

# STUDENTS' AND EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENT CONNECTEDNESS TO SCHOOL: SOCIAL SUPPORT, ENGAGEMENT, & BELONGING



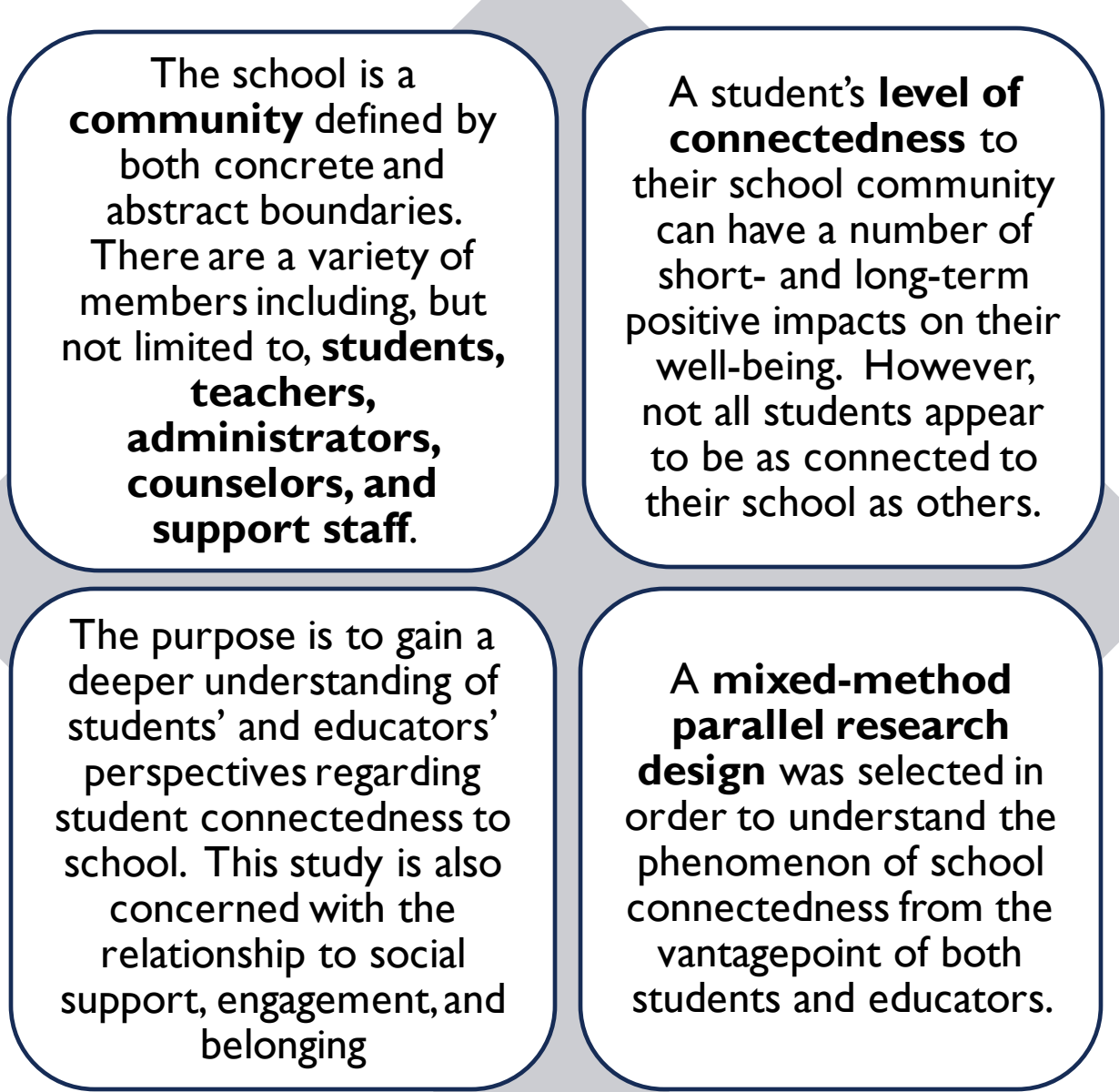
Thomas Richard Fox

Science Teacher, Bethel, Connecticut

Dissertation Chair: Tricia J. Stewart, Ph. D.

