision-making for both teachers and students. On a school-wide level the community makes decisions through a Town Meeting that meets weekly. While instruction is not under the purview of Town Meeting, virtually all other decisions are made in this forum. Teachers, students, and administrators have an equal vote. This equalization and wide distribution of power significantly influences the school culture related to teacher-student relationships.

There are symbols of this power sharing embedded throughout the school experience at School X. Teachers, students, and administrators operate on a first name basis which as one teacher explained "something as simple as having teachers known on a first name basis just sort of changes the dynamic of how a teenager and an adult interact" (Teacher 2, Interview, October 24, 2013). An experienced teacher who recently joined the faculty at School X discussed how the distribution of power impacts relationships in her opinion.

> Part of the culture is respecting students that they can make their own decisions in a way and not so much follow the rules because I made the rules and I'm the adult so this is the way it is. It is a little bit more collaborative here – I don't even know what it is about this place that makes it the way that it is but it definitely, the way they'll come in and talk with you and treat you almost like you're a peer in a way is very different and I think that must come from the school philosophy (Teacher 4, Interview, November 5, 2013).

The principal described the basis for the democratization of decision-making:

> The basic philosophy is trust. That's what is at the core of our philosophical points and I trust that teachers are going to do the right thing and kids trust that for the most part and

> this really has to do with what they do in class and what they do in their free time, TA time, Town Meeting time, personal time, personal behavior but that kind of trust does provide a field for all of us to operate on that is friendly, is welcoming, you see people smiling, you hear parents say my kid wants to go to school, they always want to be here (Principal 1, Interview, March 26, 2014).

Teachers highlighted some of the practical applications of this high level of trust in student and teacher decision-making. There are no bells to signal the beginning or end of the period which allows for greater flexibility and for "teachers to have extended moments with kids or extra time with kids" (Teacher 2, Interview, October 24, 2013). Another teacher said that the trust extends to teachers driving students in their cars and texting students to coordinate on field trips. The high-trust culture of the school leads to these norms that help facilitate relationships. Driving students makes it possible to take more field trips and to take informal excursions. This example demonstrates that the high level of community trust also extends to the parents who "trust that their kids are doing good things with their teachers" (Teacher 2, Interview, October 24, 2013).

At the instructional level a teacher explained that shared decision-making and trust at School X leads to an environment with "a high risk tolerance, higher than normal risk tolerance, we try things" (Teacher 6, Interview, November 19, 2013). She described several classes and initiatives that developed from this willingness to try new things and different or richer relationships developed as a result. Another teacher described the same phenomenon differently and directly tied it to the impact it has on her relationships with students.

> My interactions and conversations with them are not limited by the class time and they are not limited by my content area necessarily and I'm able to share things. Because I'm

> interested in something like this, because I'm a regular person and this is School X, I can make it an English elective and I can spend a lot of time on it and it ends up inspiring relationships. In the end my curriculum is better because I can be a full person and bring what genuinely interests me into my classroom. So kind of the trickle down from me being a fluid person allows them to be fluid people and our relationships are as people instead of hierarchal, sometimes stilted relationship (Teacher 8, Interview, November 20, 2013).

At the whole school level, Town Meeting operates as a vehicle for teachers, students, and administrators to share their opinions and ideas. The principal stated that while most students do not attend the Town Meeting on a weekly basis they know in the back of their minds that they always could come and raise an issue or suggest an idea. Teachers explained that the Town Meeting structure is an equalizer that facilitates teachers and students working together as allies. The democratization of decision-making at School X permeates the culture described by teachers and the principal and observed during visits to the school. While this approach to decision-making does not create a static culture it would certainly influence the implementation of any policy or mandate given by the principal or the school district about teacher-student relationships or any other aspect of school climate and instruction.

Structural conditions. Teachers at School X discussed many different structures and strategies they believe influence school norms related to teacher-student relationships. Virtually all teachers mentioned some of the structures (TA) while only a few teachers mentioned other structures. Teachers universally agreed that the TA system and dedicated time outside of class to interact with students positively influenced the process of developing teacher-student relationships at the school. Some of the ideas voiced by only a few teachers included significant

school structures like the small size. The fact that there are fewer than 100 students per grade makes many of the other structures and norms feasible at School X, yet most teachers did not mention school size. These teachers may not consider it critical or it may be an aspect of the school they take for granted. Those that did discuss school size described how it allows for everyone in the school to know each other on some level and prevents a student from attending the school "unnoticed" by teachers. The following section discusses the two primary structural considerations in detail: TA and time outside of class for interaction.

Teacher Advisory (TA). If promoting positive teacher-student relationships is an explicit cultural norm at School X, one of the primary structures in place to support the development of those relationships is the Teacher Advisory program. The program has been in place since the school began in 1971. Each full-time teacher works with a group of students. Some TA groups have two students and others have 25. Students select the teacher they would like as their TA and can choose to have the same person for all four years of high school. Several teachers commented on the importance of choice in the TA process. In giving students choice in the matter "the student is choosing to welcome this adult relationship into their life" (Teacher 1, Interview, October 19, 2013). Another teacher described it as making "them feel invested in this relationship they want to build" (Teacher 2, Interview, October 24, 2013). While the TA is primarily an academic advisor, they are also the primary point of contact for the student and their parent. One teacher described the relationship as one in which the student has "a consistent teacher who works with them over those years as their advisor and their advocate and just sort of their friend and ultimately their college counselor" (Teacher 2, Interview, October 24, 2013). Each teacher described the role and relationship differently but each identified it as a way to intentionally build relationships and community.

School X dedicates time to TA in the weekly schedule. Each week there are two 45 minute periods allocated for "TA time." Each teacher and student decides how to use that time. Sometimes there are specific all-school activities (course selection or course scheduling) and other times a teacher or student will coordinate an activity or conversation for their individual TA. Most of the time, however, these blocks are unstructured. Students do not have to be with their TA teacher but they can choose to be there. One teacher broadly characterized TA as a process that "provides the time and the framework for us to have these conversations and get to know kids in a non-academic type way" (Teacher 1, Interview, October 19, 2013).

While this structure does not directly relate to the development of relationships between teachers and students in a particular class in a particular year, it is instrumental to this school in promoting a general culture that values positive teacher-student relationships. It sets an expectation that teachers and students work together for the common interest of the student. The principle that drives the TA system and the time dedicated to it in the weekly schedule establish an expectation for both teachers and students about relationships in the school.

Time outside of class. The other common theme that emerged regarding structures that promote positive relationships at School X was the time outside of class teachers and students spend together. When asked what he does to promote relationships at the school, the principal explained his role as providing "space and time for connections" (Principal 1, Interview, March 26, 2014). He spoke specifically about how the schedule at School X offers flexibility, openness, and an opportunity for students and teachers to work together on academics, but also to establish relationships that support the academics. This happens during the dedicated TA times but also when teachers have planning time and students have free blocks (unscheduled time during the school day). The principal explained that he sets an "expectation that teachers be available when

their classes are not being held. Whether it's their planning time or Town Meeting time, keep their doors open. I would say that 9 out of 10 teachers here do that without any encouragement" (Principal 1, Interview, March 26, 2014). One teacher in describing the opportunity for teachers and students to interact commented that:

> Some of it happens during TA but it generally happens all day long, any day, any time. It's not that it's ongoing but just that it happens when it happens, that might be lunch, that might be E Block during a planning period, that might be H [Block]. It just happens naturally, it happens in an email (Teacher 6, Interview, November 19, 2013).

The combination of teachers having their doors open and students having non-class time built into their day facilitates relationships and influences how teachers experience the development of relationships with their students at School X.

The benefits of this time outside of class are many according to teachers at School X. While the major drawback cited by each of them was less personal planning time, they described the benefits in many different ways:

> I feel like I'm able to have larger, deeper conversations with students in their down time than they are willing to have in class and a lot of what I do is try to get students to have these conversations in a productive way and that's my content goal and they now come and do that in their free time with me (Teacher 8, Interview, November 20, 2013).

> It provides an opportunity to help students with their needs in a very informal, we don't have to schedule it after school, the parents don't have to work out the carpool arrangement or the whatever. There's something, what's the word, it's very organic, right (Teacher 6, Interview, November 19, 2013)?

School X intentionally created a weekly schedule that values and prioritizes unstructured time for teachers and students to interact, at the expense of traditional classroom instruction time. Teachers and students spend less time per week in a class setting where there is one teacher and 20+ students, and instead have a schedule that provides the opportunity for teachers and students to interact one-on-one or in small groups more easily. The allocation and arrangement of time provides a structure to support the school norms that prize positive teacher-student relationships. The CLASS model is incapable of capturing these processes since many of the interactions intentionally take place outside of the class period. Additionally, the CLASS model does not offer a framework for understanding the way these whole-school processes and programs potentially influence the in-class interactions between teachers and students.

Case 2: School Y.

Background. School Y is also located in the same medium-sized school district in the mid-Atlantic. It is a comprehensive high school for students in grades 9-12 that live in the surrounding neighborhood. The school population is approximately 1,800 students: 8% Asian, 5% Black, 17% Latino, 64% White, and 5% Multiple. About 15% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. While School Y is a traditional neighborhood school, they also have several county-wide programs including one for students with Aspergers. There is one principal, 3.5 assistant principals, and a teaching faculty of 132 teachers.

