

Building Collective Efficacy:
How School Leadership Supports Ninth-Grade Teams in Implementing a
Developmentally Responsive High School Transition

A Capstone Project
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Executive Summary

The transition from eighth to ninth grade is a challenging academic, social, and developmental time for the students involved. The literature addressing this transition has shown that both academic performance (Alspaugh, 1998) and academic interest (Dotterer et al., 2009) can decline during this period, which can lead to long-term negative effects both academically (Smith, 2006) and emotionally (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Newman et al., 2007). This study proposes that students are supported in this transition through the implementation of a developmentally responsive transition which addresses the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness identified as crucial in self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In turn, secondary school leaders have a responsibility to build the collective efficacy of their ninth-grade teaching staff to implement these transitions and to tend to these pressing student needs. As a construct, collective teacher efficacy has been shown to improve student performance regardless of previous achievement or demographic characteristics of the student body (Goddard, 2001), as well as to improve teacher retention (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007), stress (Klassen, 2010), and self-efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). Fostering this efficacy can yield hugely positive results for both students and faculty.

In this capstone project, I researched the ways in which school leaders understand developmentally responsive transitions for students and the ways in which leaders support their implementation. In addition, I studied leadership practices that best support collective teacher efficacy aimed towards the transitional experience for students. The conceptual framework for the study hypothesizes that by tending to the leadership domains of “setting directions” and “developing people” (Leithwood & Louis, 2012), a

school leader can enable the four sources of collective teacher efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, affective state, and social persuasion. In turn, the framework posits that by enabling those sources, the faculty will be positioned to implement a developmentally responsive transition and tend to the student need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness; that successful implementation then recursively fosters a stronger sense of collective efficacy.

This study was conducted at three private Catholic high schools in the mid-Atlantic region. Each school had similar enrollment and demographic construction. Data was collected between September and December of 2019. The study was a mixed-methods design: qualitative data were collected in the form of semi-structured leader interviews, document analysis, and teacher focus group interviews; quantitative data were collected in the form of teacher collective efficacy surveys. These data were then analyzed through the lens of the elements of the conceptual framework.

Findings from this study showed that the leaders at each secondary school in this study were well aware of the transitional difficulties for ninth-grade students. Each leader worked to create an environment of support and growth for students during the transition, and each leader supported faculty to implement a developmentally responsive transition in a number of different ways. In turn, each leader strove to foster teacher collective efficacy through the ways in which they supported the faculty tasked with implementing these transitions, with a focus on collaboration, teacher leadership, and transformational leadership.

Based on the study's findings, I propose the following recommendations for helping secondary school leaders to foster a sense of collective teacher efficacy around the ninth-grade transition:

1. Make "care" a legitimate concern.
2. Build community by creating spaces for community building.
3. Keep messaging clear and consistent with all stakeholders.
4. Build a communal understanding of competence and support.
5. Maintain a robust peer observation program.
6. Provide autonomy to faculty, but with structures that encourage collaboration.
7. Make time for building collective teacher efficacy.

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APPROVAL OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

This capstone project, “Building Collective Efficacy: How School Leadership Supports Ninth-Grade Teams in Implementing a Developmentally Responsive High School Transition”, has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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March 18, 2020
Date of Defense

DEDICATION

To my wife, Christine, whose constant love, support, and encouragement made
completing this program possible.

To my children, who I hope can find the inspiration in their own lives to never stop
learning.

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This program has been a remarkable and rewarding experience. It would be impossible to properly acknowledge all of the people who have empowered and enabled me along the way. Without the support, encouragement, love, and wisdom of family, friends, colleagues, and professors, it simply would not have been possible.

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Chapter I - Introduction

The transition from eighth grade to high school is a challenging academic, social, and developmental time for students. The difficulties of this transition can often cause damaging and potentially lingering effects beyond the ninth-grade year. After a difficult transition, academic performance has been shown to decline (Alspaugh, 1998) as has overall academic interest (Dotterer et al., 2009). Not only does academic success falter at the outset of high school, but that same faltering has been shown to have long-term effects on a student's higher education prospects (Smith, 2006). In high-performing academic environments, talented and capable students have their academic self-concepts weakened. This concept is referred to as the "big fish, little pond" effects (BFLPE), damaging their respective sense of self and academic performance (Marsh, 1987). In addition to academic concerns, the failure to appropriately support the transition of students can lead to increased psychological and emotional pressures (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Newman et al., 2007). The developmental significance of this transition for a young person's well-being is hard to deny.

The goal of the study is to better understand the ways in which leadership can build a transitional program committed to students' developmental needs and build the collective efficacy of staff to implement and attend to that commitment. This study focuses on the role that secondary school leaders play in enabling and supporting a developmentally responsive transition for ninth-grade students, and in enabling and supporting the faculty that develop, manage, and implement the transitional programming. The leadership practices and transitional programming of three private schools in the mid-Atlantic area was analyzed and leaders were interviewed about their

practices in support of a responsive transition. In addition, leaders were interviewed around the building of collective teacher efficacy as it pertains to the ninth-grade transition. In order to triangulate and connect the beliefs and deeds of leadership, surveys and focus groups of ninth-grade teachers were conducted as well.

Problem of Practice

The transition into high school presents particular challenges for students that schools often do not explicitly and adequately address in their ninth-grade transitional programming. In order to ensure that students properly engage in their new environment and to ensure that the primary psychological needs of students are met, attention must be paid to the social and emotional aspects of transition and to the emotional engagement of students at both the classroom and school level (Durlak et al., 2011; Hamre et al., 2013). The consequences of a failure to engage students properly and to tend to their emotional and developmental needs can be severe and must be avoided.

Leadership plays a significant role in this problem of practice. It is the responsibility of leadership to set the tone and the culture of the school (Leithwood & Louis, 2012) and to ensure that the faculty and staff support every child. It is the responsibility of leadership to signal the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL), of emotional engagement, and of developmental responsiveness (Allensworth et al., 2018), and then in turn to instill capacity in the staff. Teachers must be willing to engage with students on these important developmental and emotional issues, and will take their cues – both implicit and explicit – from leadership when it comes to SEL (Minckler, 2014; Raver et al., 2008; Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2014; Romer et al., 2018). Classroom-level interactions are key for positive student development and leadership can

help prepare faculty adequately and with a shared vision for what those classroom interactions should represent (Hamre & Pianta, 2010).

Designing, building, and implementing a ninth-grade transitional program that is culturally and developmentally responsive is a key task of secondary school educational leadership. In research around student perceptions of the ninth-grade transition, three main areas of concern arise: academic, procedural, and social (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Ellerbrock et al., 2015; Hauser et al., 2009; Smith & Akos, 2008). As students move from the more friendly and intimate confines of middle school, with fewer teachers, smaller classes, and less schedule flexibility, they inevitably become concerned about these areas of change and what it may mean for them.

These three areas of concern have a firm basis in the psychology and development of adolescent students. These three areas—academic, procedural, and social—align with the tenets of self-determination theory (SDT). SDT posits that a student requires three basic psychological needs be met in order to feel properly supported, valued, and validated; students require a sense of competence, of autonomy, and of relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These three align readily with the concerns cited – competence speaks to academic concerns, autonomy to procedural concerns, and relatedness to social concerns. What students are really worried about in the transition to high school is not where the bathroom is, or what their grades will be, or if they will make friends, though it may seem that way on the surface. On a deeper level, students are worried about the level of support they will receive and about whether the commitment they make will be matched by their school and their teachers (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010).

In addition to proper support, SDT highlights a student's motivational needs. Once the three needs of SDT are adequately met, motivation begins to change from extrinsic to intrinsic. Students begin to operate from their own internal motivation rather than responding to external motivation. The move to intrinsic motivation is also driven by student engagement which represents another crucial aspect of the transitional experience. Engagement is considered as containing three different components: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (Fredericks et al., 2004). In many ways, these too align with the tenets of SDT; though not a perfect match, behavioral engagement speaks to autonomy, emotional to relatedness, and cognitive to competency. In turn, these categories of concern, when taken together, speak to the importance of a transitional program that looks well-beyond academics and content-area challenges. Attending to the developmental and psychological needs of students must be a key component, and teachers and staff should be well situated to offer students the resiliency, mindset, and motivational supports they need to thrive in the start of their high school careers. It is the responsibility of the school leader to ensure that teachers and staff are as well situated as they should be.

Purpose of Study

This study examines the practices of secondary school leaders as they address the transition of students from middle school into high school. This study also explores the ways in which leadership directs and supports the work of the ninth-grade faculty and the ways in which leadership encourages a focus on students' developmental needs during the transitional period. The goal of the study is to understand and uncover the effects that secondary school leaders can have on building the collective teacher efficacy (CTE)

among the staff, particularly with the tenets of a developmentally responsive ninth-grade transition in mind.

Key Terms

There are a number of terms that warrant explicit definition prior to the advancement of the study. Those terms are: developmentally responsive transition, collective teacher efficacy, and social and emotional learning.

Developmentally Responsive Transition

A developmentally responsive transition is one that is cognizant of the developmental progression of ninth-grade students and that is attentive to the particular needs of young people at this point in their physical and cognitive maturation. A developmentally responsive transition tends to both the developmental needs of the students as well as the underlying psychological needs already discussed as part of self-determination theory (SDT). The transitional programming must unite the need for autonomy, for competence, and for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000) with the particular developmental needs of a new ninth-grade student. I take guidance from Battistich et al. (1997), who conceptualize the needs of SDT as requiring a group setting for fulfillment with a focus on the community nature of a school environment. The authors write of this community:

This setting provides the individual with a focus for identification and commitment, rather than simply offering personal support. Students' needs for competence, autonomy and belonging are thus met when they are able to participate actively in a cohesive, caring group with a shared purpose; that is, a community. (p. 138)

Ellerbrock & Kiefer (2010) also spoke of developmentally responsive transitions as realized in what they term a “community of care”: “a place where students and teachers

care about and support each other, where individuals' needs are satisfied within a group setting, and where members feel a sense of belonging and identification with the group" (p. 396). This combination of the ethic of care, a sense of community, a shared purpose, and the meeting of psychological needs within SDT form the backbone of my understanding of a developmentally responsive transition.

Collective Teacher Efficacy

Collective teacher efficacy refers to the perception of the ninth-grade teachers' capability to tend to the psychological and developmental needs of the students. Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) provide the theoretical underpinnings of collective teacher efficacy that guide this study. Building off of the work of Bandura (1997) on self-efficacy, the authors posit that collective efficacy represents "the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students" (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 480). That sense is, in turn, related to the school culture:

Perceptions of collective efficacy directly affect the diligence and resolve with which groups choose to pursue their goals. Hence, perceived collective efficacy is a potent way of characterizing the strong normative and behavioral influence of an organization's culture. (Goddard et al., 2004, p. 7)

In addition, this sense of efficacy is context-specific, which is key for the current study. The focus at hand is on the collective efficacy around SEL, and around the student needs highlighted by SDT. Goddard et al. (2000) propose two elements that enable the collective efficacy of teachers, that of the analysis of the teaching task and the assessment of teaching competence, in addition to four sources of efficacy-building: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states (Bandura, 1997). In the current study, each of these can be viewed in the light of developmentally

responsive ninth-grade transitional programming to provide a sense of collective efficacy of the teachers in question. Each also must be examined in relation to the role leadership plays in offering the supports and structures to create those sources of efficacy and to empower the analysis of task and assessment of competence.

Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) represents a curricular area beyond the academic for students and represents a focus on learning that is more than facts and figures. As a baseline definition, I prefer the definition offered by Elias et al. (as cited by Durlak et al., 2011) as “the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively” (p. 406). Leadership must make the foregrounding of SEL for incoming ninth-grade students a priority and must signal to faculty and staff the importance of this character-building work. This foregrounding of SEL takes its clearest form in the fulfillment of students’ psychological needs and in the creation and implementation of programming that tends to those needs.

Research Questions

The research questions in this study strive to explore the ways in which leadership supports the work of the ninth-grade transition and the ways in which leadership encourages a focus on student developmental needs during the transitional period. In an effort to better understand the beliefs and actions of high school leaders around responsive transitional programming, I investigated the following research questions:

1. How do secondary school leaders understand developmentally responsive high school transitions for all students?
2. What leadership practices support the work of ninth-grade faculty in creating developmentally responsive high school transitions for all students?
 - a. Sub-Question 1 – How do leaders perceive their own work as supporting these efforts?
 - b. Sub-Question 2 – How do faculty perceive the work of leaders in supporting their efforts?
3. In what ways do secondary school leaders help to build the collective efficacy of ninth-grade faculty in meeting student social and emotional needs as part of the transition to high school?
 - a. Sub-Question 1 – How do leaders perceive their own work as supporting collective efficacy among staff?
 - b. Sub-Question 2 – How do faculty perceive their leader’s supports to build collective efficacy?

Research question one strives to understand the manner in which secondary school leaders understand the challenges of the ninth-grade transition, particularly as those challenges relate to the three categories of relatedness, competence, and autonomy. This question requires a deep exploration of the leader’s beliefs and perceptions of the student challenges within the transition, and an investigation of the ways in which those needs might be met. This understanding then serves as a baseline level of clarity that enables a deeper dive into the supportive practices of the leader.

Research question two requires a more in-depth look at how leadership encourages the development of the staff around SEL and how a leader's beliefs about SEL trickle down to the staff. In a developmentally responsive transition, SEL will play a major role; this second question strives to gain a more explicit understanding of what leadership can do to build the confidence and capability among the staff to address these important concerns. This question aims to identify the leadership practices that exert the strongest influence on the implementation of developmentally responsive ninth-grade transitions. Additionally and as with research question one, it is important to understand the interplay of perceptions between faculty and leadership. The sub-questions aim to elicit the way that both leaders and staff perceive of the supports offered.

Research question three explores more intentionally the building of CTE in the context of student SEL and the ninth-grade transition. By understanding the formation and fostering of CTE, a leader can direct attention to the sources and supports that most bolster the collective construct. This question will explore leadership practices through the lens of those actions which best support collective teacher efficacy. As with research question two, the sub-questions address the potential divide between the perceptions of the staff and the leader.

Conceptual Framework

The work of this study revolves around the question of what actions a leader can take to enable CTE, which in turn enables the ninth-grade faculty to implement a developmentally responsive transition for students. The successful implementation of such a transition, in turn, reciprocally supports the growth of CTE in an affirming cycle.

For the question of collective efficacy, I return to an earlier point about motivation. When discussing student motivation, an ultimate goal for secondary school leader and his or her staff is to move motivation from extrinsic, driven entirely by outside forces, to intrinsic, where the student chooses to be guided by internal forces, desires, and interests. I propose that a student will feel properly supported if the three needs of SDT are met – autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Extending that, I would also propose that once those needs are met, the process of internalizing motivation begins in earnest. This process is what a developmentally responsive transition aims to enact.

Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy (2000) propose a simplified model of collective efficacy, upon which I would layer the beliefs and actions of leadership. I am interested in the role leadership plays in enabling the four sources of collective efficacy, and the role played in challenging teachers to an honest analysis of teaching task and assessment of teaching competence. I am employing this model as the underpinning of my understanding of CTE and its growth.

The conceptual framework, then, requires an interweaving and overlaying of a number of different theoretical and conceptual constructs. The tenets of SDT are at the core of the developmentally responsive ninth-grade transition, which is in turn at the core of this study's focus. In order to successfully implement such a transition, a school leader must strive to build the collective efficacy of the staff around supporting student autonomy, student relatedness, and student competence. How a leader might do that depends on the ways in which the model described by Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) is aimed towards SEL, towards the specific needs of ninth-grade students, and towards fulfilling the psychological needs of SDT. I propose that by enabling the four sources of

collective efficacy with these student psychological needs in mind and by encouraging the faculty involved to spend time analyzing and assessing each other's growth, a school leader can help to provide a more developmentally attentive and responsive transition to ninth-grade students.

Methodology

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The goal of the study is to understand the challenges of the ninth-grade transition within three different school settings and to understand the interactions between leadership and faculty that lead to a more intentional focus on student SEL. The goal is not to understand why these schools conduct the ninth-grade transition in the way they do, but to understand *what* they are doing for students and *how* they are implementing transitional programming. Hays and Singh (2012) highlight this different focus – away from the “why” question and towards the “what” and “how” questions – as one of the main strengths of qualitative inquiry, and it is thus appropriate for this study. In addition, Hays and Singh (2012) point out that one of the main goals of qualitative inquiry is to uncover the collaboration and process within a structured organization; indeed, this aims at the heart of my study. The study's research questions cannot be addressed without better understanding the interplay of factors within each specific environment, and without understanding (or attempting to understand) the relational interactions that lead to the observed output. A qualitative study enables the voices, perceptions, and reactions of participants to stand at the fore, and that is what this research study requires; the quantitative methods allow for a triangulation of the qualitative data.

The first method of discovery was semi-structured interviews with leadership about the role that each leader plays in building a transition and supporting the ninth-grade team. These interviews focused on the leader's beliefs about the ninth-grade transition and the actions taken in support of those beliefs. This required developing an understanding about how the leader empowers the ninth-grade teaching faculty to do this work and what level of oversight, structure, and process is provided. These interviews also focused on the leader's beliefs about SEL and how the leader imparted those beliefs to faculty and staff.

The second method of discovery was a document analysis within each school context being studied. In this document analysis, the goal was to understand what the ninth-grade transitional programming looks like and how the faculty tasked with implementing this programming goes about the work. Information about programming, curricula, professional development, teacher training, and anything else pertaining to the ninth-grade transition was examined. In addition, particular focus was paid to the role that SEL plays in each school's respective transitional programming and how that is realized in practice.

Concurrent with the document analysis, the third method was a survey on collective teacher efficacy beliefs administered to the ninth-grade faculty. Adapted from the work of Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004), this survey served to offer some triangulation both for the perceptions of leadership and for the perceptions of faculty.

The fourth and final method was focus group interviews with members of the ninth-grade teacher teams in each context. These focus groups provided more insight on the leader's actions and will help to triangulate the information gathered in the interviews

with the leader. Questions in the focus group centered upon the support of leadership, the efficacy and collaboration of the group, and the ways that leadership interacts both implicitly and explicitly with the transitional programming.

Context of Study

The context of this study is three private high schools in the mid-Atlantic area. These high schools share the characteristics of being religious in nature and mission-oriented, of being elite academic institutions with challenging and rigorous standards of study, and of being in and around the mid-Atlantic region. As such, the schools are of rather similar demographic make-up in terms of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity, as well as socio-economic diversity. The schools were chosen based on ease of access for research; in addition, schools were chosen where leadership, in exploratory discussions beforehand, expressed concern for and attention to the ninth-grade transitional period.

Biases and Assumptions

There are a few assumptions inherent in this study from my perspective as a researcher. First, it is an assumption that leadership explicitly strives for a developmentally responsive transition; it is possible to move in that direction and create a perfectly reasonable program without putting so fine a point on it. In conjunction, there is an assumption that teachers would bring the same understanding to their work with students in transition.

Second, there is an assumption that leadership is active and consistent in offering supports to the ninth-grade team. I am assuming that there are supports offered by leadership that are seen, appreciated, and utilized by the teachers involved.

Third, there is an assumption that leadership takes steps to build the efficacy of teachers. Particularly when talking about SEL, the research shows that implementation of interventions depends upon the efficacy of teachers, which in turn depends upon the support of leadership (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010). I am assuming that in the schools being studied this holds true.

Limitations and Delimitations

One major limitation of the proposed study is the sample size. Three schools of a similar demographic make-up, with similar socioeconomic profiles, grounded in similarly faith-based missions, in the same general geographic area are not representative of the broader, national private secondary school population. These schools represent a convenience sample rather than a representative one, and as such the generalizability of the results will be limited.

In addition, the focus on private schools and schools particularly of high academic rigor limits the study. There will hopefully be through-lines connecting this study to the public-school environment both in the entire mid-Atlantic region and beyond, but it is hard to say more generally that these three schools will be representative of all secondary schools. Particularly in private schools in this geographic area, the demographics and socioeconomic status of the student population are not representative of the nation as a whole.

A major delimitation arises regarding the voices represented in this study. This study is aimed mainly at understanding the actions and beliefs of leadership, and as such the majority of research and information gathering will occur among the leadership of each school involved. Research with the teacher teams is used mainly as a form of

triangulation in an effort to better understand how the perceptions and beliefs of leadership actually translate into action. There would, no doubt, be great value in studying the input of teachers on these transitional periods in order to better understand the implementation; however, this study is intentionally focused not on implementation, but on leadership's support for implementation and enabling of staff efficacy.

Additionally, student voice is not represented in this study. Again, this is an intentional (though limiting) decision; the focus on leadership precludes the need to focus on the student perceptions of the transitional experience. There is substantial research on the interplay of perceptions among students, faculty, and parents during the transition and after, but that has seemingly little bearing on the actions of leadership building capacity behind the scenes.

Finally, I have made the intentional choice not to investigate the efficacy of transitional programs themselves. In order to do this, a longitudinal study would be required incorporating student, parent, faculty, and administrative voice. In addition, at the outset the focus simply is not on whether the programming is successful, but whether leadership breeds a culture wherein there is the belief it could be successful. My aim in this study is to understand the role that leadership can play in building and supporting the program, as well as the role leadership can play in building the staff to implement the program.

Summary

This study focuses on the role that secondary school leadership plays in prioritizing the social and emotional learning of students during the transition into ninth grade. In addition to understanding the way leaders signal the importance of meeting

students' developmental needs, this study aims to understand the ways in which leaders build and support the collective efficacy of staff to address student needs and growth. The information gathered and analyzed in this study may be utilized to inform the work of secondary school leadership in building, supporting, and implementing developmentally responsive transitions for ninth-grade students.

Chapter II – The Literature Review

The goal of this review is to better understand the role that secondary school leadership plays and can play in building a school staff committed to social and emotional learning (SEL) and an environment that fosters and builds the collective efficacy of staff. As demonstrated through this review of empirical research, there is a reciprocal nature within this effort – a strong culture builds efficacy, while efficacy promotes a collaborative culture, with social and emotional health and learning as necessary prerequisites for both a strong culture and strong collective efficacy. While a focus on culture and collective efficacy is important, and indeed in and of itself could fill countless pages of research literature, that focus is particularly important when considering the way a school addresses the challenging and often problematic ninth-grade transition for students. A sense of collective efficacy is necessary for a successful focus on student social and emotional learning within that transition (Raver et al., 2008), and so understanding how educational leaders can build and bolster that efficacy is key.

The aim of this review is to identify the ways in which leaders can exert influence and play a role in guiding either the culture that fosters efficacy or the collective efficacy itself. Furthermore, given the specific focus on the ninth-grade transition, attention is also dedicated to student needs and to the reasons for emphasizing social and emotional health, with particular focus on the student transition into ninth-grade. The literature review strives to clarify the following questions:

- What does the literature say are the most salient and pressing challenges of the ninth-grade transition for students? How can school leaders mitigate those challenges in meaningful ways?

- In what ways does a focus on SEL benefit students? How are teachers enabled and empowered to do that work on a classroom level?
- What effects can collective efficacy of teachers have on students? What effects can leadership have on collective efficacy?

As such, there will be three main bodies of literature surveyed in this review:

- The challenges of the ninth-grade transition and possible responses to those challenges;
- The importance of SEL and the ways in which SEL can be fully realized in schools; and
- The collective efficacy of the teaching staff.

Included within each is a discussion of the particular role that leadership can play in responding to the needs and challenges of students and faculty around these issues. In addition, the order of the review is intentional. The challenges of the ninth-grade transition can potentially be mitigated by an intentional focus on SEL; SEL is a challenging but valuable focus for schools, with potentially powerful effects to be explored and better understood, and a focus that requires sustained commitment from all parties; sustained commitment to SEL comes from the collective efficacy of the staff, both in general and around SEL issues. There is a logic to the progression from ninth-grade challenges to the collective efficacy of adults, with crucial roles for leadership throughout.

This capstone is focused on the role that secondary school leadership plays in building and supporting a developmentally responsive transition for students, and

supporting the work of teachers to implement the same. This literature review will provide information on how this work can best be accomplished.

Search Methodology

I began my search with each of the three main bodies of literature as a search term in the EBSCO 7 Education Databases through the University of Virginia Library. I conducted the search first using all three terms—“ninth-grade transition”, “social & emotional learning”, and “collective efficacy”—for any articles that might address these themes together. Those articles I considered most salient to my topic, I flagged for later reading. After a brief investigation, I found those articles from that search deemed most crucial to this corner of the research field on Google Scholar. Then, I utilized the “Cited By” function to see other articles in chronological order that may have utilized these seminal works.

Once a quorum of research was found in that manner, I returned to EBSCO and started repeating the process using different combinations of two of the three terms. I then followed the same pattern of taking seminal articles found on EBSCO and plugging them into Google Scholar in order to utilize the “Cited By” function. This led to a fair number of articles to be reviewed.

As a final step, any time a research study or a scholarly article that I chanced upon seemed to be particularly prevalent to my Capstone focus, I would in turn use Google Scholar to find articles which had cited that work. In this way, I was able to develop three rather robust areas of literature to draw from.

It is important to note that my study focuses on three private high schools, and the transitional experiences and programming therein. In my review of literature, I did not

find salient research devoted exclusively to the experience of private school students, leaders, and faculty. As such, my research operates from the assumption that the findings that pertain to public schools are aligned with the experience at private schools.

Ninth-Grade Transition

The literature around school transition points addresses a number of inherent challenges that arise for students before, during, and after the transitional period, with effects both immediate and long-lasting. The negative effects can have serious consequences both in terms of academics and in the area of social and emotional health. I have chosen four areas of focus within the ninth-grade transition: transitional difficulties, developmentally responsive transitions, problematic transitional programming, and the role of leadership within and around the transition. Focusing on transitional difficulties allows for a better understanding of the transitional needs schools and school leaders must address. Understanding the developmental responsiveness of these transitions enables one to gain a clearer picture of a staff's focus on social and emotional health and learning. Highlighting problematic programming makes explicit some of the potential pitfalls to avoid. Bringing the role of leadership to the fore will help to support practitioners in this difficult work.

Transitional Difficulties

There are a number of transitional difficulties highlighted by the research literature, all of which this review will address. First, there are academic consequences as students struggle to adjust to the new cognitive demands placed upon them in high school. Second, there are negative consequences for a student's academic self-concept, as social comparisons cause students to doubt their performance ability. Third, there are

stressors beyond the academic that can lead to increasing disengagement and drop-out rates, inner turmoil based on the social and emotional challenges, and rising depressive tendencies. Finally, the literature calls into question whether the structure and timing of this transition is even appropriate for students given the realities of their cognitive, physical, and emotional maturation.

Alspaugh (1998) focused on the declining academic performance of students in the transitional years, highlighting the significant achievement loss encountered at both the sixth- and the ninth-grade transition. In addition, the study found that combining students from multiple different environments into the same environment was associated with an even greater achievement loss. Schiller (1999) found the same, identifying that students entering ninth-grade from diverse elementary and middle school experiences, as opposed to specific and limited feeder patterns, encountered more academic difficulty than similarly able peers in a student population more akin to their middle school. This presents a particular problem for the context of the current Capstone study, as private high schools tend to draw from a diverse array of schools.

In a similar vein, Marsh (1987) identified the concept of “big fish, little pond” effects, or BFLPE. Marsh found that the academic self-concept of previously high-performing students faltered when surrounded by as highly or more highly performing students. That faltering, in turn, contributed at least partially to declining academic performance. The BLFPE have been investigated and validated on numerous occasions (Marsh & Craven, 2002; Marsh & Hau, 2003; Marsh et al., 2004; Marsh et al., 2008; Seaton et al., 2009) and present a particular challenge to students enrolling in rigorous and selective private high schools.

Declining academic self-concept and declining academic performance could be viewed as reciprocally related, as the performance loss weakens self-concept and the weakened self-concept leads to further performance loss. In turn, both could lead to loss of motivation and a potentially dangerous level of disengagement, making students more likely to drop out of high school altogether (Alspaugh, 1998; Crosnoe, 2001; Eccles et al., 1998; Seidman et al., 2004). In the long term, the loss of achievement can linger throughout the secondary school career of a student and so negatively impact prospects for higher education as well (Smith, 2006).

Transitional issues are certainly not solely academic. Isakson and Jarvis (1999) found that the number of stressors students encounter increased upon the transition to ninth-grade, and that the increase could potentially lead to damaging social and emotional responses. Students at this juncture were found to lack the coping mechanisms to deal with the academic challenges, and so allowed academic challenges to wreak havoc on their inner selves. Newman, Newman, Griffen, O'Connor, and Spas (2007) found that ninth-grade students exhibited more depressive tendencies than did eighth-grade students, and that the difficulties of the transition in terms of academics, social relationships, and family relationships contributed significantly to those tendencies.

Ultimately, perhaps the most pressing issue for the ninth-grade transition may be that students are simply not developmentally ready for its challenges, no matter the arena. In discussing stage-environment fit theory, Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, and Mac Iver (1993) propose that the developmental needs of an adolescent at this stage of his or her life are not appropriately met by the social environment in which they operate – in this case, the schoolhouse. The failures, then,

seem inevitable, given the nature of trying to squeeze the developmental square peg of a transitioning ninth grader into the environmentally round hole of high school.

Developmentally Responsive Transitions

If it is the case that the ninth-grade environment is improperly suited for a ninth-grade student in terms of social, emotional, academic, and physical development, then it is important for school leadership to respond accordingly. This brings to the fore the idea of a developmentally responsive transition. Previously in this paper, the term has been operationalized as a transition aware of and attentive to the developmental progression and needs of ninth-grade students. These needs can take many forms; the literature base points to a few over-arching categories worth addressing.

Self-determination theory (SDT) points to three basic psychological needs that must be met in order for students to feel properly supported within their environment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Schools and school leadership must take care, particularly during the transitional period, to attend to a student's sense of competence, of relatedness, and of autonomy. If and when these needs are met, the engagement and motivational issues identified as resulting from the transition can be lessened. A proper transitional program will address these needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

There are three main categories of concerns identified in the literature around student, teacher, and parent perceptions of the ninth-grade transition. Akos (2002) isolated the categories of academic concerns, social concerns, and procedural concerns. The connection to SDT should be noted, as academic concerns match the psychological need for competency, social concerns that of relatedness, and procedural concerns that of autonomy. In that study, Akos developed an instrument to help understand stakeholder

perceptions that was then either utilized directly or slightly altered in other studies, ultimately identifying and validating the same three categories of concern (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Ellerbrock et al., 2015; Hauser et al., 2009; Smith & Akos, 2008; Zeedyk et al., 2003).

When the psychological needs of SDT are fulfilled and when the major concerns of students are addressed, they are then freed to begin forming connections in an open and meaningful way to the school environment. A sense of care from the adults is crucial (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; 2013), as is a sense of community fostered more broadly across and throughout the school environment (Battistich et al., 1997). Students do not need lower standards or lessened expectations, they simply need to know that they will be cared for and supported in a challenging time. A developmentally responsive transition, then, unites these strands of personal care and high expectations to the benefit of student development, academic progress, and personal growth.

Problematic Transitional Programming

In many ways, the issues most encountered by students academically are not the issues most addressed in transitional programming. Schools may overemphasize procedural concerns, choosing to focus on the most black and white problems to solve (Hopwood et al., 2016). It may be easy to focus on social issues and building friendships, as students often view these social concerns with more optimism and less fear (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Schools may try to boost self-esteem, but self-esteem has been shown to have little correlation to academic self-concept and performance (Marsh & Craven, 2006). Given these misguided aims, there is a stark disconnect between what eighth-grade teachers believe and expect and what ninth-grade teachers believe and expect, and

there is little communication between the two; this can present real challenges for students in adjusting to changing environments (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Hauser et al., 2009; Hopwood et al., 2016; Smith & Akos, 2008). The high school environment is generally less comforting and more results oriented, with a stronger focus on academics and grades that students may not be ready for (Eccles et al., 1984). In turn, students internalize these differences and allow their perceptions of and relationships with teachers to falter (Bru et al., 2010; Hauser et al., 2009).