Dissertation Committee Members: Dee Lisa Cothran, Ph.D. & Nicole G. DeRonck, Ph.D., Ed. D.

## Abstract



## Research Questions

1. How much of the variance in student-educator connectedness can be explained by students' perspectives on social support, engagement (affective/emotional, behavioral, and cognitive) and feelings of belonging? Which of these variables is the best predictor of student-educator connectedness?
2. Is there a significant mean difference between grade level (9, 10, 11, and 12) and student-educator connectedness?
3. Is there a significant mean difference between secondary students that can identify at least one educator with whom they can talk to if they have a problem and students' perspectives on social support, engagement in school (affective/emotional, behavioral, and cognitive), and feelings of belonging? Which, if any, of these variables are most impacted by students that can identify at least one educator and those that cannot?
4. What do educators of secondary students understand about student connectedness and its relationship to areas of social support, engagement, and belonging?

## Rationale

- Public schools—perhaps more than ever—are being tasked with **supporting students both academically and social-emotionally**.
- School connectedness and the related constructs of social support, engagement, and feelings of belonging, **has been found to provide students with many benefits—both within the context of the school (e.g., academic outcomes) and beyond the school (e.g., ACEs)**.
- More could be understood about the relationship between student connectedness to school, student-educator connectedness, social-support, engagement, and feelings of belonging.