School Y has served students in the Waverly school district for over 50 years. The school describes its primary goal as providing "all students a first-rate academic education, while fostering the development of the social and emotional skills for success in life" (School Document). One school handbook for teachers explains that the focus on both academics and

social emotional learning at School Y is a "collective effort" in which community members "make a deliberate, daily effort" to model skills and attitudes related to social emotional learning (School Document). Academically, the school is extremely strong with high participation in a range of AP courses as well as high pass rates on state standardized tests. The school has won various awards including being named a "National School of Excellence." The school established a Center for Leadership and Public Service in 2004 that helps coordinate student programs in "leadership, service, and social emotional learning."

Cultural and political conditions. All the teachers at School Y cited teacher-student relationships as a priority at the school and they indicated this was a shift in priority in the last 20 years. The teachers offered examples of how school philosophy changed and how it now contributes to this prioritization of relationships. They also discussed the importance of explicit learning opportunities for both new and veteran staff members.

School Philosophy. Teachers, both veterans and those new to the school, were quick to say that, currently, positive relationships are a priority for School Y. Veteran teachers commented that this was a marked change in the culture over the last 20 years. In characterizing the school today a teacher said:

> I do think the culture here at School Y has, that we are cognizant for the need for student and teacher relationships and particularly that kids need to be comfortable here. You can't learn in a place you're not comfortable (Teacher 13, Interview, January 23, 2014).

Further describing the change:

> Years ago when Principal Y came in it was all this emotional, social emotional intelligence, and you know, no problem with that, and I think the school has developed

> and promoted those things and for a while it was very overt but now it's more subtle. That ethos was sort of cultivated (Teacher 13, Interview, January 23, 2014).

The overall impression was that School Y stresses social emotional learning. One teacher stated that the focus on social emotional learning and teacher-student relationships was possible "because we're pretty strong in academics so we have a little bit of time to spare on things like whole person learning" (Teacher 15, Interview, January 28, 2014).

Teachers felt the change in culture was necessary because previously there was a strong emphasis on academic achievement, but not enough focus on other kinds of intelligence or the importance of relationships. Teachers attribute the improved school climate and prioritization of relationships to the leadership of the principal.

> I will point to our principal who came in with some serious ideas about what it takes to make a whole student and it's not just academics. He's made some changes which I think have been very good for promoting relationships (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014).

> From his very first time from when he took, when he became principal, he's really big on treating everyone with good will, understanding that all of us are pulled in a number of different ways (Teacher 12, Interview, January 16, 2014).

> His leadership has been very important in changing the attitude and culture of the school in terms of it's not just about the grades it is about making good people and whole people and having good relationships not only with students, but teachers and teachers, and parents and teachers (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014).

While there has been a culture shift with regards to relationships, several teachers commented that the focus on academic achievement continues to compete with the time needed to foster strong teacher-student relationships. For example, one teacher explained, "I still do feel like because it's so, I don't know, college prep, and competitive and everyone's got to get into UVA, that can sometimes detract from having the time or inclination for building [the kind of] relationships" (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014). Another veteran teacher discussed the ongoing need to promote the relationship side of the equation to balance out the heavy focus on academic achievement, "part of the culture here in this particular school is that there is a sense of high, high, high achievement here." She continued by saying that the work on social emotional learning needed a "shot in the arm" (Teacher 13, Interview, January 23, 2014).

Learning the Norms. Teachers at School Y explained that new teachers learned about the school culture and norms relative to teacher-student relationships primarily from their colleagues. Teachers described this happening informally for the most part, although teachers that work as teams at the 9th grade level explained that administrators paired certain teachers for different reasons and to meet the needs of different students. These pairings sometimes allow for new teachers to observe and learn from teachers who have been at the school for longer. Teachers also explained that new teacher meetings in the summer and meetings specifically for the teachers of freshmen focused on the importance of social emotional learning and relationships. One 9th grade teacher relayed a story used by the principal during meetings in the summer:

> Our principal, Mr. Y, often tells a story of somebody who came in and said that their child was told on the very first day of school, hurry up and get out your notebook because we are already behind and the kid came home freaking out. He uses that almost every

> year to remind us to take some time to get to know them, let them get to know you, calm the nerves down so that you can, so they can transition into high school well and I definitely think that's related to establishing relationships (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014).

The principal also cited meetings before school and a mid-year meeting for teachers new to the school. In addition, he explained how the staff developed a handbook for all teachers about social-emotional learning at School Y. The handbook explains the rationale behind this focus at the school and outlines the key principles. There are sections that outline ways to embed social emotional learning in each of the disciplines, how it relates to classroom management more generally, and suggestions from the student perspective on how to promote a positive climate in the classroom. Through these meetings and the handbook, School Y created an intentional process for communicating their priorities and norms on school climate, social emotional learning, and teacher-student relationships.

*The role of parents***.** One theme that emerged at School Y was the importance of the role and relative power of parents with regards to teacher-student relationships. While parents are an important part of any school community both teachers and the principal commented on the way they influence teacher-student relationships at School Y. As one teacher described, "Parents are very hands-on. They are in the classroom, they are ever-present, (not physically)" (Teacher 14, Interview, January 23, 2014). The principal said that he reminds teachers every year about the role that parents play in the classroom, "I say there are three people in your classroom, there's you, there's the student, and their parent because many of our students talk to their parents" (Principal 2, Interview, April 2, 2014). A teacher explained her experience with this phenomenon:

> They bring their mommy and daddy with them to the classroom and anything you say that's taken out of context that they like or don't like…like anything that happens in our classroom, they take it home, good, bad, everything (Teacher 14, Interview, January 23, 2014).

When teachers perceive that parents are an ever-present factor in their classrooms, influencing their instructional and interpersonal decisions it impacts the way relationships develop. The principal echoed this influence and said that parents are quick to call when they have a concern about something that was said or done in class. Informally, he says he uses these calls as a way of judging the climate of classrooms. He said the frequency of calls has gone down since the prioritization of social emotional learning. The influence of parents adds to the culture of pressure around academic achievement. Numerous teachers referenced their interactions with parents, usually via email, about student progress and achievement in their classes. One teacher explained that she reminds herself that parents are trying to be good advocates for their students when they have constant questions about assignments and grades. At School Y, consideration of the parent perspective would be essential when considering the implementation of any new policy or program that would impact school climate or instruction.

Structural conditions. School Y supports and informs their culture and norms around teacher-student relationships through a variety of structures, strategies, and shared knowledge. The teachers and the principal consistently cited the overarching focus on social emotional intelligence and the ABCD program (acronym changed) as having a positive influence on the development of teacher-student relationships that provided a balance to the focus on high academic achievement. Other strategies cited by the teachers included team teaching English 9

and World History at the 9th grade level and having older students serve as mentors to incoming students.

ABCD. All of School Y's public documents cite a dual focus of "high academic expectations for every student and the conscious promotion of skills and attitudes every individual needs for success in school and life" (School Document). While the principal was the driving force behind emphasizing social emotional learning at School Y, it grew beyond his expectations. His goal of promoting social emotional learning gained official traction in 1999 when 95% of the faculty voted to support the dual focus on academic achievement and social emotional learning. Shortly thereafter, the school developed the ABCD program. In describing how the program began, the principal noted "I was actually against the term ABCD when they first introduced it. Oh it's a misspelled word, it's all we're going to hear, but actually it's caught on" (Principal 2, Interview, April 2, 2014). Over the last 12 years the program expanded and is now run by a committee of teachers with the principal providing support as needed. The program has grown in size and influence and the principal described the ABCD Steering Committee as having "done many more things than I would have ever envisioned" (Principal 2, Interview, April 2, 2014).

In practice the ABCD committee sponsors a range of different activities that ebb and flow depending on the year. Its many facets include structured programs like ABCD Students of the Month and ABCD week which involves a different activity each day, including rewards for demonstrating respect for others, community, and self. At times the committee will design lessons and structure conversations that are held in every class highlighting specific areas of interest. In other years the school would "shut down" for a day and speakers would come in, and student leaders would facilitate conversations and activities.

According to the teachers, the ABCD program and the focus on social emotional learning permeates the culture. It works to address "that feeling of sort of everybody for himself and compete and get to the top [that] has really improved, or changed. It's much more community" (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014). For example, teachers said it is highlighted for freshmen in particular:

> One of the first things we say to freshmen, that's not how, if I hear anyone in the school say, any teacher hears a freshmen coming in with bad language, or speaking to another, that's not how we do things here. It's kind of changed the culture and I think it has improved it in many ways (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014).

One teacher talked about the impact of the unified message around ABCD by saying:

> It helps create a good culture in the school and we pay attention to things like bullying. And things like that and it helps and we have the Best Buddies program and things like that. And we've got a lot of nice kids, a lot of kids who are just nice to each other. When kids come from other schools and they're like not nice to each other they realize it's not really ok here to not be nice to each other" (Teacher 15, Interview, January 28, 2014).