Role of Leadership

The responsibility of leadership, then, is to build, implement, and sustain a transitional program that effectively meets students where they are in their developmental progression. A transitional program must tend to a student's need for competence, for relatedness, and for autonomy, and thereby address the academic, social, and procedural concerns at the outset. Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) highlighted three relationships most important to the development of a "community of care": the relationship of teacher to program, of teacher to student, and of program to student. In addition, teacher teams were found to be an important part of building relatedness (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; Fulk, 2003; McIntosh & White, 2006), and the positive effects of a caring transition endured for the students involved (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). Though much of the discussion has been around students thus far, teachers play a crucial role in building the appropriate daily environment for ninth-grade students, and leadership plays a crucial role in empowering teachers to do just that. Leadership must avoid making piecemeal changes to address only academic or only procedural concerns. The needs of SDT and the

difficulties of the ninth-grade transition point to the importance—for both students and teachers—of a robust focus on social and emotional learning.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Given the challenges identified in the ninth-grade transitional literature and armed with a deeper understanding of the developmental needs of ninth-grade students, it is clear that SEL has an important role to play in enabling the growth of these students. For the sake of clarity, it may be helpful to reiterate the definition offered previously in the introduction of SEL. Elias (as cited by Durlak, et al., 2011) defines SEL as “the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively” (p. 406). Though there are many nuanced definitions, I find this one to be the most direct in addressing the core psychological and developmental needs of a student in transition.

Three main areas of interest stand out under the umbrella of SEL: the importance and outcomes of SEL for students, teacher efficacy and implementation of SEL programs and curricula, and the role of leadership in guiding a school’s approach.

Importance and Outcomes of SEL

The literature on the ninth-grade transition points rather clearly to the importance of schools and school leadership paying attention to the non-cognitive skills inherent in SEL. Indeed, Dotterer, McHale, and Crouter (2009) found that schools which were able to effectively implement SEL curricula were able to shield students better from the

negative effects of the transition. Yet there are reasons beyond the transitional period that justify an intentional, robust, and sustained attention to SEL.

In a meta-analysis of school-wide SEL interventions, Durlak et al. (2011) found strong evidence and patterns of success for schools that successfully brought social and emotional learning to the students. The authors reviewed 213 programs which involved over 270,000 students; the breadth and scope of the review were impressive and the literature review was well-constructed and well-explicated. To summarize the findings, the authors write:

SEL programs yielded significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school. They also enhanced students' behavioral adjustment in the form of increased prosocial behaviors and reduced conduct and internalizing problems, and improved academic performance on achievement tests and grades. (p. 417)

The first half of the provided quote addresses the transitional areas of concern and psychological needs of SDT; developing positive attitudes about oneself (autonomy), about others (relatedness), and about school (competence) is a step in the direction of alleviating these transitional challenges. On a broader scale, though, the second half of the quote addresses an improvement in behavior and in performance. A focus on SEL, according to the authors of this meta-analysis, has the proven potential to benefit student performance academically, even without an intentional focus on academic content. This finding of academic performance growth was further supported by a longitudinal study that found a sustained, classroom level focus on SEL interventions led to a nine percentile point improvement on Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) tests (Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011). In addition, and importantly for the changing landscape of American schools and the achievement gaps that continue to persist, these

SEL interventions showed positive gains regardless of demographics and regardless of any minoritizing qualifications. All students showed improvement when schools focus on SEL, and that is a trend worth pursuing.

In supporting SEL curricula, the focus must be on both the classroom and the home. Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) emphasize the importance of a “community of care” for students, while Battistich, Solomon, Watson, and Schaps (1997) discuss a “cohesive, caring group with a shared purpose” (p. 138). In terms of SEL, students need to feel and experience that care on both a micro- and a macro-level. In the classroom, attention must be paid to classroom level interactions. Hamre and Pianta (2010) developed a framework to identify and quantify the ways in which the classroom environment meets the emotional needs of students. The authors were able to show that student experiences are driven by classroom interactions more than many other factors. Hamre et al. (2013) and Oberle (2018) were able to effectively show the same, while also evincing the level of academic improvement and progress achieved by utilizing the CLASS framework and focusing attention so acutely on the classroom.

Yet there is life beyond the classroom, too. Students need a community, not an island (Battistich et al., 1997; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; 2013). Students need to know and feel that the adults in the community care for them. It is not good enough to know that one adult cares, even if that adult clearly cares deeply; students benefit more when they know that many teachers care, even to varying degrees (Conner et al., 2014). Students need to know that their parents care about their performance, and perhaps more importantly need to know that the school cares if their parents care (Wang & Sheikh-

Khalil, 2014). Connecting the different worlds in which students live is a key facet of building the sense of community that enables effective SEL curricula.

Teacher Efficacy and Implementation

School leadership cannot implement SEL independently; effective work on SEL requires a sustained administrative commitment, to be sure, but also requires committed and effective teachers. There are two main areas of concern for teachers. First, teachers need to know, sense, and believe that SEL matters to the school. Teachers will believe that SEL matters when they are given the time to effectively learn, develop, and implement interventions (Allen et al., 2011; Jacobs & Struyf, 2015). Their own competence in social and emotional issues affects implementation (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), as do their perceptions about their own social and emotional health (Reyes et al., 2012). Ultimately, recognizing the need for teachers to be models of SEL, they must themselves feel they can fulfill that role. That role fulfillment can be enabled by addressing and supporting the social and emotional health of teachers as a pre-emptive and prerequisite first step of focusing on SEL as an entire community (Brown et al., 2010; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Role of Leadership

In order to enable the sort of committed and sustained focus on SEL required for success and required for realizing the positive outcomes for students that flow from such a focus, leadership must play a role in building the environment in which SEL can thrive. One of the clearest imperatives for effective school leadership is to set direction for the staff, and to focus resources—both time and money—in that direction (Leithwood & Louis, 2012). Setting a direction (Odden, 2011) and building a collaborative culture

(Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018) are both positive steps towards improving student and staff capacity and performance. A culture which enables such work depends on a number of things, to be sure, and this review is by no means exhaustive.

Leadership has a responsibility to create a welcoming space for all (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). This idea is a hallmark of culturally responsive pedagogy, and one that connects easily to SEL given SEL's ability to reach students regardless of their cultural, racial, linguistic, or socioeconomic background. However, it should be noted that leadership must create a welcoming space for adults as well as for students. The work and the approach must be consistent, and it must be school-wide to be effective (Allen et al., 2011; Cipriano et al., 2018). The programs involved must be sustained, and the supports offered to teachers must be sustained as well (Raver et al., 2008; Romer et al., 2018). Those supports include mental health interventions to continue fostering the emotional health of the teachers tasked with this important job for the development of students. Finally, in terms of building the culture, teachers both internalize and respond to implicit and explicit messaging from leadership on SEL (Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2014). Leaders must maintain their own commitment and their own messaging in order to build a culture that enables teachers, and a culture which in turn develops and cares for the students.

Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE)

SEL certainly has benefits for students that are positive and far-reaching, and that help address many of the most pressing challenges of education. Yet is it also clear how crucial teachers are in the implementation of SEL and its delivery to students. Realizing that, the third and final focus of the literature review is on teacher collective efficacy and

the ways that efficacy can be supported and grown both by teachers themselves and by leadership. Within this topic, three areas of concern stand out for the current study: the definition and sources of collective efficacy within a school, the potential effects of CTE on students and teachers, and the role that leadership plays in fostering a sense of efficacy within the staff.

Definition and Importance of Collective Efficacy

Bandura's work (1997) in social-cognitive theory gives rise to much of our understanding of the construct of collective efficacy. What we believe affects what we do; as such, our efficacy beliefs guide our actions. Bandura defined perceived self-efficacy as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). These beliefs in turn can have diverse effects on the actions we take, the choices we make, and the paths we choose to pursue. Self-efficacy beliefs, according to Bandura, are constructed from four major sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective state.

As a construct, collective efficacy is inherently different from self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defines perceived collective efficacy as "a group's shared beliefs in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (p. 477). As such, collective efficacy is more than the sum of the individual self-efficacy of the actors within an environment. Specifically within the field of education, "perceived collective efficacy refers to the judgment of teachers in a school that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students" (Goddard et al., 2004, p. 4). Collective teacher efficacy (CTE) is a group-level construct that reflects the interaction between teacher

perceptions of the overall competence of the faculty and the perceptions of the difficulty of the instructional task at hand (Goddard, 2001). Though distinct from self-efficacy, the sources are the same: “Perceived personal and collective efficacy differ in the unit of agency, but in both forms efficacy beliefs have similar sources, serve similar functions, and operate through similar processes” (Bandura, 1997, p. 478). Just as self-efficacy can be a driving factor in human agency, collective efficacy can serve as a powerful catalyst within an organization.

Sources of Collective Efficacy

Bandura (1997) highlighted four main sources of collective efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective state. Each is investigated in turn here.

Mastery Experiences. Mastery experiences are those experiences that reflect a level of success in a task and so contribute to efficacy. Mastery experiences are the most influential of the four sources of efficacy information (Bandura, 1997) as success strengthens efficacy while failure can serve to undermine it. Within schools and through the collective lens, the past academic success of the school and its students can help bolster the faculty’s belief in its collective capabilities (Goddard et al., 2004). Results are hard to ignore and serve as reminders that the group does indeed have the abilities to realize success. In a study of 91 elementary schools and over 450 teachers, Goddard (2001) found that mastery experiences accounted for 65% of the variation in perceptions of collective efficacy between schools. However, that still leaves 35% of the variance to consider, leading to the other sources of efficacy.

Vicarious Experiences. Vicarious experiences represent the modeling of a skill or process, whereby one can see successful attainment and so have grounds for self-referential comparisons. Bandura (1997) provides the helpful example of a student earning a score of 115 points on a test, a score that is meaningless and can be deemed as neither good nor poor without the ability to compare to the performance of other students (p. 87). Teachers and schools can enable their own efficacy by utilizing the successfully modeled programs and practices of other teachers and schools. Employing such a strategy allows teachers to have faith in the efficacy of a practice or program, empowered by its success in a similar or trusted environment.

Social Persuasion. Just as successful results can help to form efficacy, so too can successful or positive feedback. Verbal or social persuasion “serves as a further means of strengthening people’s beliefs that they possess the capabilities to achieve what they seek” (Bandura, 1997, p. 101). The collective environment and culture of a school can have a real effect—either positive or negative—on the collective efficacy of a staff. Teachers take cues, either implicit or explicit, from leadership and from peers about the manner in which the school operates. Principal leadership in particular can play a crucial role in social persuasion and in utilizing this source to enable greater collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2017).

Affective State. Affective state refers to the physical and emotional state of a person within a task or situation. For an organization, this can refer to the collective reaction to external crises or pressures (Goddard et al., 2004). The reaction of faculty to such external challenges will depend in many ways upon their own collective belief in their ability to move past the challenge and continue in the work at hand. If collective

efficacy is high, the resilience of the faculty to work through difficult situations will remain strong. The appropriate school culture can help to enable this attitude and help to bolster collective efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001).

Proximate Sources. In addition to the four major sources of efficacy formation, there are other sources that can affect a teacher's understanding and interpretation of the collective teaching task at hand. Adams and Forsyth (2006) identified three major proximate variables of note: socioeconomic status (SES) of the school population, school level, and school structure. Put simply, the context of the teaching and learning task matters: elementary school teachers, who individually teach all subjects, might feel a different sense of efficacy towards their students than a faculty of high school teachers who are more highly specialized. According to Adams and Forsyth (2006), school structure accounted for the most variability of these three proximate sources, thereby pointing to a highly-controllable school level variable that leadership can address. Indeed, school structure stands out as the variable possibly most in a leader's control, and stands out as a variable that can have an outsized impact on student performance (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Sinden et al., 2004).

Effects of Collective Efficacy

There are a number of empirical studies addressing the role that efficacy—both personal and collective—can play in schools for students and for faculty. Understanding the role that efficacy can play and the effects that it can have on a school community and on multiple stakeholder groups is key for inspiring educational leaders and leadership programs to focus more attention on the concept. Here, these effects are further explored and delineated.

Effects on Students. There is no greater gold standard in education than for a concept, an intervention, or a reform to improve student performance. Shy of bridging the equity and opportunity gaps, gains in student performance stand as possibly the single most important measurable outcome in educational theory. Not only has collective efficacy of a staff been shown to improve student performance, but it has been shown to do so regardless of previous achievement or demographic characteristics (Goddard, 2001). Indeed, it has even been shown to affect the equity gap, reducing the disadvantage of black elementary school students in mathematics by as much as 50% (Goddard et al., 2017). In a review of collective efficacy literature encompassing research conducted between 2000 and 2013, Ramos, Silva, Pontes, Fernandez, and Nina (2014) found that 100% of studies included in the review found positive correlations between student performance and CTE. Given the possibility of addressing both student achievement and equity issues, collective efficacy stands out as a concept well worthy of further study.

Bandura (1993) was one of the first researchers to show that CTE could have a positive impact on school achievement. Bandura's study found that "staffs' collective sense of efficacy that they can promote high levels of academic progress contributes significantly to their schools' level of academic achievement" (p. 143). Since Bandura's study, a number of other studies have, at least to an extent, replicated the results showing improved student performance. Goddard (2001) showed that collective teacher efficacy explained performance variations between elementary schools in a study of over 91 schools and 452 teachers. This work built on a previous study (Goddard et al., 2000) which showed that a one unit increase in collective efficacy was associated with an increase of 40% of a standard deviation in student achievement. Goddard later

reproduced similar results in high school (Goddard et al., 2004) and in a study focused on the equity gap in particular (Goddard et al., 2017). Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) also found that collective efficacy in a high school was significantly and positively correlated to school achievement, even controlling for SES. Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) found that while controlling for student SES, CTE made a significant contribution to grade 8 standardized test scores. Kirby and DiPaola (2011) focused exclusively on urban schools with low SES, finding again that CTE had a positive effect on student achievement. Parker, Hannah and Topping (2006) investigated the relationships between CTE, SES, and achievement, and found that CTE had a much stronger impact on student performance than did SES. Finally, teacher behavior and collaboration have been shown to have a direct effect on CTE, and through that an indirect effect on improving student achievement (Goddard et al., 2015; Muijs & Reynolds, 2002). Overall, it seems clear that CTE can have a significant, positive effect on student performance and achievement.

Bandura (1997) identified efficacy beliefs as an important factor underlying one's resilience towards a given task. He writes that individuals with a strong sense of efficacy and a strong belief in their own capabilities are more likely to "invest a high level of effort in what they do and heighten their effort in the face of failures or setbacks" (p. 39). This resiliency is key for understanding one of the main benefits of CTE for students – namely, that teachers with high CTE exhibit higher levels of persistence when working with students and exhibit a more robust sense of commitment to helping their students learn. Goddard (2001) found that teachers will continue to persist in their efforts with students if they sense their peers would do the same. Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) found that high collective efficacy schools are more likely to accept responsibility

for student outcomes, and are less likely to accept low achievement as a result of external factors. Ross and Bruce (2007) found that teachers in high collective efficacy environments tended to have more positive attitudes towards low-achieving students, and tended to set higher academic goals for those students than their counterparts in lower efficacy environments. When the collective efficacy of a teaching staff is high, students of all backgrounds and abilities benefit.

Effects on Teachers. Students are not the only ones who benefit from a high collective efficacy among the teaching staff. Teachers themselves stand to gain from an enhanced sense of collective efficacy. In much the same way as school leaders must tend to student improvement, so too must they tend to the development and support of the adults on staff. Indeed, that development of staff has been highlighted as one of the core leadership responsibilities within school environments (Leithwood & Louis, 2012). The research around CTE shows just how and why that work is so important.

There is evidence that high collective efficacy can contribute to high personal efficacy for teachers. Goddard and Goddard (2001) highlighted collective efficacy as the “only significant predictor of teacher efficacy differences among schools” (p. 815) in a study of 438 teachers across 47 urban schools. Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2004) found that perceived collective efficacy was the aspect of a school’s context most strongly related to an individual teacher’s sense of personal efficacy. The authors related this finding to the sources of efficacy already identified from the work of Bandura (1997), namely verbal/social persuasion, stating that “the power of this normative press lies in the social persuasion it exerts on teachers” (p. 9). The collective drive towards success in an environment encourages actions in pursuit of that goal and thus encourages

the self-efficacy of individual teachers. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) found the same, arguing that a context of high collective efficacy “promotes student engagement and achievement, which again enhance individual teachers’ sense of self-efficacy” (p. 621). Though potentially mediated by student achievement, the effect of CTE on self-efficacy is very real.

CTE can also contribute in a positive way to teacher retention. In particular, collective efficacy has been shown to have a positive effect on reducing teacher stress and reducing burnout. Klassen (2010) identified that when attention is paid to the sources of collective efficacy and collective motivation is built up, teacher stress around student behavior and discipline will be much lower. Particularly in challenging school environments, this is an encouraging finding for potentially improving teacher retention. In a study of Norwegian elementary school teachers, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) found a strong correlation between teacher efficacy, heavily influenced by collective efficacy, and burnout. Klassen, Usher, and Bong (2010) found that collective efficacy was positively related to job satisfaction, building off of Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) and extending the findings to diverse, international contexts. A context with high collective efficacy is likely to have a more satisfied and less stressed teaching staff, the benefits of which will no doubt trickle down to the students as well.

Fostering a Sense of Collective Efficacy

The benefits of a strong sense of collective efficacy within a school should be clear. There are positive outcomes and correlations for both teachers and students, including improved student performance and higher teacher retention. Additionally, many of those results come even when variables that cannot be controlled – such as

school size or level and SES – are accounted for. Collective efficacy stands out as a variable capable of creating positive improvement within schools that could be addressed, altered, and amplified. Addressing CTE, based on the extant research, should give school leaders an opportunity to address student performance, the equity gap, motivation, engagement, and teacher satisfaction. There are a number of approaches highlighted in the CTE literature base that show how educational leaders can work towards fostering an improved sense of efficacy among a school's staff.

A Culture of Collaboration. One of the most prevalent themes for building collective efficacy in a school is that of enabling collaboration among and between teachers. As a group-level construct, the more that efficacy can be fostered together the more effectively it can be fostered at all. Thinking back to Bandura's (1997) sources of efficacy, collaboration enables all four, in some ways. In particular, vicarious experience and social persuasion stand out as byproducts of teacher collaboration, as well as the sharing of mastery experiences and the affective state of personal satisfaction that comes from a healthy work environment. Finding ways to increase meaningful collaboration among teachers is a seemingly straightforward way to create the culture in which efficacy can bloom. Leaders should strive, above all else, to encourage collaboration and peer observation in order to share expectations and mastery experiences throughout the faculty (Goddard et al., 2017; Goddard et al., 2015).

The instructional leadership of a principal can have a direct effect on CTE by enabling a more collaborative structure within the school. In a study on instructional leadership in elementary schools, Goddard et al. (2015) found that "the more that principals serve as instructional leaders with detailed knowledge of classroom practice,

the more likely are teachers to engage in collaborative interactions designed to improve instruction and facilitate group goal attainment” (p. 503). Instructional leaders build the structures that enable collaboration and inspire the practices that elicit student improvement. Leaders must find ways to increase meaningful teacher interaction so that the faculty can build group-level efficacy together (Parker et al., 2006).

The success of collaborative structures built by a leader in many ways depends upon the success of the teacher teams that meet within those structures. Olivier and Hipp (2006) studied the effects of professional learning communities on leadership capacity and on collective efficacy. The authors found a reciprocal relationship between capacity and efficacy, and found that productive learning community teams dedicated to improving instruction and collaboration enabled both higher collective efficacy and higher student performance. Prelli (2016) studied the differences in efficacy perceptions at the faculty level and at the team level, and found particularly that increasing the collective efficacy within a team would promote success for students, for teachers, and for the school overall. Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2000) found that those teachers on teams with high collective efficacy were more likely to commit to extra-role behavior, going above and beyond the proverbial call of duty for the good of the team. Like Prelli (2016), the authors found this more prevalent at the team level than the school level.

Teacher teaming is certainly a major aspect of collaborative work within a school, as is the social network that teachers establish. Berebitsky and Salloum (2017) studied the role that social networks of teachers play in fostering efficacy, specifically in relation to the centralization and density of those networks. The authors found that density – a concept based on the number of meaningful connections between actors within the

network – was a significant predictor of CTE. They pointed out that teachers rely on and learn from trusted colleagues, and when more teachers turn to more colleagues for advice, collective efficacy increases. For a leader, they found that “it is critical to facilitate discussion among and between teachers to foster a belief in the collective capabilities of a faculty” (p. 9). Teacher collaborative work, discussion, observation, and interaction are all important factors for the growth of collective efficacy.

Enabling Teacher Leadership. Building trust is a key factor for creating a healthy and effective school culture and also plays an important role in fostering CTE (Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Faculty trust in the principal is crucial to building commitment and resilience. One way to build that trust, and thereby one way to build collective efficacy, is to enable effective teacher leadership.

A number of studies have pointed to the importance of shared leadership and of empowering faculty voice within the school community for the fostering of CTE. Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy (2004) found that the more opportunity there is for faculty to have input—on decisions, on curriculum, on goal setting—the higher the collective efficacy will be. Olivier and Hipp (2006) found that shared authority and shared power led to higher collective efficacy of staff in that organizational direction is shared more broadly. Generally, a commitment and an openness to teacher leadership in meaningful roles will build the efficacy of the staff (Flood & Angelle, 2017). There are some cautionary notes on teacher leadership, however: informal leadership roles seem to have more effect than formal roles on CTE (Angelle & Teague, 2014), and the efficacy falters if the principals select and appoint the teacher leaders (Derrington & Angelle, 2013). When given the space to lead, teachers and teacher teams with high task independence tend to report

higher levels of CTE (Stajkovic et al., 2009). Ultimately, the ability of a leader to share decision making, share power, and empower teachers to lead can support an enhanced sense of collective efficacy.

Transformational Leadership. There are a number of studies that highlight the direct effect transformational leadership can have on building collective efficacy within a staff (Leithwood et al., 2010; Minckler, 2014; Printy et al., 2010). Ross and Gray (2006) define transformational leadership in this way: “The essence of transformational leadership is dedication to fostering the growth of organizational members and enhancing their commitment by elevating their goals” (p. 180). Leithwood and Louis (2012) add that this style of leadership emphasizes “communicating a compelling vision, conveying high performance expectations, projecting self-confidence, modeling appropriate roles, expressing confidence in followers’ ability to achieve goals, and emphasizing collective purpose” (p. 5). This style of leadership builds efficacy by pushing teachers to set high expectations and hold each other accountable; in turn, when met, those expectations improve the store of mastery experiences that continues to build the efficacy base of the faculty.

In the same vein and picking up on one thread of transformational leadership already outlined, the ability to create and build goal consensus can help to foster collective efficacy. Goddard, LoGerfo, and Hoy (2004) discussed how principals and faculties, working together within schools, could help develop efficacy by setting small and achievable short term goals for the school. When accomplished, the shared goal becomes a mastery experience and serves as evidence of collective capability. Ross and Gray (2006) highlighted the same idea, asserting that “principals should help teachers set

feasible, proximal goals to increase the likelihood of mastery experiences” (p. 194). Kurz and Knight (2004) found goal consensus as the strongest predictor of collective efficacy in a study aimed at understanding the relationship between self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and goal consensus.

As a final attribute worthy of mention, a principal’s emotional intelligence can play an important role in building collective efficacy of a staff. Though not explicit in the definition of transformational leadership, the ability to build relationships and serve as the charismatic and unifying leader of a staff speaks to the nature of the transformational leadership ideal. Pierce (2014) found in a study of elementary school teachers that the assessed emotional intelligence of the principal was significantly related to teacher collective efficacy. The author also highlights the need for principals to be aware of their own emotional intelligence and how that affects the staff they serve.

Synthesis of Literature Review

There is a logical progression inherent in the present literature review that speaks to the important role leadership can play in secondary schools. The ninth-grade transition is a challenging one for students for a number of reasons. Most prevalent, though, is the lack of developmental responsiveness and the failure to meet the developmental needs of students at that point in their maturation. In order to address the difficulties and challenges of transition, leadership should strive to create a transitional program focused on social and emotional health and learning that goes beyond the purely academic.

In order to create that program, leadership must strive to identify and maintain a commitment to social and emotional learning. That commitment requires teachers to implement and sustain the school-wide focus. Teachers need to know that leadership

supports them in that task and that leadership believes in the power and value of SEL. Educational leaders must both implicitly and explicitly maintain a consistent and powerful message on the importance of SEL within the school.

The successful implementation of this work depends upon the presence of a strong sense of collective teacher efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy, as the literature review in this chapter has shown, has a powerful effect on student achievement and improvement. It has a powerful effect on teacher well-being and retention, and it is the hallmark of a collaborative, empowered, supported, and personally engaged faculty. This group construct is built on culture, on collaboration, and on a shared belief that positive differences can be made in the life of students. Leadership must model these beliefs and must do so without any doubt or hesitation. Leaders must be attentive to the culture of the school which empowers teachers to grow, to experiment, to innovate, and to work together with the students always coming first.

By focusing on culture and collaboration, educational leaders can foster the collective efficacy of staff. By fostering the collective efficacy of staff, leaders can confidently implement a robust SEL curriculum. By supporting staff to implement a SEL curriculum, leaders are committing to the growth of all students. By committing to the social and emotional health and learning of all students, leaders can in turn address many of the challenges of the ninth-grade transition. Indeed, this progression represents a huge task for an educational leader but one that could yield immense fruit in the development of the students within the school's care.

Chapter III – Conceptual Framework and Methodology

This study seeks to understand and uncover the effects that secondary school leaders can have on building the collective efficacy of a teaching staff, specifically with the tenets of a developmentally responsive ninth-grade transition in mind. The conceptual framework that undergirds this work relies on three main bodies of literature, reviewed in Chapter II: literature addressing the challenges of the ninth-grade transition and possible ways to alleviate those challenges; literature addressing student social and emotional learning (SEL) and how that learning can be more fully realized in schools; and literature addressing collective efficacy. The conceptual framework incorporates aspects of each in order to visualize the relationship between leadership actions, collective teacher efficacy (CTE), and a developmentally responsive ninth-grade transition.

Conceptual Framework Components

There are three main components to the conceptual framework: the role of CTE, the role of leadership, and the implementation of an effective ninth-grade transition.

Collective Efficacy

It may be helpful here to define again the concept of collective efficacy: Bandura (1997) defines perceived collective efficacy as “a group’s shared beliefs in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment” (p. 477). This study aims to understand how and why the actions and practices of a school leader might affect CTE. To that end, it is important to understand the sources of CTE and how CTE might develop, strengthen, and grow. As a group level construct, CTE can be a driving factor in the agency of a teaching staff to accomplish a given task or realize a proposed shared vision.

Sources of CTE. In his seminal work on self-efficacy, Bandura (1997) identified the sources of collective efficacy as well. Though collective efficacy as a construct is not the same as self-efficacy, the sources that foster it are the same. There are four sources that are key to understanding CTE: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states. In addition, and as described in Chapter II, the literature around CTE also posits a fifth source that addresses proximate sources of an environment; Adams and Forsyth (2006) identify school socioeconomic status, school level, and school structure as important pieces of the CTE puzzle also. However, for the purpose of this study and conceptual framework only those sources cited by Bandura (1997) will be addressed, as those are sources over which a leader may exert some control.

Development of CTE. Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2000) offer a simplified model of CTE that addresses how the construct might develop and grow for a staff. This model is provided as Figure 1.

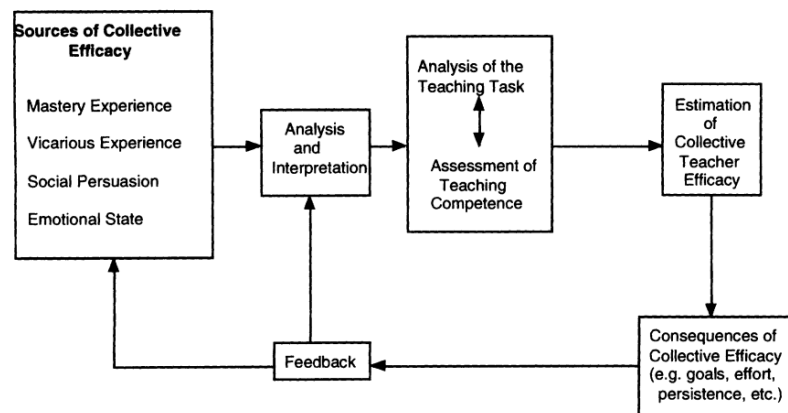


Figure 1. The simplified model of collective efficacy offered by Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy (2000).

Importantly, and as the model makes clear, the sources of CTE alone cannot foster the development of the construct. As the authors point out, efficacy is context specific; for the purposes of this study, efficacy around student developmental needs and the ninth-grade transition is the key focus. Teacher analysis of the task and assessment of collective and individual competence is necessary for establishing an estimation of CTE around a specific task.

Leadership Actions

This study focuses explicitly on the actions and role of leadership in enabling and empowering the work of teachers within a building. My approach to leadership practice arises from the domains outlined by Leithwood and Louis (2012), which offer four main areas of focus: *setting directions*, *developing people*, *redesigning the organization*, and *improving the instructional program*. In addition, the authors suggest “core leadership practices” particular to each domain that stand out as exemplary leadership practices; I posit that these practices are also indicative of the leader’s drive to develop collective efficacy. Specifically, this study focuses on the first two domains: *setting directions* and *developing people*. These serve as the lens through which leadership practice is being explored.

Setting Directions. Leithwood and Louis (2012) identify four core leadership practices under the domain of “setting directions”: *building a shared vision*, *fostering the acceptance of group goals*, *creating high performance expectations*, and *communicating the direction* (p. 65). Given the collective nature of the CTE construct and as shown by the literature review in Chapter II, each one of these practices reflects a key method for leadership that can contribute to collective efficacy. To build CTE, goal consensus and

vision play an outsized role (Goddard et al., 2004), as does creating academic optimism around the expectations and potential of the school (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). These practices appeal to the CTE sources of mastery experiences and of social persuasion and so contribute to enhanced efficacy. Strong instructional leadership, which helps foster the acceptance of group goals and create high performance expectations, has a direct effect on enabling a more collaborative structure (Goddard et al., 2015); additionally, the review within Chapter II showed that a culture of collaboration can have an outsized effect on building CTE. The vicarious experiences and social persuasion inherent in collaboration are integral to the development of efficacy. It is clear that the leadership domain of “setting directions” can have a major impact on fostering CTE within a staff.

Developing People. Under the domain of “developing people”, Leithwood and Louis (2012) offer three core practices: *providing individualized support and consideration, offering intellectual stimulation, and modeling appropriate values and practices*. The literature on CTE makes it clear that the more input and engagement that faculty have within the school (Goddard et al., 2004) and the more open and committed a leader is to teachers taking on leadership roles (Flood & Angelle, 2017), the more likely the sense of CTE will rise. These both represent core practices, as a leader must individually support and engage teacher leaders and must offer the intellectual stimulation that these teacher leadership roles provide. Additionally, it is clear that faculty will take their cues on SEL – and its importance – from leadership (Raver et al., 2008), making evident the need for effective modeling to clarify the priorities of the organization. These actions that stem from the “developing people” domain all have been

shown, then, to connect to the productive fostering of CTE through the enabling of the four sources of CTE.