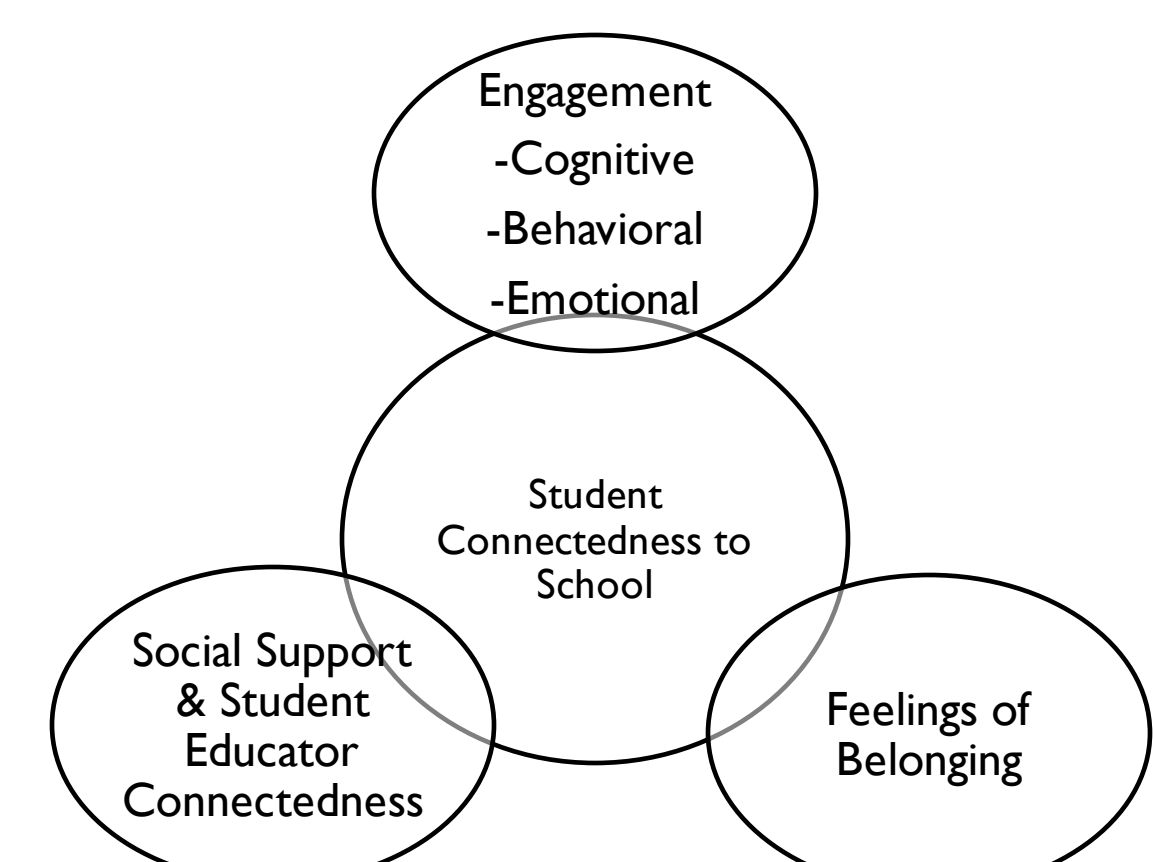
## Significance

- School connectedness has been found to be **less prevalent among adolescents** in contrast to their elementary counterparts across countries. (Garcia-Moya et al, 2015)
- Through the lens of educational leadership, an increased understanding of the impact of student connectedness to school may offer insight in how to best **allocate resources to improve student connectedness and in turn, school climate**.
- Educators' and educator leaders' understanding of school connectedness could be **more granular**.
- This topic may help to further **connected more students to their school community**.

### Key Terms

<b>Belonging</b>	Feeling respected, welcomed, and wanted by others within their community. (St-Amand, Girard, & Smith, 2017)
<b>Educators</b>	People whom students learn from within the confines of the school. (Oxford University Press, n.d.)
<b>Engagement</b>	A multi-faceted meta-construct that consists of behavioral, cognitive, and affective or emotional components. (Finn, 1993; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012)
<b>Social Support</b>	the extent to which one experiences and perceives support by others within their community. (Taylor, 2011)
<b>Student Connectedness to School</b>	The extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, cared for, close, and supported by others in the school environment. School connectedness has been associated with the following: A sense of belonging, social support, and engagement. (McNeely & Folci, 2004)
<b>Student-Educator Connectedness</b>	The belief held by students that adults in the school care about both their learning and them as individuals. (American Psychological Association, 2014)