The public recognition of students that embrace the ABCD philosophy communicates high expectations for student behavior. Those students "are recognized on the announcements which everybody watches so it's always there and hopefully it's seeping into their minds. If they see it enough" (Teacher 14, Interview, January 23, 2014).

In observations at School Y there are many visual reminders of the ABCD program. There are posters throughout the hallways, the symbol is on ID badges and on stickers in the classrooms. During ABCD week there was a banner announcing the occasion and coupons

handed out to students for demonstrating the skills associated with social emotional learning. As the teachers commented, the slogan and the ethos permeate the school.

Cross-case analysis

These two case studies highlight the unique programs and processes developed at the school level to address school climate, teacher-student relationships, and emotional support for students. While teachers at both schools have similar definitions of teacher-student relationships and their benefits, the cultural and structural aspects of each high school did influence how teachers experienced teacher-student relationships. Since teachers and principals at both schools believe there are benefits to strong teacher-student relationships, each school developed programs and processes that encourage emotional support for students that fit with the cultural and structural conditions of the school. The presence of these school based programs and processes contributed to teachers and the principal largely ignoring or passively resisting the CLASS model, because it was an externally-developed tool that tries to minimize differences and aims for a uniform experience in every classroom. These case studies highlight the differences in context and conditions in the two schools and the CLASS model is not sensitive to those differences. Educators in both schools also felt that there was already a high level of attention paid to emotional support and teacher-student relationships in their schools and they did not necessarily see how the CLASS model would improve the emotional support provided to students.

Differences in context. Each school's different cultural and structural considerations influenced teachers' experience in developing teacher-student relationships and providing emotional support to students. These school-level differences include hallmarks of the schools

and the CLASS model's insensitivity to this local context contributed to the low levels of implementation and interest in the model at the school level.

For example, there are significant differences in decision-making structures and culture at the two different schools. The democratization of decision-making at School X leads to a greater level of informality in relationships, and also in the way the school communicates norms and establishes programs and structures. Teachers at School X referenced informal mentoring and learning about school norms. Official documents and handbooks did not explicitly state the focus on teacher-student relationships described by the teachers and principal, but there was nevertheless consensus on key strategies and structures used in the school. This democratization also has an impact on the role students play in shaping teacher-student relationships. Teachers consistently referred to the student role in teaching new teachers about norms and expectations related to relationships at School X. Student empowerment in governing themselves and the school impacts the role they play in shaping the culture and climate at School X.

Additionally, all the teachers at School X pointed to two structures, the TA system and scheduling decisions, which allowed for time outside of class to develop relationships, but teachers described these as relatively informal and fluid structures. Teachers described each TA differently and the school does not require teachers and students to use the time in any specific or detailed way. In the discussion of how they used the extra time built into the school day, each teacher seemed to use and view that time differently. Each thought it yielded benefits for relationships, engagement, and motivation, but there were few edicts or expectations for how teachers and should spend the time.

School Y, on the other hand, has a more traditional decision-making structure which leads to more structured communication of norms and formally established programs such as ABCD. While teachers at School Y also pointed to informal mentoring amongst teachers, they also pointed to more formal learning opportunities such as new teacher staff meetings and school handbooks with explicit references to the goals of the social emotional learning focus. School Y also translated their focus on relationships into a school-wide program (ABCD) that takes a proactive role in sharing strategies with teachers, and establishing activities and structures that impact the entire school community. There are clear expectations for what ABCD stands for and the teacher and student behaviors it promotes. The principal's role in communicating expectations about relationships was also much stronger at School Y. All the teachers pointed to the principal as one of the driving forces behind the change in school culture that put a great emphasis on social emotional learning and relationships. While there was clear teacher buy-in to ABCD, and social emotional learning more generally, at School Y the principal had a significant role in developing the focus. While the leadership of the ABCD program is more dispersed now and run by a committee of teachers, the support of the principal keeps the school focused on its dual goals of high academic achievement for all and teaching the social and emotional skills students need to be successful in life.

These differences in decision-making, as well as the various structures, programs, and processes developed in each school are critical for teachers and students. Efforts to improve teacher-student interactions need to take into account these school level differences. When these externally-developed reforms or instruments do not value different school contexts, school-level educators resist or ignore implementation.

Lack of information and trust at the school level. While district level administrators in Waverly adapted the CLASS model for use in program evaluation, it gained almost no traction at the school level, which limited the impact the model had on teacher-student interactions, and teacher-student relationships specifically. The principals at both schools had a basic knowledge of CLASS including awareness of the model but they did not know Waverly used it for program evaluation. Both principals received CLASS scores for their school in the fall of 2012. The reported scores included average scores and a range on each of the dimensions. One principal described his experience with the data: "We were given this data over a year ago. We were just given it. There was a brief conversation at Administrative Council and then there was nothing else" (Principal 1, Interview, March 26, 2014). In reaction to the data for his school he commented that:

> When we got our first data I was pretty surprised because we scored pretty low on some of the measures. Not that we were in a danger area but we were lower than some of the other schools and it just doesn't make sense, especially when it looks at climate, our numbers were low on climate. I questioned myself first and thought is there something we're really doing wrong here? But the more I learned about the tool…that they were just measuring, just taking snapshots for these short periods of time and they weren't really looking at our overall climate. So no, I don't think this is valuable. I can't say I'm getting anything out of the data because I have a big question mark as to why we're putting this kind of money into this type of observation (Principal 1, Interview, March 26, 2014).

Similar to the principals, the teachers at both schools were unaware of Waverly's use of the CLASS instrument. Only one teacher could explain what the tool measures and none of the teachers knew how Waverly uses the CLASS tool. After a brief explanation of the instrument,

several teachers recalled observers came to their classrooms but they did not know what the observers were looking for during the observation. There was one teacher that was familiar with the instrument and was able to describe his interaction with an observer in his classroom during one cycle.

At the school level teachers and principals were largely unaware of CLASS and how district level administrators used it at the district level. This lack of knowledge about the CLASS model at the high school level indicates that implementation and impact at the school level is minimal. While the district allocates resources to this model, which serves as a major component of the program evaluation process, the teachers and principals responsible for implementing the program (curriculum) are unaware of the model the district uses to assess teachers' delivery of instruction and interactions with students. School level educators receive limited information about the CLASS model and its use at the district level. The information principals do get does not motivate them to adopt or implement the model beyond what the district requires for program evaluation. A tool designed to improve instructional and emotional support cannot have a school or classroom level impact if those directly responsible for teaching and learning are not aware of the tool. The CLASS model's insensitivity to individual school climate and established programs and processes, such as TA and ABCD, undermines the credibility of the model with practitioners.

Resistance to the CLASS Model: Teachers' Beliefs about Teacher-student Relationships and CLASS

The following section answers two research questions: How do teachers define teacher-student relationships? And, how do the teacher definitions of teacher-student relationships

compare with the definitions embedded in the CLASS tool? School-level educators have common definitions of teacher-student relationships and their benefits. These educators also believed that the content of the CLASS model aligned with their beliefs about teacher-student relationships and emotional support, however, they generally disagreed with process aspects of the CLASS model (as developed by Teachstone and adapted by Waverly). Teachers and principals felt an externally developed tool that ignored school-level context did not resonate with their lived experience in schools relative to emotional support and teacher-student relationships. The incongruence between teachers' beliefs and the CLASS model contributed to teachers and principals ignoring the model at the school level. While the teachers' believed the CLASS model had construct validity, they disagreed that the model was reliable in measuring emotional support and teacher-student relationships. This section outlines the common definitions and beliefs of the school-level educators as well as the areas of conflict, specifically the short observation cycles and scoring of specific interactions.

Common Definitions of Teacher-Student Relationships

The area where there were the most commonalities between teachers, principals and administrators across the district was in how they defined teacher-student relationships. Teachers define positive teacher-student relationships as ones where they know the student well because the student feels comfortable talking with the teacher about class and non-class issues, specifically by asking questions and getting help from the teacher (in class and out of class). The teacher definition was much broader and less specific than the CLASS instrument definitions of relationships, but there was overlap in the content.

Knowing students well. When teachers described a positive teacher-student relationship the most common response focused on opportunities for the students to talk with the teacher

about both class and non-class issues. In most cases, teachers highlighted the importance of connecting with a student about topics beyond the course content. There were also several references to the use of humor. Teachers described these opportunities to connect and build rapport happening largely on a one-to-one basis during the class period, and during more informal times such as before and after class, before and after school, and at lunch. Each teacher described the dynamic differently, but each response captured the importance of connecting on an individual basis.

> I think I have a good relationship when I know a little bit about what's going on in their life. They'll tell me things, I don't know, what they are doing on the weekends or they won a kung fu championship for example. When they are willing to share those things I think that's a good sign that we have a good relationship (Teacher 4, Interview, November 5, 2013).

> I think I know when I have a good relationship with a student when the student can come to me if they are having trouble. They feel comfortable talking with me about things, not just school things but other things that might be impacting them academically or not. Might be good news or bad news whatever (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014).