Developmentally Responsive Transition

Ultimately, the focus of this study is on the way that school leaders and staff can work together to appropriately address the challenges of the ninth-grade transition for students. To reiterate from Chapter I, a developmentally responsive transition is one that is aware of and attentive to the particular cognitive, social, and emotional needs of students in the transitional period from eighth to ninth grade. Specifically, I argue that a transitional program must tend to the three psychological needs identified as key within self-determination theory (SDT): the need for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When these three needs are met for students, I propose that the challenges of the ninth-grade transition can be overcome or avoided all together. As described in Chapter II, Akos (2002) identified social, procedural, and academic concerns as the three main areas of need identified in the literature on ninth-grade transitions. Those concerns align readily with the tenets of SDT, providing a framework for addressing transition successfully.

Conceptual Framework

It is the interplay of these three bodies of literature that give rise to the conceptual framework for this study. Leadership practices are examined through the lens of Leithwood and Louis's (2012) domains of *developing people* and *setting directions*. Specifically, those actions are examined for the ways in which they help to enable the four sources of collective efficacy. Once enabled, those sources help teachers to develop the collective efficacy to address the three psychological tenets of SDT that, when

addressed, allow for a developmentally responsive ninth-grade transition. By understanding the leadership practices that enable the sources of CTE, and by understanding the reciprocal relationship between CTE and successful transitional programming for students, this study may inform the educational community as to how leaders in secondary schools can best support both teachers and ninth-grade students. A visual representation of this framework is provided in Figure 2.

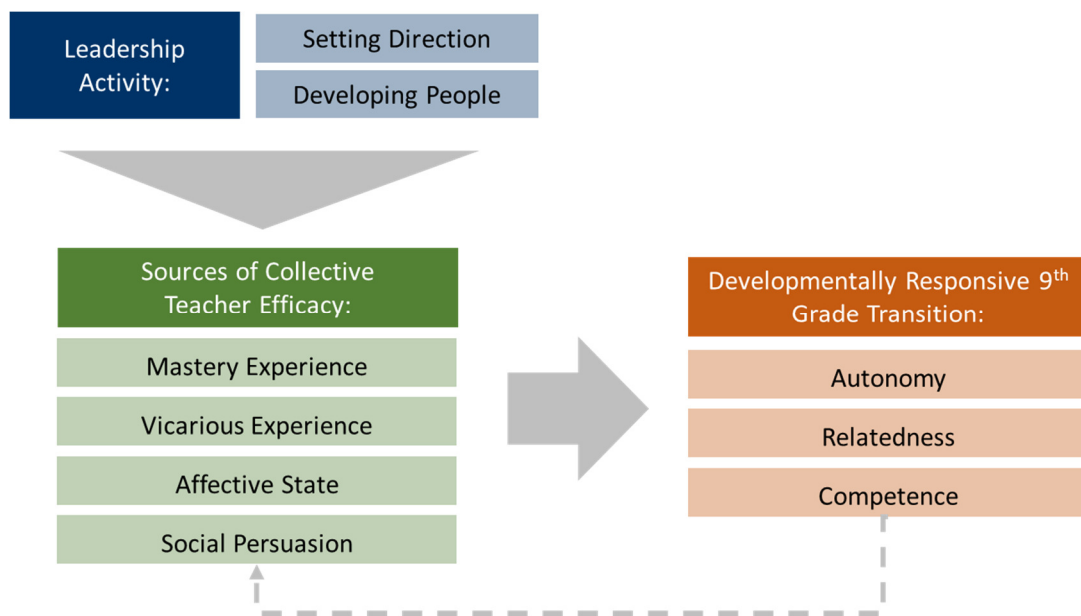


Figure 2. The conceptual framework for the present study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. How do secondary school leaders understand developmentally responsive high school transitions for all students?
2. What leadership practices support the work of ninth-grade faculty in creating developmentally responsive high school transitions for all students?

- a. Sub-Question 1 – How do leaders perceive their own work as supporting these efforts?
 - b. Sub-Question 2 – How do faculty perceive the work of leaders in supporting their efforts?
3. In what ways do secondary school leaders help to build the collective efficacy of ninth-grade faculty in meeting student social and emotional needs as part of the transition to high school?
- a. Sub-Question 1 – How do leaders perceive their own work as supporting collective efficacy among staff?
 - b. Sub-Question 2 – How do faculty perceive their leader's supports to build collective efficacy?

Each question takes root from the conceptual framework outlined above. Research question one represents a combination of both leadership practice and perception, as well as an understanding of the student needs addressed by developmentally responsive transitions. Leaders must be able to explicate a vision for that transition which should address the tenets of SDT.

Research question two develops from the *setting directions* domain of leadership practice. This question strives to uncover what leaders do, and how leaders perceive what they do, to help support the developmental and psychological needs of students during the ninth-grade transition. Sub-question two under research question two addresses the teacher perception of the leadership practice around the ninth-grade transition, which plays a role in the contextual assessment of CTE.

Research question three focuses on the ways in which leadership practice helps to offer and support the four sources of teacher collective efficacy. The literature review in Chapter II shared three core areas of concern which help to bolster and support CTE: a culture of collaboration, an enabling of teacher leadership, and the presence of transformational leadership. In addition, the leadership domain *developing people* and its core practices serves to enhance collective teacher efficacy. This question aims to address the practices of a secondary school leader that most enable a faculty to build the sources of collective efficacy. In addition, both sub-questions under research question three address the alignment of practice and perception.

Study Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data. By utilizing both of these two types of data together, the study design allowed for more varied data to be collected and served to strengthen the validity of the ultimate research findings (Butin, 2010). Qualitative data was emphasized more so than quantitative, with quantitative data serving to enrich and deepen the information gathered qualitatively.

This study was conducted at three Catholic and private secondary schools in the mid-Atlantic. These schools have similar mission statements, similar curricula, and roughly similar socioeconomic and racial diversity. The first school, Ricci High School, is the only coeducational school of the group, with a student body of approximately 1,200 students in grades 9-12. Ricci is the most suburban of the schools in the study. The second school, Claver Academy, is all-male, with approximately 1,000 students in grades 9-12 in an urban environment. The final school, The Faber School, is the only one of the

three serving students in grades 6-12; however, for the purposes of this study, focus remained on grades 9-12. Faber enrolls approximately 750 students in an all-male environment for grades 9-12. It is more urban than Ricci and more suburban than Claver, and is the smallest of the three high schools.

These schools were chosen through purposive sampling (Hays & Singh, 2012). According to the criteria in the category of “representativeness of sample,” these schools represent both a homogeneous and a convenience sampling of secondary schools in this particular mid-Atlantic region. In terms of convenience, these are schools to which I, as an administrator in a similar context, had either a personal connection or was connected through a professional contact. For each of the three schools, I was also aware before reaching out to inquire about participation that they either had transitional programs in place for ninth-grade students or had put thought into ways to better care for students during the transitional period. In this assets-based study, I wanted to focus my research on contexts where I knew the ninth-grade transition was an issue of concern and an area being addressed in some way.

Researcher Bias

As a scholar-practitioner, I have come to know rather deeply the variety and diversity of educational experience throughout the different levels of schooling in this country. For my part, I am personally a product of Catholic schooling and have worked my entire professional career in a Catholic school. Given my relationship to the institution of Catholic education, it is possible that my own interpretation of the data taken from these schools could be influenced by my own experiences. In order to

counteract that bias, I have tried to root my data analysis firmly in the conceptual framework and ground it in the literature base.

In addition, my own current professional role places me firmly in the position of helping students, parents, and faculty tend to the difficulties of the ninth-grade transition. As much as possible, I attempted to focus on rooting my questioning, my analysis, and my interpretation of the data received in what the literature says to be effective rather than in my own personal experience of what I have found to be effective. I recognize that my experience of one context may be completely anomalous; the research and conceptual framework will serve as the steady anchor of my work.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study employed four main methods of discovery: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, surveys, and document analysis. Each method was explicitly chosen for its ability to address the stated research questions.

This study was conducted over four months, from September through December of the 2019-20 school year. The goal of this time frame was to access information pertaining to the ninth-grade transition as close in time to the transition itself as possible. The further removed from that period, the less likely that the data would be as rich or as descriptive.

The process of data collection began with semi-structured interviews with school leaders. These interviews helped to inform the document analysis, ensuring that all relevant and important documents and artifacts are acquired. Next, documents were collected and analyzed, with the teacher survey being distributed at the same time. The final research component was focus groups with ninth-grade teachers. This order was

intentional; given the explicit focus of this study on leadership action, it was important that the data analysis and collection begin with the leader and continue outward from there. Interviews highlighted the documents worthy of and necessary for consideration in order to triangulate the data collected from the leader, and the teacher survey provided information that helped to better focus the probing questions during the teacher focus group. The data collection plan followed a similar progression to the visualization of elements offered by the conceptual framework (Figure 2).

Semi-Structured Interviews

The leader at each school was interviewed with a semi-structured interview protocol. Given this study's focus on school leaders and on secondary school leadership practice, these interviews served as the primary method of discovery and are appropriately prioritized in the findings. Semi-structured interviews, with a consistent and clear protocol guiding the questioning, allow for more participant voice to be directly included in the research findings, thereby providing a richer and thicker description of the phenomenon being researched (Hays & Singh, 2012). The questions within the protocol addressed research questions one, two, and three. A copy of the interview protocol is provided in Appendix A. Each interview took place during a school day in each respective leader's office, and the interviews lasted between fifty and sixty minutes each. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the leader's responses were then analyzed and coded in a structured coding frame derived from the major themes of the study's conceptual framework. Utilizing a consistent coding frame that is explicitly connected to the conceptual framework enabled the data from multiple interviews to work together in pursuit of crafting a story around the construct in question (Given, 2008). Data that

addressed the ninth-grade transition were coded according to the student needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Data that addressed leadership practices were coded according to the Leithwood and Louis (2012) domains of *setting direction* and *developing people*, as well as coded to align with the four sources of CTE. Finally, data that addressed the ways in which a leader can foster CTE were coded according to the three practices identified in Chapter II, of building a culture of collaboration, enabling teacher leadership, and the presence of transformational leadership. The code list can be found in Appendix B.

Document Analysis

A robust document analysis provided for triangulation of data for each research question. Document analysis as a methodology can be seen as “a powerful yet oftentimes underused research strategy” (Butin, 2010, p. 99), and a strategy that allows for a comprehensive, varied, and in-depth picture of what is happening in a given environment and context. In the case of this study, any and all school materials, publications, or plans for, or in any way related to, ninth-grade transitional programming were analyzed and assessed in relation to both their developmental responsiveness and their relationship to the sources of CTE and the leadership domains. The document analysis in this study did not offer divergent information from the semi-structured leader interviews, the teacher focus groups, or the survey data. Though rich in and of itself, the data from the document analysis tended to support and affirm the other data sources; as such, the document analysis data does not often appear in the study’s findings. The document analysis was guided by the same codes found in the code list in Appendix B.

Surveys

Teachers of ninth-grade students were surveyed regarding their sense of CTE. Surveys allow for information to be gained directly from those people most intimately involved and potentially allow for more consistent and accurate information across different research sites (Fink, 2017). From the outset of research interest in collective efficacy, the measurement of the construct has presented conceptual challenges. Much of the challenge lies in separating the construct from the closely related but inherently different concept of self-efficacy; though nourished from the same sources, the two are not the same and cannot be treated as such. Bandura (1997) pointed out that collective efficacy is “an emergent group-level attribute rather than simply the sum of members’ perceived personal efficacies” (p. 478), and thus is so much more than just the sum of its parts. I administered a slightly altered version of Megan Tschannen-Moran’s “Collective Teacher Efficacy Beliefs Scale,” with the wording of questions adjusted to address the ninth-grade transition directly. The survey instrument and a broader discussion of CTE instrumentation can be found in Appendix C. This survey served to highlight the effectiveness of stated leadership practice on CTE. If schools show high CTE, then particular attention can be paid to the practices of leadership that may have enabled it. Conversely, if a staff exhibits low CTE, the leader’s responses to the interview questions can help to determine which practices are less effective for enabling the construct.

Teacher Focus Groups

Those teachers involved in the ninth-grade transitional programming at each school were interviewed using a focus group. Given the collective nature of the CTE construct, a focus group interview is an effective research strategy for this study. Though focus groups can be limited by the social pressure of a communal setting, they offer an

interactive set of data based on the interpersonal interactions of those involved and the shared experience of the group (Hays & Singh, 2012). These focus group interviews addressed sub-question two under both research questions two and three. Additionally, these focus groups served as triangulation for the leader interviews to ensure that there was alignment of practice and perception. Details about the administration of these focus groups is provided in Table 1. The protocol for the focus group is provided in Appendix D.

Table 1

Faculty Focus Group Implementation Details

School Context	Structure	Length of Time	Participants
Ricci High School	Utilized time set aside during a faculty professional development day	46 minutes	18
Claver Academy	Utilized the three lunch periods during a standard school day; no participants showed up for one lunch period, so utilized two	Session 1: 32 minutes Session 2: 32 minutes	Session 1: 8 Session 2: 2
The Faber School	Utilized the time after a standard school day	34 minutes	6

Methodological Limitations

There are a handful of limitations worthy of note within this study. First and foremost, this study is limited by the sample. Three schools displaying relative homogeneity are hardly a representative sample. The generalizability and applicability of any research findings outside of this very particular subgroup of schools may be difficult.

Even within the region in which these schools operate, they do not represent the variety of private and independent high schools that exist.

Second, there are limitations within the chosen methodologies. Though the variety of methods is meant to supply some level of data triangulation, semi-structured interviews offer a risk of highlighting the experiences of one person within an organization as representative of the whole. In much the same way, focus groups present challenges as to just how representative of the collective voice the group interview may be (Hays & Singh, 2012). However, given the importance of leadership action in the conceptual framework, and given the collective nature of the efficacy construct being studied, I feel that the limitations do not discount the value of these methods.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the ways in which leadership practice can help to enable the sources of CTE within the particular context of a developmentally responsive ninth-grade transition. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach allowed for quantitative data about collective efficacy to be enriched by thick qualitative data gathered in interviews, focus groups, and through document analysis, and allows for a roadmap of effective leadership practice to be created around the challenging ninth-grade transitional period. This study seeks to enable secondary school leaders to better understand how to foster collective efficacy around social and emotional learning and how best to enable teachers to support students in the challenges of a difficult transitional period.

Chapter IV – Findings

Three research questions have guided this study investigating the ways in which the leader of a secondary school works to build the collective efficacy of a teaching staff, specifically focused upon the construction and implementation of a developmentally responsive ninth-grade transition for students. Those same research questions guide the analysis of the findings which are presented for each school, followed by a cross-case analysis of the similarities and differences discovered. The cross-case analysis will address how all of the information gathered pertains to the research questions and conceptual framework of the study.

The first research question asks: How do secondary school leaders understand developmentally responsive high school transitions for all students? For each school, as discovered through leader interviews, I relate how each school's leader addressed the transitional student needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy. As has been discussed, these three needs represent the core focus of a developmentally responsive transition and represent the psychological needs at the fore of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The way those needs present themselves, or the way in which they are understood in each environment, provides a context to understanding the practices discussed as the findings for the second research question.

The second research question asks: What leadership practices support the work of ninth-grade teacher teams in creating developmentally responsive high school transitions for all students? This question also has sub-questions that deal with both leader and faculty perceptions of those practices. For each school, I address the practices discovered through leader interviews, faculty focus group interviews, and document analysis which

appear to support the work of creating these developmentally responsive transitions. These practices are organized by the study's conceptual framework and the leadership domain of *setting directions* found therein. Leithwood and Louis (2012) describe four core practices in this domain: *building a shared vision, fostering acceptance of group goals, creating high performance expectations, and communicating directions*. In the analysis, I address how each leader carries out these practices and how both teachers and the leader perceive that work in terms of the three umbrella categories that organize these core practices: transitional programming, parent education, and deliberate expectations. For one school, freshman advisory was an additional category of leadership practice employed to create developmentally responsive high school transitions. Altogether the practices in these categories represent the core practices leaders in this study used to *set directions* for ninth-grade teacher teams' work.

The third research question asks: In what ways do secondary school leaders help to build the collective efficacy of ninth-grade teams in meeting student social and emotional needs as part of the transition to high school? Like question two, this question has sub-questions that deal with both leader and faculty perceptions of those practices. For each school, I first share the results of a survey distributed to faculty to gauge their sense of teacher collective efficacy. I then examine the leadership practices, discovered through interviews with the leader and teachers and the document analysis, which serve to support and build collective teacher efficacy. In Chapter II three groups of leadership practices were cited as crucial for building collective teacher efficacy: creating a culture of collaboration (Goddard et al., 2017), enabling teacher leadership (Olivier & Hipp, 2006), and transformational leadership (Leithwood et al., 2010). As defined earlier,

transformational leadership “is dedication to fostering the growth of organizational members and enhancing their commitment by elevating their goals” (Ross & Brown, 2006, p. 180). To further discuss how the transformational leadership practices might promote teachers’ collective efficacy, I analyze the findings in terms of the core practices of the *developing people* domain (Leithwood & Louis, 2012), which are *providing individual support and consideration, offering intellectual stimulation, and modeling appropriate values and practices*. These leadership practices are theorized to work together to provide the sources of collective efficacy for teachers (i.e. mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states).

The presentation of findings for each individual school and for the cross-case analysis follows a similar pattern. Findings are presented in relation to the study’s guiding research questions, and key insights from leader interviews are followed by pertinent evidence from teacher focus groups. Where applicable, relevant data from the faculty surveys and the document analysis are provided as well.

Ricci High School¹

Ricci High School is a Catholic, coeducational, 9-12 school located in a mid-Atlantic state. The school’s enrollment is approximately 1,200 students with an average class size of nineteen students. The school’s principal, Luke Marshall, was himself a graduate of the school and was serving in his seventh year in the role at the time of our interview.

¹ The names of both the schools and the individual leaders have been pseudonymized in order to provide anonymity.

Transitional Student Needs

As the school's leader, Luke clearly evinced an understanding of the need he felt for the school and his staff to pay particular attention to the freshman transitional period. He recognized and cited the diversity of experience of the incoming ninth-grade class, identifying that "we draw in a typical year from 80 or more feeder schools," and throughout the interview spoke regularly of his desire to create a sense of community for students at the school. He identified the main task of the school's transitional programming as "teaching (the students) to navigate high school life after middle school." That statement reflects Luke's clear understanding that the landscape is changing for the student, and that for many it is changing dramatically. In addition, as an alumnus and someone who knows the historical context of the school, Luke also recognized the changing landscape of education and its effects on the community at Ricci:

There was a time, certainly I think when I went to school here, where the overwhelming majority of our students were coming from Catholic schools, knew the Catholic thing, knew the discipline, knew the faith, knew the uniforms, knew the work ethic, knew all of that. That is no longer the case.

The awareness that many incoming students are joining a Catholic school community for the first time has shaped Luke's understanding of students' transitional needs at Ricci; that awareness leads to a recognition that in order to keep pace with the students coming through the doors, Ricci must recognize that the traditional approach and methods must evolve as well. Though the environment within Ricci still maintains many of its traditional characteristics and attributes, Luke recognizes that the students entering the

Ricci community are not the same as they once might have been and because of that fact, he works to help the students acclimate to the more traditional environment.

Relatedness. Luke's awareness of the relational challenges at Ricci was clear. He spoke of reaching out to those students whose feeder schools may not have prepared them for the social landscape and of finding ways to help them acclimate more intentionally. He spoke of the challenge of fitting in given the size of the new environment and the challenge of adjusting to being the youngest in the building and interacting with older students in the halls, in the classroom, and on the athletic fields. He cited one student as a particularly indicative example of this disparity in context:

This child came to us from a small private school. I think they had, [the size of] the eighth-grade class was in the teens maybe, and then they come in, they're one of 300 in a class and 1200 in a building. Socially, that can be difficult.

The literature on ninth-grade transitions clearly shows that the move from the smaller and more comforting confines of middle school to the bigger and more intimidating environment of high school can present serious challenges to students (Akos & Galassi, 2006; Smith & Akos, 2008), and Luke certainly recognizes that challenge at Ricci.

Luke's concern was not only for those students who might have come from much smaller environments, but for all students. He spoke explicitly of building a strong community, and of utilizing all of the school's resources to do so:

(W)e tell [the freshmen] from day one that sometimes we know you will feel alone, but we're here for you. We have counselors, we have advisors, we have teachers, we have coaches, we have everybody [who] wants to help the students fit in.

Luke recognized the need for building relatedness and shared that he felt his strategies were working: “We’ve always had good student retention, but particularly with our freshmen, we’ve been having success.”

Competence. Like the social challenges, Luke recognized the difficulty of bridging the gap for students between their new environment at Ricci, with its heightened academic expectations, and their old environment of diverse middle school experiences. The lack of communication between the middle school and high school levels and the variety of academic expectations in each create a very uneven playing field at the outset of ninth grade. Given that variety, Luke said of Ricci’s ninth-grade students: “(W)e get students across the spectrum in terms of their academic background, content, knowledge, skill development, work habits...we have found students lacking in some of the foundational content and skills that we used to be able to assume students come to us with.” He cited the challenge “of getting everybody introduced to and acclimated to our expectations.” His statements reflect a clear awareness that academic challenges are a big stumbling block for students at the outset and are a challenge that must be addressed through transitional programming and through intentional work with the faculty.

Autonomy. The student need for autonomy also emerged in Luke’s discussion of the transitional challenges at Ricci. Luke discussed the tripartite relationship between student, school, and parent, and the ways in which he feels that relationship needs to be addressed. Having already described what he saw as the role of the school, he discussed the student and parent roles in terms of the need for students to build independence in a safe environment. He described the tone of his message to students as “This is your responsibility. You need to come see us. If you have questions, you need to advocate for

yourself.” Since Luke cited the need for students to push themselves and to be pushed to operate more independently, he tells parents to avoid helicopter parenting, instead promoting “submarine parenting... underneath, unseen, unheard, but should a problem arise you can surface and you can support.”

Leadership Practices in Support of Developmentally Responsive Transitions

In his interview, Luke made clear that he saw the challenges students faced in making a transition to ninth grade at Ricci. He works with his team to implement his leadership practices and to implement the policies and programs he believes will help students better manage their entry to the school. Luke grounds his work and his messaging in collaborative and mission-based language, including sending weekly emails to faculty with a mission-focused touchstone within. He consistently holds the best interest of the students at the fore of discussion and decision-making and in conversation with teachers about classroom challenges. He strives to create the opportunities and the structures that will help enable his faculty to better serve the incoming students’ needs and challenges the entire adult community to work in concert in that enterprise. He aims to achieve a collective vision, with faculty, students, and parents all working towards the same goal. He and his team have built a number of structures and programs in the attempt to do so. Those practices are described next along with the teacher perceptions and understandings of those practices.

Freshman Advisory. At Ricci, one major initiative stands out in Luke’s attempt to build his vision for the school. Luke and his staff operate an advisory program, particularly for freshmen, which focuses explicitly on becoming a more deeply-rooted

member of the community. The school's mascot is an eagle², and the theme for the freshman advisory program is "becoming an eagle." Luke explained that this theme is designed to address the very concerns around relatedness, competence, and autonomy which he identified in our interview: "[Our] whole advisory curriculum is geared toward ... helping them acclimate, helping them find a place to fit in." Additionally, Luke explained that this program is rooted in the school's mission "that every student is valued, every student is loved, and every student has something to contribute." That shared mission, with its emphasis on the care for and value of each individual student, appears to create an impetus for the school's advisory program, through which the Ricci staff attends to each individual's needs while also helping each to see themselves as a member of the community.

Through the advisory program, Luke is able to offer every student an adult connection and a small group of peers with whom they share a common bond. Luke expects every teacher to serve as an advisor, making explicit his expectation that tending to the social and emotional needs of students is a crucial part of the faculty's work. This advisor then helps to meet the transitional needs of the ninth-grade students, many of whom Luke recognized are asking the question "Who am I?" This phenomenon of students' self-concept and identity shaken by their transition into high school is supported in the literature (Marsh, 1987; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Newman et al., 2007). Students may suffer academically more than ever before, they may struggle socially more than ever before, and this blow to self-concept can be damaging, particularly at the developmental stage of a ninth-grade student. Luke and his team seek to intervene to

² The mascot has been changed.

alleviate these threats through the Ricci advisory program. Luke works to empower his staff in creating a context that encourages students to find their place at the school, even if that might not have been their place before. He cites athletic coaches who will work together, encouraging students cut from one team to join another. He also cites extracurricular activities that stand out as welcoming and to which students are often directed by their teachers and advisors. Luke states that “it’s important to get involved, it’s important to be here past 2:50 in the afternoon and build those connections and relationships.” The advisory program strives to build resilience in students by opening windows when a door might be closed and by showing students that what matters is the community more than the individual activity.

Luke explained that the advisory program seeks to build students’ competence and autonomy to consider how to address any academic challenges they might face. Thus, while there is no explicit academic skill-building, the advisory program does offer students regular grade checks and conversations with their advisor. This advisor strives to build in students the self-advocacy skills they need by challenging them to take the lead in solving academic problems when they arise. Luke shared an anecdote that made him believe that the program was, overall, a success:

I think one of the best compliments I got was when we first started this whole advisory push and we're meeting with freshman really regularly. I was walking down the hall with a senior and the senior is like, "What are all the freshmen up to today?" And so I explained it him, he's like, "Wow, I wish we had that when I was a freshman." That's when you know you're onto something when the students say, "Boy, I wish we had that."

In terms of building a shared vision for this transitional experience, it is worthwhile to note that many of the teacher perceptions around the advisory program

mirror what Luke offered as well. This suggests that the messaging from Luke has been consistent and that the teachers have engaged with the advisory curriculum and its goals in a meaningful way. Of advisory, one teacher said in the focus group interview:

(A) lot of the work that the people who are in charge of advisory do has to do with developing those ninth graders into what is 'becoming an eagle'. Emotionally, psychologically, just developing skills. So, I think, just through advisory as a community, we've identified that we want students to become an eagle. We probably have done it in the past, but now, it's actually something that's part of our program.

This teacher explicitly recognizes and states the importance of tending to freshmen students' non-cognitive needs, and of helping those students to build the capacity to address social and emotional challenges. In the same vein, another teacher during the focus group said:

And that's a part of the whole 'becoming an eagle'. Teaching those self-awareness skills, regard for others, concern for others, being aware of how your behavior affects the other people around you. All of that's a part of that development in the classroom, in the school. Everything. Throughout.

Both teachers indicate a clear recognition of what advisory is meant to provide students, and that this has become a formalized focus at Ricci; this is not simply an informal, some do and some don't type of situation. This suggests that Luke and his team have developed the advisory program as a shared goal by which Ricci staff support ninth graders' successful transitions. There was a clear sense among the faculty that this program was doing what Luke intended it to do, and the message from leadership of what was most important in this context was clear and was shared. There was some slight regret expressed regarding the time lost to faculty collaboration, but that regret was still couched in a recognition of the advisory program's value. One teacher stated that "another piece that we do as teachers [and] is also done in advisory is teaching them

independence and maturity and how to advocate for themselves,” as clear an endorsement of a developmentally responsive transition as one could have.

Transitional Programming. There were a few programs that Luke discussed which stand out as attempts to help students in transition. These, in addition to advisory, help to address the students’ psychological needs.

In the summer prior to enrolling, Luke and his administration invite students to participate in a number of different opportunities at the school. Luke estimated that roughly 70-75% of incoming ninth-grade students participate. There are academic options, with a study skills course, STEM courses, technology courses, and even credit-bearing foreign language courses. For students in Ricci’s program for learning challenges, there is a mandatory five-week summer school to help set and clarify academic expectations. In addition to academics, sports teams will meet for optional practice and exercise sessions throughout the summer, which interested incoming freshmen are invited to attend. For students who don’t play a particular sport, there is a strength and conditioning program to help them learn the basics of exercise. There are extracurricular options too, like Speech and Debate, which set the tone for the start of a student’s high school career by allowing for some experience before the year begins.

Luke discussed the value of these programs not necessarily in what they accomplish academically or athletically, but in what they accomplish psychologically for the students. He pointed out that they allow the acclimation process to start even before it must begin in earnest. He cited that they allow for socialization as students meet peers and upperclassmen, and that they allow for increased autonomy as students acclimate to the campus, the buildings, the faculty and staff, all prior to the first day of school. Luke

expressed that they allow for competence, as the students build their confidence with the academic workload or with the athletic competition. In all, as Luke put it, the summer programs aim to “shorten the learning curve” for incoming students.

In addition to summer programming, there is a freshman orientation at the outset of the school year. This orientation marks the first mandatory experience for students, and it starts with a grounding in the school’s mission. The day begins with a convocation mass, shared with parents, setting a tone of mission-based work to come. Then, the orientation program moves to more procedural concerns, including a scavenger hunt that challenges students to explore the campus and get to know the staff. Finally, students hear from Luke, his Dean of Students, and the Student Government President as they begin to acculturate into the new environment.

Once the year begins, there are two additional programs that Luke and his team have implemented. One is a mentoring program, and one is a broader academic support program. In the mentoring program the 10-20 students who present the most concern at the outset, based on both their admissions file and their first few weeks of school, receive a mentor teacher in addition to their advisor. Luke and his team may identify these students for further support on the basis of family or academic need, social concerns, or because of the feeder school they attended. Luke intends this program to provide the pointed attention of another adult on campus in addition to their advisor, or as he put it to provide “someone who’s really there just to teach them how high school works.” Luke handpicks these mentor teachers and has charged his assistant with leading the program. Then, as the year goes along, students who begin to find success can “graduate,” as it were, while still keeping the connection with their mentor teacher alive. In the case of

these “graduated” students, even if a student may no longer need to attend the program or check in regularly, they still have the intentional support of an additional adult on campus if needed.

The second program is the academic support program. This is a more traditional model, where students are assigned to a study hall with an English teacher and a Math teacher. This program is designed for struggling students of all grade levels, but as Luke said “our antenna is up with freshmen.” Luke explained that the goal is to provide yet another adult for a student to lean on, and yet another opportunity to grow the skills and build the sense of competence a student needs for success.

The faculty also named the mentoring and the academic support program as tools built to support Ricci’s students. In the focus group, teachers cited the mentoring program as a way to help ease the burden on individual teachers of catching students up to grade-level work. The academic support program was described by teachers as providing selected ninth graders with another adult to help them manage their work, reflecting Luke’s stated goal for the program. One teacher in the focus group said of this program’s focus: “You have a representative who tries to help students that are overwhelmed with sport schedules and extracurricular schedules and need a little extra support and guidance to keep the grades up and see if it’ll work.” This additional safety net serves to buoy the students most in need and reflects Luke’s vision for building the community at Ricci that supports students in transition.

In the focus group interview, when asked about ways that the administration at Ricci helped students transition into the school, the faculty did not name the summer programs or the freshman orientation. I believe that this reflects the time and energy that

these faculty devote to the implementation of the advisory program overall. From this omission, I inferred that the faculty see Ricci's orientation programming as simply another component of the broader scope of advisory. I believe the omission of summer programming has to do with the faculty focus on the ninth-grade students collectively; though participation in the summer is robust it is not complete, and some students do not receive that support before their arrival at the school. The advisory program is focused so clearly on supporting all ninth-grade students acclimate that teachers might simply have overlooked the presence of summer programming.