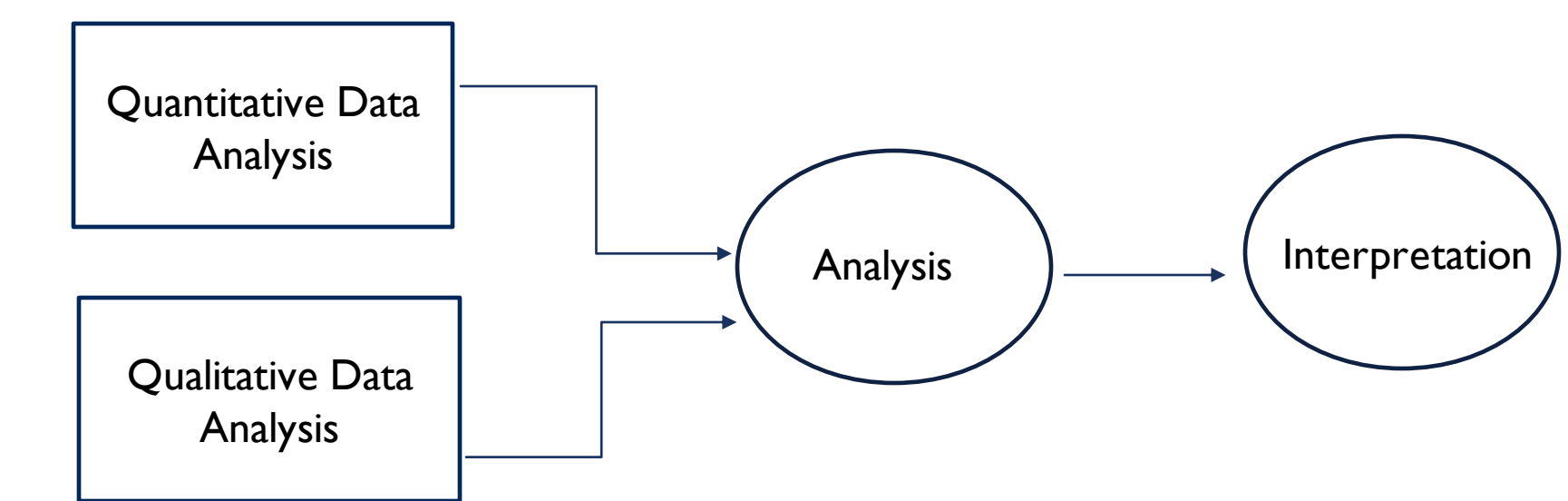
## Theoretical Framework



## Theoretical Framework

- Psychological Sense of Community Theory**
- First proposed by Seymour Bernard Sarason (1974), attempts to describe the impact of the perception of being a part of a community on the behavior and actions of individuals.
- Social Support**
- Social support is the extent to which one experiences and perceives support by others within their community. (Taylor, 2011)
- Engagement**
- Also a component of School Connectedness—manifests in multiple forms
    - Behavioral Engagement, Affective Engagement, Cognitive Engagement. (Garcia-Moya, 2020)
- Belonging**
- On a broad scale—includes feeling respected, welcomed, and wanted by others within their community. (St-Amand, Girard, & Smith, 2017)

## Methodology & Research Design



- The research will take place in a suburban school district located in the southwest region of Connecticut. The school district will be referred to as "Springcrest Public Schools."
  - Approximately 92% of the households in the district have access to the Internet.
  - As of the 2018-19 academic year, approximately 30% of students within Springfield School district were eligible for free or reduced-price meals.
  - This research will take place at the high school within the Springcrest Public School district. For purposes of confidentiality, the school will be referred to as "Heather Hills High School."
- A mixed-methods design will be used to better understand the complexities of the dynamics that exist between student-educator connectedness, social support, engagement, and feelings of belonging. This research design approach allows for the simultaneous collection and analysis of data. (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009)
- A convergent parallel design entails that the researcher concurrently conducts the quantitative and qualitative elements in the same phase of the research process, weighs the methods equally, analyzes the two components independently, and interprets the results together. (Creswell & Pablo-Clark, 2017)

## Data Collection

- This mixed methods study relies on pre-existing quantitative data that was collected in the form of surveys to high school students within Heather Hills High School. The qualitative data to be collected include participant interviews, review of appropriate existing documents, and a researcher journal.
- Quantitative**
- The proposed study will analyze one year and four cohorts (Classes 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) of pre-existing survey data from Heather Hills High School's Safe School Climate Survey (SSCS). N= 643
- Qualitative**
- Semi-structured Interview Protocol
  - High School Teachers and Staff Members
  - Participants (N=10)
  - 45-90 minute interviews
  - Interviews digitally recorded for transcription purposes

## Limitations

- Only one site in the Northeast is being researched.
- The study is limited by the nature of the instrument – This instrument was designed by members of the school in which the research is taking place. It has not undergone rigorous validity studies by scholars in the field.
- This study takes place during the Covid-19 Pandemic and participation may be limited.
- The nature of teaching during a time of collective trauma with the pandemic may alter the ways that participants understand the topic under study.

## Data Analysis

- How much of the variance in student-educator connectedness can be explained by students' thoughts on social support, engagement (affective/emotional, behavioral, and cognitive) and feelings of belonging? Which of these variables is the best predictor of student-educator connectedness? **Multiple Regression**
- Is there a significant mean difference between grade level (9, 10, 11, and 12) and student-educator connectedness? **ANOVA**
- Is there a significant mean difference between secondary students that can identify at least one educator with whom they can talk to if they have a problem and students' perspectives on social support, engagement in school (affective/emotional, behavioral, and cognitive), and feelings of belonging? Which, if any, of these variables are most impacted by students that can identify at least one educator and those that cannot? **ONE WAY MANOVA**
- Qualitative Research Question**
- What do educators of secondary students understand about student connectedness and its relationship to areas of social support, engagement, and belonging? **Qualitative, Thematic Coding**