> The student who comes and visits you at lunch or before school or after school and they feel comfortable talking to you about things that are academic and non-academic and particularly when they are having trouble (Teacher 1, Interview, October 19, 2013).

These individual conversations that teachers had with students during class, as well as outside of class, gave them the opportunity to learn more about the student and connect with them on academic and non-academic issues. Teachers explained that these conversations were essential to

building strong relationships with students. These conversations indicated that students trusted their teachers. Teachers believed this higher level of trust had an impact on classroom interactions and student learning.

Each teacher interviewed for the study was also observed for one class period. During these observations there were many examples of teacher-student interactions that corroborate the teacher's experience with relationships. There were several instances where it was clear that the teacher knew the student well. Often times the interactions happened in the few minutes between classes when a student would approach the teacher. In one class a student flew into the room exhorting her new-found true love. It led to a brief conversation where both the teacher and the student shared their thoughts on love but it was clearly not the first conversation the two had had on the topic. In another case, two students "stopped by" during a break between classes just to check in and say hello to the teacher. They had been students in her class the previous year. They talked with the teacher for five minutes about their current classes and how the school year was going, and then returned to class. Again it was clear there was an established rapport and the students were seeking out contact with the teacher.

While the teachers talked about the experience more holistically, the CLASS instrument does capture some of the teachers' lived experience with building and sustaining relationships with their students. Rather than a broad view, the CLASS instrument uses specific indicators to categorize and assess the nature of the interaction. For example the CLASS instrument includes indicators such as students seek support and guidance, acknowledgement of emotions and out-of-class factors, interest in each other's lives, and social conversation. These indicators capture some of the interactions between teachers and students, but a one-time observation could not

capture the intensity, subtlety, or frequency of the interactions, particularly those that happen outside the bounds of a given class period.

Asking questions and asking for help. Another area teachers focused on in their definitions of positive teacher-student relationships was the willingness of students to ask questions both in and out of class. Teachers believed that when students ask questions in class or ask for help it is an indicator that they trust the teacher and feel comfortable with them. In one example a teacher described their understanding of the process a student goes through in asking a question.

> When a student feels comfortable kind of showing a vulnerability, which we don't necessarily think of as a vulnerability, but raising their hand and either answering a question or asking a question. There is a certain level of comfort that they must have for that to happen (Teacher 3, Interview, October 24, 2013).

As this teacher explained, the process of asking questions is a key component of developing a relationship with the teacher. Sometimes teachers described this happening in a whole-class environment, but teachers also commented on students asking for help individually. Sometimes the help is specific to the course content or assignments. One teacher explained that when students honestly communicate about how or why they're struggling in her class, she knows there is a solid foundation for the relationship. At other times students are building upon class relationships to ask for help in other areas. One teacher gave an example, "when they are comfortable enough asking for help. Like today I had a student say I'm getting all these requests from colleges. What do I do with them? So we had a conversation" (Teacher 13, Interview, January 23, 2014).

The other common thread in teacher definitions of positive teacher-student relationships was that students wanted to spend additional time talking with the teacher when there was a positive relationship. One teacher described it as students "feel comfortable coming around to my class early rather than dragging their feet. Or they visit in the office here and they just chat and they keep coming back" (Teacher 1, Interview, October 19, 2013). Another teacher explained that during times where she asks students to stay after class, there is opportunity to assess and build upon the teacher-student relationship.

> I have a couple of students who didn't do as well as they normally would on a recent test and I pulled them in individually and talked about what's going wrong, what can we do, because I really want you to succeed. I usually just get their input on where they think they might need support. I offer up a lot of things. They don't realize they could turn in their homework, for example, and I could mark it up thoroughly and just try to trouble shoot and work together on strategies. So that comes out of a position of trust in each other and a little bit of compassion and just understanding not everything goes perfect the first time (Teacher 6, Interview, November 19, 2013).

One teachers' response to how she defines a quality teacher-student relationship included all three of these themes: knowing the student well, having them ask questions, and spending extra time with them outside of class:

> I think it is when the student feels comfortable coming to me outside of class, speaking up in class if they need help and also being willing to be honest if there are other things going on because often with HILT (English language learners) students you have a lot of other factors that are influencing their performance in school that are completely outside

> of school and you have some students that might not be comfortable telling you. But when you have a better relationship they'll usually be honest with you and you're better able to help them be more successful because they often need support outside of just being a good teacher. You have to be willing to provide other kinds of assistance (Teacher 9, Interview, December 4, 2013).

The observations of teachers done during this study validated the teachers' assertions about the importance of students asking for help and asking questions during class. During virtually every observation there were students that asked questions of the teacher either asking for help or clarification. There were also many examples of students approaching the teacher to ask for help individually before, during, and after class. In some instances students asked for help on a particular problem "I'm not sure what to do next." In other cases students were asking for a broader level of support. One student approached the teacher after class and said he felt behind in the class. He wanted to know what he could do to improve the situation. The student initiated the interaction and it led to a positive, forward-looking conversation. During this study the researcher observed this type of interaction during virtually every class in both schools. Once again, when the researcher used the CLASS instrument to score the interactions, she captured some components, but frequency and intensity were hard to measure in an observation of a single class period.

Benefits of positive teacher-student relationships. Teachers and administrators across the district also agreed that positive relationships between teachers and students improve student motivation and engagement that leads to more student learning. The experience of these teachers and administrators corresponds to similar findings in the research on teacher-student relationships. The descriptive words and examples differed from teacher to teacher but each one

expressed a difference in student's attitudes towards school, the content, and achievement when there was a strong relationship with the teacher. Some teachers focused specifically on students' willingness to participate or complete tasks:

> The students are going to feel more invested in what they are doing and feel more connected. When you feel like there's a person counting on you to do something you're going to be more likely to do than if it's just a task that has to get done. It makes the kids more invested in things too and willing to do what's asked of them (Teacher 2, Interview, October 24, 2013).

Others talked about how it helped students to persevere when a topic is challenging: "the more that I make an effort to develop a relationship the more a student will be with me when they are having trouble or the more willing they are going to be to take a risk" (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014). One teacher felt that many high school students in particular don't have intrinsic motivation yet, and so instead the motivation can often come from the relationship with the teacher. One teacher gave a specific example of how her personal knowledge of the students can help with engagement during class:

> When I'm giving examples for words or trying to relate things to the book I can talk about their personal experiences. So even if they've dazed off I can make a reference to their favorite football player and they're like what? I know him! I know that name! And I'm back and when you do that consistently they are just sort of waiting on you to say something that relates to them even if you just make up an example and use their names and you know whose names you can use who everybody will kind of be ok with. It helps.

> It helps you be able to relate the information to them (Teacher 14, Interview, January 23, 2014).

Overall teachers felt students who were comfortable with and had a positive relationship with the teacher usually wanted to do well and were able to "acquire more knowledge as a result of that" (Teacher 5, Interview, November 19, 2013). The CLASS instrument acknowledges the importance of positive climate and teacher-student relationships and several of the indicators in the instrument mirror what teachers in this study described as markers of strong teacher-student relationships. This acknowledgement of the role emotional support plays in student learning was one of the key ways teacher beliefs corresponded with the CLASS model.

Teacher Beliefs and the CLASS Model: Content

Given the uniform lack of familiarity with the CLASS instrument, the researcher showed each teacher the indicators for the three dimensions within the Emotional Support domain (teacher sensitivity, positive climate, regard for adolescent perspective). Overall, teachers felt that the indicators for each of the dimensions matched with their own definitions of these constructs. While the teachers defined each of the constructs more generally and with less specificity than the CLASS instrument, they agreed that the indicators reflected good teaching practice in each of these areas. Common responses from the teachers were statements such as: "I think this encapsulates a lot of what I'm thinking" (Teacher 8, Interview, November 20, 2013); "these all sort of resonate with me as things I would consider as things to look for teacher sensitivity" (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014); "I'd say this has got the positive climate covered" (Teacher 6, Interview, November 19, 2013); and "I think this is actually a really good list. I think a lot of these pieces here are good" (Teacher 1, Interview, October 19, 2013). Of the

indicators included in the CLASS instrument on the Emotional Support domain, there were some that some teachers questioned. Two teachers commented on the inclusion of choice as an indicator in the "regard for adolescent perspective" dimension, including one who explained her concern by saying:

> We try to build it in as much as we can but more and more with the curriculum being narrowed and getting more, I'm trying to say this in a nice way, getting more, being told more frequently from above exactly what we have to do, and when we have to do it, it seems like that's the way it's going. Choice, it's laughable to me that they would put that on their, their indicator, or whatever (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014).

Teachers' reaction to the indicators was positive with regard to the content. Teachers felt that the indicators were hallmarks of good teaching and matched with how they defined the constructs. Their concern focused on the ability of an observer to actually see and understand many of the indicators. Particularly in the realm of emotional support, however, teachers said there were indicators that would be difficult to observe, particularly during a single observation, for example, takes risks or anticipates problems; "these are difficult things to put a ruler to by coming and observing" (Teacher 15, Interview, January 28, 2014). One teacher's metaphor seemed apt in describing the indicators overall:

> You know something you would, you ever seen those old science fiction movies and the lights are going off and on? Well that's what it would look like. A bunch of these are being hit at different times. They are never all on at the same time (Teacher 12, Interview, January 16, 2014).