Parent Education. Luke spoke clearly of the importance he placed on educating the parents of ninth graders in addition to the students themselves. Luke and the team at Ricci strive to make clear to parents that it is important that students know their parents care about their performance, and that the school cares that their parents care. Early in the ninth-grade year, he involves the parents in several key ways to help create this interplay between school, home, and students. This overlapping support can improve a student's transitional experience (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

First, Luke sends emails home to parents throughout the summer before the ninth-grade year even begins. He intends these as preemptive communications, sent before parental questions can escalate to concerns or problems, in order to put parents and the school on the same page before the student even sets foot on campus. These emails range from simple administrative information, with times and dates of events, to more detailed explanations of the school's values and expectations. The emails identify what makes for a successful Ricci student, what attributes a Ricci graduate should possess after four years

at the school, and how to help students build at home the same sense of autonomy the school's advisory program seeks to build.

Second, there is a "Back to School Night" that is exclusive to parents of freshmen, separate from that of the other grades. Luke explains how this allows him and other members of the faculty and staff to add information explicitly about the transition the ninth-grade students are making:

(W)e have a separate back to school night for freshmen parents and [it's] a longer one. They still walk through their child's schedule and meet all of their child's teachers, but we have a longer preamble to it where we review a lot of, here's how life at (Ricci) works. With our returning parents, it's 15 minutes of business. With our freshman parents it's about 45 minutes of 'Here's how we operate'.

Luke explained that the decision to separate the ninth-grade event from the others helps the leadership team to signify to parents, to teachers, and to students that this transition is not just another step up the ladder, and that there is more involved than a mere change in year.

Finally, there are three other events that stand out as opportunities to enlist the support of freshmen parents and to start building a shared sense of mission and support for their children. One, there is a cocktail reception the evening before freshman orientation. This gives parents a chance to socialize together while also addressing any lingering questions before school starts. Two, there is an event termed a "101," sponsored by the Parent Association. Luke described this event as a "more in-depth version of what we do with freshman parents at Back to School Night." At the event, parents get the chance to hear from a wide swath of administrators and to get a better sense of what resources and opportunities are available to Ricci students. Three, Luke hosts an event

entitled “Coffee and Conversation” three times throughout the first semester. This enables parents to meet both with Luke, as Principal, and with the school’s President. Luke intends the smaller group setting to let parents learn more about how the school is run and to ask any questions they might have. In all, these events present a number of opportunities for Luke to share explicitly his messaging about the ninth-grade transition and to enlist parents as supportive partners in the educational enterprise.

The Ricci faculty echoed the importance in the focus group interview of these efforts to educate parents and expressed their appreciation for them. One teacher recognized that the school shared a good deal of information with parents. Two teachers cited the changing nature of parental involvement at the school. One teacher during the focus group mentioned that “in the past few years, I’ve had more receptive freshman parents,” signaling just such a shift. Another teacher mentioned, “it has been a shift in the last couple years, administrative support for student self-advocacy has really improved.” For Luke, the development of this narrative among the faculty points to the success of his messaging and of the clarity of his focus on supporting the developmental needs of Ricci’s ninth graders. A third teacher in the focus group shared an anecdote about the freshman parent Back to School Night, as this teacher had both a nephew and niece attending Ricci currently:

The language from the administration at back to school night for freshmen parents, not any other grade levels but specifically freshmen parents, has been really encouraging them to having students self-advocate and that sort of thing, and they're trying to enforce the channels of communication.

By trying to educate parents about the importance of student autonomy, Luke and his team are working to give parents the same sorts of coping mechanisms and skill sets that they are working to give students.

Deliberate Expectations. One recurrent theme of the interview with Luke was about the clarity of Ricci's expectations of students. He mentions on multiple occasions the need to be clear with students about what is expected of them. This stands out as an attempt to level the diverse playing field; without a consistent batch of feeder schools and drawing from such a diverse geographic and educational pool, Luke sees setting expectations that leave no room for confusion as one of the simplest ways to expedite acculturation and acclimation. He explained his deliberate effort to signal clear expectations with the ninth graders: "At the beginning of the year, I meet with every class. For the freshmen, I take a little bit of a more deliberate approach to saying, 'Here's how we act, here are what our expectations are.'" For Luke, this expectation setting is grounded in the particular Catholic mission of the school and he strives to instill that in the students as well. He uses repetition to get the point across to students as they adjust to all of the new demands upon them:

We repeat that over and over and over again. This is your responsibility. You need to come see us. If you have questions you need to advocate for yourself.... So it's through advisory, it's through just those daily teachable moments that we try to impress upon the students: One day you will be out of your parents' home, you will be in college, you won't have our safety net under you. You need to learn to try to overcome issues and to deal with adversity.

Luke consistently touched upon this same idea of deliberately teaching to students the expectations of the school:

We've found that we have to be very deliberate. If we expect it from them, we have to tell them, we cannot assume that they are going to know...we have to be more deliberate about teaching what we expect.

Clarity of expectations helps Luke build a shared mission among not only the faculty but the entire community at Ricci.

One teacher in the focus group interview recognized the need to be particularly direct with ninth-grade students, saying of their growth that:

I think naturally, though, they do grow out of it a little bit. You see them the beginning of sophomore year and something has happened on its own, but I think a lot of it still has to be directly taught just because they don't see it.

Since this statement implies that the Ricci faculty sense that developmentally, the freshmen are not ready for the level of autonomy expected of them, the explicit teaching of that skill is beneficial. For the teachers, setting expectations for ninth-grade students seems related to leveling the playing field and helping to alleviate the diverse nature of the students' middle school experiences. One teacher said of trying to set expectations among diverse abilities: "One of the things we do for the curriculum is make sure that after the first quarter, any kid who's in that classroom, whatever background they have, they're all on the same page." Another teacher in the focus group highlighted the importance of addressing issues of student immaturity with consistency: "We just had a whole talk to a group of kids about Little Boy Syndrome – 'You're acting like a ten-year old. Here are the ramifications.' That's really important." Both Luke and his team recognize the importance of identifying difficult transitional challenges for incoming students and finding ways to address those challenges in clear and consistent ways.

Teachers' Collective Efficacy and its Foundation

In response to a survey measuring their collective teacher efficacy, Ricci faculty indicated that they feel they have the ability collectively to help ninth-grade students to acclimate and adjust to the community. They responded particularly positively to a question about whether they feel the school can make students feel safe; there was also strong agreement that teachers can produce meaningful student learning for freshmen, and that teachers can get freshman students to believe they can do well academically. Next, I discuss the leadership practices that appear to build this sense of collective efficacy.

Culture of Collaboration. Intentionally working to create a culture of collaboration allows teachers to experience all of the sources of collective teacher efficacy. Productive collaboration enables mastery experiences, where a group encounters success together. It enables vicarious experiences, where members of the group can experience and hear of the success of the team. It builds a more positive sense of both social persuasion and of affective state as the team's positivity and resilience thrive.

Luke described his work to create meaningful opportunities for collaboration at Ricci. The advisory program, covering all grades and requiring all teachers, is one example of faculty collaboration. An advisory committee provides oversight for advisory, comprised of a point person for each grade level and an administrative coordinator who leads the whole program. Faculty spoke of the way advisory operates within the community and how particularly the freshman team work together to find the best ways to reach students. In addition to advisory, there is a "student support team" composed of

the school counselors, administrators, nurse, athletic trainer, and chaplain. In concert with the mentoring program, the academic support program, and the advisory program, Luke has made it easy for faculty members to collaborate around student support and social-emotional care.

There is academic collaboration, as well. Luke discussed how at least once a year, he meets with academic departments to set expectations and discuss student performance and growth. He has direct conversations with departments, with faculty members, and with teachers of freshmen. He has enabled time for professional learning teams (PLTs), with two days reserved for professional time in the schedule; that time can be used for PLTs or for departmental meetings, but either way there is time set aside in the schedule for collaboration. Within departments, Luke has encouraged collaboration both vertically and horizontally, with particular attention paid to course and grade level work. That said, Luke recognized the challenge that many schools and administrators face when it comes to professional collaboration: “We're figuring things out, but we haven't quite cracked the code of how do we be available to students and get professional time without sacrificing instructional time.” Luke reported that time stands as one of biggest hurdles at Ricci to greater collaboration among teachers.

In focus groups, the faculty echoed this concern. It was mentioned that they have had grade level meetings encouraged by administration in the past, but that they no longer have those meetings unless a faculty member initiates them and that instead the discussions about student growth and progress have become more informal. However, one teacher noted how even informal communication can help teachers collaborate:

I think the informal collaboration is effective because it allows you to in a casual, relaxed way speak with another teacher or teachers about particular students or one student in particular, and it informs you, and it makes you realize that no I'm not crazy. It's very collaborative [here], and I think it is sort of a nice way to interact and sort of intervene when necessary with a student.

This statement, which met with general assent in the focus group, implies that teachers feel a culture of collaboration can lead to meaningful teacher exchanges even without formal structures. Time was cited by several faculty as a barrier to formal collaborative structures as PLTs, departmental time, and grade level conversations all seemed to fall by the wayside given the demands of the daily schedule and instructional time. In addition, during the focus group one faculty member cited the time demands of advisory, with its focus on helping to better serve students, as a possible reason professional time had slipped:

I think with the onset of advisory, where it is worthwhile, it also makes it almost impossible to have a block of time that you can do some of the things we're talking about. Meeting as a department, meeting with different departments about certain kids. There just isn't any time in the day, because that's a period of time every day that we have, almost like another class.... It has its good things, but there are negative things that it limits us to what we can do with a lot of these other good ideas.

Given his stated value of tending to social and emotional student development, Luke and his team have elevated the advisory program as the priority for where faculty are to spend their time. Yet, as this faculty member indicates, that has limited collaborative time.

The culture of collaboration at Ricci, then, continues to be a goal for Luke and his team and continues to be a work in progress. The structure of the freshman advisory program and the grouping of faculty advisors provides at least one effective collaborative structure for teachers. Luke employs instructional leadership in his efforts to inspire

departmental collaboration, though as the Ricci teachers noted in the focus group he could work to build a more robust faculty teaming model for grade level concerns. Given the time commitment Luke has offered by scheduling professional learning into the school schedule, the opportunity for continued and extended collaboration at Ricci is present.

Enabling Teacher Leadership. Teacher leadership, like collaboration, addresses multiple sources of teacher collective efficacy. Leadership from the ground up, rather than the top down, enables faculty to more intimately encounter mastery experiences and allows for confidence in the ability to accomplish the desired tasks to grow. A secondary school leader must be willing to allow space for faculty leadership and to empower the sort of culture that encourages individual faculty members to feel that they have the influence to effect change.

At Ricci, Luke's reliance on teacher leadership is most evident in the advisory program, and particularly in the freshman advisory program and its focus on "becoming an eagle." Though he and the administrative team supported, encouraged, and prioritized it, Luke talked about how the advisory program was the result of teacher leadership.

One teacher in the focus group explained the impetus behind the advisory program in this way:

So a few years ago, myself and another teacher... we put together a meeting for the freshman teachers and we started spitballing, like 'What are we seeing? What could we possibly address?' Spun out of that a year later was the advisory program, but that was definitely a grassroots [effort]. All freshman teachers came and met with us after school one day. It wasn't a top-down directive.

The inception of the advisory initiative represents a confluence of a number of factors and is an encouraging sign of the Ricci faculty's collective efficacy. This initiative was clearly sparked by issues of academic support and helping to build competency in the incoming students. Stoked by the culture of informal communication and empowered by the space to become leaders on the ground, these teachers took it upon themselves to help lead the school in developing this initiative, which provides a powerful example of the power of positive thinking and clear messaging from leadership.

Teachers are also the driving force behind Ricci's professional development model. With the collaborative time lost to the advisory program for initiatives like PLTs and grade-level conversations, a void opened for serving the professional needs of the faculty. In an effort to enlist the faculty's support in building a stronger culture of collaboration, Luke has built a committee to help design and implement the professional development programming at Ricci throughout the year. It is a collaborative team of faculty and staff who have developed a website of faculty options and who post reviews and encourage others to seek out opportunities. On campus, Luke taps into the ability he sees in the staff:

(W)e try to do things in house. When we have professional development days, sometimes we'll bring in speakers, but otherwise we will tap the teachers on the shoulders who are doing something innovative and say, "You need to share this with your colleagues" and we'll do that.

Even with the time constraints, Luke has tried to create a culture at Ricci that encourages collaboration and that empowers teachers to lead, and the students reap the benefits of this culture.

Transformational Leadership and Developing People. Among Ricci leadership and faculty there are clear shared goals regarding the advisory program and in the shared drive between leadership and faculty to support the needs of students in transition. Coupled with that is the clarity of expectations, grounded in mission, that Luke propounds and that the faculty echo. There are a number of leadership practices Luke employs to focus faculty members' growth in terms of and through these goals. For example, Luke made it clear that it was an intentional choice to employ the mission as a guiding principle, and that the mission must be a constant part of the decision-making process. Speaking of his work with faculty, Luke said:

Again, [I meet with faculty regularly to] kind of reinforce expectations but it's also just in the day to day conversations when a teacher comes in and said, "Hey, I've got this issue, or I've got this" and I always go back to, "Okay, well here's our mission. Here's what we're trying to achieve." Let's let that inform what our path is going to be as we figure this out.

Faculty in the focus group reflected back the value of the mission statement as an active guiding tool. One teacher explained it this way:

(H)aving your employees understand the greater objective of your school for coaches, for teachers through that feedback, through that critical feedback or positive [feedback] is absolutely essential. It's what you do with your athletes. It's what you do with your students to help them through that little failure they have that might have the small consequences but are part of the whole process of getting where they need to be as students. It's the same thing for your employees I think, or your coaches...Just big picture. Where are we going? Where would you like me to be with my classes, with my students, with my teams?

This quote seems connected to a sense within the faculty that Luke's emphasis on mission serves to enhance teachers' commitment to the school and students and helps to foster their growth as they work to live out the mission. With the simple question "where would you like me to be?" this teacher highlights the recognition that the communal

acceptance of and striving towards the school's mission, led by Luke's leadership, helps to create a faculty committed to continued improvement. In addition, this quote reflects the individualized attention that Luke and his team offer to the faculty at Ricci given the presence of critical feedback that helps each teacher to grow. Goal consensus at the school seemed strong in conversations with the faculty, who understand what they are being asked to do and why. They did not equate this with the tasks always being easy, but they were clear on how their work connected with the mission and focusing their work on the students. In addition, Luke made clear that even in the employment application process, the questioning of prospective teachers focuses on the administrative mission. Speaking of his work with new teachers, Luke referenced the importance of clarity in the new teacher orientation, and went on to say of his focus on mission within that orientation:

I set it out very clearly with them from not quite the first hour, it might come up in the second hour of the day, but the first day they're here, we talk about it. Even I think backing that up even further, in the interview process of questions that we ask and what we're looking for in teachers, I think help set expectations for [the mission] ... We ask questions about parent communication about how you help the struggling student, how do you meet students where they are?

Thus, Luke provided examples from hiring a teacher to hearing an impromptu idea of how he chooses to be as explicit as possible about the school mission in the hopes of maintaining a community that continues to further it. By both modeling the school mission himself and by supporting the faculty individually in their push to exemplify that mission, Luke helps to build collective efficacy among the staff.

The literature suggests that to lead in a transformational way and to *develop people* it is crucial for a school leader to model appropriate values and practices. The

faculty take their cues from their leader, and so Luke's actions and activity are key. He and his administrative team ask teachers to create a professional growth plan and they have individual feedback conversations with each teacher around that plan. Luke made it clear on multiple occasions that he strives to have individual contact with teachers as much as possible, running the gambit from just grabbing coffee in the break room to sitting in on a departmental curriculum meeting. This personal touch, though seemingly small, helps to keep the faculty connected both to Luke and the school and so helps to foster a stronger sense of CTE. Luke holds teachers to the same standards he appears to hold himself, challenging the school as a community to hold the students at the fore and not to forget the driving force of Ricci's mission. He even sends out weekly emails to faculty within which he provides a touchstone for the mission:

I send out a weekly email every Sunday to faculty and staff with the calendar for the week ahead, what's happening, I'll add in a little something about what I call the (Ricci) way... Our calls or our characteristics or values or it could just be an article about how to connect with students. And then it's usually like a quote that I tag onto the end of it.

Through these emails, not a week of the school year goes by without Luke reminding the faculty of the importance of the mission and without Luke modeling the values he hopes to instill. This sort of intellectual challenge to continue considering and implementing the mission helps to build a sense of collective efficacy that the mission of the school is indeed worthy of pursuit. With these reminders, Luke works to build a broader sense of commitment to school's mission and along with it a broader sense of CTE.

Summary

Luke Marshall, as Ricci High School's Principal, strives to set a tone and build a culture that allows a focus on the developmental needs of students transitioning into the ninth grade to thrive. Luke works to make his vision clear and has worked to make that a shared vision through explicit and clear messaging. The vision, in turn, appeared strong among the faculty and seemed a point of clear and general consensus. No significant evidence of divergent or contrasting perspectives around the ninth-grade transition arose in the faculty focus group. Luke enabled teacher collaboration and leadership and therein helped to build and support the collective teacher efficacy among the staff. The teacher focus group also provided evidence that the teaching staff had taken hold of Luke's messaging and that the school-wide attention to the ninth-grade advisory program was appreciated. In addition, the teachers in the focus group interview seemed generally appreciative of the efforts Luke and his team had made to provide clear and mission-based direction to parents and students alike. Though the teacher survey results at Ricci were lower in comparison to the two other schools studied, they still evince a robust sense of collective efficacy. In particular, it is clear from the survey that teachers feel they can produce meaningful learning for ninth-graders, an important sign of their positive collective assessment of both student ability and teacher competence. Luke was clear with faculty, with students, and with parents about what was important at Ricci, and he tried to live that out in his own job function.

Claver Academy

Claver Academy is a Catholic, all-male, grade 9-12 school located in a mid-Atlantic state. The school's enrollment is approximately 1,000 students with an average

class size of fourteen students. Will Erikson is Claver's Principal, serving in his seventh year in the role at the time of our interview.

Transitional Student Needs

Will spoke during the interview of the challenges students face in the transition into the ninth grade at Claver and referenced a number of concerns related to the psychological and developmental needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy. One of his foremost concerns was the diversity of middle school experience and the inherent acclimation challenges which he believed that diversity of experience brought about: "We draw from 190 different zip codes, so there are primarily one or two students from [each incoming student's] school with few exceptions to that."

During the focus group interview the teachers at Claver also spoke of the difficulties posed by the diverse middle school experiences of the incoming students. One teacher echoed Will's reference to the zip codes represented and to the paucity of established connections for incoming students: "There is, I think, a unique aspect ... with freshmen in that because they're all coming from, what is it over 150 middle schools, they don't necessarily know each other that well." A second teacher put an even finer point on student transitional difficulties by referencing all three major areas of psychological need in explaining the challenges she saw for her students:

[The students] all come from different schools, some come from public schools, some come from big schools... and they don't all come with the same abilities. So socially ... this is not just your class of 30 kids. You have to be in competition with other kids and you have to grow in all kinds of different languages, foreign instruction, being able to do your work on your own. Not necessarily expect that your parents are going to be there to help you out or that you might be able to go to your parents. [The students] really have to grow up in all kinds of ways.

Given the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the construction of a developmentally responsive ninth-grade transition, it is a very positive sign of faculty buy-in that the teachers seem to be trumpeting the same call as the school leader. Will and the faculty of Claver clearly recognized the transitional challenges facing ninth-grade students and that recognition grounds their collective work with their students and community in understanding developmentally responsive transitions.

Relatedness. Will and the Claver faculty identify the students' geographic diversity as the largest stumbling block to the students' need for relatedness. Will put the initial lack of relatedness for students bluntly: "Most of the kids are coming here alone, without a big peer group." He also recognized the challenge of institutionally connecting to the students given the size of the school and staffing demands. He expressed this concern by highlighting that it may take over a quarter of the school year for a ninth-grade student and his counselor to meet:

The challenge is we have a lot of kids and one counselor per grade, so sometimes it's not until mid-second quarter that they're having their first meeting with their group and meeting with their counselor ... So that is a challenge, getting to them all on an individual basis.

This statement makes evident that students at Claver can go through the opening transition into their freshman year without ever getting explicit institutional, adult support from a counselor, further threatening their ability to connect with the school community.

Competence. Will pointed out almost immediately in his interview that the academic challenges that new Claver students face are "the volume of work and pace of coverage of material." The breadth of middle school experience came to the fore again as a complicating factor with academics, as it can be very difficult to get all of the students

operating on the same level of proficiency. Will went so far as to suggest that some students might struggle at the outset because the academic challenge is greater than any they have faced in the past, though their ability is up to the task: “We have naturally intelligent kids, [many of whom] have never really had to work that hard.”

The curricula of the feeder middle schools present difficulties to Will and his team at Claver in terms of dealing with student competence. He referenced the challenges of placing students in the proper freshman mathematics course based on their eighth-grade math course, saying that “nearly every school that feeds to us teaches a course that they call Algebra 1.” The Claver Mathematics department has developed a placement test, but Will and his team do not require it of students, so the teachers and administrative team have to work at the outset to determine proper placement with or without the test results. Even then, variations in the pace and depth of a student’s previous math course may continue to linger; Will explains this disparity in this way:

Kids jumping into Algebra 1 can be way behind other students who are in Algebra 1. So someone might have had three quarters of the course [in middle school] and they still need to be in Algebra 1, because they're not ready to jump up to Geometry or an honors class, but others may have never really seen Algebra at all. And they're in the same classroom. So that's a struggle for both our teachers and for the students, to try and catch up.

The breadth of experience in a course as seminal as freshman year Algebra 1 makes the initial process of setting expectations all the more difficult for teachers. In many ways, that course serves as a foundational one, and the teachers at Claver have a responsibility to ensure every no student, no matter the entry point, builds that same foundation. That can present a rather difficult challenge when dealing with ninth-grade students. Similarly,

foundational English skills also presented challenges. Of this particular skill disparity, Will said simply: “Students come with writing skills all over the board.”

Will expressed during the interview his awareness that Claver was going to be a bigger challenge for some students than middle school. He also expressed his awareness that the school played an important role in helping students to rise to that challenge. The “big fish, little pond” effects mentioned in Chapter II seem applicable to the context of the students transitioning into Claver. What was academically not a challenge before can become one, and a student who once sat easily at the top of his class now can find himself evenly matched or even out-matched in the classroom. Will spoke of the school’s need to address this by saying, “There’s a realization [for the student] that, ‘I’m going to have to stretch to get an A.’ So we want to push them to do that. It’s not going to come as easy.” Will recognized that the school must support and assist the students through the academic challenges during the transitional period.

Autonomy. Will was clear-eyed about the student need for autonomy at Claver and what he saw as the school’s role in helping students to build that autonomy. He put his own administrative focus on this issue simply by stating that “[w]e are big on cutting the cord here.” He spoke during the interview of how important he feels that it is for the young men who enter Claver to take responsibility for their own work, their own actions, and their own needs, and of how important it is that their parents accept this burgeoning autonomy. When it came to parents, he referenced not helicopter parenting but backseat parenting as a means of providing support but not controlling the student experience. In discussing the role of parents, Will expressed that he believed they played an important one, but that his messaging around that role was consistent and was in support of student

autonomy and building independence. He also strove to make evident the role he felt the school's administration and teachers played in this pursuit, as students are pushed to cite their own needs: "We always say, "What can Claver do to help you better?" Will's question to students serves as both a support and a challenge, as they must grow in their own sense of personal understanding in order to identify the help they need.

Leadership Practices in Support of Developmentally Responsive Transitions

Will made evident in his interview that he saw, recognized, and understood the challenges that students face as they transition into Claver for the ninth grade. With the faculty and the rest of his administrative team, Will has implemented a number of different programs and worked in a number of different ways to support those students. Will's actions with his team and the broader community at Claver address many of the core practices of the *setting directions* domain of leadership practice. Specifically, he cited his attempt to be consistent in his messaging and in his building of a vision for the school founded upon its mission; his drive to push the different constituencies of the school—parents, students, and faculty—in the same direction and to greater heights; and his desire to ensure that the goals he set were understood and accepted by the broader community at Claver. These actions of Will's trickle through a number of different avenues at the school. In this section, these practices will be examined through both Will's own perspective and the perspective of the teachers at the school.

Transitional Programming. The institutionalized transitional programming that Will and his team have created at Claver takes mainly two different forms. There is a program Will runs called the "Freshman Transition Program" which occurs in the

summer before freshman year, and there is a freshman orientation which occurs at the very start of the school year for ninth-grade students.

Will focused on the “Freshman Transition Program” in the summer as the most important tool at Claver for helping address students’ psychological and transitional needs. In his descriptions of the program and of those students who attend, Will addressed the ways in which the program can help students find greater relatedness, competence, and autonomy as they enter the ninth grade. Will estimated that even though the program was not mandatory, 80-85% of incoming students elect to enroll to some extent. Students can choose to take a minimum of one and a maximum of three courses each day, choosing from English, Mathematics, study skills, or reading comprehension. Will and his team do have some students who are “strongly encouraged” to attend the summer program based on their incoming profile and the school from which they are coming to Claver, but that group does not represent the majority. Will highlighted the benefits of this program in his view, addressing within concerns of competence, relatedness, and autonomy:

[The students] are coming in in the summer, and they're taking either English, Math, study skills, or reading; any one of those four classes or up to three of those classes and spending some time on campus. They get to know the campus in a lower-risk environment. There are upperclassmen here doing enrichment courses and Credit Review, but not nearly as busy as it is during the school year, so they kind of get their own introduction to the [rest of the freshman] class. The freshmen are by far the largest chunk of students here.... students go through our acceptable use policy on technology, they get their ID cards, they get in some cases their locker.

Here, Will addresses competence concerns in citing the acclimation to academic disciplines; he addresses relatedness concerns in the opportunity for incoming freshmen to meet much of the rest of their class; and finally, he addressed autonomy concerns in

the more basic procedural elements of getting some training and comfort with the physical space of campus. For the vast majority of the incoming class who chooses to attend this program, Will said that “they are ahead of the game” – they have had an introduction to the academic, social, and procedural expectations of Claver before ever officially beginning their course work. Will and his team use this program to build a bridge into the start of the year that they hope helps to ease the transition for Claver students.

Though not as lengthy as the summer transition program, the freshman orientation at Claver also serves to help address transitional needs for students. In a smaller time frame—only one full day—the returns are more modest, but Will believes that he has structured the event in such a way as to address the same concerns that he strives to address with the summer program. The orientation begins with a mission-focused address in the school Chapel with a talk from the President, who is a Catholic priest. The students are then broken into groups and ushered through rotational addresses by the school counselors, learning specialists, and educational support team, as Will believes the students should know what resources are available even if those resources end up not being needed. The small groups meet with Will and his administrative team and they meet with the student council leaders, building a greater sense of the Claver school community for themselves. Then, they are broken into even smaller groups and given the opportunity to have conversations with each other to start the socialization process. Will described the final piece of the orientation day as an explicit nod to inviting these newest students into the Claver community:

Then we have a field day, which is called the Freshman Olympiad, out on the field that [the groups] rotate through. Tossing water balloons, blowing off some steam, things like that, and then we end the day with a picnic for the entire class out on the street here. And all the faculty come out and they sit with the kids and eat.

Will and his team have constructed this final event as an intentional community building exercise, giving students and faculty alike a chance to be themselves around the other.

Students have the opportunity to meet their peers, to meet their teachers, and to meet the leaders and support networks at Claver, all freed from the stress of the normal day-to-day operations of the school year. Though brief and a fair amount to take in for one day, Will expressed that he believes this event serves an important purpose in helping students transition.

In focus group interviews, when asked about ways in which the administration worked to support students during their transition to the school, Claver faculty did not explicitly cite the “Freshman Transition Program.” Additionally, one faculty member spoke of the Orientation program, and did so positively but briefly. The Claver faculty focused more of their attention on the relationships they experienced in the classroom with students and the ways that the ninth-grade students handled the transitional period after the start of the school year. The faculty focus was more on the day-to-day life of a ninth-grade student rather than the bigger picture administrative programming that helped to kick off the year.

Will did discuss one other institutional program that he and his team run at Claver designed to support ninth-grade students. He and his team have created a freshman seminar designed for those students who fail to meet certain benchmark criteria upon

enrollment. Will spoke of how he uses data to determine the students with the most potential need for support:

We've been able to identify in the last couple of years, using the entrance exam, students who fall below what we call our threshold in areas of battery and cognitive skills quotient (CSQ). So, the test is broken down into battery skills and cognitive skills, and then there's a CSQ which is roughly equivalent to an IQ. The battery tends to be more predictable for us, and that tests their schoolwork as opposed to their intellectual ability. The kids who are lower in the battery areas tend to not do well freshman year. We have a threshold in those four categories, and anyone who falls below in all four, we put into our freshman seminar.

Will and his team have worked to identify what skills those students who struggle most in their first year at Claver are lacking and have constructed a way to identify those students in advance. Then, they have built a program to specifically address those skills and help the students "build the skills they need to be successful ... and acclimate to the load."

Will believes that this program, in addition to the summer program and the orientation, plays an important role in helping students transition into Claver.

When asked in the focus group about what structures administration at the school has put in place to support the ninth-grade transition, the Claver faculty highlighted a few other items of freshman year programming which they saw as important for student transitions, but which Will did not mention in his interview. First, the faculty spoke highly of the school's freshman retreat; connected intimately and directly to the school's Catholic mission, the faculty saw this retreat as an important opportunity for students to grow both individually and as a community. The retreat occurs in January, which one teacher in the focus group interview explained offered the chance for students to build relationships a bit on their own before going off together as a class: "I think the view is kind of like, rather than sort of force them together at the beginning, wait until people

were a little settled, have some friends and then [go on the retreat], that brings the class together in some ways.” Another teacher in the focus group mentioned that the retreat is an important institutional opportunity for students to gain a relational sense of context, because the students are able to hear from other students about challenges and difficulties they might be facing:

I mean [students] will complain, but they will not talk about their real struggles. And I think [the retreat is] something that makes a big difference because it's a school event, but it makes it, it can really impact them in a way that, you know, I'm not the only one going through a real rough time. And I think the earlier they hear that the easier it is because ... it makes a big difference for the next four years.

The retreat, then, encourages students to engage not only with the school's Catholic and religious mission, but also to engage in a meaningful way with their classmates in a manner that carries more depth than the simple, social conversations held every day.

Second, a handful of faculty members spoke of a program run by Claver's Campus Ministry department designed to offer after-school activities to freshmen. These “spirit days” give students the opportunity to assemble and socialize while playing dodge ball, Mario Kart, or any number of different activities. The events are facilitated by upperclassmen, and as one teacher explained it in the focus group interview the events represent that the faculty and students at Claver want the school “to be a place where everyone feels that they're in it together.” That sense of community and relatedness is crucial for a developmentally responsive transition for students.

Third, the faculty spoke of a grassroots effort by Claver's librarians to help students as they transition into the school or as they struggle with their place in the community. With no seeming explicit guidance from Will and the administrative team,

the school's librarians have worked to build a safe space for students that helps ensure student needs are being met. One teacher in the focus group explained the program the librarians have created and the positive effects on students who are finding their transition to be difficult:

The women who run the library have taken upon themselves this incredible kind of extra mission. They have had already at this point a ping pong tournament, a chess tournament, and it's mostly freshmen who gravitate towards that... And then you know, they are point people for a lot of freshmen who are having trouble transitioning. The library is where kids will end up, if like they don't feel comfortable sitting at a lunch table, they'll go up to the library.

Another teacher, building off of that description, defined the goal of this program rather simply in this way: "It builds [the students] up." When asked why the librarians might have chosen to play such a pivotal role in the challenging transitional period for Claver students, one teacher cited the school's mission and the way faculty and staff feel empowered to give voice to that mission:

It's part of the idea of community. I think you'll see again in the end that the way that people who work here express the school's mission is through relationships and through actions and not through just repeating words or phrases.