The following section further details the teachers' concern about the feasibility of observing all the different indicators in the CLASS instrument during an observation.

Teacher's Beliefs and the CLASS Model: Process.

After showing teachers the indicators and explaining how Waverly uses the tool, teachers stated that they did not believe a 30 minute observation would accurately capture their relationships with students. Every teacher talked about the challenges involved in assessing dimensions such as positive climate and teacher sensitivity in a single observation. Several teachers commented that an observer could not observe all the indicators in 30 minutes, "on a day to day basis you don't even have an opportunity to showcase all of those things. It's not possible" (Teacher 14, Interview, January 23, 2014). Similarly, another teacher agreed that one observation "is too short of time, too limited of an exposure to really develop an understanding of what's really happening in the class between the teacher and the student" (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014). Some teachers believed it would be difficult to observe all the indicators in one class period, but differentiated between those that would be easier and harder to observe. For example, this teacher stated:

> You won't see everything in one class period for certain. Like I think for the positive climate you'll probably see most of that if you just come in for 20 minutes, you'll probably see most of that. For teacher sensitivity you'll probably see most of that also. I think the regard for adolescent perspective might be a little more challenging to see, like every aspect of that, because conversations and those kinds of things yeah. But the connections to life and the usefulness of content that's a challenge to see, that's kind of a hard (Teacher 9, Interview, December 4, 2013).

Other teachers commented that the course content and the instructional activity would influence what an observer sees on a given day. One teacher spoke broadly about the issue by saying "I'm very dubious about how real that and how deep that snapshot would be, how detailed it would be you know, and particularly depending on what was happening in a class on a particular day" (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014). Another teacher relayed an example from two recent class periods. The instructional activities differed significantly during the two class periods and the teacher believed that would impact what an observer sees. During one class period the students engaged in a conversation about a high-interest article. The teacher noted that during that class:

> Necessarily I have to be responsive, I have to be aware of the way students are perceiving the subject to not alienate and keep in mind all perspectives, there are a lot of things I have to do in order to facilitate this conversation (Teacher 8, Interview, November 20, 2013).

Conversely, she felt an observer would not see that same level of responsiveness during the next class where she read out loud from the class novel and led a discussion on more concrete topics. The teacher concluded from this example that "I can't see how a stranger who is not a part of the culture can come in and observe the culture in a way that is very meaningful" (Teacher 8, Interview, November 20, 2013). A different teacher shared the same concern and described his experience having a CLASS observer visit his class on a day when he showed a film. When he questioned the observer about what they would observe that day they said they would be able to observe how he introduced the film. The teacher expressed concern that with this single use of the CLASS instrument they would not see the previous lesson where he provided context for watching the film, or the following lesson where the class discussed what they learned. The

instructional activity influenced the amount of interaction there was between the teacher and the students (Teacher 15, Interview, January 28, 2014).

During observations conducted for this study, the researcher validated the teachers' concern that particular instructional activities would lend themselves to better "scores" from the CLASS tool. During the observations, students and teachers participated in a wide range of instructional activities. Sometimes students participated in small group discussions, other times the teacher lectured and directed whole group discussions. During several classes students worked independently almost the entire class period. Many teachers used a variety of instructional strategies during a single period. The instructional strategy did have an impact on what the researcher observed.

During one observation, the lesson was almost entirely teacher directed. The teacher made several comments indicating that this was not how she ran the class every day, but it was the strategy she used that day based on her instructional goals (grammar and vocabulary). The researcher was not able to see many of the indicators on the CLASS instrument for teacher sensitivity or adolescent perspective. Under the teacher sensitivity domain the observer did not observe any of the behavioral indicators for awareness, effectiveness in addressing problems, or responsiveness to academic and social/emotional needs and cues. As the teacher previewed the next class period it was clear students would be working in small groups the following day and there may have been more opportunity to observe the indicators that CLASS highlights for teacher sensitivity or regard for adolescent perspective (Observation, February 10, 2014). During the observed lessons of other teachers when students worked in small groups or discussed different topics, these indicators were present. There is no reason to believe these indicators of teacher sensitivity would not be present during a different lesson taught by this same teacher. In

this case the instructional activity influenced how the researcher scored the teacher-student interactions using the CLASS tool, confirming the teacher's concerns about reliability of the instrument.

Similar to their concerns about the influence the instructional activity has on what an observer sees, teachers felt there were factors beyond the control of the teacher that could influence what an observer sees in 30 minutes. One teacher commented, "I don't know that on any one day you can guarantee that you're having the normal, whatever the "normal" interactions are" (Teacher 6, Interview, November 19, 2013). The singular nature of the observation led some teachers to feel the CLASS tool would not be a reliable measure because:

> Once is not enough to be reliable. And so if they're really going to use this, anybody can come into my classroom at any point in time but if you're going to start making judgments on me that reliability factor matters to me. Because let's face it we all have rough days. We all have rough classes (Teacher 13, Interview, January 23, 2014).

Teachers explained that the time of day, whether it was the beginning or end of the quarter, and whole school activities (games, field trips, assemblies) could all have an impact on relationships and class climate on a given day, "they're not the same kid every day and I'm not the same teacher every single day" (Teacher 8, Interview, November 20, 2013). Teachers believed an observer could not capture the teachers' ability to adapt and be flexible given the changing dynamics of the class if they only observed one time.

CLASS as context stripping. Teachers also stated that a 30 minute observation would not accurately portray their relationships with students because the culture of the class is previously unknown to the observer. Teachers described aspects of class climate and teacher-student relationships that are difficult to observe because often actions are "unspoken or not

demonstrated every day" (Teacher 14, Interview, January 23, 2014). One teacher explained her doubt about Waverly's process for using the CLASS instrument by saying:

> Again some of these things I think are hard to observe and hard to observe if you're only observing once and are necessarily hard to gauge if you aren't really embedded in the culture of the classroom. You might not see all of this or you might misinterpret some things that are positive in that culture (Teacher 11, Interview, January 15, 2014).

In one specific example, a teacher detailed her relationship with a particular student struggling in her class. After meeting with the student and two of his other teachers, the group agreed on two ways she could help him be more successful. She would reserve a seat at the front of the room for him and use an inconspicuous signal (a flat palm on his desk) to cue him when he was getting off task. The teacher felt that both these actions demonstrated her awareness of his needs, but an observer would not necessarily observe or score either one using the CLASS instrument. The teacher concluded that she did not believe "that one person coming in and doing it once would yield anything that's really that valuable" (Teacher 8, Interview, November 20, 2013) because the observer could not fully understand the culture of the class. Teachers' concerns about the process employed in the CLASS model undermined their general agreement with the content of the model. The length of the observations, the use of a single observation, the impact of particular instructional activities, and the observers' lack of background knowledge of the classroom content and culture were all concerns teachers voiced about the process used in the CLASS model.

Adaptations and Consequences.

The disconnect between teachers' beliefs and the process used in the CLASS model (as adapted at the district level) meant the model did not resonate with teacher experiences with

providing emotional support. While teachers agreed with the content or constructs of the model they expressed little trust in the observation tool or the process. While other Waverly-specific district and school conditions meant these teachers did not use the CLASS model in a systematic way, the lack of congruence with their beliefs further limited interest.

Principals echoed many of the same concerns as the teachers and as a result they are not using the data available for their schools, gathered from the CLASS observations conducted at the secondary level. The end result is that the CLASS model has virtually no impact on teacher decision-making or understanding of their interactions with students in the emotional support domain. Instead, teachers and principals continue to rely on their beliefs about teacher-student relationships and use their established school specific programs and processes to address how teachers provide emotional support to students and develop strong teacher-student relationships.

Summary of Findings

This study examined political and normative factors at the district and school level that educators in Waverly identified as influencing the definition, formation, and maintenance of teacher-student relationships at the high school level. Additionally, the study focused on how Waverly tried to use an evidence-based reform model (CLASS) to improve student achievement by measuring teacher-student interactions. It also considered how teacher perspectives aligned with the assumptions underlying this model.

Using the co-construction perspective (Datnow et al., 2002) and the political, cultural, and structural conditions lens (Oakes et al., 1993) this study suggests three key findings.

1. The conditions in Waverly created an environment where district administrators adapted and modified the CLASS model to such an extent that

it ultimately became a largely symbolic policy with minimal impact on classroom instruction.

2. The CLASS model did not take into account school-specific programs or processes developed in different schools, and did not consider the ways in which whole-school culture influences classroom interactions. This ignorance of school-specific context contributed to CLASS being largely ignored at the school level.

3. The incongruence between teachers' beliefs and the CLASS model led teachers and principals to ignore or passively resist use of the model at the school level. The teachers' believed the CLASS model had construct validity, but they did not believe the model could reliably measure emotional support and teacher-student relationships at the high school level.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

School districts across the country exist in a high-pressure environment that demands constant improvement (Cuban, 2008; Hess, 1999) and the use of evidence-based reform models to improve test scores (Hammersley, 2013). In response to these demands, policymakers adopt externally-developed, quantitative measures of teaching, that include measuring constructs such as teacher-student relationships. When districts adopt these technical tools without attention to the cultural and political conditions in a district or school, the policymakers and practitioners often adapt, change, misuse, and ignore the reform (Datnow et al., 2002; Oakes et al., 1993). Additionally, these tools claim to measure multi-faceted constructs, but the underlying post-positivist assumptions embedded in evidence-based models do not match with the reality that practitioners encounter in their schools. As a result, reforms often have a minimal impact and serve as largely symbolic gestures towards improving teaching (Rosen, 2009; Smith, Miller-Kahn, Heinecke, & Jarvis, 2004). Waverly's use of the CLASS model is a case study in how the high stakes accountability culture drives policymakers to adopt evidence-based models that measure some aspects of teaching, but fail to have an actual impact on teaching or learning. In Waverly, there were three key reasons the use of CLASS had a minimal impact on teaching or learning at the high school level:

- District administrators adapted and modified the CLASS model to such an extent that it became a largely symbolic policy.
- The CLASS model does not value school-specific conditions and their role in influencing classroom interactions.

- The CLASS model, as Waverly adapted it, is incongruent with teachers' beliefs because they felt it could not reliably measure quality teaching, including teacher-student relationships.

Endless Reform

Throughout our history, Americans and our elected officials have viewed schools as a key lever for change and the solution to myriad national problems (Cuban, 2008; Rosen, 2009). During each generation policymakers decry a "crisis" in American schooling and develop new policies, strategies, and reforms to fix the problem of the day. Schools are seen as the solution to problems as wide-ranging as poverty, assimilation of immigrants, and rectifying racial inequalities (Rosen, 2009). We put great faith in schools, but they are uniquely constituted as a "tax-supported public bureaucracy governed by lay policymakers" (Cuban, 2008, p. 103) and are under extreme pressure from outside groups to demonstrate that that they are taking action to address the given problem or crisis. The result is a revolving door of new initiatives. In the realm of education, Hess (1999) explains that "policymakers are driven by professional and community pressures to initiate a great deal of activity, because it demonstrates leadership and steers the local education agenda onto politically and professionally comfortable ground" (p. 4). Similarly, Cuban (2008) argues that political, social, and economic conditions "push school districts to try novel programs, join regional and national efforts to improve curriculum, and adopt innovative technologies so as to be viewed as worthy of continued endorsement" (p. 103). Hess (1999) suggests that society expects superintendents to have reform ideas and the focus is on initiating reform rather than following through, creating an "endless stream of new initiatives" (p. 52). Even though there is no set of strategies that consistently improve education outcomes and no set

of remedies that will directly lead to better outcomes, there is pressure on districts to try as many as possible in pursuit of constant improvement.

The climate in Waverly is similar to the environment described by Cuban (2008) and Hess (1999). By many measures Waverly is a high achieving district with strong public support, but, as in virtually every district, there are areas in need of improvement. District administrators described a system on overload with priorities and initiatives designed to improve a range of outcomes, including standardized test scores for specific subgroups. The district-wide program evaluation system is one way the School Board tries to assess each curriculum area, ostensibly to provide accountability for how the district uses resources. The pressure for a robust accounting of the goals and accomplishments of each curriculum area, at the district level, influenced the adoption of the CLASS tool. Use of this tool sent a signal to the wider community that Waverly had a uniform and systematic way of measuring teaching and implementation of the curriculum. District administrators in Waverly are under the same pressure to improve as their counterparts across the country, specifically to find ways to measure improvement. In an example of "spinning wheels" (Hess, 1999), district administrators purchased the CLASS tool so they could "uniformly measure" teacher-student interactions, without establishing a mechanism for actually changing the interactions they measured.

Evidence-based Reforms

The pressure to continuously improve, along with the veneration of evidence-based programs, means districts and schools are prone to adopting one-size-fits-all, off-the-shelf programs that promise research-based results (Datnow et al., 2002; Hammersley, 2013). The last 30 years have seen the prioritization of evidence-based research, in social science generally and in education specifically. The federal government funds and prioritizes research with randomized

controlled trials and systematic reviews of studies. The evidence-based practice movement directly impacts districts and schools by stating that "what is good practice can only be determined through research" (Hammersley, 2013, p. 17), which in turn influences the strategies and reform models available to districts and schools. Hammersley (2013) argues that this focus on evidence-based research ultimately hurts schools because "research usually cannot supply what the notion of evidence based practice demands of it – specific and highly reliable answers to questions about what 'works' and what does not" (p. 19). Policy at any level cannot rely exclusively on research because "the impact of policy or practice is always highly mediated by factors that are not under the policymakers' or practitioners' control" (p. 32) and "practitioners will take account of other considerations than purely 'technical' ones including what is and is not politically viable" (p. 32). Yet, in the high pressure atmosphere where the public demands constant school improvement and evidence-based reforms, schools feel compelled to purchase and use these externally-developed tools "validated" by the research as symbolic evidence of their responses to constructed problems or deficiencies.

The national trend of adopting evidence-based solutions shaped the policy response in Waverly. The impetus for using the CLASS model in Waverly stemmed from a desire to have a uniform mechanism of measuring instruction across all grade levels and subject areas. At the district level they wanted to standardize the way they "measured" teaching and be able to compare teaching in their district with teaching in other districts. Ideally, they hoped that using this tool would help improve teaching and learning, but the primary focus, initially, was on measurement. District administrators were under pressure to quantify how teachers deliver curriculum and interact with students, so they selected a model that promised research-based evidence that the tool could improve teacher-student interactions. The research Teachstone

publishes on the CLASS model suggests that the observing and feedback loop embedded in this tool can improve instruction. While Teachstone outlines a "learn, measure, improve" model, Waverly limited the scope of how they used CLASS to the "measure" component. They only used CLASS for projects and processes directly managed at the district level, mainly program evaluation. The district did not engage teachers in the "learn" part of the model but instead simply "measured" teacher-student interactions using the observation tool. By collecting data using the CLASS observation tool, district administrators satisfied calls for accountability but there was no connection made with teachers to inform them about the tool the district used to measure their teaching.

This study highlighted some of the reasons why district administrators in Waverly limited the scope of CLASS and why there was little communication with principals and teachers about the model. First, the immediate need was a way to uniformly measure teaching for the purposes of program evaluation. The CLASS model included an observation tool that district administrators in Waverly believed would meet this criteria, so they paid to have access to this tool and the training needed to use the tool. Program evaluation in Waverly is under the direct purview of district administrators, so teachers and principals have little knowledge of the tools used for that process. Second, district administrators felt that the CLASS model could be a powerful tool for improving teaching and learning but they did not have the power or the resources to mandate use of the model at the school level. The model was not directly linked to the teacher or school evaluation systems and there were many other competing priorities in the district which limited the financial and staff resources devoted to using CLASS at the school or teacher level. Waverly chose to use one aspect of the CLASS model, the measurement tool, and ultimately misused the tool. There has been little return, with regards to changing teaching and

learning, at the high school level as a result of using CLASS in Waverly. The pressure to constantly measure and find the new model that will improve student test scores leads districts to quickly adopt technical processes and programs without a clear understanding of what they are buying and whether it will work given the cultural and political conditions of their district and schools.

District and School Level Context

The disconnect between the underlying assumptions embedded in evidence-based, standardized reform programs and the reality of practice in schools exacerbates the "spinning wheels" cycle (Hess, 1999). Off-the-shelf programs promise results in every school without considering the inevitable differences in political, cultural, and structural conditions in various districts and schools. Many of these programs assume that with a high degree of fidelity of implementation a technical tool alone can change teaching practices and improve learning outcomes. Alternatively, interpretive approaches to policy implementation in education recognize that all policy decisions are made in context and the experiences of educators are not universal and will differ between individuals and schools. Datnow et al.'s (2002) co-construction model views local variation as inevitable, where local educators and reformers work collaboratively to construct change and implementation of reforms is multi-directional. Similarly, Oakes et al. (1993) focuses on the importance of considering normative and political changes to support the technical aspects of school reform. Both perspectives confirm that adopting a technical model without commensurate attention to the unique political and cultural realities of individual schools predicts reform failure as local practitioners and policymakers will inevitably adapt, change, misuse, or ignore the reform in an effort to make it work in their specific context (Oakes et al., 1993; Datnow et al., 2002).

Datnow et al. (2002) and Oakes' et al. (1993) interpretive lens is instructive in analyzing why CLASS had a limited impact on instruction in Waverly. As Datnow et al. (2002) predict, district administrators in Waverly adapted the model to such an extent that it had almost no impact on classroom instruction or teacher-student relationships at the high school level. Waverly only used CLASS to measure the quality of instruction for the purposes of program evaluation, and decreased the number of recommended observation cycles used by the observers and provided no individual feedback to teachers. By adopting and investing in CLASS, the district-level administrators received data about whether teachers provide certain kinds of instructional or emotional support on the given day they were observed, but Waverly has none of the tools needed to help teachers improve that support. The way Waverly is using CLASS, the teachers receive no data specific to their classroom. The only information they get after being observed is average scores for their overall subject area. This process does not give teachers any of the information they need to change or improve in the identified areas (emotional support, instructional support). Districts that want to encourage change in instruction need to do more than adopt a technical tool. They also need to create a culture and norms around the ideas reflected in the tool. The use and implementation of the tool depends on understanding the complexity of introducing a new tool in an established culture (Oakes et al., 1993). We should question tools that do not allow for this kind of variation and flexibility because districts and schools will inevitably adapt them, which calls into question their claims of validity and reliability.