This statement speaks to the importance and prevalence of the school's mission to its faculty. It also suggests that Will has built support for a shared vision among the faculty.

Ultimately, all three of these teacher-cited transitional programming initiatives connect to the school's mission and to the role that it plays at Claver in helping to support ninth-grade students. Common direction and shared vision are widely acknowledged in the literature to come from the school leader (Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2014), and thus

even though Will did not mention these initiatives himself, it is hard not to think that his work has played an important role in helping them to grow.

Parent Education. Will's belief in "cutting the cord" and his focus on student autonomy and independence has been mentioned already but certainly plays an important role in the way that he has structured communication to and education for the parents of ninth-grade students. Implicit in "cutting the cord" is the cooperation of parents, hence the "backseat parenting" model mentioned previously. Will has established two main opportunities to share this outlook with parents. The first is a school-wide "Back to School Night," which by Will's own admission is "for all parents, but most heavily attended by the freshman parents." Second, Claver operates both a Mothers' Club and a Fathers' Club, and each of those holds an orientation for new parents at the start of the year.

The "Back to School Night" event does not actually give Will a chance to speak to parents, but he highlighted it as an opportunity for parents to connect with the Claver faculty. He mentioned specifically the chance for teachers to give "their philosophy of the course," setting the academic tone across the board. Though Will does not speak himself, the consistency of his messaging rings true through the teachers, as will be discussed in the next section.

At the parent club orientations, Will does get a chance to speak directly to those in attendance. The Mothers' Club holds its orientation in the early summer, just after Claver's graduation in May and before any of the summer programming at the school begins. At this event, a number of Claver administrators speak and share school events and themes, and welcome the mothers in attendance into the community. For the Fathers'

Club, orientation is an evening in the first two weeks of the school year, after the first day of school but before the “Back to School Night.” Will described this event as “a little more informal” than its counterpart, with fewer speakers and a more dynamic conversational approach. With each of these events, Will was clear that the focus was on how parents can support their children and what to expect as their son enrolls at Claver:

We talk about the academic goals, what it's like to be a new parent, why we cut the cord, why we don't let parents see the gradebook... I always say, "Parents, we want your sons to own their educational experience." I mean, parents take a backseat, [but] that doesn't mean they're not in the car. They're still part of the process.

These orientation events for parents provide Will a chance to set his direction and his tone from the outset, and to ensure that his administrative approach and the stance that he pushes the school to take towards students is clear.

Outside of those events, Will spoke a number of times in the interview about conversations with parents and student around the same idea of autonomy and “cutting the cord.” He discussed bringing students into parent and administrative meetings, because he feels it important that he “invite the student to be here, at least for a portion of it that's appropriate, so that they know that they're advocating for themselves as well.” He spoke of using data to provide perspective for the parents of students who might be struggling for the first time. Particularly at the beginning of the freshman year, when those students from the top of their middle school class begin to struggle in ways they haven't before, Will references the entry test data on both the national and the school level, citing for instance that a 75th percentile student nationally might rank in the bottom fifth of his class at Claver. In this way, Will seeks to help parents build the same resilience he pushes his team to help students build.

In the focus group interviews, Claver faculty did not speak of the role that parents play at the school, or of their interactions – positive or negative – with parents. They spoke almost exclusively of their dealings with students.

Deliberate Expectations. The single most consistent message that Will shared during the interview was that of “cutting the cord” and building student independence. He wants the students at Claver to own their experience, and he wants all constituencies—parents, students, faculty—to buy in to that same message.

Will spoke of the principle of subsidiarity that he pushes with the Claver students and the idea that students must know where and how to address their problems. The idea of subsidiarity stresses the importance of addressing questions or concerns at the appropriate level before elevating the problem up the administrative ladder. Will wants the students to advocate for themselves at the school and not to hand the hard work over to their parents:

If you have a problem with your teacher, you go to your teacher first as a student, as step number one. If you're unsatisfied, then you go to the next administrator, whether it's the Dean of Students or the Academic Dean. And then if you're not satisfied there, then you can have your parents call, and it escalates from there. But we always want the student to be involved.

Will went on to talk more about in what ways he and his team strive to make that message clear to the students at Claver, whether it be related to academics or athletics:

For better or worse, we just force [the idea on students]: You're responsible. You don't have your book? Okay, sorry, you have the consequences. Mom can't run it down here for you. You don't have your book today... We just keep telling [the students] that they're independent. I don't know whether that works or not, but we keep telling them that they're more mature than they are, that they should be aspiring to be independent, and not to have mom and dad call.

The strength of Will's messaging to students and families around this idea of independence is in its consistency. He was very clear in the interview that this is what he feels is the most important attribute for a successful transition into Claver as a ninth-grade student. He describes how this is part of the essence of the school in his opinion: "[this idea is] kind of ingrained in the place ... it's intentional."

The teachers at Claver echoed this message of student independence routinely and clearly during the focus group interview. When asked about the goals of working with ninth-grade students, the first answer a Claver teacher gave was "A greater sense of independence and a proactive attitude, and not needing me to literally lead them along every single step of the way." Another teacher said of his goal with students that they needed to find their voice and have the wherewithal to speak up in order to be successful: "You need to ask questions here and know what's up." Another teacher in the focus group directly recalled the principle of subsidiarity that Will referenced in his own messaging, saying of student questions, "I don't care how you communicate, just communicate with a classmate first, and if they can't help you then come to me."

The teachers in the focus group interview spoke both of recognizing the need for independence and helping the students to build it by establishing clear routines and expectations. One teacher recognized the importance of her role in helping students build this important trait, particularly from the outset of the ninth-grade year, saying: "the first few weeks is just establishing what I expect of them and the routine when they walk into class and what is going to happen." Another teacher built on that same idea, explaining the scaffolded independence expected in the classroom:

I want [the students] to be independent but more, I want them to understand the proper avenues. You don't have to be completely independent and know it all yourself, but it would be then teaching them in the situation [if you have a question] you come to see me before you go home.

Like Will, the teachers recognized the importance of this skill and recognized explicitly that it had to be taught. One teacher in the focus group even directly connected this skill-building to the ninth-grade transition, pointing out that students struggle to do it for reasons that are not entirely in their control; she said, “some of [this difficulty] is just what I call the ‘whoosh factor’ - you know, it's just going over their head.” In the transition to the school, the students are adjusting to the new environment on multiple levels and this teacher cited the overwhelming nature of that adjustment as a part of the challenge in building independence. One teacher even mentioned the role that growth, maturity, and building independence play in the freshman curriculum. She described how her English department has used this as a theme in the ninth-grade course and connected it explicitly to both skill-building and the mission of the school:

Everything that [the students] do [in English] is about growing and maturing into a young man, as far as the content that we read. So we also, in addition to teaching skills, are trying to teach and open up their eyes on a lot of bigger picture thematic issues as well, and we try to expose them to school culture a little bit with some of the school values as a Catholic high school.

The idea of student independence, autonomy, and “cutting the cord” was a consistent theme among teachers in the focus group interviews and reflects Will’s assertion that the idea is “ingrained” in the school. It is clear that Will’s messaging has taken root among his faculty.

Teachers' Collective Efficacy and its Foundations

The teachers at Claver reported a high level of collective efficacy based on survey results. In particular, the teachers responded positively to the efficacy questions related to academics and those related to helping students feel they can accomplish their work successfully. The survey results point to a robust sense of efficacy; the following section will address the ways in which Will's leadership practices help to build and support that efficacy at Claver.

Culture of Collaboration. Building a culture of collaboration at Claver is an important focus of the work Will and his team try to accomplish. He spoke of the culture as one of the greatest strengths of the school, even before his arrival: "One of the things that drew me to this place was the community, and people are really invested in one another." Finding ways to continue fostering that mutual investment is a major focus of Will's leadership efforts.

Will spoke during his interview of a few different mechanisms he uses at Claver to build teacher collaboration. One was introducing class-level meetings, where teachers of each grade level come together to discuss issues and students of concern. For Will, this was in response to the challenge he saw of finding ways for teachers to collaborate; of this challenge, he admitted that "it is a growth edge for us, where we can look at ways to...identify the needs of that class in a more structured way." He discussed the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that he created at Claver and the opportunities that those groups offer for meaningful collaboration. He and his team run a cohort-based "new teacher institute" over the summer that welcomes new teachers into the community at Claver and provides them with a built-in support network of peers from

day one. The institute focuses on the classroom but also on the school's mission, Catholic history and teachings, and professional development. He also talked about his attempt to schedule so that department members are free at the same time in order to allow for departmental collaboration but admitted such scheduling was a challenge. He did say, though, that he believes departmental teachers at Claver do a great job working together horizontally to align expectations and content.

The teachers mentioned a number of the same initiatives as Will when asked during the focus group interview about opportunities for collaboration at Claver. They mentioned the class-level meetings and spoke of full professional development days that were class-level organized. They also mentioned that in the past a member of the administrative team had sent emails at the start of the year to open communication among like-level teachers, but that the practice had not occurred in the current year. As Will had discussed, teachers believed that their individual departments had strong internal collaboration, but not as much cross-curricular or cross-grade level collaboration. One teacher in the focus group interview described the strength of the departmental work in this way: "Within the department, we have really strong community and really strong conversations about what each other are doing, and how we're teaching, and are we in the same place, and sharing your resources." Within the document analysis, Will provided the teacher feedback from a departmental PD day he and his team had offered. In it, the teachers who responded overwhelmingly spoke of their appreciation for that opportunity to collaborate, and many asked for more opportunities to do so both within departments and cross-curricularly. Teachers did not explicitly mention the PLCs or the new teacher institute in the focus group interviews.

The idea of independence and autonomy that Will and his team push out to the students also seems applicable to the faculty. Of the average teacher's position at Claver, Will said simply that "our teachers have a ton of autonomy here." During the focus groups, teachers agreed with that sentiment and saw it as a real strength. One teacher said of this autonomy, "we really appreciate the fact that we are allowed to pretty much run the ship" when it comes to the individual classroom. Another said of the working environment at Claver that "that is one of the, I think, really positive things about working here is that we're given a lot of autonomy." Will seemingly grants to Claver's teachers a measure of the same independence and autonomy that he wants to instill in the students.

Autonomy, though, can be a double-edged sword when it comes to collaboration. Will recognized the challenges that this autonomy presented at Claver; speaking about inter-departmental work as opposed to intra-departmental work, he said "we're not as good at cross-discipline" at Claver as faculty are within the department. He spoke further of the challenge of autonomy, recognizing that even within a department coherence can be adversely affected: "That's something that we struggle with, the ability to have a coherent message across all courses and classes versus the ability to have a teacher to do some things that they like and are passionate about, and can elicit that passion in students." Will addressed that space can be an issue on campus, but that he was working to challenge teachers to push past that issue; he spoke of how he has begun stressing more casual collaboration using lunch as the medium:

[Collaboration is] something that we work on. This year, I encouraged everyone to always eat in the faculty dining room. Eat the lunch we provide, or you bring your own. That's a place to build community and get

that cross-pollination. More and more, people grab their lunch and take it to their desk or their office because everyone's busy, and we try and encourage people to take timeouts.

Will also mentioned numerous after school parties and happy hours for faculty which he believes all serve to enable a better culture of collaboration at the school.

In the focus group interview, teachers echoed the challenges with autonomy that Will spoke of. One teacher pointedly addressed the double-edged nature of the problem, saying “we do have a lot of autonomy as individuals, which is a good thing, but then collectively, I don't know how we're trying to measure [student success].” Another teacher spoke of the geographic challenges with intra-departmental collaboration given teacher schedule demands and campus limitations; she said of her department, whom she believed worked well internally, “we're very isolated, and we don't see anybody else outside of this building.” Another teacher spoke of individual teacher isolation, saying that “most of us have our own classroom that we stay in the whole day and come out for lunch and maybe we see our shadow and run back into our ground bubble.” In a subtle nod to Will's efforts, this teacher at least recognized that teachers leave their rooms for lunch.

One other seeming offshoot of this teacher autonomy is the willingness to embrace informal structures and avenues for collaboration and communication. Teachers at Claver don't wait for Will or a member of his team to start the process of collaboration, but instead simply reach out to colleagues on their own if they feel it is needed. A few teachers in the focus group interview mentioned starting email correspondence with all teachers of particular students of concern to discuss strategies and techniques for how best to work with them, and of going out of their way to discuss curriculum with teachers

both inside and outside of their department as they work to better serve the ninth-grade students. These discussions seem to imply that the autonomy they feel extends outside of the classroom as well.

The culture of collaboration at Claver, then, depends upon the opportunities and challenges that Will's focus on autonomy enables. Teachers in the focus group at Claver expressed satisfaction and growth around departmental collaboration, but saw less opportunity for cross-curricular or inter-disciplinary collaboration. Will enabled PLC meetings, but given the optional nature of participation their reach and effectiveness were limited. Professional development days were regarded well by teachers, but occurred only four times a year. The culture at Claver seems to be more of a bottom-up than a top-down one, with opportunities for collaboration led more by faculty interest and engagement than by Will and his team.

Enabling Teacher Leadership. The autonomy Will extends to teachers at Claver seems to enable a strong sense of teacher leadership at the school as well. Will and teachers alike spoke of a number of ways that the administrative team at Claver enabled teacher leadership.

Will discussed the academic council, a group composed of his academic administrative team and of the individual department chairs. This group addresses all academic concerns at Claver and gives those teachers a seat at the table. This group allows their voices to be heard on matters of curriculum and course changes and ensures that the broader teaching faculty feels represented as well.

Will also discussed the importance he placed upon teachers being the driving force behind professional development at Claver. He talked about the progression of this

initiative through his time at the school, as he started realizing more the value of tapping into the resources he had on hand. He said of this shift that when it came to professional development at Claver,

[T]he one thing that really has helped is having peers present to peers rather than administrators, having other teachers who are leading the conversation, because it's a little less threatening, they don't feel like they're being told. They have a seat at the table.

Will implies in this statement that he recognizes the importance of giving teachers voice and of allowing teachers to lead the conversation at the school. He also recognized that this approach offers a certain amount of vicarious experience to teachers and forces teachers to look beyond their own experiences to the experience of another in the same boat:

Often our faculty will rely on anecdotal data and their experience. And so when you can show them someone else's experience or collective experience through data, and say this is actually what happens, they do respond to that.

Will recognized not only the value for the broader faculty of having internally-driven professional development, but also the value for each individual teacher chosen to present. He stated that this represents an important moment of recognition for faculty and a way for him and his team to show their appreciation for the hard work: “People like to be recognized—obviously we can never pay our teachers enough—so it's nice to give them professional opportunities to grow, and so then they tend to then hone that, and we can then repeat it again.” This teacher-led professional development, then, becomes a valuable tool for both personal and collective growth at Claver.

Teachers at Claver expressed during the focus group interview a number of ways that they feel enabled to lead. One example has already been cited, as the librarians who

run events for students represent an example of a grassroots campaign to help students transition and acclimate to the environment. Another grassroots type of event was also mentioned; one teacher spoke of an upcoming event whose creation had been wholly teacher-driven:

It's sort of a field day and I guess people had been asking for it long enough that at some point administration said, 'Okay, let's do it.' And so a few faculty decided that they're the most interested; they're on this committee. They meet, let's say they meet once or twice a month, and then I think they get student input too, and so we're having this event happen next week that was administration listening to us. It was letting faculty mostly decide what it's going to look like.

One teacher talked about the feeling that Will and his team were generally open to teacher-led ideas and that the opportunity was there for teachers to take if they were interested. The teacher put this sense in this way, saying:

Administration I think is supportive of these [teacher efforts], but it would have to be something that the faculty decides, 'you know what, we really should do this' and then they go to administration. Administration is generally amenable.

This statement implies that a culture of openness exists, and that when taken advantage of it enables teacher leadership at the school.

Like the librarian-led effort, teachers talked during the focus group interview about the ways they feel empowered to use their own classroom as a support mechanism for students who might be struggling with their transition into the school. One teacher said of this empowerment, "within each of our classrooms we establish that certain comfort zone where the students are allowed to speak their mind." Another added, speaking of the diversity of challenges students might be facing, that "we're all such different teachers, such different people, but with the variety of our classrooms, kids can

feel comfortable in at least one.” A third said that as students transition in, and as they perhaps start encountering difficulties, “they find teachers who they confide in and who will establish kind of like groups of students who hang out and see each other.” By these statements, the faculty at Claver demonstrate comfort with their own ability to address student needs without relying on formal communication networks established by Will and his team. And that is not to say formal networks of student support and belonging don’t exist; one teacher explained the balance, saying “there are formal [student support] institutions that exist... but I also think that it's not more or less, but it's also equally existent in sort of informal groups.” Overall, through the focus group, teachers at Claver expressed they felt empowered to lead within the walls of their own classrooms in the ways that feel will best fit the student needs they identify.

Transformational Leadership and Developing People. Will spoke in his interview of a number of different ways he and his administrative team work to develop the people on staff at Claver. There are a few items that stand out as most representative of his attempts to build personal capacity and enable personal growth among the faculty.

One way that Will works to help the teachers at Claver develop is through a faculty growth program. This program begins with the new teacher orientation and continues for five years as each teacher acclimates to the school, its mission, and the students. The main focus of the program is on pedagogy and classroom observation, and on feedback to teachers to help them hone their skills. Will explained his administrative focus during this five-year program in this way:

We [on the academic administrative team] try and make sure we hit every faculty member at least once per semester. So if you're a new teacher, also new to [Claver], you're getting observed formally three times a semester,

at a minimum, and you're having people come through your classroom fairly regularly for 10 minute pop-ins. And then there's a feedback loop afterwards.

Through this program, focused on those new to the community, Will helps to set the tone for the ways in which he and faculty communicate and helps to provide personal care and attention to those who may need it the most. This individualized support helps to acclimate new teachers to the environment and expectations more readily, and the consistent feedback helps to set shared goals that then enhance each faculty member's commitment to the school. By intentionally building a more granular understanding of an effective Claver classroom, Will helps to enhance a sense of CTE right from the start.

Will mentioned one other way that he and his team work to develop the new teachers at Claver. He has hired and kept available an outside educational consultant at the school who participates in the faculty growth program. This consultant works with individual teachers to help build pedagogical skills, classroom management, lesson planning, and all of the weapons in the arsenal that a teacher new to the school might need. Will explained the role and its benefits to the school in this way:

It's not just us teaching you the best practices at [Claver] for teaching, but someone who's seen multiple other schools coming in and talking about lesson planning, time management, classroom management, seeing things we might not see. And it also allows us [on the academic administrative team] the time to be a little more flexible, and instead of spending all of our time with the brand new teachers to be able to spend more time with the rest of the faculty as well.

For Will, this resource of an education consultant represents an important investment in the personal and professional growth of each teacher he brings on staff. This commitment of time, energy, and resources to each teacher exemplifies Will's attention to each teacher's individual growth; in addition, the intellectual stimulation offered by a teaching

consultant helps to push faculty members towards their own growth edges in the classroom and works to build their commitment to improvement. This commitment, in turn, helps to foster CTE as teachers experience both mastery and vicarious experiences in their pursuit of better pedagogy.

Moving towards the faculty as a whole, Will has instituted a peer observation system for the staff to help all members continue to grow as a community. These observations also entail a feedback mechanism as the teachers are expected to have a conversation after each observation. Will explained the details a bit further, saying:

All teachers, new or old, are required to visit someone inside their discipline and someone outside of their discipline every year. So they just do two observations, and then have a conversation with that person. So if you get observed and you are observing, you could have up to four conversations a year, or even more if more people are coming into your classroom.

This program opens the door for collaboration both inside and outside of departments and helps to address the needs and desires of both Will and the faculty already identified to improve that flow of information. In addition, at the close of the year teachers are each asked to reflect upon the observations they have done and that they have had done in their class, along with student survey data. They are asked by Will and his Dean of Faculty to write a personal growth plan for the next year based on these data points. Will then reads these reflections over the summer.

Teachers in the focus group interview spoke of this observation process as well and of the value they see in undertaking it. One teacher spoke of the growth she has experienced through this process, highlighting particularly what she has learned from her colleagues about dealing with ninth-grade students:

I have sat in the majority of the people's classroom in this [focus group] because my students have these teachers and I want to see how the students are in the room and how they interact with students as well. And so that is something that I've learned, how to deal with freshmen in a better way by learning from my peers.

The intellectual challenge and the collaborative spirit that this process entails serve as another way for Will and his team to invest in the growth of the Claver faculty, using the Claver faculty themselves as the mechanism. The ability to see in person the effectiveness of one's peers can be immensely beneficial to a robust sense of CTE at a school, and Will and his team have tapped into that vein.

In the discussion about collaboration, Will mentioned that the school offers PLCs to faculty as well. Though not required, teachers who are interested can participate in these after school learning communities. In the document analysis, the schedule of meetings and topics for these PLCs was provided for the current school year. Will chose to use this year's PLC as a book club, selecting books that addressed issues of race, diversity, and inclusion that he believed were important for the community. The selection of these books signals a willingness to engage with faculty on a deeper level and a willingness to push faculty to think about students and student growth beyond the classroom - an approach closely aligned with the school's mission. The books chosen represent intellectual stimulation for the faculty, and the PLC discussion offers the opportunity for collegial collaboration and interaction.

Through the construction of these PLCs and through his push for peer observation, Will aims to provide for the Claver faculty the outlets he believes are best suited to their growth. The peer observation program, coupled with the faculty growth program also outlined, serve as a way for Will to bring faculty into the conversation

about classroom performance and pedagogical approach. They allow Will, as an instructional leader, to model the sorts of things each teacher should be looking for and working towards. In addition, Will's encouragement of and participation in the PLC book club helps to signal to faculty that the world outside the walls matters, too, and that their development outside the classroom is just as important to Will and his team as their development inside. This modeling of appropriate Claver values and practices helps Will to instill a stronger sense of efficacy among his team.

Summary

Will Erikson, principal of Claver Academy, recognizes the challenges that students face as they transition from middle school into the larger, more academically demanding environment of the ninth grade. He has worked to instill in these students a sense of independence that resonates across their experience and has worked to instill that same sense in their parents and teachers as well. He has created a number of structures to help support students, while also recognizing that certain logistical challenges limit what he and his team can accomplish. He has found ways to support and challenge the growth of his faculty and has tried to keep Claver's mission at the fore of what he does as a leader.

The faculty at Claver operate with a good deal of autonomy, which they recognized in interviews as a both an opportunity and a challenge. They expressed appreciation for the freedom they received but lamented at times the lack of more formal and institutionalized structures for communication, collaboration, and student support. They were able to lead as they saw fit in their classrooms, and they were empowered to build on their own the support networks which they felt transitioning students needed.

They took advantage of the opportunities for growth that Will and his team offered and they expressed great faith in their peers.

The Faber School

The Faber School is a grade 6-12, all-male Catholic school located in a mid-Atlantic state. The enrollment in the high school, grades 9-12, is approximately 750 students, with class sizes that range from 10-24 students. Emily Carroll is the principal at Faber, and at the time of our interview was serving in her sixth year in that role. She is the principal for both the middle school and the high school, but our interview focused exclusively on the high school experience.

Transitional Student Needs

From the outset of the interview, Emily made clear that she was intimately attuned to the transitional problems that incoming ninth graders might face at Faber. When asked about the challenges, she almost immediately referenced the self-concept and self-image issues that the “big fish, little pond” effects can bring about for students. She also referenced the diversity of Faber’s incoming class and the way that can affect student transitions. She explained the challenges in this way:

Most of our kids are coming from a much smaller pond then coming to here, you know? We're not a huge school, with about 180 a grade, but we do pull from upwards of 70 zip codes. With that in mind, we're getting a lot of high quality kids so for students from everything from arts to athletics to academics, they were the best in their area, they're coming here and you have everything from students not being as great as they thought they were stacking up against a new set of peers, to maybe not making a team or not getting the starting role or not being placed right off the bat in an honors class, for example. I think not so much that those things make it a bad experience but early on it calls into question who a student thought he would be when arriving at [Faber] versus what circumstances are dictating he might be.

This statement makes clear that Emily understands the potential psychological pitfalls of the transitional period, and she continued to make clear throughout the interview that tending to student needs holistically was an important focus of her leadership and a driving force behind her practices. She put in blunt terms the movement she has helped push her team towards regarding ninth-grade students during her tenure: “In the last two to three years I would say we've got to a place where our faculty, our staff, our leadership has realized that it's not appropriate to treat freshman like small adults.” This statement argues for an end to a “sink or swim” transitional mentality and for a more intentional focus on building a transition that better meets the students where they are.

Emily was also clear about her belief that the role of the school had changed from its traditional roots. She intentionally shares the message with her team that they must work to change the idea of a Faber education from an ordeal to be survived to a journey to be experienced. She said of this mindset shift:

We've got to change this attitude of . . . “We are the gatekeepers” to “We are the door holders”. We've got to be the people who find ways to open the door and hold it open for kids so that when they come out the other end they are still the, I hate using the term 'product,' that [Faber] has always produced. We are not meant to be the gatekeepers who say, "Get in and get through. It's this gauntlet." It might have worked at a time, but it also worked at a time where people were lining up to come in here. We had a wait list a mile long. Catholic education was still highly valued, right? We're in a terrible position in Catholic education. It's the lowest it's been in terms of enrollment since 1922. Nobody wants to come to Catholic school anymore for a lot of reasons. Let alone pay \$20,000... So, the markets changed as have our students and we've just got to be willing to change with it.

With this statement, Emily makes clear her desire to mold Faber into a more modern Catholic school environment, to make Faber into a school that serves its constituencies

now rather than trying to maintain some vestige of previous tradition. She has a keen eye for the school's market and feels an imperative to impress this upon her team.

Relatedness. As a middle school and high school, Faber presents a slightly different challenge than the other schools in this study when it comes to relatedness. Emily explained that in a class of approximately 185 freshmen boys, 80 of those students came from the Faber middle school. That means 105 students are entering from different contexts, while 80 already know much of the landscape at the school. As Emily recognized, certainly the challenge of acclimating those 105 still exists; however, an additional challenge arises of incorporating the class so that the 185 is a single community, rather than two blocks of students.

Emily views relatedness and community as perhaps the biggest focal points of her administration. She put this simply and clearly, saying of this important issue:

The idea we [as an administrative team] have been preaching, and it has been very much embraced by the community, is that belonging, a sense of belonging, is key to a student's academic achievement and health and wellness.

Emily's push for belonging is rooted in her understanding of educational research and her commitment to the school's Catholic mission, which she explained she saw as the moral imperative behind this work. Striving to create a sense of belonging for students at Faber drives Emily's work with students and with her team, and certainly has an out-sized effect on the programs and structures she and her team have worked to create.

Competence. Emily's focus on belonging does not mean she overlooks the other needs of incoming ninth-grade students. She is also clear about the academic challenges that students face whether they come from the Faber middle school or not. She said that

even before belonging and relatedness issues can arise, competence concerns often affect the students first:

Right away I would say across the board what tends to be the universal [challenge] is an uptick in academic rigor. No matter what background our students are coming from, whether it be public, whether it be private, or whether it be parochial, universally they experience a higher level of rigor and it's both in the amount of work but also in the critical thinking skills they're asked to exhibit.

She references here again the diversity of incoming student experience, and the fact that almost universally the level of rigor in feeder middle schools—no matter the type—is not at the same level that will be expected of students at Faber. Academic support remains an important challenge of the ninth-grade transition.

Autonomy. Emily explicitly recognized the need to support the budding autonomy and independence of ninth-grade students during the transition. Already cited, she made clear her belief that freshmen students are not “small adults” but adolescents in need of appropriate support to grow and to learn. She even went so far as to say of Faber, “I worry that our culture is one of too much autonomy,” and pointed to the effects that she and her administrative team have had on that culture during her tenure, saying “we spend more time supporting [students] now than we did five or six years ago.” Her statements reflect a clear-eyed understanding of the psychological and developmental needs of her students at Faber.

Leadership Practices in Support of Developmentally Responsive Transitions

Emily’s administrative commitment to the developmental needs of ninth-grade students drives her leadership practices at Faber. She and her team work in many ways to support both the students and the teachers as she strives to implement developmentally

responsive transitional programming. As a domain of leadership practice, setting directions is one of the most powerful ways a school leader can steer a community in the direction she believes is right. Emily's actions at Faber reflect a strong desire to set direction for the school and its staff and reflect a powerful impetus to create a meaningful learning environment for the students. She sets direction at Faber by grounding her message in the school's Catholic mission, by intentionally building shared understanding of the challenges students face among different constituencies, and by clearly and without pretense preaching her own gospel of support and belonging. Below, I will address the ways in which Emily enacts these core leadership practices in her work at Faber.

Transitional Programming. In order to help students as they transition into Faber, Emily and her team have built and implemented a four-day freshman orientation. She has designed the program with student needs in mind and in the four days addresses each of the categories of student psychological and developmental need.

Emily's first focus with the freshman orientation is on community building. She addresses student relatedness concerns in a number of ways. Thinking of the mix of Faber middle school students and students from external feeder schools, she says that "we intentionally mix up the groups because we have a middle school, and we want to be clear that we're spreading out those middle school guys so they don't become their own cluster." Starting to incorporate the two different blocks of students from the outset is an important goal for her.

In addition, Emily tries to use orientation as a way to introduce the new students to the broader Faber community. Of the four days, she has built one day simply to introduce the students to the school: "we do one day on campus where we do mission

building and ‘get to know you’ kind of exercises.” She also uses upperclassmen to oversee and lead the orientation, enabling the new students to acclimate to the presence of their older peers.

Academically and procedurally, Emily has designed about a day and a half of the orientation to focus on what life as a student looks like at Faber. Students have a chance to get their locker, to walk through their new schedules, to train on technology and digital citizenship, and to understand “the nuts and bolts of being a student at [Faber].”

Finally, the students have an opportunity to experience the school’s mission in person and to build their own capacities. With the final two days, Emily introduces some of the important non-cognitive skills and attributes that she deems important in a Faber student. She explains the plan for those days:

One day is a service day where they go off campus to a farm that donates to the food bank and they as a group of students pick either potatoes or corn and then we do some character-building lessons around that. [Then,] we do one day when we’re on a ropes course where it’s leadership and team building.

Emily believes these sorts of activities are just as if not more important than the nuts and bolts, though recognizes that both are necessary in her attempt to create a proper transitional experience for students.

Moving on from orientation, there are two all-freshman events that occur in the first few months of school that Emily intends to continue the growth and acclimation process that the orientation kicks off. The first is simple and purely social in nature, but one that Emily sees as important in building the community among the new ninth-grade students. It is a school dance created entirely for freshmen: “at the end of the first week of school, we have probably what is our second-best attended dance of the year which is our

freshman mixer, where we basically don't give freshmen a choice—[we] say 'You all come' and people love it.”

Then, after a little over a quarter of the school year has gone by, Emily and her team run an overnight freshman retreat on campus, which as she put it “revisits a bunch of the themes” that first arose during the orientation programming. Emily utilizes the existing community at Faber to build the community for the ninth graders, as the retreat is run by sophomores, juniors, and seniors. These students attempt to make each student feel valued and important as the retreat begins; Emily explained the role of the upperclassmen in this way:

The upperclassmen greet them, they're out there with a gong and a drum and a megaphone and every time a kid gets dropped off they run down, they pick up his bags, the kid gets his name shouted out when he comes in and they do that. They decorate the classrooms, empty all the furniture out, they decorate it. They bring in couches and Christmas lights and things like that.

As part of the retreat, the students continue to build their understanding of and familiarity with Faber’s mission, as well as building their sense of both internal community as a class and external community with Faber more broadly. The entire class attends a school football game together, while also spending time in small groups reflecting upon their transition and their time at the school thus far.

Emily spoke of one additional program that runs for all classes at Faber but that she felt was particularly meaningful to the freshmen. It is called “Chicken and Cheers,” and it is an opportunity for students to attend events on campus and get a free chicken sandwich. Emily described it as a “low stakes, low pressure” way to build community and establish deeper connectedness to the Faber community. Students can opt in, and

Emily and her team try to build the event around lesser known events rather than the big sporting events; of scheduling the event, Emily said:

We organize it around a day that might have a lot of events going on campus that wouldn't draw crowds typically - it might be a day where there's like, a middle school soccer game, a JV volleyball game and a forensics tournament going on.

Building community around these events reflects a continued effort on Emily's part to make clear that all students of all abilities and all interests are valued at Faber; it is not just the best actors or the best athletes who should draw crowds, as the Faber community must strive to support each and every one of its members.

Members of the faculty at Faber also reported in the focus group interview that they considered both the freshman retreat and "Chicken and Cheers" positive aspects of the school's transitional programming for ninth-grade students. They also reported that from their work with these students, the students themselves reported them as positive events. The faculty did not discuss the freshman orientation or freshman dance.

Throughout the freshman year, Emily and her team run a community homeroom for every grade level, including the freshmen. At Faber, there is a short homeroom period each day where students meet in a classroom and hear school-wide announcements. In the past, Emily explained that she and her team had tried to use the homeroom time to help freshmen transition, but that the plan had not worked as she had hoped:

There was a time that [homeroom] was thought about as a freshman prep period, there was a time we had mandatory study hall that was freshman prep. That was a lot of squeeze and not a lot of juice to be quite honest and it's something we still struggle with.

In lieu of the failure of that plan, Emily moved to this communal homeroom which meets once a week as a large group. She explained why she felt this was an important program:

[The freshman are] together as a group and rather than getting the all-school loudspeaker stuff, every class has a grade dean and so they have an adult representative who will be with them for all four years and who works with them... and so they bring up, work on, and get advocacy for grade specific initiatives, which include opportunities to find ways to socialize, et cetera.

Emily's statement about the goals and the importance of this program reflect much of what she has built the other transitional programming around; the students have an opportunity to socialize, to build their own sense of advocacy and ownership within the Faber community, and they receive additional, intentional adult support in doing so. This communal homeroom period, then, seems a logical progression from the orientation and programming built into the early transition into the school.

Parent Education. In our interview, Emily spoke of three different times when she intentionally communicated with and educated parents on what to expect for their sons at Faber. She spoke of being clear about her messaging during the application process, of sharing the school's mission during the summer, and of building a structure for parental support during the school year. In addition to those more explicit opportunities, she also shared the ways in which she and her team strive to communicate with parents around students and student issues.

During the application process, Emily shares with parents and prospective students the importance she places upon community and belonging. Of this information, she said: "We're very intentional about the messaging we put out there during admissions season about why we offer so much that we do." She went on to explain that the messaging focuses not on what Faber offers—the different academic leveling, the number

of athletic teams, the variety of extracurricular options—but why she believes these offerings are important:

We're very deliberate in saying the reason we [offer all of these opportunities] is because A, we have a lot to offer but B, we want to have students find new ways to identify themselves because it might happen that in your school, you were the best pole vaulter, but when you come to [Faber] there's going to be a bunch of other kids that you've never seen before who might be good pole vaulters and we want to encourage you to keep working at that skill, but we also want to make sure that you find other ways to connect. We're very intentional about, I hate to use the word advertising but I will, advertising connection as part of our philosophy of educating here.

Emily's focus with potential families and parents is not simply SAT scores, or college admissions, or athletic prowess, some of the standard hallmarks of college preparatory school marketing. She focuses as explicitly with parents as she does with her own team on the importance of belonging, and of a student feeling part of the community at Faber.

Once a student enrolls and the summer comes along, Emily makes the school's Catholic mission the forefront of communication. She wanted to find a way to help acclimate parents to the spiritual side of the school and so she implemented a prayer network of sorts by incorporating the faculty and staff. She explains: "We put it out to faculty and staff and asked, 'Who would be interested in praying for incoming freshman by name?'" With that simple directive, Emily received enough support from her team that each person who volunteered received the names of four incoming Faber freshmen. She then reached out to the families, to make sure the parents knew that the faculty and staff saw the parents as partners and that they saw students as assets to be valued:

We wrote all the families notes just saying, 'Hey, just so you know as part of our community, even though he's not here yet we're praying for Johnny and your whole family as he gets ready to transition from middle school to

high school. We want you to know that he's on our mind and we can't wait to have him here.'

Emily's messaging here is clear, with a focus on belonging and inclusivity and the inherent value of each student. She embraces the school's Catholic foundation with the new families while extending welcoming and open arms.

After the school year proper begins, Emily and her team run a series of events designed specifically for freshman parents, entitled the "Parent Roadmap Meeting Series." It begins as early as the first night of freshman orientation and continues throughout the year, with six meetings in total throughout the ninth-grade year. Emily spoke of the way in which she tries to build a partnership with parents, and to educate them on how best to help their student through this challenging transition:

A big myth is that now these kids are in high school, a lot of parents think it should be hands off and not that they're abdicating responsibility, but they think they're building independence and resilience. My message to the parents is very clear that that's not what we want. We want them to be partnering. We said, 'The key is, our job is to educate you to know what supporting a ninth grader looks like as opposed to supporting a sixth grader.'

By her work with parents, faculty, and students alike, Emily makes clear that students in the ninth-grade should not be expected to fulfill their psychological and developmental needs themselves. They need support and they need scaffolding to help them through a difficult time. In the other "roadmap" meetings, Emily and her team share information and resources, advise on how to find support, share strategies for navigating social challenges and conflict resolution, and address executive functioning skills. The goal for Emily is that the parents become as strong a part of a student's support network as the teachers and structures she has built at Faber.

The Faber teachers did not explicitly address during the focus group interview any of the communication that Emily shared with parents, but they did talk positively about their engagement with parents and the ways they utilize the parents as support in their work with students. This discussion implies that the partnership Emily envisions between school and parents may be taking hold, if teachers view parents not through the lens of conflict or in an adversarial context but as meaningful and supportive partners in education.

Deliberate Expectations. Throughout our interview, Emily was very clear and deliberate about the way she believed her administration and the teachers at Faber should view students. She talked often about belonging and community and about valuing and caring for the students, and about how those values take root in the mission of the school. There are a number of ways that she helps to make those expectations and values clear to her team in addition to the work already described with parents and students.

One tangible sign of Emily's messaging stands out as a powerful manifestation of her expectations for the faculty and staff at Faber. She and her team have created a metric by which they can keep track of a student's connectedness; she explains:

We have a list of all students that are new to [Faber's] upper school and we ask teachers to identify their level of familiarity [with the student]. [We put on the list] four columns "I know the student by name and face, I know how the student is connected at [Faber], I know this student's story and his context, and I know what this student needs to succeed at [Faber]." Periodically, typically twice a quarter, once midway and once at the end, I'll ask teachers and staff, everybody on campus, to go in and just tick mark next to boxes next to the kid's names who they feel comfortable checking those various boxes.

This exercise forces an explicit recognition for Emily and her whole team of how deeply they know and understand the students in their charge. It allows Emily and her team to

keep track not necessarily of those students in the most academic trouble, which she says are easy to keep track of, but those students who might need more than simply academic support. She describes the challenge as she sees it in this way:

[Helping students with academic problems is] the easy work to do. That's the work we do. It's what do we do with a kid who's really good at masking it, you know? What's there to do with a kid who wants to become wallpaper and is successful at that? That's where it is really, I mean, we've gotten more and more and need to get more and more intentional about grabbing those kids.

The checklists provide Emily's team with a "heat map" of students who are struggling with the transition and offer a better sense of where those struggles are arising. They are able to then reach out and draw that student into the community with a better sense of what he may need to find success.

Emily provided a fictional anecdote that belies the strength of the questions this exercise asks teachers to consider. She spoke of a student who might come to class out of uniform, with the wrong shoes on, and a teacher frustrated with uniform violations who loses their patience with this young man. What a teacher who isn't connected to the student may not know is that the student's parents are in the midst of a bitter divorce, and he is shuttled back and forth between the two as a pawn, and he left the shoes with one parent but spent the night at the other's house. She said of this story:

Who's wrong? It's not a question of wrong, it's just context, context, context. The long and short of it is helping teachers individually and collectively reframe their context. This is something we talk about all the time - benefit of the doubt, the presupposition of good will, asking the right questions.

By challenging teachers to really know the students in their care, Emily pushes for the broadest possible community of concern at Faber.

Teachers in the focus group spoke positively of this exercise as well. When asked about what they believed was most positive at Faber around the ninth-grade transition, one teacher said: “separate from the academic piece, just really caring for all of them and making sure they all belong in some way.” She went on to say she thinks that school as a whole does a great job of providing students this sense of care and community.

Emily’s implemented vision of student support also serves as a deliberate and consistent reminder of her expectations of faculty towards students at Faber. She spoke in the interview of her efforts to shift the narrative at Faber of which students garner the most attention from faculty and administration: “Our bottom 10-15% and our top 10-15% are well known and get probably about 60% of the attention, 70% of the attention, and my goal is to shift it so that it's proportionate.” Like the checklist exercise, Emily is intent on broadening the focus of school-based support beyond those students in the most evident need:

If I walked down the hallway and I grabbed freshman teachers and I said, ‘Name me five freshmen who are on fire,’ I would guarantee that there would be some overlap in the names. If I would have said, ‘Name me five freshman who are plugging away and they're getting B's but it's exhausting them, but they just want to keep achieving at the high level they think they can achieve at,’ there'd be a lot of head scratching. They'd be like, ‘Well B students. He's getting a B.’ It's important for us to find a way to put together that narrative.

Furthering that point, she added her opinion that the traditional view of students simply was not working in light of her focus on supporting every student:

I think for too long we here at [Faber] were just willing to say, ‘He's a B student. He's a C student. He's a D student. He's an A student.’ I think it's important that we recognize that it's not that simple.

In order to further her vision, Emily has worked with her team to build a few different support systems at Faber. She has implemented two different academic support centers, one for students with learning differences and one for any student in academic need. She has worked with the Mathematics department to offer study halls during every period of the day. She has worked with the Foreign Languages department to offer rotational study halls during lunch periods. She has built a support team of academic administrators, counselors, and grade-level deans—the advisors of the communal homeroom period—who meet regularly

to identify students who might need, it's not so much the large intervention students, our bigger concern is those students who do have a strong enough base that they're able to stay afloat at a level that is not setting off alarms but they're breaking their back to do it.

She has empowered her academic assistant principal to review student performance twice a quarter and identify any negative trends worthy of intervention, no matter how slight the trend may be.

In addition to those supports, Emily keeps her message clear and consistent. She expressed that she feels her messaging is working, saying: “It's not just me, I'm not the one who's driving this - we all want the same thing.” She spoke of pushing back against the idea that the students at Faber are not what they once were and of changing the mindset around that idea. She explains this pushback in this way:

It's not that the kids aren't as smart. They're coming to us as competent as ever. They're coming to us with fewer skills. They're not taught the same skills you were 40 years ago... We have to admit to ourselves that the kids are coming with different competencies. Our job now has shifted from continuing growing the competence they have to teaching them new competencies.

She then explicitly connected this to how she wants Faber to deal with incoming ninth-grade students, saying “in terms of supporting students in transition, half of that is us just acknowledging [the different competencies] and admitting it and building these systems out.” Emily’s care for students and her passion for creating a community and sense of belonging resonates loud and clear in her messaging to faculty.

Finally, Emily takes the opportunity to be clear with students about what is important to her. She recognizes that building these systems is not necessarily enough to make students feel valued and cared for; she explained her approach:

[One thing] I think is important is telling kids we care. Just using the words like, "I care about you." I was very intentional. I meet with every grade in an opening meeting during orientation and I was very intentional this year about telling every grade like, "Listen I'm telling you this stuff because I love you." They hear the words, "You're valued. You're loved and you're cared for." That doesn't mean it's going to be showed in the way you want it to be shown all the time but know that the motivations are these.

Emily makes it clear that she is not content letting programs and structures speak for themselves, but that she is willing to stand up and make the school’s direction clear. She does this with parents, she does it with faculty, and perhaps most importantly she does it with the students at Faber.

Teachers’ Collective Efficacy and its Foundations

The efficacy survey results from the Faber faculty evince a robust sense of collective efficacy at the school. Teachers responded positively to the array of questions. In particular, the Faber faculty responded positively as to their ability to promote “deep understanding of academic concepts” and their ability to help students think critically during the ninth-grade year. They also responded rather positively to their ability to help

students feel safe and to set clear expectations for their students. The leadership practices employed by Emily helped to foster this sense of CTE in a number of different ways.

Culture of Collaboration. Given the breadth of Emily's focus at Faber and the universality of the mindset shift that she is striving to achieve, a culture of collaboration is key. She aims to create and support that culture in a few different ways, and the culture in turn helps to support a strong sense of collective efficacy.

The checklist exercise already described whereby teachers identify the depths of their knowledge of Faber's students is one of the most prominent examples. This represents a level of collaboration deeper than simply aligning content or curriculum; this represents a school-wide commitment to the care, the belonging, and the wellness of each student. This makes each student a communal concern, and forces teachers to think beyond their own class rosters. Emily and the Faber teachers both expressed viewing this exercise as a collaborative exercise in mission-based care for the ninth-grade students at the school. In many ways, Emily has elevated the collective goals of the school beyond the academic enterprise and in doing so has helped to bolster CTE.

Additionally, Emily discussed a previous attempt to build a freshman support program during the homeroom period that failed, which was mentioned earlier. She did not, however, let the bones of the program go to waste. In the previous ninth-grade support plan there were two major pieces: one was a grammar and writing mechanics course, and another was an academic reading course. Rather than abandon those skills and necessary supports, Emily assembled a team of academic administrators and department chairs and discussed what skills were most important for all ninth-graders rather than just focusing on a select few. Working in collaboration and cross-curricularly,

the team was able to highlight the skills they deemed necessary and build them into the curriculum for all students.

With the help of her academic assistant principal, Emily worked on revising the expectations of the school's department chairs in order to give them a more functional, more vocal, and more involved seat at the proverbial table. Emily wanted to move the role away from a clerical conduit between administration and teaching faculty and instead create master teachers who could help guide the academic work of the school. She describes how she proposed this shift to the department chairs in this way:

I said to them, I need you to be the instructional leaders in your department. I don't need you to hire and fire people. I don't need you to evaluate people and remove them. I need you to get feedback. You're content experts; I need you to be teaching experts. We'll work together on that.

Emily believes that this shift helped enable a weakening of the traditional "us vs. them" mentality that often limits administrative and faculty relationships and helped to move the academic work of the school forward in the direction she was hoping.

The culture of collaboration at Faber represents an intentional move on Emily's part to align the whole school's perspective; she strives for her administration and faculty to be on the same page, and that starts with the willingness and ability to collaborate. She has made care of the ninth-grade students a collective concern and a collaborative venture by inviting every teacher to quantify their individual relationships on a shared checklist. She has tapped into the department chairs and her assistant principal in order to maintain robust communication and cooperation on the academic front, and she continues to look for ways to maximize the potential of teacher groupings. Teachers also spoke highly

during the focus group interview of their freedom to collaborate as they saw fit both within and outside of their departments.

Enabling Teacher Leadership. The shift in the department chair role that Emily envisioned and implemented is emblematic of the work she has tried to do at Faber to better enable teacher leadership. In a broader sense, she has tried to give all teachers a voice and a sense of leadership within the school. Emily spoke during the interview of how she came to realize that she was not valuing teacher voice and teacher leadership potential the way that she should be, and indeed the way she needed to be to move the school forward as she wanted. When asked how she learned to convince teachers to commit to her vision for the school, Emily answered wryly, “I’ll tell you how I’ve learned - I’ll tell you what doesn’t work. Telling them doesn’t work. Me telling them doesn’t work.” This statement reflects her recognition that a top-down approach to leadership was not going to work at Faber, and that recognition led to a change on her part. This empowerment helps to provide teachers with a real sense that they are trusted by Emily and her team, and that they and their colleagues are worthy of that trust. Such trust helps to foster a stronger sense of CTE among the staff.

Emily reflected back on the start of her tenure as principal at Faber and how she tried to change things from the outset. She had been a teacher herself and assumed that her classroom experience gave her a different level of credibility than other administrators with teachers. She said she assumed that since she was not a career administrator, her word would be enough to convince people to change. She found that it wasn’t and so adjusted her approach, as she explains here:

I had a choir who didn't need a choir master. Then I had a bunch of people who weren't in the choir. I probably spent about two years singing that song and it wasn't working. Looking back what I realized is it wasn't distrust but I just hadn't built a relational trust. I had credibility as an educator but I didn't have [Faber] credibility. What happened instead was we started working on a lot of curricular and pedagogical directives from the ground up, really investigating what teachers were interested in doing and what departments were interested in accomplishing.

Emily committed to a ground-up instead of top-down approach and showed a willingness to adjust her own aims to what the aims were of those with their proverbial boots on the ground. Once she started listening to the faculty and empowering their leadership, she found a way to accomplish her own goals as well.

Emily related an anecdote around this shift and how she was able to utilize teacher voice without losing her own. She related how her focus was on pedagogy, curriculum, and support, but teachers wanted to discuss assessment. Working with her academic administrative team, they started to think of how assessment could serve as their “back door” – not in a nefarious way, but as a means of opening the conversation up and eventually segueing back to pedagogy, curriculum, and support. She challenged teachers to investigate their own assessments and find out which student skills did and did not show up. Then, using backwards design, she was able to open the doors to a broader discussion on the topics she started with while also addressing the assessment concerns that faculty wanted to address. She related this anecdote to share the realization it gave her, which has since driven her leadership approach:

That was much better received because it was materials they were already doing. It was their experience on the ground and that's when I started to understand much better as a leader like, ‘Okay, it has to come from them. It has to be relevant to their content and what they're doing, and it has to be organic.’

By enabling teacher leadership at Faber and by allowing teacher voices to be heard, Emily was able to build a community working in concert towards the same goals. By trusting teachers to guide this improvement process, she was enabling both mastery and vicarious experiences to flourish at Faber and continuing to support the growth of a healthy sense of efficacy. In terms of overall faculty and administrative agreement on academic issues, she put it this way:

If there was a Venn diagram, by the end of a meeting, it would be an 80% overlap between [academic administration] and the faculty and the staff. That rift has closed a lot. I will say that has been the biggest shift is allowing the teachers and the department chairs to tell us, we'll tell them what we're looking for and they'll tell us how we can go about getting it. We've been a little more successful there. Are we great at it? Depends on the day. It's the best we've been, I'll say that.

Emily and her team have worked to create a community of adults just as she has strived to create a more deeply rooted community of students, a community that is committed and working together towards the same goals.

Transformational Leadership and Developing People. The leadership domain of developing people has at its core the ability to, among other things, “communicate a compelling vision” and “emphasize collective purpose” (Leithwood & Louis, 2012, p. 5). Emily made clear through her interview (as recounted in various ways in the preceding sections) the ways in which she strives to do just that. In addition to that, goal consensus has been shown and cited as an output of transformational leadership; working with the collective as she has, Emily has built an impressive level of consensus at Faber around the care, community, and value of the students there. She said of her work on building a culture committed to student support and to changing collective perceptions of students: “Everybody here agrees. Nobody's fighting it. It's a great culture that we all recognize it.”

She is no longer, to paraphrase her words, a “choir master without a choir.” She has built consensus by communicating her vision loudly, clearly, and passionately, and rooting that work in the mission of the school. She has elevated the goals of the school and the faculty, highlighting the importance of student care and the school’s mission, and in doing so has fashioned her own “choir” with a steadfast commitment to both the school and their own personal growth as social and emotional caretakers.

Beyond building a collective vision and purpose, Emily and her team have built structures to commit to the individual growth of the teachers at Faber. Emily herself finds as many ways as she can to be personally present and supportive to the teachers on her staff. She said that she often has face-to-face meetings with teachers, attends departmental meetings, or speaks more broadly at faculty meetings or professional development days. She talked of specifically asking teachers how she can support them in the drive to meet the collective vision, using her experience in the classroom to connect with as many as she can. This individual support and attention contributes in a meaningful way to the sense of CTE at Faber.

Additionally, she and her team have built a system of observation and feedback to help teachers grow. The whole team, but in particular the Dean of Faculty, commits to observing as many teachers as possible. Each observation comes with at least an informal follow-up in the form of an email or personal conversation. Observations can be as short as fifteen minutes or as long as a full forty-minute class period. Then at the end of each semester, Emily asks each teacher to reflect upon the feedback they have received, in addition to a student survey. Each teacher writes a personal reflection which they share with Emily and she shares with her team. The observations use a common checklist based

on the Danielson framework and so enable teachers to be granular with their areas for improvement. In addition, the framework helps to establish a sense of what Emily and her team believe is important in a Faber classroom and helps teachers to rise to that challenge. Emily has helped to set personal improvement as a collective goal, and has made intellectual stimulation a part of every teacher's experience. CTE at Faber is certainly supported by these elevated goals and commitment to growth as well as by the intellectual challenge the personal reflections represent. By committing to these personal reflections, Emily has created an avenue for each teacher to connect in a meaningful way with the feedback they receive; by using these reflections as growth mechanisms, Emily can continue to challenge teachers to grow without that challenge seeming to come from outside. The structure, it seems, makes the motivation to grow in the classroom a more intrinsic than extrinsic one.

As the biggest proponent of putting care for the students first, Emily strives to model for the Faber faculty the values she hopes to instill in the community. She spoke of the ways in which she pushes the faculty to grow in their understandings of students and of student needs, and she individually helps the Faber faculty unpack any preconceived notions they might have. In addition, she and her team attempt to model the same feedback mechanisms she has put in place for faculty; each year, Emily collects a faculty survey that includes questions about the performance of both Emily and of her administrative team. These questions have to do not only with job performance, but with the way each administrator helps the faculty to feel supported or not. She strives to represent for the school community the idea of being open to growth and of being attentive to more than just the nuts and bolts of the academic enterprise. In many ways,

Emily seems to hold herself to an even higher standard than she holds the faculty, and seems to push herself to represent everything she wants the team at Faber to become.

Summary

At the Faber School, Principal Emily Carroll leads with a vision for what this traditional Catholic school can and should become in a more modern era. She grounds her vision in the school's mission and challenges her faculty and staff to create an environment where belonging, concern and care for the student, and a welcoming environment to learn stand out as primary goals. She has committed to sharing that message consistently with students and with parents just as she does with her own team. She models that approach in every way that she can in the hopes of building and sustaining a collective vision.

The faculty at Faber expressed confidence in their ability to carry out Emily's vision, and expressed a level of consensus with what she aims to accomplish. They spoke of how their vision of student support aligned with those Emily proposed and how the school strives to provide a community of concern to its students.

Cross-Case Comparison

This cross-case comparison will attend to the similarities and differences between the three schools studied as the leadership practices relate to this study's research questions and conceptual framework, and is organized in the same manner as each single-case analysis. I will first address developmentally responsive transitions, and the three student psychological needs within; I will then address the practices in support of those transitions by analyzing leadership actions through the lens of the leadership domain *setting directions*. Finally, I will address how each school's leader supports collective

teacher efficacy by analyzing leadership practices through the lens of the leadership domain *developing people* and the three practices that best enable collective teacher efficacy. I will also provide a comparison of the collective teacher efficacy survey data from each school.

Transitional Student Needs

The leaders of each respective school clearly evinced a recognition of the challenges students face upon transitioning into the ninth grade in their environments. Each leader showed an awareness of difficulties related to the three psychological needs that must be met in a developmentally responsive transition, the needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Additionally, in each case the leader pointed to the diversity of students' middle school experience as a major factor in these difficulties. Thus, these schools have in common their leader's recognition that students have specific developmental needs and that as a leader they must orient their school toward taking responsive actions that fit their specific school context.

For each of the three major student psychological needs, the diverse nature of each institution's feeder school landscape played a key role. Each leader specifically cited the geographic, contextual, and demographic diversity of the eighth-grade environments from which the new ninth-grade students arrive. Leaders spoke of the challenge for students from such disparate environments to acclimate socially, to adjust academically, and to build the autonomy needed for success. Additionally, leaders recognized the challenges these adjustments offered to many students' sense of self; reflecting the "big fish little pond effects" (Marsh, 1987) discussed in Chapter II, each leader pointed to the common struggle of ninth-grade students to find who they are and

might be in this new environment. Through these discussions, each leader made clear that they were aware of the developmental and psychological needs of ninth-grade students and were working to address those needs.

Though there is a great deal of congruence in terms of the findings, it should be noted also that there are contextual differences in each environment which lead to some divergence in each leader's understanding of student transitional needs. For example, in discussing the competence concerns for incoming students, Luke at Ricci and Emily at Faber offered a more nuanced understanding of and approach to the challenge for teachers and students alike; Will at Claver expressed more of a "sink-or-swim" approach, which given his administrative and school-wide focus on student autonomy seems to make sense. Additionally, the decision by Emily at Faber not to offer programming during the incoming summer is worthy of note and likely reflects the diminished transitional challenge for those students matriculating directly from the Faber middle school. Where the teams at Ricci and Claver suffer from a lack of communication between the eighth-grade and ninth-grade faculty, Faber is able to build at least a somewhat more moderate understanding of the academic starting point for many students. These differences, though, do not detract from the general agreement across contexts regarding the challenges of the ninth-grade transitional period.

Leadership Practices in Support of Developmentally Responsive Transitions.

Given that each leader recognized the developmental challenges of the ninth-grade transition, each also then worked to support the construction and implementation of developmentally responsive transitions at their school. There are a number of similarities and differences in the ways in which each leader went about this process, with leaders

citing school contexts, traditions, and resources as explanations for the specific response at their school. In all cases the school's Catholic mission was cited as a rationale for needing to care for the incoming freshman and their specific needs, and that as private schools they needed to retain these tuition-paying students. However only a few practices, like praying for incoming ninth graders, explicitly referenced faith.

One of the most important components of these leadership practices is the ability to manifest a shared vision among disparate stakeholders. Each leader strove to do this, but that shared vision inevitably took on a different shape and sprung from different roots in each individual context. The one tie that seemed to bind in each school was the explicit connection to the school's Catholic mission. Each leader in their own way encouraged faculty to use the mission as a guiding principle, and that mission then served as a sturdy starting point for a shared vision.

In each environment, that vision was then nourished from different sources. Each leader explicitly worked to make their vision known and to build support and faculty alignment, but the major sources of strength differed based on the site. At Ricci, Luke spoke often of the mission and used it to guide decision-making and communication; however, the structures he and his team created offered the most palpable sign of that vision at work. The freshman advisory program in particular stands out as emblematic of a collective purpose in pursuit of shared goals. At Claver, Will seemed more ready to stand on the shoulders of the pre-existing culture; he himself spoke of how even from his arrival, he appreciated and valued the culture, and he seems comfortable continue to marshal the ingrained Claver attitudes. The institution itself seems to be the source of shared vision at Claver, a vision that aligns with Will's leadership focus and with the

existing faculty culture. Finally, at Faber, the shared vision is more leader-driven than at any of the other sites. Emily's outspoken leadership among all stakeholders and her powerful and persuasive leadership help to instill and foster a shared vision in the community. Though each school was starting from the same place and building off of the strength of the Catholic mission, each leader and each community took a different path towards a truly shared vision.

Freshman Advisory. Only one school in this study explicitly focused on an advisory program for freshman. Luke Marshall at Ricci has made the freshman advisory program there a major focus of his and his team's work with freshman transitions. Both he and the faculty at Ricci spoke often and spoke positively about the ways in which that program helped to acclimate students to the environment. Luke is the only leader in the study, and Ricci the only school, where time was explicitly set aside for a program of this sort. Luke made clear that advisory was important to him and his administration, communicating a clear direction to faculty and working to build collective support. He saw the community building inherent in this program, where students were required to participate and faculty required to serve, as a valuable tool for supporting students during their transition into Ricci.

While neither had any programs that reached the same level of structure or development, on a smaller scale both Claver and Faber offered daily group homeroom periods where students heard school-wide announcements and technically had an adult in the room, although he or she did not serve in an advisory capacity. This was extended a bit more at Faber, where Emily Carroll constructed a communal homeroom program with once-a-week meetings for a group of students with a faculty advisor. Though it provides

an adult advocate to the ninth-grade students, it is one adult to 185 students which is far different from the environment at Ricci. Certainly, the lack of explicitly-scheduled time in these two contexts is a major factor in the lack of such programming. However, it is also worth pointing out that the expressed sense of autonomy among faculty was stronger at both Faber and Claver than at Ricci; given that autonomy, it might be implied that the school leaders were more likely to shy away from imposing a demand like the advisory program on faculty's time.

Transitional Programming. At two of the three schools studied, the leaders spoke positively of the role that summer programming played in helping ninth-grade students transition into the school. Luke Marshall at Ricci and Will Erikson at Claver both pointed to the importance of the summer program in helping students acclimate to their peers, to the environment, and to academic demands before the school year actually begins. At Ricci, Luke estimated that 70-75% of students participated, while at Claver, Will estimated he saw an 80-85% participation rate. At Faber, Emily Carroll did not speak of any summer programming for incoming freshmen; one possible reason for Faber's lack of participation could be the comparatively less diverse feeder environment. Given that Faber has its own middle school and that a sizeable percentage of the ninth-grade class matriculates from there, the need to build uniformity of expectation and skill in the summer is somewhat less pressing. The diversity of feeder programs at Ricci and Claver, though, make the summer program a valuable support mechanism for incoming ninth-grade students.

Each leader in this study has designed and implemented an orientation for freshmen at the start of the school year. These orientation programs aim to support

students during their transition and each strives to address the psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy, though to differing degrees. In addition, each offers an introduction to the school's mission for the new students.

At Claver, freshman orientation is a one-day affair. Students receive some procedural guidance, meet their teachers while following an abbreviated course schedule, and hear from school and student leaders. At Ricci, the schedule of events is roughly the same, but spread over two days. At Faber, the freshman orientation covers four days of events. In addition to the events at Ricci and Claver, Emily Carroll has added a day of community service and a day of team-building at a ropes course. So, an incoming freshman at Faber spends two orientation days on campus and two off campus, all in small groups. Faber has the most explicit focus on community building and acclimation to the school's mission of the three, though those certainly play a role in the programming of Ricci and Claver. This variety of experience is interesting, and belies some of the broader context of each school. Given the lack of transitional summer programming at Faber, it makes logical sense that the orientation there would be the longest; there is simply more introduction to be done. However, Faber also had a much more mission-centric orientation than the others, signaling Emily Carroll's intentions as a leader and the focus of her administration on living out the mission of the school in care for the student. At Ricci and Claver, the focus seemed more to be on setting the groundwork and introducing the clarity of expectations that would help students find their footing.

Once students complete orientation, each leader has created academic support mechanisms that continue throughout the ninth-grade year. Luke at Ricci has

implemented both a mentoring program and an academic support program; the mentoring program adds another interested and caring adult to a struggling student's support network, and the support program offers the academic help a student might need. With the presence of Ricci's robust advisory program, there is less need for broad oversight and the programs can be a bit more pointed. The ninth graders at Ricci have, from the start, at least one adult on campus attuned both to the school's goals for the ninth-grade year and to the needs of each student. These programs bolster the support of the advisory program, but don't need to offer nearly the same level of attention. At Claver, given some of the staffing challenges identified and the lack of an advisory program, Will has devised a freshman seminar for those students whom the data says will struggle. Using a formula he and his team created, he is able to mine the data of the high school entrance exam to identify those students most in need of support even before they arrive at school. Will employs data rather than anecdotal experience because given the context, he and his team may not receive anecdotal experience on the ninth-grade students until well into the school year. Will cannot rely on an advisor spotting a student in need, and so employs more quantitative means of assessing capability. At Faber, Emily has not created any overarching program like at the other schools, but she does operate two different academic support centers for students and has worked together with multiple departments to offer study halls that fit into student schedules. Given Emily's explicit focus on collective care and concern for the ninth-grade students among the entire faculty, there need not be any overly structured programs; simply put, at Faber every student is every teacher's responsibility, and any student's failure is a failure of the collective. The

different contexts of these three schools help to guide the choices and practices of the leadership.

More broadly, these academic support networks address a number of important ideas. First, they each help to create a collective understanding of how to support students in each environment and a collective understanding of what type of students require help in each context. These networks help teachers to gauge the ability of the student body which can be a particular challenge among ninth-grade classes. Second, each helps to build the communal aspect of caring for the students in the school. By utilizing support networks like this, each struggling student is not simply the problem of each individual teacher but is a student cared for and tended to by a number of different adults. These programs, in their own way, help to build community among both the students and the faculty.

Beyond academic support, a number of programs exist to support students in transition. At both Faber and Claver, leaders and faculty spoke of the importance of the all-freshman retreat as a way for students to build relatedness and to grow in their commitment to the school's mission. Both retreats bring the students to campus for an overnight experience. At Faber, Emily spoke of "Chicken and Cheers," the low-stakes event meant to bring students together outside of the school day. Similarly, the faculty at Claver spoke of Campus Ministry "spirit days" that enabled freshman to come together in a low-risk environment. The faculty at Claver also discussed the librarian-led effort to support student transitions, and the ways in which the librarians have built a program of their own to tend to student needs. The autonomy offered by Will at Claver helps to create the context where faculty can propose their own programs and their own specific

solutions to some of the more pressing transitional challenges. These programs, in addition to the more formal orientation and summer offerings, give students a chance to have their needs met in a more informal setting. Each of these programs, like the academic support programs, helps to foster a real sense of community. That sense of community, in turn, is one of the most important attributes of a developmentally responsive transition.

Parent Education. Each leader in the study spoke clearly of the importance of parent education and the faculty at each school echoed the value of having parents who were clear on the school's mission and expectations. The interviews with school leaders showed that they each saw parents as crucial partners in the student transitional and educational experience at their schools. Each leader put this in slightly different terminology that reflected their belief that ninth grade was a time where students must take more responsibility and parents' roles should shift, but all within certain limits.

Luke at Ricci called this submarine parenting, and Will at Claver called it backseat parenting; they both explicitly communicated to parents the important, but different, role they should now play to support their high-school aged child. Emily at Faber took a slightly different angle, empowering parents to be more involved and to not feel as though they had to pull back completely. She talked about looking past freshman students as "small adults" with her faculty, and that understanding applied to her communication with parents as well. These parental roles do not arise by accident, but rather are reflections of the different contexts in which they take root. Will has a much greater focus on student autonomy and independence, and so expresses most clearly his belief that the parental role is a "backseat" role. Luke sees the importance of parental

involvement more intimately, and seems to understand that though ninth-grade students should be building independence they are not there quite yet at the early stages of their high school career; his commitment to a robust advisory program serves as an explicit reminder of his belief that students require support and adult guidance, and his approach to parental education mirrors that idea. Emily strives to offer students the most support of the three leaders studied, intentionally strengthening their support net by including parents as partners.

Each leader has created avenues by which they can communicate their expectations with parents. Both Emily and Luke open the lines of communication with parents in the summer: Luke, to make expectations clear and address common questions; Emily to introduce the school's mission and share that the school is praying for each parent's son. Will has not created a system of communication with parents in the summer. Will's focus on student independence comes to the fore here, as he seems to have made the choice to begin "cutting the cord" immediately upon enrollment. These three different communication patterns reflect each leader's understanding of the parental role. By emphasizing expectations and common questions, Luke is enabling the parents to serve as the quiet submarine, ready and able to help when called upon. By focusing on prayer, Emily is explicitly inviting the parents into the community of the school, to serve as partners in mission. And by not focusing on communication at all, Will puts the students squarely in the driver's seat of their experience.

Once the school year begins, each leader spoke of the importance of "Back to School Night" programming as a communication tool, though only at Ricci was there a night reserved exclusively for freshman parents. Through each of these avenues, school

leaders work to communicate a clear direction and to partner with parents with a shared vision and high expectations for the ninth-grade students. By incorporating parents so explicitly, the school leaders in this study extended the students' community outside of the school doors and made direct connections between the school and home environments.

At each school, the leaders spoke of events throughout the freshman year that offered further opportunities for clarity with parents. Both Luke and Will speak at parent club orientations, which offer the chance to share information in a more informal and smaller setting than some other options. Both Luke and Emily spoke of continuing opportunities beyond the start of the year. Luke has implemented a "Ricci 101" program that parents can attend, as well as "Coffee and Conversation" with him and Ricci's president. Emily and her team have implemented a "Parent Roadmap" series designed exclusively for freshman parents that meets six times throughout the year. Will did not discuss continuing opportunities for parent education past the early stages of the year, again reflecting his institutional decision to focus on building student independence. In many respects, these programs represent an extension of the summer parental communication already discussed and the differences inherent in each leadership approach. Luke focuses on frequently asked questions, empowering parents with information; Emily and her team offer a deeper dive into student needs, student learning, and student wellness, offering to parents information well beyond the nuts and bolts of the school day; Will continues to focus on student autonomy and independence.

Overall, faculty seemed appreciative of the work school leaders have done with parent education. The clarity with which each leader delivered messaging to parents

made the job of the teacher easier as the parent expectations were generally consistent with their own. With parents aware of the administrative vision and direction, teachers were better able to enlist their support in the educational enterprise.

Deliberate Expectations. One of the strongest points of alignment between the three leaders in this study is the consistency of their messaging with the different constituencies of their schools. Each spoke often of the ways in which they share their message and their vision of the school with teachers, with parents, and most importantly with students. Each was passionate about the direction in which they were leading the school and in what they saw as most important for their community to accept and value. It is possible that in the context of private schools like those studied, the familiarity of an incoming school leader with the mission prior to arrival plays a role in inspiring passion for the school's direction. Indeed, in each school studied, the leader had experience in the particular Catholic environment of their respective school. Luke was a Ricci alumnus, while both Will and Emily had attended schools governed and guided by the same religious order as Claver and Faber. Each leader, then, was already connected to and likely inspired by the school's mission, which no doubt leads to the continued inspiration each brings to their respective roles.

Faculty at each school echoed this strength of messaging. In each environment, teachers spoke of the ways they communicated with each other and with students, and that communication always resounded with the same message that the school's leader had shared. While in the focus group interviews they did not always explicitly cite their own work as faculty as deriving from the approach of the leader, the congruence suggested

that in each school the faculty had begun to synthesize, support, and align with the leader's vision.

Teachers' Collective Efficacy and its Foundations

The ninth-grade faculty at each school in this study received and completed a survey on collective teacher efficacy. The results of that survey are presented in Table 2. In the table, you will see that the highest mean response is highlighted in yellow. In general, the average mean response at Claver was the highest, indicating that Will and his team were able to foster the highest sense of collective teacher efficacy. The teacher responses at Faber fell just behind the Claver results, showing a similarly robust sense of CTE. Ricci showed the lowest average mean response of the three schools studied.

Table 2

Collective Teacher Efficacy Survey Results

<i>Survey Question</i>	Ricci (n = 17)	Claver (n = 12)	Faber (n = 21)
1. How much can teachers in your school do to produce meaningful student learning during the 9 th grade transitional year?	7.29	8.00	7.85
2. How much can your school do to get 9 th grade students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?	7.24	8.17	7.70
3. To what extent can teachers in your school make expectations clear to 9 th grade students about student behavior?	7.06	7.58	7.67

4. To what extent can school personnel in your school establish rules and procedures that facilitate learning during the freshman year?	7.06	7.33	7.43
5. How much can teachers in your school do to help 9 th grade students master complex content?	6.53	7.67	7.33
6. How much can teachers of 9 th graders in your school do to promote deep understanding of academic concepts?	6.47	7.33	7.57
7. How well can teachers in your school respond to defiant 9 th grade students?	6.47	6.75	6.67
8. How much can school personnel in your school do to control disruptive behavior among the 9 th graders?	6.59	7.08	6.90
9. How much can teachers in your school do to help students think critically in their freshman year classes?	6.47	7.42	7.60
10. How well can adults in your school get 9 th grade students to follow school rules?	6.65	7.25	7.19
11. How much can your school do to foster creativity among the 9 th grade students?	6.29	7.42	7.19
12. How much can your school do to help 9 th grade students feel safe while they are at school?	7.71	7.92	7.95

Note. This table provides the mean score of each survey question from each site, with the highest mean score of the three sites highlighted in yellow. Respondents were asked to answer each question on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 9 (a great deal).

Across all schools, the question that earned the highest mean response was question twelve, addressing how much the school can do to help students feel safe. Given that each of these schools is grounded in the Catholic faith, and given the respective emphasis placed on communal commitment to mission by each school leader, the positive nature of these responses makes eminent sense. The lowest mean response was to question seven, about the teachers' response to defiant students. At no point in the focus group interviews with faculty or the interviews with individual leaders did school discipline or student defiance arise as an issue of concern. The positive responses around student behavior questions at each school indicate and corroborate the high levels of CTE reported, as when schools exhibit high levels of CTE discipline issues are less likely to be cited by teachers as problematic (Klassen, 2010).

These survey results reflect a strong sense of CTE in each environment. There are a number of different ways in which each leader has supported the strength of teacher collective efficacy in their respective environments. These practices are identified below.

Culture of Collaboration. As discussed in Chapter II, building a culture of collaboration within a faculty helps to meet all four sources of collective efficacy. Collaboration and peer observation allow teachers to share classroom expectations and mastery experiences (Goddard et al., 2017; Goddard et al., 2015). Additionally, a culture of collaboration improves the social environment and affective state of faculty in a positive way, as a healthy and productive sense of community forms around the shared task at hand. At each school studied, the leader spoke of striving to build collaboration among the faculty.

At each school, the school leader and administrative team conduct regular observations of faculty members; this applies particularly to new faculty members but continues throughout a faculty member's tenure. Each leader insists that these observations come with some form of feedback, often in the form of personal conversation with the teacher. Again at each school, the school leader asks the teacher at the end of the year to reflect on the feedback they've received and present some synthesis of that reflection to the leadership team, either written or in a sit-down conversation. Though administrative observation may not be considered a particularly collaborative enterprise, what stood out at each school was the collective synthesis of the feedback presented between teacher and administration. The observation in many ways is the mechanism that empowers the individual consideration and the building of communal improvement goals between the school leader and each teacher, and that process helps to support the sense of collective efficacy among the staff.

At each school, peer observation represents an important aspect of faculty collaboration. For Emily and Luke, peer observation is encouraged; some teachers are given directives, but for the most part it is voluntary. Luke asks new teachers to observe their teacher mentors at work in the classroom, and Emily and her team will ask certain teachers to go observe other master teachers at work if they think a teacher might benefit. For Will, he requires two peer observations of his faculty each year, one inside their own department and one from a teacher outside of their department. Each of these observations comes with a checklist and a feedback form, so that teachers have a common set of look-fors and expectations when they walk into a classroom. This model in particular helps teachers to understand what the expectations are at Claver, and what

Will and his team want each teacher to be modeling in the classroom. Teachers at Claver in particular spoke positively of this experience. At Ricci and Faber, teachers spoke of the importance of critical feedback with the observations that administrators complete and the importance of that feedback for their own personal growth. It is important to note that even though peer observation was not an explicit requirement at these two schools, teachers expressed an interest and a desire in being pushed to do more. They expressed a lack of time and a lack of structure around the program as the reasons for not performing more peer observation. This stands out as an area of possible growth, particularly in light of its likely positive effects on collective teacher efficacy.

Formal avenues for collaboration existed at both Ricci and Claver, though to varying degrees. At Ricci, Luke has implemented professional learning teams and has built time into the schedule for those teams as well as for departments to meet and collaborate. At Claver, Will has implemented a professional learning community; he has modeled it as a book club in the current iteration and the group meets after school. Luke expects teachers to participate while Will leaves participation optional. Emily did not discuss any such formal structures for collaboration. At both Claver and Faber, teachers spoke positively of the autonomy afforded them; however, they also expressed some regret that there were not more structures in place to collaborate.

Perhaps more importantly, at each school studied the presence of informal avenues for collaboration and faculty communication arose as a strength. The teachers at each school spoke of finding ways to collaborate both horizontally and vertically, and finding ways to do so both inter- and intra-departmentally. This evolution of informal

collaboration speaks to the sense of collective efficacy at each site and trust that faculty have in their peers.

Enabling Teacher Leadership. As discussed in Chapter II, the strength of teacher leadership in a school reflects the trust a leader has placed in the faculty and serves as a powerful support for collective efficacy. Building trust creates a healthy culture (Tschannen-Moran, 2003), which supports the affective state and social persuasion factors of CTE. Allowing for teacher voice in decisions about curriculum and school goals helps to memorialize that trust (Goddard et al., 2004), and creating a more inclusive shared power structure helps to enhance teacher commitment (Olivier & Hipp, 2006). Each leader in this study spoke of the different ways that he or she enabled the teachers to lead within the community.

Luke and Will highlighted the important role that teachers play in creating and delivering meaningful professional development to the faculty at their schools. They entrust the direction of PD days to their teachers, and both spoke of the value that carried with the faculty. Though not explicitly related to PD, Emily identified the value she and the faculty at Faber found when she began empowering their voice more in the direction of the school. At all three schools, giving a louder and clearer voice to faculty helped to create an adult community more connected to and engaged with professional growth. Recognizing the role of CTE in this study, the empowerment of teachers to deliver PD also helps to build the shared sense of competence, of professionalism, and ability within the faculty.

The academic department chairs at each school play a role in collaborating with the academic administrative teams. The role of chair is a pivotal faculty leadership role,

and one that when properly constructed and enabled can help not only the chairs themselves feel empowered, but help each faculty member within the department to feel empowered as well. Each leader spoke of the formal mechanisms by which these chairs take their position at the table with the administrative team. Emily spoke of the ways in which she and her team had re-imagined the chair position and the value she felt that shift brought to the Faber community.

A number of faculty in this study's focus groups spoke of the ways in which they felt enabled to lead. At Ricci, faculty were the driving force behind the advisory program that plays such an important role. At Claver, faculty were behind the supportive and responsive library program, where students experiencing difficult transitions could find a safe place. Teachers at Claver also spoke clearly of using their classrooms as places of support for students. Teachers at Faber spoke of the ways they set expectations with students with the implicit knowledge of Emily's support and on the strength of Emily's messaging. All of these leadership mechanisms help teachers to feel confident in the teaching task at hand and so help to enable a more powerful and robust sense of CTE.

Transformational Leadership and Developing People. The presence of transformational leadership and the core practices of *developing people* all reflect a commitment to the individual needs and growth of faculty and to the ability to build goal consensus on the strength of those personal connections (Leithwood et al., 2010). The commitment of a school leader to helping individual teachers set achievable, short-term goals both for themselves and for the broader community serves as a strong example of individual attention and attention to personal growth serving the collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2004). It also requires modeling of appropriate values as the faculty look

to the school leader for cues and direction (Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2014). In each environment of this study, the leader discussed the ways in which he or she focused personal attention upon each teacher and pushed towards greater goal consensus.

The clarity and consistency of the vision from each leader in this study stands as one of the greatest strengths in building consensus. The faculty synthesis of that vision in each case reflects a communal commitment and a willingness to grow and develop the school as the leader has charged. In addition, each leader was clear in his or her willingness to stand and deliver that message themselves – whether that be with faculty, with parents, or with students, the vision was clear. This sort of modeling helps the faculty to embrace and share the vision as well.

At each school, the school leader spoke of the ways that he or she connected individually with teachers. In each case, this was not necessarily through a formal and structured mechanism, but both the ability and the desire to connect personally helped the common vision and common goals to take root among the faculty.

Cross-Case Analysis Summary

The school leaders interviewed in this study espoused a clear understanding of students' developmental needs during the ninth-grade transitional period. Each leader understood the ways in which students entering their schools faced challenges of relatedness, competence, and autonomy, and each leader worked with their team to address those challenges.

Each leader employed both their own vision and the mission of the school in pursuit of building a shared understanding within their community of the school's goals. Each leader shared their vision clearly and actively with teachers, with parents, and with

students to build as broad a community of concern as possible. Each leader communicated clearly about letting the school's particular Catholic mission drive decision-making.

Finally, each leader committed to building a faculty that believed the work of achieving this vision was both achievable and meaningful. Each leader focused in varying ways on building collaboration, on empowering teachers to lead and have a voice, and on attending to individuals' needs for growth. By doing so, each leader helped to support the sense of collective teacher efficacy among their respective faculty.

Many of the broader findings in this study echo across contexts, signaling a fair amount of alignment in each school's approach to the ninth-grade transition. However, throughout the individual cases there were also important and distinct variations based on contextual differences. While there are overall similarities, it is important to highlight that the exact approach in each school varied based on the context.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the findings of my research study. Through interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and surveys at three different schools, I have addressed the three research questions that guide my study and analyzed the data in light of my conceptual framework and the literature review presented in Chapter II of this work. In the next chapter, I will offer a discussion of these findings and present implications and recommendations for school leaders.

Chapter V - Discussion and Recommendations

The conceptual framework for this study hypothesized a relationship between leadership activity, collective teacher efficacy, and the meeting of ninth-grade students' needs through a developmentally responsive high school transition. Drawing upon this framing, I posited that by attending to the core leadership practices of *setting directions* and *developing people*, a secondary school leader can help to support and bolster a staff's sense of collective efficacy, and specifically of collective efficacy to implement successfully a developmentally responsive transition that fulfills the student needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

My goal in this study was to better understand the ways in which secondary school leadership can build a ninth-grade transitional program committed to the developmental and psychological needs of ninth-grade students. I also aimed to understand better the ways in which secondary school leadership can support the work of teachers in implementing this transitional program and the ways in which leaders can help to build teacher collective efficacy relating to this transition. To investigate this, the first two research questions of this study addressed a leader's understanding of a developmentally responsive transition and the student needs therein, and the ways in which a leader supports the implementation of that transition. The third research question addressed in what ways leadership practice supports and strengthens collective teacher efficacy. Following the discussion of the findings to these questions I present the implications of the findings for secondary school leaders and offer recommendations for leadership practice.

Discussion of Findings

Major Finding One (RQ1)

One major finding that stands out and that addresses the study's first research question is that the secondary school leaders in this study were aware in a deep and meaningful way of the transitional challenges students face at their school. Each leader spoke clearly of student needs and difficulties that reflected the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as identified by self-determination theory, or SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In addition, those three needs of SDT align closely with the student categories of concern identified by Akos (2002) in a study on student perceptions of the ninth-grade transition; namely, concerns that are procedural, academic, and social in nature. The leaders in this study each had a vision of how best to support student needs during this difficult time to avoid the pitfalls identified in the literature review and their respective approaches spoke to an institutional focus on attempting to better serve these student needs.

Diverse Feeder Schools. The literature review in Chapter II addressed a number of the most salient transitional issues for students, and the issues that give rise to the call for a developmentally responsive transition. Alspaugh (1998) and Shiller (1999) both pointed to the academic difficulties encountered in secondary schools which draw from diverse feeder elementary schools. This certainly was an issue at each of the schools in this study and was one of the primary challenges highlighted by each leader. In order to address this challenge, at each of the schools there were a number of academic expectation-setting and skill-building initiatives that the leader identified as crucial.

Leaders and teachers alike spoke of the importance of getting students onto the same page. This could be related to behavior, to academic competencies, to executive functioning skills, to interpersonal relationships – no matter the environment, in this study the need to “level the playing field” was certainly on the minds of faculty and staff. In fact, there is not a single student psychological need as identified in this study that the problem of diverse feeder schools does not affect. Each leader spoke of the challenges that this diversity offered in terms of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Each spoke of ways that their administration and the school’s faculty and staff intentionally reach out to those students for whom the transition may be most challenging, but still saw that almost every student would face these difficulties.

Academically, there is simply no way to assume a standard set of skills or even a standard understanding of those skills from the outset. The number of different schools that feed to these three high schools varies, but at each it is a very diverse landscape: at Ricci, Luke Marshall highlighted that the ninth-grade class draws “from 80 or more different feeder schools”; at Claver, Will Erikson spoke of the “190 different zip codes” that students hail from; and at Faber, Emily Carroll pointed to the “upwards of 70 zip codes” from which students enter that environment. In addition, each of these three schools draws students from not only geographically diverse middle schools but from institutionally diverse schools as well. Each of the schools studied is a Catholic high school; to be sure, many of the students arriving in the ninth grade are coming from Catholic middle schools, but many are coming from private, independent, or public schools as well. The challenge of finding common ground academically is a real one for both students and teachers.

Another challenge of diverse feeder schools that further feeds the academic transitional difficulty is the lack of communication in any meaningful way between the high school and the middle school environment. Given the geographic and institutional variety, it is just about impossible to create any system of reliable information flow. There is no connection to speak of at any of these institutions between the administrative team at the secondary level and the various administrative teams at the middle school level. This problem seems a particular challenge for private schools; a public secondary school may draw from a handful of middle schools, with similar district-level goals and similar geographic and demographic characteristics. Though the literature identifies that communication between eighth- and ninth-grade teams does not often occur (Akos & Galassi, 2004), it is at least in theory an easier conversation in a public-school environment. For these private Catholic secondary schools, there is simply no way to create a shared understanding with the wide swath of schools involved. That lack of shared understanding leads to a lack of shared expectations upon arrival, and so leads to a more challenging transition for students (Shiller, 1999).

The same essential problems trickle into autonomy and relatedness concerns as well. Each leader spoke of the challenge students have in adjusting to the much bigger environment that the ninth grade offers and the stark contrast between that environment and the smaller confines of the eighth-grade classroom. Each highlighted the challenges of adjusting to the Catholic school model for those coming from non-Catholic feeder schools and of acclimating to a religious environment that comes as almost entirely new to the student. Finding ways to create a shared consciousness around these aspects of

school life and around the school mission is key to helping students adjust to their transition.

Big Fish, Little Pond Effects. In the literature review of Chapter II, the concept of “big fish, little pond” effects (BFLPE) was discussed. This idea, which was first identified by Marsh (1987) and has been validated through various studies and by a number of different researchers, identifies that the academic self-concept of previously high-performing students can falter when that student is surrounded by as highly- or more highly-performing students. In the selective and academically rigorous schools of this study, the BFLPE were very clearly in play in the perspective of each individual leader. Each spoke of the difficulty that both students and parents faced when academic results no longer met expectations and the ways in which their administration worked to help build the coping mechanisms and competencies for dealing with that challenge. Finding ways to uproot those effects is important, because without intervention the student simply recasts his or her self-concept as a lower-performing student. Given the selective admissions process at each of these schools, student ability and competency is generally not the issue; the issue is more helping the student to acclimate to the academic environment.

Each leader recognized the BFLPE in action in his or her environment. Luke at Ricci listed several “how do I” types of questions that incoming students often ask regarding adjusting to the schedule, socializing at lunch, and making sports teams that could all impact their own self-concept. Will at Claver spoke of “naturally intelligent [students] who never really had to work that hard,” highlighting rather succinctly the presence of BFLPE. Emily at Faber spoke readily of these challenges, even echoing some

of the terminology: “Most of our [students] are coming from a much smaller pond than coming to here.” The recognition of the challenges of BFLPE is clear, as is the institutional and administrative attempt to undercut the negative effects. Helping students re-imagine themselves and re-invent a battered self-concept is an important psychological role that each school leader expressed an understanding about and a drive to fulfill.

Major Finding Two (RQ2)

A second finding that arose and that addresses the study’s second research question is that secondary school leaders have a number of tools in their arsenal that can support the work of implementing an effective developmentally responsive ninth-grade transition. However, the intentional building of a community, of a shared identity within the school’s walls, and of clearly established expectations with all stakeholders stand out as some of the most valuable tools at hand. Each leader in the study either implicitly or explicitly strove to build up these skills and in doing so helped to support the implementation of developmentally responsive transitions in their environment. This work was done through many of the core practices of the leadership domain of *setting directions*. Each leader spoke of their work to build a shared vision among disparate stakeholder groups to the advantage of the students, of their drive to foster better and greater acceptance of group goals as they relate to ninth-grade students, and of the clear communication they offered around the school’s direction.

Communities of Care. The research suggests that an important role of a leader is to help create and foster communities of care. Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010; 2013) highlighted the valuable practice of creating a “community of care” for ninth-grade students in order to address transitional needs, “a place where students and teachers care

about and support each other, where individuals' needs are satisfied within a group setting, and where members feel a sense of belonging and identification with the group" (2010, p. 396). The authors found that these communities, driven by the relationships between teachers and students as well as the relationships between teachers and the school programming, could support students at the time of transition and beyond, with lingering effects throughout the students' high school careers. Students in transition need to know that the big, difficult, and possibly intimidating environment they are entering cares about them and their well-being, and they need to know that not just one or two teachers care, but that many do, even to varying degrees (Conner et al., 2014). Battistich, Solomon, Watson, and Schaps (1997) write that "students' needs for competence, autonomy and belonging are thus met when they are able to participate actively in a cohesive, caring group with a shared purpose; that is, a community" (p. 138).

In each environment studied, the leader's push to create a community of care helped to build and support the sense of relatedness, autonomy, and competence that ninth-grade students require to feel supported. In each school, the leader has found ways to make care of ninth-grade students a collective concern and ways to make the development and growth of each student a point of focus for each faculty member. By involving ninth-grade teachers in transitional programming, by building a shared understanding of student ability, and by engendering a collective responsibility to ninth-grade student support, the leaders in each school strive to put student needs first. This collective work has helped to make the care of ninth-grade students a shared responsibility and served as a manifestation of shared and accepted group goals and vision. In many ways, the creation of this community of care stands as the outcome of the

leadership practices within the *setting directions* domain of leadership and represents a successful push by school leaders to communicate direction and model the school's mission. This community-building stood as an essential leadership practice of each principal in the study and as a consistent one across contexts.

Clarity of Expectations. Each leader in this study worked to build a common understanding of the problems students face in the ninth-grade transition and worked to build a community of adults that could help to address student psychological needs. However, what also stood out clearly as a leadership practice of note across contexts was the stated importance of making expectations as clear as possible. Each leader spoke of the push to share clear and direct expectations with different stakeholder groups—parents, students, and faculty—in the drive to communicate direction and build a shared vision for the transitional period.

The ninth-grade advisory program at Ricci stands out as a particularly strong example of collective clarity around expectations. Luke and his team have made this advisory program a central focus of the work with freshmen. In addition, Luke at Ricci and Will at Claver both used the summer before the ninth-grade year to introduce the students to the environment of each school and to the expectations the students would face upon arrival in the fall. At every school in the study, an orientation program existed to provide the students some meaningful interaction with the school mission and with what would be expected from them on day one of freshman year. Each leader spoke of the benefits these programs offered as a sort of on-ramp to the school year proper.

In addition to clarity with students through transitional programming and an advisory curriculum, each leader in this study utilized parental communication and

support to the advantage of these students in transition. Each leader spoke of how they shared their vision and their goals with the parents and how they used structural elements of transitional programming to introduce parents to their own set of expectations. The leaders interviewed employed parents as an additional layer of support for students by being very clear about how best parents could operate to their child's advantage. Also, many faculty members across contexts spoke of how helpful it was to have parents so clear on the school's expectations of their relationships.

Ultimately, each leader in this study strove to set direction in their environment by focusing on clarity of expectations and by focusing on being deliberate with all stakeholders about their vision for students. Whether through an advisory program, communication outreach, or transitional programming, by striving to create a common language and a common understanding about each student's place in the school and each adult's role for the child, each leader supported the implementation of a transition that tended to the developmental and psychological needs of the ninth-grade students in their environment.

Major Finding Three (RQ3)

A third finding which addresses the study's third research question is that leaders can help to build collective teacher efficacy not only by addressing the four sources of the construct but also by utilizing effectively the two additional actions proposed by Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) in their model of collective teacher efficacy (CTE): analysis of the teaching task and assessment of teaching competence. These two actions are hugely influential in the support of building CTE and serve to bolster each of the four sources of CTE. The information pertaining to these four sources is certainly important,

but “the cognitive processing and interpretation of this information are critical” (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 485). The more opportunity each leader gave the faculty to complete these two actions, the more positively the faculty perceived their own abilities. The ways in which leaders empowered this analysis and assessment in support of CTE are identified in greater detail below.

Before addressing these two actions, it is worth noting again the four sources of collective efficacy identified by Bandura (1997) – mastery experience, vicarious experience, affective state, and social persuasion. The leaders interviewed addressed each of these sources in diverse ways at each respective site and the faculty at each school spoke often of the ways their work manifested these four sources. My assumption entering this study, and an assumption that is evident in my conceptual framework, is that leadership practice serving to address these four sources would be sufficient for raising CTE. In fact, I found that though addressing the sources did serve a sense of collective efficacy, without the subsequent analysis and assessment of task the communal confidence was not as robust. Thus, rather than identifying the ways each source was addressed, the more potent leadership activity may be to address the actions involved in fostering collective efficacy beyond those four sources.

Analysis of the Teaching Task. In order to address the ways teachers might collectively analyze the teaching task, it is important to present the definition of this task offered by Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000):

Teachers assess what will be required as they engage in teaching; we call this process the analysis of the teaching task. This analysis occurs at the individual and school levels. At the school level, the analysis produces inferences about the challenges of teaching in that school, that is, what it would take for teachers in the school to be successful. Factors that

characterize the task include the abilities and motivations of students, the availability of instructional materials, the presence of community resources and constraints, and the appropriateness of the school's physical facilities. To summarize, teachers analyze what constitutes successful teaching in their school, what barriers or limitations must be overcome, and what resources are available to achieve success. (p. 485)

This challenge of assessing the teaching task at hand seems particularly important from the perspective of ninth-grade teaching faculty. Attention has been paid already in this analysis to the challenge of constructing shared academic expectations in a student body matriculating from diverse middle schools. Given the variety that each school leader cited for the incoming ninth-grade student experience, it can be difficult for teachers to grapple with many of the factors cited in the definition above. In particular, I would point to “the abilities and motivations of students” and the “presence of community resources and constraints” as the factors most likely to affect teachers’ assessment of the teaching task in this study.

In order, then, to enable this assessment for teachers, school leaders must find ways to help address these questions and support a positive assessment by the faculty. By creating a positive assessment of student motivations and of community resources, teachers are able to view the school context through the lens of mastery experience and so support a robust internal sense of collective efficacy. A real sense of the academic success of a school and its students can be a powerful support for CTE (Goddard et al., 2004). Particularly around the ninth-grade transition, there are ways that each school leader in the study helped to support a more positive assessment through clear messaging, through individualized support, and through modeling of appropriate values.

Each leader in this study made direct overtures to faculty about the ability level of the ninth-grade students entering the school. Importantly, each leader used data to offer to faculty a more granular understanding of the sort of student enrolling at the school, thereby offering a detailed analysis of the ability levels present. As discussed in Chapter IV, at each school the leader used entrance test data to present a realistic profile to ninth-grade faculty of the skill levels of incoming students. In addition, at each school the leader used this same data to interrupt potential biases among faculty towards these incoming students and to direct the narrative about their abilities and competencies upon arrival. This enabled the faculty at each school to build a collective sense of student ability grounded in data and to construct a common understanding of ninth-grade student capability and motivation.

Academically, teachers also must know that there are resources available to support the difficult task they sometimes face. Each leader in this study has built a number of programs, mechanisms, and support networks for students who struggle academically. Teachers often echoed the value of these programs in helping students in ways that they themselves cannot, and they signaled appreciation for the support these programs offered. Knowing that there are additional resources on hand to support those students most in need, teachers are able to assess their own and their collective teaching task more positively, thus better supporting their sense of collective efficacy.

By using data to create shared understanding of student ability and by marshalling resources in support of student needs and in support of the faculty working with those students, the leaders in this study enabled a more positive assessment of the ninth-grade

teaching task, which in turn supported the sense of collective teaching efficacy in each environment.

Assessment of Teaching Competence. Moving on from the analysis of teaching task, Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) also point to the importance of building a positive assessment of collective teaching competence in support of collective teacher efficacy.

The authors describe this exercise in this way:

Teachers analyze the teaching task in conjunction with their assessment of the teaching competency of the faculty; in fact, teachers make explicit judgments of the teaching competence of their colleagues in light of an analysis of the teaching task in their specific school. At the school level, the analysis of teaching competence produces inferences about the faculty's teaching skills, methods, training, and expertise. Judgments of teaching competence might also include positive faculty beliefs in the ability of all children in their school to succeed. (p. 485)

In order for leadership to help build and foster a sense of collective teacher efficacy, opportunities for this assessment of competence must be available. The leaders in this study, while not explicitly organizing their work for this purpose, did create opportunities for teachers in each school to learn of each other's competencies and thereby enable this powerful means for developing teacher efficacy.

For example, at each school studied the leaders encouraged or even required peer observation, which sets the stage for faculty to assess competence. Each leader further formalized this assessment process and created an intentional feedback loop; teachers then synthesize the peer feedback received in order to formulate goals for the next year. Thus, each teacher is challenged to grow and develop with and by this peer feedback. These approaches serve a few important efficacy practices. First, they enable a sense of both mastery and vicarious experience without ever leaving the school context. Teachers

are able to see and experience not only good teaching and good pedagogy that they can bring back to their own classroom, but good pedagogy that is context-specific; like the construct of collective teacher efficacy itself, this context-specific sense of productive pedagogy is particularly pointed and particularly helpful to teachers. Through a robust peer-observation structure, teachers get an intimate sense of what it means to be a good teacher at their school in particular, and not just a picture of good pedagogy more generally. This is key for a sense of CTE, and when properly utilized helps teachers to understand better what classroom instruction should look like.

In addition to peer observation, teachers at each school were able to build a more positive assessment of collective teaching competence through teacher-led professional development. To be sure, enabling teacher leadership in this manner addresses collective efficacy in a number of ways; however, what seems perhaps the most powerful is the assurance it gives faculty of the collective expertise of their peers. Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) wrote that “the analysis of teaching competence produces inferences about the faculty's teaching skills, methods, training, and expertise” (p. 485); by allowing faculty to be the main delivery mechanism for school-wide professional development, each leader in this study is allowing this analysis to move beyond mere inference. Teachers are able to exhibit to their peers the strength of their skills, training, and expertise, and able to give an impactful sense of what learning can and should look like in the classroom. Already identified as one of the main leadership practices that empower collective teacher efficacy, it should not be underestimated how much impact this specific enabling of teacher leadership can have on the collective assessment of competence.

Through peer observation and teacher leadership in professional development, the school leaders in this study provided the data needed by teachers to conduct a positive assessment of teaching competence among their peers. This assessment and sense of communal understanding of the school's teaching environment and expectations helped to foster the sense of CTE in each environment.

Recommendations for Practice

A number of suggested recommendations for leadership practice follow from these findings. These recommendations are meant to offer practices, structures, and mechanisms by which secondary school leaders can support not only teacher collective efficacy broadly but also how leaders can support the CTE of teachers at the ninth-grade level as they work to support students in transition and to implement developmentally responsive transitional programming. These recommendations are grounded in the data observed and analyzed at each of the three sites in this study as well as in the bodies of literature presented in Chapter II. Though by no means exhaustive, they offer a number of possibilities for secondary school leaders as they look to better meet both the transitional needs of students and the collective efficacy needs of faculty. They also address a number of the areas of concern raised already in this analysis and reflected in the study's three guiding research questions – a leader's need to address developmentally responsive transitions (RQ1), a leader's need to support faculty in the implementation of the same (RQ2), and a leader's responsibility to foster collective teacher efficacy (RQ3).

Make "Care" a Legitimate Concern (RQ1)

The intentional creation of a "community of care" comes through as a pressing objective not only in the literature but also in the three schools studied here. A focus on

“care” as more than just a buzzword and on “care” as more than just a reflection of the school’s mission serves to help address each of the respective psychological needs of students within a developmentally responsive transition. A leader who makes this sense of “care” for students explicit and who encourages staff to do the same creates an environment where students are safe to fail because they know and trust that they are supported. By allowing students to fail with a net, the repercussions of failure are far lighter and the willingness to push oneself far greater. When “care” is more than a word, and instead is an engrained part of the ninth-grade student experience, the transition lacks the anxiety and uncertainty that it otherwise might have.

In addition, the phrase “community of care” mentions not only care – “community” is just as important. A leader expressing care is a great start, but like transitional programming the leader’s expression is only as good as its implementation on the ground. There must be an explicit focus on making the care of students one of the faculty’s foremost concerns. This suggests a communal exercise whereby school leaders help all ninth-grade teachers feel intimately connected to the ninth-grade student experience and needs. A leader must find ways to involve teachers explicitly in this creation of care; like the checklist for new students created by Emily Carroll at Faber, making the care for each student a concern for all teachers should be a priority of secondary school leaders.

Build Community by Creating Spaces for Community Building (RQ2)

Just as all teachers must be involved in providing “care” to students, so too must all teachers be involved in building a sense of community for ninth-grade students. The advisory program at Ricci stands as an example of how to implement such an approach.

With all teachers involved and with an explicit focus on acclimation, an advisory program like Ricci's can serve to get every adult involved in helping students transition. By including ninth-grade teachers in the effort to help ninth-grade students transition, the faculty's own understanding of and expectations for ninth-grade students inherently match up with those of the school leader. Building an advisory program like Luke Marshall did at Ricci allows for community-building on both a micro-level, within advisory groups, and a macro-level, as the entire ninth-grade (both teachers and students) experience the same curriculum. This could not occur if involvement were not an expectation of faculty – no one knows better or needs to better know the needs of ninth-grade students than ninth-grade faculty, and so they must be incorporated into any freshman advisory-style program.

Keep Messaging Clear and Consistent with all Stakeholders (RQ1 & RQ2)

Each leader in this study was adamant about the importance of clarity. One major challenge of the ninth-grade transition is the uncertainty it brings – for students, entering a new environment; for parents, unsure of what to expect for their children and how to support their needs; and for teachers, needing to adjust to the new crop of students and the experiences which they each bring to the classroom. By being consistent and clear with students, with parents, and with teachers about what is expected of ninth-grade students, about how ninth-grade students and parents are expected to carry themselves, and about how communication between all three stakeholders should be conducted, a school leader can help to strip the transitional period from the intimidating uncertainty which it often brings. Additionally, this clear expectation-setting can help to level the

playing field for students from academically, socially, and demographically diverse environments as they come together as a single ninth-grade class.

Build a Communal Understanding of Competence and of Support (RQ2 & RQ3)

This recommendation applies to both faculty and students. A leader has a responsibility to build a communal understanding of student competence for faculty and to create meaningful and effective mechanisms for student support. The use of data stands out as key here in helping faculty understand the students in their charge. Helping faculty move beyond anecdotal or surface level understanding and helping them to see without pretense the ability of ninth-grade students is an important step. By doing so, a school leader can help to foster greater acceptance of group goals for work with these students, and can help to create high-performance expectations among the faculty.

Additionally, a leader has a responsibility to build a communal and collective understanding of faculty competence and to build a professional development program that works in support of those same faculty. Leaders can do this by empowering teachers to direct and lead professional development throughout the year. By helping teachers to trust in the high level of faculty ability, professionalism, and passion, a secondary school leader is able to work effectively in support of collective teacher efficacy.

Maintain a Robust Peer Observation Program (RQ3)

Perhaps the most effective way to help enable a positive assessment of the collective teaching competence, and thereby to foster a strong sense of CTE, is for a secondary school leader to create a robust peer observation program. Each school in this study had a peer observation program, though only at one school—Claver—did it have expressed requirements of faculty. Teachers at Claver spoke of the strength and value of

this program, while teachers at the other schools expressed a desire to do more work in this area and a desire for the school leader to push this initiative more strongly. Building an observation program “with teeth,” where teachers are held responsible for the observations, for their feedback, and for their analysis of feedback offered to them, helps to foster a strong sense of CTE. A program like this creates a shared understanding of an effective classroom in a given environment and builds mutual respect and social persuasion within a faculty. By committing to peer observation, a school leader is committing to the leadership domain of *developing people* by offering individual support through the collective and by offering intellectual stimulation in the exercise of analyzing the pedagogy of a peer. Additionally, by participating in the observation, feedback, and analysis loop, a school leader can model the sense of reflection so crucial to the model of collective teacher efficacy.

Provide Autonomy to Faculty, but with Structure (RQ3)

This recommendation may seem counterintuitive, given that faculty autonomy would imply a freedom from constraining structures. However, in the schools studied here, teachers expressed both sides of this seemingly contrasting divide. Almost unanimously, teachers expressed appreciation for the autonomy provided to them by the school leader; the discussion of autonomy was particularly positive at Claver under Will Erikson, where teacher survey results also showed high levels of CTE. Yet in almost the next breath after trumpeting their autonomy, teachers lamented that there were not more options for collaboration, for communication, and for interaction with their peers. So, the challenge for secondary school leaders is to create mechanisms for these activities that faculty see as valuable and as productive, and so worthy of ceding their own autonomy

for. Certainly easier said than done, but there are ways to enable such collaborative work. For instance, in each school studied teachers spoke clearly about their desire for meetings of ninth-grade teachers collectively and of the value they saw in these meetings. Teachers seemed willing to commit to structures that helped enable them to be better classroom instructors to the students they teach, and seemed willing to commit to anything that helped them live out more fully the school mission in relation to their ninth-grade students. Teachers in this study wanted to find ways to better address the concerns discussed, but often seemed to express a sense of inertia rooted in their autonomy. A leader must solicit and then take action upon the input of the faculty and build the structures they want in order to encourage the most robust participation; by heeding faculty input, even intensive structures can be put in place without yielding much of the already extant autonomy.

Make Time for Building Collective Teacher Efficacy (RQ3)

The final recommendation, and one of both the simplest and most difficult for a secondary school leader, is to make time. The idea is simple in terms of content but difficult in terms of implementation. A leader must create the time and the space for teachers to engage with students, with each other, and with leadership in meaningful ways. Particularly in schools like those studied here, with rigorous academic programs and high academic expectations, there is often a sense that no instructional time can be sacrificed for collaboration or professional development. Yet looking at the model of CTE employed in this study, it should be clear that time is exactly what teachers need in order to appropriately analyze the collective teaching task and assess collective competence. And if that model holds true, and the positive effects of CTE on student

performance and social-emotional learning identified hold true, then making time for teachers to collaborate and grow professionally becomes an issue of the utmost importance.

Summary

In this section, I have discussed the findings of my research study as they relate to the study's conceptual framework. Through this discussion, and through this deeper understanding of the role that secondary school leaders can play both in meeting the developmental needs of ninth-grade students and in building the CTE of the faculty, I have offered a number of recommendations for practice. These recommendations would help to foster the CTE necessary to help faculty implement a developmentally responsive transition for ninth-grade students, empowered and enabled by an effective school leader.

Action Communication Products

In this section, I offer the action communication products which I intend to employ in communicating the results and recommendations with the individual principals at each of the three schools in which I conducted my study. I propose two forms of communication with each of the schools studied. First, I will send a briefing to each individual principal that covers the findings and recommendations of the study. Second, I will set a time to meet with each principal, at which point I will offer a presentation tailored to the results from their individual context. Each presentation will present the findings in light of the practices at that school, as well as address the results of the teacher efficacy survey and offer explicit suggestions and recommendations based on those results. The text of the briefing is provided here as is the template for the presentation, though without context-specific information included at this point.

Individual Principal Briefing

Dear (Secondary School Principal),

I am writing to report my findings and recommendations for you and your school based upon the results of my research study. Entitled “Building Collective Efficacy: How School Leadership Supports Ninth-Grade Teams in Implementing a Developmentally Responsive High School Transition”, this study was conducted at three different Catholic secondary schools between September and November of the 2019-2020 school year. The study involved four distinct sources of data from each context studied: interviews with each school leader, a document analysis, a survey of ninth-grade teachers on collective efficacy, and focus group interviews with ninth-grade teachers.

The goal of the study was to better understand and uncover the effects that secondary school leaders can have on building the collective teacher efficacy (CTE) among the staff, particularly with the tenets of a developmentally responsive ninth-grade transition in mind. The study focused on how leaders could support CTE, specifically in the implementation of a ninth-grade transition that is attuned to student psychological and social-emotional needs.

The major findings of this study can hopefully serve as points of emphasis and discussion for future growth as you and your administrative team work to develop the teaching and learning environment at your school. The findings of this study are:

- **There are real and significant challenges that students face during the transition into ninth grade in private secondary schools and it is crucial for school leadership to address those challenges.** Administrative focus must be on the three psychological needs of students of autonomy, competence, and

relatedness, with attention paid to the difficulties of diverse feeder school patterns and the potentially damaging “big fish, little pond” effects.

- **One of the strongest weapons in a school leader’s arsenal for supporting students during the ninth-grade transition is the school community itself.** An intentional focus on building community between and among all stakeholders helps both to engender commitment for students and to foster collective efficacy among faculty. Clear expectations and an explicit sense of care serve to further strengthen the community bonds.
- **Faculty must have the time and the space to analyze the collective teaching task and assess the collective teaching competence of their colleagues in the ninth-grade instructional enterprise.** Peer observation, use of data to better understand student capabilities, and recursive feedback loops between faculty and administration around instruction are all key aspects of this task.

Based on these findings, I offer the following recommendations for supporting teacher collective efficacy and the implementation of developmentally responsive ninth-grade transitional programming at your school:

- ***Make “care” a legitimate concern.*** Create an environment where students feel safe and supported, strengthened by the community that they can see and sense helping to hold them up.
- ***Build community by creating spaces for community building.*** Make student needs the concern of everyone on staff. The ninth-grade transition must not be just a ninth-grade problem, but a community-wide issue to be addressed together.

- ***Keep messaging clear and consistent with all stakeholders.*** Clarity of expectations to all stakeholders strips the challenging transitional period of the uncertainty that can stoke anxiety.
- ***Build a communal understanding of competence and support.*** Create a shared understanding grounded in data and in feedback of both student and faculty competence.
- ***Maintain a robust peer observation program.*** Empower your teachers to strive together for better pedagogy and for constant professional growth, all while challenging each other to continue to improve.
- ***Provide autonomy to faculty, but with structures that encourage collaboration.*** Provide teachers with freedom but enable both formal and informal communicative and collaborative mechanisms that can help tap into the healthy culture that such autonomy brings.
- ***Make time for building collective teacher efficacy.*** As a leader, make the growth, development, and collaboration of faculty a priority by providing scheduled time.

I hope you find these findings and recommendations helpful. I certainly invite any further questions you might have about them or the study itself, and welcome further conversation. Please feel free to contact me at esm8yu@virginia.edu.

With Thanks,

Erik S. Maginnis

Individual School Presentation

Building Collective Efficacy:

How School Leadership Supports Ninth-Grade Teams in Implementing a Developmentally Responsive High School Transition

A Capstone Research Project

Conducted by: Erik Maginnis

The Problem of Practice:

- The transition into high school presents particular challenges for students that schools often do not explicitly and adequately address in their ninth-grade transitional programming.

The Purpose of the Study:

- The goal of the study was to understand and uncover the effects that secondary school leaders can have on building the collective teacher efficacy (CTE) among the staff, particularly with the tenets of a developmentally responsive ninth-grade transition in mind.

Methodology of the Study:

- **A mixed-methods study**
- **Qualitative Data:**
 - Interviews with three private, Catholic secondary school principals
 - Focus group interviews with ninth-grade teachers at each of the three schools studied
 - Document analysis from each of the three schools studied
- **Quantitative Data:**
 - Teacher Collective Efficacy survey results from ninth-grade teachers at each of the three schools studied

Major Finding
#1:

- There are real and significant challenges that students face during the transition into ninth grade in private secondary schools, and it is crucial for school leadership to address those challenges

• *Individual School Areas of Strength:* • *Individual School Areas for Growth:*

Major Finding
#2:

- One of the strongest weapons in a school leader's arsenal for supporting students during the ninth-grade transition is the school community itself

• *Individual School Areas of Strength:* • *Individual School Areas for Growth:*

Major Finding #3:

- Faculty must have the time and the space to analyze the collective teaching task and assess the collective teaching competence of their colleagues in the ninth-grade instructional enterprise

• *Individual School Areas of Strength:*

• *Individual School Areas for Growth:*

Collective Teacher Efficacy Survey Results:

- The following three questions earned the *highest mean score* in your school:

Question:	Mean Score:	Areas of Strength:

Collective Teacher Efficacy Survey Results:

The following three questions earned the *lowest mean score* in your school:

Question:	Mean Score:	Areas For Growth:

Recommendations & Suggestions for Your School:

Recommendation #1: Make "care" a legitimate concern.
<i>Suggestions:</i>
Recommendation #2: Build community by creating spaces for community building.
<i>Suggestions:</i>
Recommendation #3: Keep messaging clear and consistent with all stakeholders.
<i>Suggestions:</i>
Recommendation #4: Build a communal understanding of competence and support.
<i>Suggestions:</i>

Recommendations
& Suggestions for
Your School:

Recommendation #5: Maintain a robust peer observation program.

Suggestions:

Recommendation #6: Provide autonomy to faculty, but with structures that encourage collaboration.

Suggestions:

Recommendation #7: Make time for building collective teacher efficacy.

Suggestions:

Thank you for your
participation!

• Any Questions or Feedback?

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Appendix A: Leader Interview Protocol

This appendix offers the interview protocol employed in the semi-structured interviews with school leaders.

Date of Interview:

Interviewee:

Position, School:

Location of Interview:

Duration of Interview:

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to understand and uncover the effects that secondary school leaders can have on building the collective efficacy of a teaching staff, specifically with the tenets of a developmentally responsive 9th grade transition in mind. In particular, I hope to uncover the particular actions of a leader that most support teachers in their work with 9th grade students.

Purpose of Interview: The purpose of today's interview is to learn more about the way in which you, as a secondary school leader, understand and interpret the needs of your 9th grade students. In addition, I hope to better understand the ways in which you enable your faculty to address the challenges particular to that transitional period.

Confidentiality: I would like to be clear that you have the utmost right to confidentiality. I will not use your name or the name of your school in my work; throughout, pseudonyms will be employed. Your school is only identified as a "Catholic, private school in the mid-Atlantic," and you as the leader of that school. No further defining characteristics are offered. Anything you relate to me today or throughout the research process will be treated as confidential.

Recording: In order to assure the accuracy of the data collected here today in this interview, I would like to ask your permission to record the interview. This will allow me to be sure that my information is true to its source, and that I treat your words and ideas with the respect they deserve. In addition, I will be taking notes to supplement that recording. Please let me know if you are comfortable with both the recording and the note taking; if at any time, you begin to feel uncomfortable, please know that you can ask me to stop either the recording or the note taking.

Approval to Record – (Y/N)

Approval to Note-Taking – (Y/N)

Consent: I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to meet and speak with me today. I want to remind you that this is entirely voluntary, and that you have agreed to participate in this research with generosity and of your own free will. You may at any point choose not to answer a question, choose to stop the interview, and ask for the recording to be destroyed. Thank you again for your help and participation.

Interview Questions:

1. **If you don't mind, tell me a little bit about your background at the school. How long have you been here? What other roles, if any, have you been involved in here?**
 - a. PROBE: How do you think (experience x) has helped to prepare you for this role?
2. **As you think about your current students, what do you think are some of the challenges students face in the 9th grade transition into your school?**
 - a. PROBE around nature of transition/SDT:
 - i. Autonomy –
 1. In what ways do you think the school helps students to build a sense of independence?
 2. In what ways do you encourage students to build their sense of grit or to focus on mindset?
 - ii. Relatedness
 1. In what ways does the school help its newest students feel at home?
 2. In what ways do you think the school turns this disparate group, coming from so many different schools, into one community?
 3. How, if at all, do you involve the parents during the transitional period?
 - iii. Competence
 1. Do you think students are academically prepared for the 9th grade here when they arrive? Why/why not?
 2. What are the greatest strengths/weaknesses of your incoming 9th graders academically?
 3. **What do you (and your staff) do to help address/alleviate those challenges?**
 - a. PROBE around core practices of *setting direction* and *developing people*:
 - i. How do you share your vision with the faculty?
 - ii. In what ways do you use the school's mission to help keep this work moving in the right direction?
 - iii. How do you inspire faculty to push themselves and their peers further in terms of commitment to students and student growth?
 - iv. In what ways do you feel that you work together with the faculty in achieving a more responsive transition for your students?
 - b. PROBE around sources of CTE:
 - i. Mastery Experiences
 1. What are some of the ways that your faculty have really been successful with these students in transition?
 2. What opportunities do your 9th grade teachers have to really explicitly work together?
 - ii. Vicarious Experiences
 1. How do teachers know what success means? Where should they look for a model of what it is that you are looking for during this period?
 2. What sort of professional development do you offer, if any, that might be particular to your 9th grade team?
 - iii. Affective State
 1. In what ways do you feel you build a sense of camaraderie and professional respect among your 9th grade team?
 2. How do you think your teachers feel about their work with 9th graders?

iv. Social Persuasion

1. What feedback, if any, do you offer the teachers on your 9th grade team?
2. Where do the teachers of your 9th grade students get feedback on their work, both individually and collectively?

Appendix B: Code List

The following codes were used to analyze the data in the leader interviews, the teacher focus groups, and the document analysis. Each code is named, the abbreviation listed, and a short description provided. The codes are direct reflections of themes, concepts, and ideas contained within the conceptual framework guiding the study.

Code Identification	Code Abbreviation	Code Description
<i>Leadership Action Codes</i> (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood & Louis, 2012)		
Setting Directions: Building a Shared Vision	SD:SV	Refers to the fostering of shared meanings and understandings, centered on mission, that support the collective vision of the school.
Setting Directions: Fostering Acceptance of Group Goals	SD:GG	Refers to the collaborative work of striving to accomplish a school's common goals in concert.
Setting Directions: Creating High Performance Expectations	SD:HPE	Refers to the expression of high performance expectations for staff, and to the identification of the difference between where a school/faculty is and where it should/could be.
Setting Directions: Communicating Direction	SD:CD	Refers to the consistent messaging from leadership in support of the common goals and shared vision.
Developing People: Providing Individual Support & Consideration	DP:S&C	Refers to a respect for staff and their feelings/needs, as well as an equitable attention to the individual learning and growth of faculty.
Developing People: Offering Intellectual Stimulation	DP:IS	Refers to the encouragement of reflection and the challenge to examine assumptions in the classroom, as well as the continued offering of resources for teacher development.
Developing People: Modeling Appropriate Values and Practices	DP: MVP	Refers to the effective modeling of a school leader of those values and actions that strive to increase capacity and effect change.
<i>Sources of Collective Efficacy Codes</i> (Bandura, 1997)		
Collective Teacher Efficacy: Mastery Experiences	CTE: MEX	Refers to experiences that offer proof of success with a task through successful overcoming of challenges/difficulties.
Collective Teacher Efficacy: Vicarious Experiences	CTE:VEX	Refers to the use of modeling of experiences that then enables a referential comparison of one's own abilities.

Collective Teacher Efficacy: Social Persuasion	CTE:SP	Refers to the social/verbal persuasion by peers/significant others/leaders that one possesses the capabilities to master given tasks.
Collective Teacher Efficacy: Affective States	CTE:AFF	Refers to the physical and emotional states of a person within a task or situation, often in an organization referring to collective reaction to external challenges.
<i>Social & Emotional Learning Codes (Deci & Ryan, 2000)</i>		
SEL: Autonomy	SEL:AUT	Defined as reflecting an internal perceived locus of causality as opposed to an external. Refers to the sense of control a person feels, and has subsequent effects on internalization of motivation.
SEL: Relatedness	SEL:REL	Defined as the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others. This connectedness leads to a secure connection to the external environment.
SEL: Competence	SEL:COM	Defined as a feeling experienced during actions affected by social-contextual events like feedback, reward, and optimal level of cognitive challenge.
<i>Leadership Practices Empowering CTE</i>		
Leadership Practice: Culture of Collaboration	LP:CC	Refers to leadership practice that enables meaningful collaboration among and between teachers.
Leadership Practice: Enabling Teacher Leadership	LP:ETL	Refers to leadership practice that shares decision making, shares power, and empowers teachers to lead.
Leadership Practice: Transformational Leadership	LP:TL	Refers to leadership practice that fosters the growth of organizational members and enhances their commitment by elevating their goals.

Appendix C: Teacher Survey

The survey instrument administered to teachers at each research site is a modified version of Tschannen-Moran’s Collective Teacher Beliefs scale, accessed at the personal website of the author, found here: <http://wmpeople.wm.edu/asset/index/mxtsch/ctb>. Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) devised an instrument to measure CTE, responding to perceived limitations of the Goddard (2002) instrument. The authors write that the collective teacher efficacy scale devised by Goddard *et al.* (2000) “artificially drives down the collective efficacy scores of schools in more challenging environments by its explicit measurement of task difficulty” (p. 199), and that it does not accurately represent the conceptualization of the construct as proposed by Bandura (1997). Instead of focusing on group competence and task analysis as factors, Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) anchored their questions around instructional strategies and student discipline. Like Goddard, the questions focused on the group as the level of analysis rather than the individual, with questions focused not on personal but on collective efficacy exclusively.

In the chart below, you can see the modifications to the questions as initially constructed, if applicable. Responses were given on a nine-point scale: 1, labeled “None at all”; 3, labeled “Very Little”; 5, labeled “Some Degree”; 7, labeled “Quite a Bit”; and 9, labeled “A Great Deal”. The directions, prompts, and information provided to survey recipients were the same as on the original, with edits to the questions shown in **bold**. The survey was administered through Qualtrics.

<p><i>Directions:</i> Please indicate your opinion about each of the questions below by marking any one of the nine responses, ranging from (1) “None at all” to (9) “A Great Deal” as each represents a degree on the continuum. Please respond to each of the questions by considering the <i>current</i> ability, resources, and opportunity of the teaching staff in your school to do each of the following. This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that can create challenges for teachers. Your answers are confidential.</p>	
<i>Original Survey Instrument</i>	<i>Modified Survey Instrument</i>
1. How much can teachers in your school do to produce meaningful student learning?	1. How much can teachers in your school do to produce meaningful student learning during the 9th grade transitional year?
2. How much can your school do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?	2. How much can your school do to get 9th grade students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?
3. To what extent can teachers in your school make expectations clear about student behavior?	3. To what extent can teachers in your school make expectations clear to 9th grade students about student behavior?
4. To what extent can school personnel in your school establish	4. To what extent can school personnel in your school establish

rules and procedures that facilitate learning?	rules and procedures that facilitate learning during the freshman year?
5. How much can teachers in your school do to help students master complex content?	5. How much can teachers in your school do to help 9th grade students master complex content?
6. How much can teachers in your school do to promote deep understanding of academic concepts?	6. How much can teachers of 9th graders in your school do to promote deep understanding of academic concepts?
7. How well can teachers in your school respond to defiant students?	7. How well can teachers in your school respond to defiant 9th grade students?
8. How much can school personnel in your school do to control disruptive behavior?	8. How much can school personnel in your school do to control disruptive behavior among the 9th graders?
9. How much can teachers in your school do to help students think critically?	9. How much can teachers in your school do to help students think critically in their freshman year classes?
10. How well can adults in your school get students to follow school rules?	10. How well can adults in your school get 9th grade students to follow school rules?
11. How much can your school do to foster student creativity?	11. How much can your school do to foster creativity among the 9th grade students?
12. How much can your school do to help students feel safe while they are at school?	12. How much can your school do to help 9th grade students feel safe while they are at school?

Appendix D: Focus Group Protocol

Teacher Focus Group Protocol for all three teacher focus groups.

Date of Interview:

Number of Participants:

School:

Location of Interview:

Duration of Interview:

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to understand and uncover the effects that secondary school leaders can have on building the collective efficacy of a teaching staff, specifically with the tenets of a developmentally responsive 9th grade transition in mind. In particular, I hope to uncover the particular actions of a leader that most support teachers in their work with 9th grade students.

Purpose of Focus Group: The purpose of today's focus group is for me to better understand the ways in which you, as a 9th grade team, work together to address the needs of your 9th grade students. Additionally, I am interested in how you work together both with school leadership and with each other.

Confidentiality: I would like to be clear that each of you has the utmost right to confidentiality. I will not use your name or the name of your school in my work; throughout, pseudonyms will be employed. Your school is only identified as a "Catholic, private school in the mid-Atlantic," and you as a 9th grade teacher at that school. No further defining characteristics are offered. Anything you relate to me today or throughout the research process will be treated as confidential.

Recording: In order to assure the accuracy of the data collected here today in this interview, I would like to ask your permission to record the interview. This will allow me to be sure that my information is true to the source, and that I treat everyone's words and ideas with the respect they deserve. In addition, I will be taking notes to supplement that recording. Please let me know if you are comfortable with both the recording and the note taking; if at any time, you begin to feel uncomfortable, please know that you can ask me to stop either the recording or the note taking. In addition, if you'd like to ask afterwards to be removed from the study or for your responses to be removed, please don't hesitate to do so.

Approval to Record – (Y/N)

Approval to Note-Taking – (Y/N)

Consent: I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to meet and speak with me today. I want to remind you that this is entirely voluntary, and that you have agreed to participate in this research with generosity and of your own free will. You may at any point choose not to answer a question, or choose to leave the group at any time. Thank you again for your help and participation.

Interview Questions:

1. **As a group, what would you say are some of the big, over-arching goals of your work with 9th grade students?**
 - a. PROBES:
 - i. In what ways do those goals connect to the mission of the school?
 - ii. Where do these goals come from for you?
 - iii. Do you feel like the school's leadership supports these goals? In what ways?
2. **In what ways do you all work together as a team? In what ways do you see collaboration playing a role in your work with 9th graders?**
 - a. PROBES:
 - i. What opportunities for collaboration are provided?
 - ii. How do you get to see/know what your colleagues are doing?
 - iii. How you get to see/know how your students are performing in other classes?
 - iv. What are the communication structures in place for you as a team, if any?
 - v. In what ways do you see leadership as a member of your team?
3. **What would you point to as some big successes that you have had as a group working together with your 9th graders?**
 - a. PROBES:
 - i. What are the particular challenges you feel you most have to overcome with the 9th graders?
 - ii. How do you define success? Who defines success, in your mind?
 - iii. In what ways do you share your own success with the team?
4. **In what ways has school leadership encouraged professional growth, either personally or as a team, within this community?**
 - a. PROBES:
 - i. How has the focus of the 9th grade teacher team changed over the last few years, if at all?
 - ii. What sorts of feedback do you receive? What sorts of feedback do you offer each other?