While Waverly had unique conditions at the district level that influenced implementation of the model, this study also found that school-specific context and conditions influenced use of CLASS in this district. In essence the district chose to layer the CLASS model onto existing

school level programs. Prior to the adoption of CLASS, each school had already developed specific programs and processes that focused on improving climate and developing teacher-student relationships within their school context. The CLASS model was not sensitive to these established programs or the ways teachers defined and experienced teacher-student relationships in their specific schools. The CLASS model does not acknowledge that the overall school climate and school-wide programs impact the observed interactions between teachers and students in the classroom.

The interviews with teachers and principals highlighted the importance of considering school-level conditions in the implementation of a reform model. While there were many similarities between the schools, and a common district context, there were many significant cultural and structural differences between the two schools. These influenced the programs they had in place and would influence implementation of a model such as CLASS if there was a district mandate to use it. The research outlined in the literature review on teacher-student relationships shows there are many school conditions that influence the development of teacher-student relationships. School size (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Gladden, 1998), having time built into the day (Hamre & Pianta, 2006), continuity of people and place (Bergin & Bergin, 2009), school values, and decision-making (Battistich, 1997) are all key factors in the development of relationships. Teachers and principals mentioned each of these factors as significant for the development of teacher-student relationships, even though they differed in the two school sites. The technical approach used in the CLASS observation model does not take any of these school-wide factors into account, even though teachers talked about how they influenced what happens in their individual classrooms. Teachers and principals largely ignored CLASS, since the model does not account for the influence of these factors.

Each of the schools had a different culture and norms related to providing emotional support and developing teacher-student relationships. Implementation of a reform model should be responsive to the given context and culture of the individual schools. As Oakes et al. (2000) explain, the introduction of technical strategies and structures requires an understanding and recognition of existing cultural and political norms. Reform models must address these underlying cultural conditions and consider ways to work with them and shift them when needed. The developers of the CLASS model try to eliminate the role of context and aspire to have similar teacher-student interactions in every classroom. This highlights the differences in the underlying post-positivist assumptions of the CLASS model and the interpretive approaches of education reform reviewed in this study. The underlying assumptions of the designers of the CLASS model isolate and exclude teacher decision-making and meaning-making while an interpretive approach to school reform would be based on a design that emphasized teachers' lived experiences. The CLASS tool is not sensitive to multiple perspectives or realities, whereas an interpretive approach to program reform would value those different perspectives as a way to understand what is happening in the class.

The data from CLASS also lacks generalizability. Given that each classroom and lesson will be different, it is hard to apply lessons from one teacher or one school to the next. As the data from this study indicates, teachers did not believe that the process Waverly used with CLASS could accurately measure emotional and instructional support. While teachers agreed that the dimensions and behavioral markers accurately captured these constructs, they did not believe that one observation, during one class period, could accurately assess complex constructs such as teacher-student relationships. In comparison, the interpretive approach used in this study garnered rich data on the how classroom and school specific-contexts influenced the

development of teacher-student relationships. For the administrators using the CLASS model there is no recognition that school-wide programs, processes, and norms impact the teacher-student interactions taking place in a given classroom. The administrators and teachers using the pre-existing programs in place at each of these schools strive to improve climate and teacher-student relationships broadly, but they also assume these programs ultimately have an impact on classroom level interactions as well. Because the CLASS model does not appreciate and incorporate these school-level conditions and programs, it had little traction in the studied schools.

Symbolic Policy

When district administrators select evidence-based reform packages that ignore the impact of local context and have little influence on the actual teaching and learning happening in classrooms, they continue to spin their wheels, participating in the endless cycle of school improvement. When policymakers set goals, but select instruments that cannot plausibly achieve their goals, the policies serve as largely symbolic gestures towards improving teaching. Traditional policy analysis assumes "a direct, logical connection between the instruments of policy and specific objectives" (Rosen, 2009, p. 267) but "when a policy lacks an instrument or provides an instrument so weak that it could not reasonably be expected to effect the desired outcomes, that policy falls into the category of hortatory or symbolic" (Smith et al., 2004, p. 6). When policymakers set goals but do not provide realistic means for attaining the goals, they are intentionally or unintentionally trying to "reduce the inherent complexities of education, assigning simple, stable explanations and motives to unstable, ambiguous, and highly complex events and conditions" (Rosen, 2009, p. 271). These symbolic policies are a consequence of a culture where district and school administrators are under constant pressure to quickly

demonstrate improvement, yet the established tools are unrealistic and disconnected from the reality of schools. At a minimum, when district-level decision makers adopt these policies they signal to "the public at large or a particular interest group that they are doing something, anything, to address a problem" (Smith et al., 2004, p. 9), but when the goals do not have a "credible relationship to the means provided or suggested to achieve them" (p. 29), district level policymakers end up spending significant funds on prescriptive, evidence-based programs that cannot possibly change teaching and learning in the ways promised.

The use of the CLASS tool in Waverly meets the criteria established by Smith et al. (2004), for a symbolic policy. The district administrators operated in a context where they felt pressure to find a common way of measuring high-quality instruction so the program evaluation process could be more systematic and robust. This program evaluation process was the tool created by district-level policymakers to demonstrate that money is spent well and instruction is improving. Quantifying teaching and learning through a standardized assessment score or a score on the CLASS observation tool is challenging and does not necessarily provide significant evidence about whether money is spent well or whether there is high-quality instruction occurring in the classroom. Yet, the district-level decision makers adopted the program to try and signal this. Ultimately the goal of program evaluation in Waverly is to improve teaching and ensure students are learning, yet the district-level policymakers adopted a technical tool that could never realistically achieve that goal. By selecting the program, training observers, and providing quantitative data on what they observed, the district leadership signaled an attempt to measure teaching in Waverly at a given point in time. They put no strategies in place that would actually lead to changes in the way teachers teach or students learn, nothing that would actually connect the evidence-based program to changes in instruction. Once again, caught in the endless

reform cycle, Waverly policymakers adopted a program whose designers claim it can improve teaching and learning by focusing on the interactions between teachers and students. Those interactions are essential to how students learn, but when teachers do not know how the district is measuring these interactions and they are given no guidance on how or why to change them, a goal of improving student outcomes (on standardized tests or any other measure) is unrealistic and an inefficient use of time and money for the principals and teachers caught in this cycle.

Contribution to the Literature

This study contributes to the field in several ways. The impetus for the research was an interest in the intersection of policy and education practice with a particular focus on teacher-student relationships and the role school-level conditions play in influencing how teachers experience these relationships. The current climate in education focuses on student achievement as measured by standardized test scores and other quantitative data, and teacher-student relationships are viewed as a potential lever for improving student success on standardized assessments. While positive school climate and strong teacher-student relationships are important variables, the advent of externally-developed reform models and policies that purport to measure these constructs seems to be at odds with the lived experiences of teachers. This study was an attempt to closely examine one such model and understand how the local conditions diverge from the underlying assumptions of evidence-based programs and how this divergence influences the implementation and impact of a given reform model.

The decision makers in this school district, like many others, are earnest in their interest in improving student achievement by focusing on improved relationships between teachers and students. One approach taken by policymakers in this district, however, was to focus on measuring these relationships using an externally developed, generic tool rather than first

gathering information from teachers and school-level staff about how they define relationships and the factors that influence these relationships. Efforts to improve teacher-student relationships typically focus on the individual interactions between teachers and students rather than considering the impact of school-level factors (size, continuity of relationships, proximity, etc.). This study identified some of these pertinent school-level factors that teachers believe are important in defining and encouraging the development and maintenance of relationships with students: decision-making, time outside of class, the role of parents, and overall school philosophy.

This study also focused on the importance of considering the teacher's perspective on political and normative aspects of teacher-student relationships and educational change. While relationships are one specific area of teaching related to student outcomes, the phenomenon of relying heavily on technical, one-size-fits-all approaches to school reform rather than considering how teachers make sense of local, context-specific events is a significant barrier for effective school reform in school districts in the United States.

The most surprising aspect of this study, however, was how little teachers in the district knew about the CLASS model even three years after its adoption. While administrators at the district level were well-versed in the model and associated terminology, there was little penetration at the school-level generally, and almost a complete lack of knowledge at the teacher level in the studied high schools. When prompted, most teachers in the study recalled being observed by CLASS observers using this instrument, but they had no knowledge of what was measured or how the information was used at the district or school level. This presented a challenge in studying implementation of the model given the practitioners involved in the teacher-student interactions were largely unaware of the model.

As a result, the focus of the study shifted to an analysis of why the district adopted the CLASS model and the reasons it had a limited impact on student learning. This study offers an example of what can happen when district policymakers adopt externally-developed, evidence-based programs to improve student achievement. The philosophical assumptions of technical-rational inspired programs like CLASS are fundamentally at odds with the lessons learned from interpretive approaches to policy implementation in education. As Datnow et al. (2002) and Oakes et al. (1993) conclude, adopting technical approaches to reform without considering local context and the importance of cultural and political conditions results in superficial and symbolic policies that do not impact student learning. The adoption of CLASS in by decision makers in Waverly was ultimately a symbolic gesture with no lasting impact because the model is predicated on a belief that we improve learning by quantifying and systematizing teaching. This study confirms the disconnect that arises when district-level policymakers make decisions based on research that strips away context. Any effort to improve teaching and learning happens in context, and when evidence-based programs do not take into account the essential and inevitable role of political, structural, and cultural conditions the adopted reforms have little impact.

Future research in this area should delve deeper into the reasons schools and districts continue the symbolic use of evidence-based reform programs even when the results are disappointing and predictable. Having districts, schools, and teachers focus on ways to improve the emotional and instructional support teachers provide to students (key domains in the CLASS model) is laudable, but the research must focus on how this can be done while also acknowledging that each district and school is different. Successful approaches to school improvement must respect the influence of school-based programs and processes, as well as the

beliefs of teachers, if they hope to truly impact teacher-student relationships and student learning.

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Appendix A
Teacher interview protocol

Intro: Your responses to this interview will be anonymous and your names and the name of this school will not be identified. The study is about how teachers define and understand teacher-student relationships and their perceptions of how school-level factors associated with organization, culture, and politics influence these relationships. The study is trying to provide political and cultural context to a technical approach being taken by the district. So I'll also compare how teacher definitions of teacher-student relationships compare with the definitions embedded in the CLASS tool.

I would like to know your thoughts on some of these topics.

First, tell me a little about what you teach; how long you've been teaching and where you've been teaching.

How would you define high-quality teacher-student relationships (how do you know when you have good relationships with the students in your class)?

Describe your approach to building relationships with the students in your class. (How do you connect/relate with students?)

- Possible prompt: Not everyone connects with every kid – what kind of student do you typically connect with?

What specific actions do you take that you think are effective in building relationships with students in your class?

- When do you develop relationships with students (i.e. When does that happen)?
- How did you come to do things the way you do?

Are you familiar with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation tool used by the district to broadly measure emotional support provided by teachers for students?

How would you define teacher sensitivity in the classroom?
(If a teacher was highly sensitive to student needs what would I observe in the classroom?)

Here is a list of factors that the CLASS tool uses to observe teacher sensitivity. Does this match with how you would define teacher sensitivity? Is it comprehensive? Is there anything missing?

How would you define positive climate? If a there was a positive climate in the classroom what would I observe?

Here is a list of factors that the CLASS tool uses to observe positive climate. Does this match with how you would define positive climate? Is it comprehensive? Is there anything missing?

How would you define regard for adolescent perspective? If a teacher had a high regard for adolescent perspective what would I observe?

Here is a list of factors that the CLASS tool uses to observe regard for adolescent perspective. Does this match with how you would define regard for adolescent perspective? Is it comprehensive? Is there anything missing?

This tool is used by trained observers who watch activity in the classroom for a minimum of 20 minutes. Arlington Public Schools purchased this tool and trained observers to observe in all secondary schools in the district.

If you were observed using this tool would it give an accurate portrayal of your relationships with students?

What is your reaction to being evaluated with this tool?

What are the instructional benefits of (having/prioritizing) positive teacher-student relationships? What are the drawbacks?

What could this school do differently or better to promote relationships?

What unique aspects of this school influence the relationships between teachers and students?

When you were a new teacher here how (or from whom) did you learn about teacher-student relationships at this school?

Possible prompts or follow ups

- So they (relationships) are/are not a priority at this school?
- How is that communicated to teachers? To students?
- If it is not a priority, why not?
- Who sets expectations in this school about teacher-student relationships?
- Are there different expectations depending on the grade-level or the department?
- Are the expectations spoken? Unspoken?

What are some of the structures in place at this school to promote relationships (size, schedule, teaching assignments)?

- Are these factors specific to this school?

Have you participated in professional development related to teacher-student relationships? If so, what kind? And when?

Is promoting teacher-student relationships a priority for the district? If so how is that communicated to teachers? If not, why not?

In general, if I wanted to observe teacher-student interactions in this building where should I go? When should I be there?

Appendix B

Principal Interview Protocol

Intro: Your responses to this interview will be anonymous and your name and the name of this school will not be identified. The study is about how teachers define and understand teacher-student relationships and their perceptions of how school-level factors associated with organization, culture, and politics influence these relationships. The study is trying to provide political and cultural context to a technical approach being taken by the district. So I'll also compare how teacher definitions of teacher-student relationships compare with the definitions embedded in the CLASS tool.

How would you define high quality teacher-student relationships? In other words how do you know when teachers and students have a good relationship with each other?

What are the benefits of positive relationships between teachers and students?

The teachers I interviewed here commented on the key role you play in talking about the importance of relationships. Can you tell me about your role in this and why it's important to you?

> Other wording: What role do you, as the principal, play in making sure teachers and students have positive relationships?

When teachers have good relationships with students what do observe happening in the classroom?

Are there unique aspects/programs at your school that you think influence the development of relationships between teachers and students?

How do new teachers learn about the role of teacher-student relationships at this school?

Do teachers participate in professional development related to teacher-student relationships? If so, what kind? And when?

Are you familiar with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation tool used by the district to measure instructional/emotional support provided by teachers for students?

How are you using this tool or the data collected with this tool?

Do you think the tool gives an accurate portrayal of teacher's relationships with students?

Should schools or teachers be evaluated with this tool?

Do you think this tool is being used well at the district or school level?

Is promoting teacher-student relationships a priority for the district? If so how is that communicated to the principal and teachers? If not, why not?

Appendix C

District Administrator Interview Protocol

Intro: Your responses to this interview will be anonymous and your name and the name of your department will not be identified. The study is about how teachers define and understand teacher-student relationships and their perceptions of how school-level factors associated with organization, culture, and politics influence these relationships. The study is trying to provide political and cultural context to a technical approach being taken by the district. So I'll also compare how teacher definitions of teacher-student relationships compare with the definitions embedded in CLASS tool.

Can you describe your role in the district and how long you've worked in Waverly?

Describe the role of relationships between teachers and students in excellent teaching and learning.

From your perspective, is promoting teacher-student relationships a priority for Waverly? If so how is that communicated to principals and teachers? If not, why not?
What role does the district (administrators, supervisors, specialists) play in making sure teachers and students have positive relationships? Are there other district level resources?
Are there unique aspects/programs in Waverly that you think influence the development of relationships between teachers and students?
What is the role of professional development related to teacher-student relationships in Waverly? If professional development plays a role, what kind? And when?

Are you familiar with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation tool used by the district to measure instructional/emotional support provided by teachers for students? Highlight the key dimensions for the study.

From your perspective why was the CLASS tool adopted by Waverly?

Where did the drive to use CLASS come from?

How is the data collected using the CLASS tool being used in Waverly? By the district? By the schools?

Can you talk specifically about how it was used in program evaluation in your department?

Do you think the tool gives an accurate portrayal of teacher's relationships with students?
Should schools or teachers be evaluated with CLASS? If not why does the district think it is important to keep them separate?
This tool is not being used as intended by the developers (no feedback to teachers etc.). Why do you think Waverly is choosing to use it differently (just for program evaluation)?
Do you think this tool is being used well at the district or school level?
Are there other administrators working at the district level that you would recommend talking with about the use of CLASS in Waverly?

Appendix D

Classroom Observation Protocol

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

Positive Climate

Relationships		
Physical proximity		
Peer interactions		
Shared positive affect		
Interest in each others' lives		
Social conversation		
Positive Affect		
Smiling		
Laughter		
Enthusiasm		
Positive Communications		
Positive comments		
Positive expectations		
Respect		
Respectful language		
Use of each other's names		
Warm, calm voice		
Listening to each other		
Cooperation		

Teacher Sensitivity

Awareness		
Checks in with students		
Anticipates problems		
Notices difficulties		
Responsiveness to academic and social/emotional needs and cues		
Individualized support		
Reassurance and assistance		
Adjusts pacing/wait time as needed		
Re-engagement		
Acknowledgement of emotions and out-of-class factors		
Timely response		
Effectiveness in addressing problems		
Student issues/questions resolved		
Follow-up		
Student Comfort		
Students seek support and guidance		
Students take risks		
Students participate freely		

Regard for Adolescent Perspectives

Support for Student Autonomy and Leadership		
Choice		
Shared responsibilities		
Chances for leadership		
Connections to Current Life		
Connects content to adolescent life		
Communicates usefulness of content		
Student Ideas and Opinions		
Encourages sharing of student ideas and opinions		
Follows and responds to student comments		
Meaningful Peer Interactions		
Provides structures for peer sharing		
Promotes peer conversations		
Flexibility		
Relaxed structure for movement		

Notes: