

STUDENT DISENGAGEMENT IN A LOW SOCIOECONOMIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:

APPLIED RESEARCH

by

Dawn Michele Cobb-Fossnes

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of student disengagement in an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district in central New Jersey and to formulate a solution to address the problem. Student engagement is an issue of concern for school administrators and teachers. Disengagement often results in lower student academic performance. The problem of student disengagement may have a long-term impact on a student's academic success as well as his or her career. The central research question guiding this research was: How can the problem of disengagement be solved at Beacon Charter Elementary School, located in central New Jersey? The school selected is in a low socioeconomic school district. Students living in low socioeconomic communities often have academic gaps that are at a higher level than students living in rural communities. An applied research multimethod approach was chosen, collecting and analyzing data using qualitative and quantitative methods. The data-coded research was analyzed by categorizing common themes from interviews, a focus group, and a survey. The teachers met in a focus group to build on the issue of disengagement and strategies they felt might make a difference. A survey was given to teachers from the same school to add additional data to provide a possible solution for student disengagement. The research results may be important for teachers, administrators, students, and the community to provide an answer to the problem of student disengagement.

*Keywords:* disengagement, engagement, low socioeconomic, elementary level

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation manuscript to my entire family--my parents, Norman and Dorothy Cobb, who raised my sisters and me to always pursue the passions that God has placed in our hearts, and my husband, Tor, who supported me through many early mornings, late nights, and weekends to pursue my educational goals.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Check-In Check-Out (CICO)

Cooperative Learning (CL)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Interactive Response System (IRS)

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College Careers (PARCC)

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

Self-determination Theory (SDT)

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

The purpose of this applied research was to solve the problem of student disengagement and to formulate a solution to address the problem. Disengaged students are a concern for educators because students generally will perform lower academically (Cipriano, Barnes, Rivers, & Brackett, 2019), have behavioral issues in school (Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014), be considered at risk with a higher probability of dropping out of school (Peixoto, Pipa, Mata, Monteiro, & Sanches, 2017), and possibly have a negative long-term impact on the student's future career (Duffy & Elwood, 2013). Students living in low socioeconomic school districts have various dynamics that influence their environment, contributing to disengagement in the classroom (Jensen, 2009). In other words, schools will have issues with student disengagement, but students dealing with issues of poverty will compound the challenges facing schools located in low socioeconomic school districts. Therefore, the research sought to solve the problem of disengagement.

Educators place high importance on student engagement since it promotes higher levels of student achievement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). The purpose of this research was to solve the problem of student disengagement in an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district in New Jersey. In the next section, the historical background, social contexts, and theoretical frameworks are covered, followed by the problem statement and purpose statement of this research: The central research question addressed how the problem of disengaged students may be solved at Beacon Charter Elementary School, located in central New Jersey. The three sub-questions were as follows: (1) How would teachers in an interview solve the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School, in central New Jersey? (2) How

would educators in a focus group solve the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey? (3) How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central, New Jersey? Following the research questions the significance of the study was presented, the pertinent definitions, and then the summary.

### **Background**

An ideal classroom would have all students engaged in learning, a classroom where the students are emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally showing their love for learning. However, the reality is that many students are disengaged which creates a challenge that educators face in their classrooms. Students' disengagement is defined as students displaying behaviors that avoid being on-task for learning, resulting in negative academic outcomes (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Disengagement is a problem in school districts across the United States of America, often resulting in students' dropping out of school in the middle- to high-school years (Easton, 2008). A predictor of students' having a higher level of achievement is their being connected and engaged in the classroom (Wang & Degol, 2014). Since research has indicated the importance of student engagement in the classroom, the overview of historical, social, and theoretical perspectives was presented for this research.

### **Historical Background**

In 1983, President Reagan stated: "Our Nation is at Risk" (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1). He encouraged all citizens to consider the educational needs of schools in America since education is our nation's future and strength (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). To develop life-long learners, schools need to have a greater understanding of student learning (United States National

Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Steinberg (1996) stated that the nation has not addressed the seriousness of the educational system failures, noting one of the problems with our educational system is students and parents are disengaged. The issue of the children of our nation's education being at risk was a concern in the 1980s and 1990s for many Americans. Therefore, some of the research in the 1990s addressed the issue of disengagement as being one of the concerns in education. For example, research was conducted with 15,737 eighth graders on the role that student engagement had on students being at risk (Finn, 1993). The results showed that a predictor of students' dropping out of school and being considered at risk in their education was students who were disengaged in school (Finn, 1993). Research on the value of having smaller classroom sizes showed improved student engagement and academic achievement since the learning environment was considered more personable with fewer students (Lee & Smith, 1995). Voelkl's (1995) research was based on teachers' needing to create a positive learning environment that would promote greater participation or engagement from the students, resulting in higher levels of academic achievement. From these studies, it can be observed that educators were concerned with student disengagement.

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) became a federal law, signed by President George W. Bush, to hold schools accountable to improve academic performance for all students (NCLB, 2001). The NCLB act was a result of academic gaps with minority students and low socioeconomic students (Klein, 2015). A major shift in education occurred under the NCLB, which changed control from state control to federal control, and its implementation required public schools to give high-stake tests (Hursh, 2005). According to Markowitz (2018), the question was whether the NCLB promotes or hinders student disengagement; furthermore, some educators felt that the NCLB would decrease student engagement since the teachers would not

have the flexibility to develop student-teacher relationships. However, Markowitz (2018) conducted research that showed that the NCLB act supported student engagement because teachers and administrators had higher expectations for academic achievement with schools being held accountable to provide interventions to help students to be academically successful.

Engaged students are attentive in class, participate in discussions, and take part in the academic activities inside and outside of the classroom (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). When students are actively disengaged, the result can be disruptive behavior which affects other students; or they may be passively disengaged, and not respond to learning in the classroom (Earl, Taylor, Meijen, & Passfield, 2017). Disengagement is a concern for educators because students who are disengaged may score lower academically, have behavioral issues, and possibly drop out of school (Lee, 2014). This implies that the attitude of the student influences how the student will respond to learning. Additionally, students that drop out of school will most likely not attend college; therefore, they may have fewer career choices (Gottfried & Plasman, 2018). High rates of students who drop out of school often have a negative impact on the community, which may result in increased crime rates, mental issues, and physical health issues (Lee-St. John et al., 2018). Educators have the responsibility to engage students in learning; therefore, it is important to know, from the teachers' perspectives, what strategies they felt might help students to be engaged and to increase student achievement.

### **Social Context**

Many educators recognize the importance of student engagement in school as a predictor of student learning and achievement (Anderson et al., 2019). The social environment of students who are engaged is very different from that of students who are disengaged. Disengaged students will often display behavioral issues, will not be responsive in the classroom, and will

have low academic achievement (McDermott, Rovine, Chao, Irwin, & Reyes, 2017). A teacher who has disengaged students will often find students who are not completing their homework, will not actively participate in learning, have negative social interactions with peers, and may have low academic achievement (Cipriano et al., 2019). Therefore, based on the research, the social environment of disengaged students may negatively affect academic learning.

A classroom-learning environment with disengaged students may appear different depending on the type of student disengagement. Behavioral engagement is evident by students having positive interactions at school, including making right choices in behavior, listening, following the rules, and actively participating in learning (Lee, 2014). However, behavioral disengagement is evident in students who are excessively absent, late for school, do not actively participate, or have behavioral issues in the classroom that distract others from learning (Fredrick's et al., 2004). Emotional engagement is evidenced by how students respond to their classmates, teacher, and how they feel about learning and being in school (Lee, 2014). At the same time, emotional disengagement is evident when students are bored with school, implying they do not like coming to school and display negative emotions about learning (Fredricks et al., 2004). Cognitive engagement is how students view their capability to learn (Hart, Stewart, & Jimerson, 2011). On the contrary, in cognitive disengagement students appear to have a lack of intrinsic motivation to learn, struggle with self-regulation, and do not have a desire to take on academic challenges (Lee, 2014). Since there are different types of disengagement, the students in the classroom-learning environment may show different signs of disengagement.

Research shows that the social context of student disengagement impacts students of all ages (Hancock & Zubrick, 2015). Pre-kindergarten students often show signs of disengagement by not being responsive to simple instructions, and nonchalant, which is often an influence from

living in a low socioeconomic environment (McDermott et al., 2017). Elementary students could show signs of disengagement by being disruptive in the classroom or having lower academic performance (Bunch-Crump, 2017). However, in the middle-school years, disengagement increases, which often results in behavioral issues and a decline in students' academic success (Fredricks, Parr, Amemiya, Wang, & Brauer, 2019). High-school students become at risk of being disengaged when they are not feeling connected with the school, are performing poorly academically, or have behavioral issues (Moses & Villodas, 2017). Research shows that students who are disengaged have a much lower rate of attending college and having successful careers (Orthner et al., 2010). Students who are disengaged are at a higher risk of performing poorly in school, which results in having less financial stability (Moses & Villodas, 2017).

Disengagement may impact students' education at all grade-levels of learning and may have a long-term negative impact on society since students who are disengaged may lack the skills necessary for a successful career because they were disengaged in school.

### **Theoretical Context**

There are two theories that are applicable to this study; the first is Deci and Ryan's (1985) theory of self-determination and the second theory is Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement. The self-determination theory is based on students' having their basic psychological needs met, which include relatedness, autonomy, and competency to promote motivation and student engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The more students' basic psychological needs are met, the more positive they will feel about themselves, which may increase their motivation and engagement (Moreira et al., 2018). Based on Ryan and Deci's (2017) self-determination theory, educators need to consider the basic psychological needs of students to promote student engagement.



The second theory that is applicable to this research is Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, which states that students who have higher levels of involvement in school, including participating in events outside of the classroom, are more committed to being engaged in learning and may gain higher academic achievement. Students who participate in extracurricular activities and create positive social connections with their peers will most likely have higher levels of academic achievement and engagement (Alley, 2019). Research has shown that student engagement and academic outcomes may be influenced by student-teacher relationships (Cook et al., 2018) and by developing positive peer relationships (Vollet, Kindermann, & Skinner, 2017). One way of viewing behavioral engagement is noting how students socially interact and are involved in the classroom, ideas supported by the theory of student involvement (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008). In conclusion, Deci and Ryan's (1985) theory of self-determination and Astin's (1984) theory of involvement provided the framework for this research because these theories help explain how to motivate disengaged students by meeting their needs.

### **Problem Statement**

The general education problem is that students are disengaged, which negatively impacts academic achievement. The specific education problem is that Beacon Charter Elementary School was concerned with disengagement since the school desires all students to be engaged to promote higher levels of academic achievement. These students perform poorly academically, have behavioral issues, have social issues with their peers, and disengagement may have a long-term negative impact on their education as well as their future (Cipriano et al., 2019). Students who are disengaged will often feel like they do not belong, have an increased chance of substance abuse, and have a higher risk of dropping out of school (Mose & Villodas, 2017). In

addition, students who are disengaged in their school have a higher probability of making bad choices and participating in risky behavior (Cunsolo, 2017). Students may show signs of disengagement behaviorally by how they are acting in class, emotionally by how they feel and respond to those around them, and cognitively by whether or not they personally feel prepared and desire to learn (Montuoro & Lewis, (2018). On the other hand, students who are engaged are motivated and may have higher levels of academic achievement (Lei, Cui, & Zhou, 2018). The setting for this research was an elementary charter school located in central New Jersey. The stakeholders for this research were teachers and administrators working at Beacon Charter Elementary School who have a concern with disengaged students. This research was connected with this school because of its being a relatively new charter school that was located in a low socioeconomic school district and also considered low in academic performance.

Disengagement in schools has been a problem in the educational system and is often discussed among educators as well as politicians. Research has shown that there is a higher level of disengaged students in low socioeconomic school districts (Washor, Mojkowski, & Kappan, 2014). Since disengagement is an issue in this location, this research is important to collect data concerning teachers' opinions about what is causing students to be disengaged and possible strategies that may help the students to be engaged in the classroom. The problem of disengagement in an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district was addressed by gathering data from the teachers to design a solution to promote higher levels of student engagement, which may result in increased academic achievement.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of student disengagement in an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district in central New Jersey and to

formulate a solution to address the problem. A multimethod design was used consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first approach was interviewing five individual teachers to ask their opinions on reasons they believe their students were disengaged in the classroom and strategies they believed may support student engagement. The second approach was to interview a focus group of four teachers and one administrator to build on the information that was collected during the interviews. The third approach was conducting an online survey with 15 educators from the same school to collect information on disengagement.

### **Significance of the Study**

The practical contributions of this study were learning from teachers' opinions about student disengagement, specifically understanding what can be done differently to promote a higher level of engagement in the classroom and what strategies these teachers believed will help students become engaged. This research is important since every year there are students who are disengaged, resulting in poor behavior and lower academic achievement (Duffy & Elwood, 2013). Academic disengagement will often be the result of students' declining in their behavioral engagement because of lack of attending and participation in the school (Anderson et al., 2019). Behavioral issues not only affect the student displaying the signs of disengagement, but also may negatively influence their peers in their classroom (Wang et al., 2018). Student engagement is considered by educators an important part of student academic achievement (Barta, 2018); therefore, as educators, we have the responsibility of reaching all students in our school. Hearing the opinions of teachers may enlighten educators on how to reach more students who often feel disengaged in the classroom.

An elementary school was selected for this study since much of the research on disengagement has been conducted in middle school, high school, or on the college level, and

since disengagement is a problem at this particular elementary school. Elementary-age students are developing their study habits that may have long-term impact on their academics in their futures. Elementary school students having behavioral issues are a predictor of students in middle and high school who may score lower academically, not attend school, and conduct criminal behavior (Anyon, Nicotera, & Veeh, 2016). This research is significant since considering the problem of disengagement in an elementary school and conducting research, a solution to the problem of disengaged students may be devised. The goal is to promote engagement in the classroom for all students, which may be evident by students listening, participating, taking notes, asking questions, and interacting with the teacher (Fuller et al., 2018). This research may also benefit other schools that have the same issues of disengagement on an elementary school level.

Students living in low socioeconomic school districts have various dynamics that influence their environment, contributing to disengagement in the classroom. Research has shown that students in low socioeconomic communities will require additional strategies to promote engagement and academic achievement (Palumbo & Kramer-Vida 2012). There are basic needs that are, at times, not met for students living in low socioeconomic homes, such as having the proper food to eat, health issues, or poor housing conditions (Williams, Bryan, Morrison, & Scott, 2017). Children living in poverty will often have unfortunate events in their lives, lower academic achievement, and often behavioral issues (Jensen, 2009). This applied research is important in the area of education to collect data on a school in a low socioeconomic school district to provide a solution for the students that are disengaged. This research may benefit the school, teachers, administrators, students, parents, and society since increased student

engagement may have a positive long-term impact, resulting in better outcomes in the students' lives.

### **Research Questions**

**Central Research Question:** How can the problem of disengaged students be solved at Beacon Charter Elementary School, located in central New Jersey?

**Sub-question 1:** How would teachers in an interview solve the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey?

**Sub-question 2:** How would educators in a focus group solve the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey?

**Sub-question 3:** How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey?

### **Definitions**

1. *Engaged students:* Students who are “attentive and participate in class discussions, exert effort in class activities, exhibit interest and motivation to learn” (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012, p. 700).
2. *Disengaged students:* Students who display behaviors that avoid being on-task for learning, resulting in negative academic outcomes (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).
3. *Low socioeconomic status school:* Schools that would qualify for Title I funding through the federal government, which requires that the school has a high percentage of students whose families have low incomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

### **Summary**

Student engagement is important in education for students to achieve academically. The problem is there are students who are disengaged in the classroom. The purpose of this applied

study was to solve the problem of student disengagement in an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district in central New Jersey and to formulate a solution to address the problem. Educators have the responsibility to reach all students. Furthermore, federal laws have been passed, such as the NCLB, in hopes of closing the academic gap with minority and low socioeconomic students. Students from low socioeconomic communities often have social and emotional issues that prevent them from being engaged in the classroom to have higher levels of achievement. The significance of this research in a low socioeconomic school district was to understand teachers' opinions about reasons for disengagement and to promote strategies to enhance student engagement for the purpose of increasing student academic achievement.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

Student disengagement, a serious concern in the field of education, is often discussed among educators. The purpose of this applied research study was to solve the problem of student disengagement for an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district in central New Jersey and to formulate a solution to address the problem. This literature review addresses the theoretical framework, including two theories, the first theory is self-determination by Deci and Ryan (1985), and the second theory is student involvement by Astin (1984). Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory is based on students having basic psychological needs that must be met to promote higher levels of student engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The theory of student involvement is based on the importance of students being involved both physically and emotionally, resulting in higher levels of student engagement and academic achievement (Astin, 1984). The two theories imply the significance of students' needs being met and their involvement in school to decrease disengagement and to promote higher levels of academic achievement in the classroom.

The related literature review section is organized into four sections. In the first section, disengagement is defined, discussing the risk of disengaged students. The second deals with causes of students being disengaged in the classroom. The third section is concerned with engagement, presents definitions and shows the importance of student engagement with learning. The section on engagement is subdivided into behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement, to show how engagement impacts student learning. The fourth section discusses interventions that promote engagement, which have been researched and used in various schools that promote engagement. There are several subdivisions that will note what research has to say concerning

interventions to help students change from being disengaged to being engaged in the classroom. The final part of chapter two is a summary of the literature review.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Identifying a theoretical framework has the purpose to explain and help the reader understand the problem presented in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The theoretical framework for this study was to examine the work of three theorists who have influenced research in disengagement: Deci and Ryan's (1985) theory of self-determination and Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement. The theoretical framework guided the research as the building blocks for the structure of this research. The self-determination theory (SDT) shaped this study, which "examines how biological, social, and cultural conditions either enhanced or undermine the inherent human capacities for psychological growth, engagement, and wellness" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 3). Also, this study was guided by Astin's (1984) student involvement theory, which asserts that the more students are actively involved, the more positive impact there will be on student learning and engagement (Astin, 1984). The present study's theoretical framework was based on the premise "that there is a well-established link between student engagement, student behavior, and academic achievement" (Sullivan et al., 2014, p. 45). Therefore, this study's theoretical framework was based on the self-determination theory and the student involvement theory.

#### **Self-determination Theory**

Deci and Ryan's (1985) book on the self-determination theory explained that people have three basic psychological needs--competency, autonomy, and relatedness. When met, these needs may promote a person's well-being, leading to self-motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Students' motivation to learn is a predictor of high levels of student engagement (Ryan & Deci,



2017). Research suggested that students might perform at a higher level academically when their psychological needs are fulfilled in the classroom in all three areas, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the areas considered part of the self-determination theory (Lee & Reeve, 2012). According to research conducted by Dennie, Acharya, Greer, and Bryant (2019), if students' psychological needs have not been met while being part of a class, they generally will have higher levels of disengagement. Thus, it was important to consider the self-determination theory as a framework for the problem of student disengagement.

Each of the three basic competency levels was considered in the framework of this study. The lack of a person's basic psychological needs being met, according to the self-determination theory, may result in frustration and the person's having a deficiency in his/her well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). On the other hand, students tend to have higher levels of engagement and motivation when their psychological needs are met (Moreira et al., 2018). The research showed the importance to educators of providing a learning environment that may meet students' psychological needs.

The first basic psychological need is competency, which is how students perceive their ability for learning and understanding a subject (Booker, 2018). When students' need for competency is not fulfilled, they may have a sense of frustration, which may negatively impact their behavior by being disengaged (Earl et al., 2017). To help develop student competency, teachers need to provide interventions and support. The second psychological need is autonomy, which gives students the opportunity to make personal decisions about what and how they will learn (Booker, 2018). Teachers who support a learning environment where students' need of autonomy is nourished allow the students opportunities to suggest ideas for class instruction and to gain knowledge (Alley, 2019). Additionally, teachers will empower students to give input in

the learning process (Cheon, Reeve, & Moon, 2012). Teachers who follow this model give students ownership and allow them to invest in their own education.

The third psychological need is relatedness, defined as how students feel connected to their class and to others in their learning environment (Booker, 2018). Students must feel supported in their learning and feel connected to be engaged (Moreira et al., 2018). Teachers and peers play a crucial role in students feeling a sense of emotional support (Moreira et al., 2018). Teachers who practice the self-determination theory discover that by taking care of students' needs, the students may respond positively to the classroom (Nie & Lau, 2009). Positive teacher-student relationships support a student's emotional wellbeing, promoting higher levels of student engagement (Moreira et al., 2018). Also, peer groups' social interactions influence student engagement, motivation and academic achievement (Vollet et al., 2017). Therefore, teachers should promote a learning environment that builds competency among the students, allow students to have autonomy by making decisions in learning, and structure the classroom so students develop relatedness by feeling connected to others. When students' basic psychological needs are met, students may show evidence of "motivation, engagement, and a sense of belonging" (Kiefer, Alley, & Ellerbrock, 2015, p. 1), which fosters an effective academic environment.

The self-determination theory helps educators understand classroom management through an "adaptive motivational and positive psychology perspective" (Nie & Lau, 2009, p. 186) that decreases student misbehavior, while increasing student engagement (Nie & Lau, 2009). Students' perception of student engagement is influenced by the classroom management and the learning environment established by the teacher (Opdenakker & Minnaert, 2011). This research suggested that each day students attended school for the purpose of receiving an

education to prepare them for their future; some students come to school and were disengaged in the classroom, which negatively impacted their learning. Therefore, the self-determination theory validates the need for students to have emotional support in competency, autonomy, and relatedness to foster engagement and promote higher levels of learning (Moreira et al., 2018).

### **Student Involvement Theory**

The second theoretical framework for this study is Astin's (1984) theory on student involvement, which defines student involvement as the amount of energy a student will commit physically and psychologically to being academically successful (Astin, 1984). The student involvement theory is based on students' getting involved in education in ways that are evident and measurable (Astin, 1984). Students who are actively involved in their schoolwork, in extracurricular activities, and in social interactions with their peers will most likely have positive academic outcomes as a result of their behavioral engagement (Alley, 2019). The study that led to the development of the student involvement theory was a result of researching college dropouts, revealing that college students who lived on campus and were active in extracurricular activities were mostly likely not to drop out of college (Astin, 1984). Although Astin's student involvement theory was directed toward college students, it has an implication for all students. Research conducted by Alley (2019) supported the theory of student involvement; the research showed students had higher levels of behavioral engagement and academic achievement when the students were involved with extracurricular activities and developed positive peer relationships. According to this theory, the more students are involved at school, the higher levels of engagement, resulting in higher levels of academic achievement (Astin, 1984). Astin's (1984) theory gives insight and possible solutions to the problem of disengagement. Astin (1999) wrote an additional journal article that added information to his original student

involvement theory, which had been published in 1984. Whereas the original theory of Astin's (1984) dealt with involvement in various activities and academics in college, his later work (Astin, 1999) emphasized the value of involvement in various relationships on the college campus. Eventually, Astin stressed the influence that teacher relationships with students and peer relationships have on student engagement and achievement in academics. Research evidence from revealed the importance of developing positive teacher-student relationships to promote higher levels of engagement with higher levels of academic achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004). Also, another study suggested that student engagement and academic outcome may be influenced by the positive or negative relationship students develop with their teachers (Cook et al., 2018). In addition, studies have been conducted on the influence peers have on student engagement and motivation in learning (Vollet et al., 2017). Agreeing with this research, it was evident that teacher and peer relationships are important for student engagement. In fact, according to Wentzel and Ramani (2016), peer relationships at all ages will influence positively or negatively students' academic achievement, which includes engagement and motivation. Astin's theory was important to this research since the student involvement theory plays a role in student disengagement.

### **Related Literature**

The purpose of a literature review is to critically evaluate the conclusions and the framework used to develop previous research (Check & Schutt, 2012). Disengagement has been a topic of research at all levels of education, with findings that reveal concern for present and future students. However, limited research has been conducted on engagement at the elementary level, even though engaging students in the early years may impact their future years in education, as well as their adult lives. Understanding interventions and ways to promote

engagement provides insight into solving the problem of disengagement. The following literature review provides information about disengagement and engagement to solve the problem of disengagement.

### **Disengagement**

Disengagement has short-term and long-term implications, impacting academics as well as social development which reaches, far beyond the classroom (Cipriano et al., 2019). The significance of this statement for educators is that it demonstrates the importance of being aware of the problem of disengagement in the classroom. The literature revealed concerns for students who are disengaged in school. These disengaged students are more likely to do poorly academically, have psychological and social issues, possibly resulting in students dropping out of school (Cipriano et al., 2019). Furthermore, Hart et al. (2011) stated that disengaged students are more likely to have issues with “substance abuse, depression, suicidality, aggression, [and] early sexual activity” (p. 67). Research indicates the need for educators, families, and other stakeholders to consider the seriousness of disengagement since not only will students struggle in school, but the disengagement may impact their futures (Olivier & Archambault, 2017). The claims of concerns for student disengagement led to this study, which focused on the problem of disengagement in a low socioeconomic school district.

Disengaged students are defined as students who display behaviors that avoid being on task for learning, resulting in negative academic outcomes (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Educators consider disengagement in several aspects: students performing low academically, students not appearing to feel connected to the learning environment, students displaying behavioral issues, students having negative relationships with the teacher or their peers, and students often being late for class or school (Duffy & Elwood, 2013). Additionally,

disengagement may impact students' self-worth by the students not trying, but instead giving up on their work (Vallee & Ruglis, 2017). These definitions imply that students who are disengaged are off task, have possible behavioral issues, and perform lower academically, indicating that disengagement is a problem in many aspects.

Researchers have provided in-depth understanding of disengagement by providing deeper insight into student disengagement. Balwant (2018) explained that a characteristic trait of student disengagement is low motivation. Furthermore, Brint and Cantwell (2014) implied that students who spend little time studying are most likely disengaged. Also, students who are disengaged may show signs of poor attendance, may not complete their homework or classwork, may be less successful academically, may show an increase in behavioral issues, and may have less social interaction with their peers (Cipriano et al., 2019). Research has broadened the understanding of the meaning of disengagement in the classroom and has provided indicators and signs of students who are disengaged. The research has implied that students may have various signs and levels of disengagement.

Students' academic accomplishments or failures in the early years of education may be a predictor of their future in education and their opportunities later in life (Hughes et al., 2008). Lower student engagement in the elementary level matters later in school development and high school years (Cipriano et al., 2019). Anderson et al. (2019) believe that student engagement may have impact on students later in life as a result of the difference engagement makes in their academic achievement. Disengaged students are considered at risk with the danger of becoming dropouts (Peixoto et al., 2017). The belief of the researchers has implied the importance of addressing disengagement in the early years of education. Most importantly, the research has revealed the long-term impact of student disengagement, showing educators need to consider

ways to improve student engagement for students to do well in school and life. Additionally, research on disengagement has implications in society with students being considered at risk in many areas.

### **Possible Outcomes of Student Disengagement**

Student disengagement has been identified as having possible negative outcomes “including delinquency, violence, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and school dropout” (Yang, Bear, & May, 2018, p. 45) and “poor mental and physical health, and involvement in crime” (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015, p. 37). Research has shown that disengagement often results in students having social issues, behavioral problems, and are withdrawn, these having adverse impact on the student’s life (Phan, 2014). This research considered the possible negative outcomes of student disengagement.

Students who are disengaged may not have a sense of connection to learning, which may result in below-proficient levels in their academic classes where the disengagement is taking place (McDermott et al., 2017). The implications of students not being engaged in learning indicates the disengagement often leads to failure in school, which could lead to students dropping out of school (Cipriano et al., 2019). Student academic disengagement, which could be influenced by factors in school and from their home environment, has indicated students are at a much higher risk of becoming high-school dropouts (Lee-St. John et al., 2018). Furthermore, research has implied that students who have early inventions in pre-school and elementary school will reduce their risk of later becoming dropouts (Lee-St. John et al., 2018). In addition, students who are disengaged in learning may become withdrawn and experience social issues with their peers, leaving them feeling alone (Pyne, 2019). Also, disengaged students are at a higher risk of dropping out of school; therefore, teachers have a responsibility to enhance a

learning environment, giving students a classroom that will promote student engagement (Lerdpornkulrat, Koul, & Poondelj, 2018).

Students' disengagement in elementary school level may have long-term impacts on students' educational years, causing difficulties in secondary school, college, and their future careers (Gremmen, van den Berg, Steglich, C., Veenstra, & Dijkstra, 2018). Some students, though not dropping out, due to disengagement, may be ill prepared for life beyond high school, even though they may have graduated (Washor et al., 2014). Disengagement in school may develop negative learning patterns that may have long-term impact on a student's life (Phan, 2014).

### **Causes of Disengagement**

A study conducted on college students who were considered disengaged used three predictors: the first was students coming from disadvantage backgrounds, where their families had not attended college; the second was students who did not do well in high school or had weaker academic backgrounds; and the third was their choice of majors, having an impact on their engagement (Brint & Cantwell, 2014). As a result of this research, one needs to consider both disadvantaged students and their parents' background in education when discussing disengagement. Disadvantaged students, students at-risk, include children living in poverty who often "suffer from poor nutrition, poor health care, and little educational stimulation" (Barr & Parrett, 2007, p. 22). Students living in low socioeconomic communities are at times disengaged as a result of concerns from their environment that "may include poverty, a lack of social skills, an unstable support system, or even a disillusioned concept of school as a whole" (Hanna, 2014, p. 224). However, researchers have different views on the influence of poverty on engagement and academic achievement. In fact, research conducted in England suggested that teachers have



lower expectations for students living in poverty, a view which may have a negative influence on students' academics (Thompson, McNicholl, & Menter, 2016). Teachers having low expectations may negatively impact their teaching approach, which may not be effective in teaching to the needs of their students (Thompson et al., 2016).

**Low socioeconomics.** Although there seems to be conflict about the reasons students who live in low socioeconomic communities struggle, there is truth in the different causes of disengagement, which depends on the school environment and the student. For example, teachers' belief systems or their expectations of student achievement will affect students' academic outcome (Jensen, 2009). Research was conducted with four students who were immigrants from Mexico who entered the United States' school system in their elementary years (Barajas-Lopez, 2014). Two of the students were in a classroom environment with low expectations; the result was they were disengaged, resulting in mathematic deficiencies. However, two of the students' learning environment had high expectations, where they were engaged in learning and were successful in mathematics (Barajas-Lopez, 2014). Research has suggested students living in low socioeconomic homes may often struggle with doing well in school as a result of unpleasant circumstances in their lives (Jensen, 2009). Also, students from low socioeconomic environments may struggle with engagement in school, resulting in lower academic achievement (Yue, Rico, Vang, & Giuffrida, 2018). In view of the different research, one could agree that a teacher's expectations and belief in student success play a role in student engagement and academic achievement. Additionally, students living in low socioeconomic environment often have circumstances in their lives that provide challenges for the student to be engaged in learning.

Furthermore, Brint and Cantwell (2014) implied that another predictor of disengagement is students having parents who do not have a higher-level of education. Academic gaps are very evident among students from families with higher levels of education compared to families that are disadvantaged and do not have higher levels of education (Burger & Walk, 2016). It can be concluded that parents who are raising children in low socioeconomic circumstances will often have unskilled jobs as a result of their own lack of education and may not be able to assist their children with schoolwork. These parents may also believe that higher education is not an option (Payne, 2005). To further conclude, parents living in low socioeconomic environments may not value education or discuss education with their children, which may be a predictor of disengagement; however, it is difficult to determine if the disengagement is the result of a lack of education of the parents or the result of the stressors that low socioeconomic circumstances puts on a student.

It is not always easy to understand the circumstances that children who live in low socioeconomic communities face every day and how those circumstances may cause students to be disengaged. Many scholars believe that among minority students living in low socioeconomic communities' disengagement is at higher levels with a greater number of students dropping out of school (Fredricks et al., 2019). Consequently, low socioeconomic and minority students who are struggling with disengagement are a concern for all stakeholders to consider how to promote higher levels of engagement in them.

**Anxiety and boredom.** Student disengagement is a complex issue. Anxiety disorders and unhealthy and violent behavior may affect student engagement as well as academic achievement (Cunsolo, 2017). For example, a cause for disengagement is students wanting to avoid work as a result of anxiety, believing that if they do not do well, their self-esteem may be

hurt (Peixoto, et al., 2017). To put it another way, students may sometimes not want to be engaged since they do not want to appear as failures by not understanding the work requirements. One study “showed that emotions, defined as academic emotions which include, [sic] hope, pride, relief, anxiety, anger, shame, boredom, and hopelessness, were significantly related to academic achievement, student motivation, learning strategies, self-regulation, and value appraisals” (Pentaraki & Burkholder, 2017, p. 4). Therefore, students’ emotions may have a negative or positive influence on their engagement; students who have a higher level of positive emotions are normally more involved in classroom participation (Pentaraki & Burkholder, 2017). One may conclude from the research that students’ emotional well-being influences negatively or positively their engagement in the classroom and academic achievement.

Another negative emotion important in disengagement is boredom, which decreases student engagement in the classroom (Eren & Coskun, 2016). Boredom may be caused by several factors, one being the lack of interest or the desire to escape a situation, resulting in student disengagement (Weinerman & Kenner, 2016). Originally it was considered that gifted students were more bored, but research has discovered that the students with the higher level of boredom had intelligence quotient (IQ) of less than 95, with boredom correlated to lower academic ability (Pekrun, Goetz, Daniels, Stupnisky, & Perry, 2010). To compensate for this correlation, teachers could provide additional strategies for students who show signs of being bored to encourage motivation and engagement (Eren & Coskun, 2016). Hence, teachers need to consider why they feel their students are bored and to try various strategies to promote engagement in the classroom.

**Classroom learning environment.** Disengagement is also related to classroom environments, with students needing a classroom where they feel comfortable (Shernoff, Ruzek, & Sinha, 2017). In a classroom where students do not feel trust and a good relationship with their teacher, disengagement is more prevalent (Hanna, 2014). Also, fear may cause disengagement; for example, students might feel embarrassed in front of their classmates by not knowing an answer or the information (Hanna, 2014). Social interaction among peers is so important to students that they may not really be disengaged but acting a certain way to protect their image (Hanna, 2014). For that reason, teachers and administrators could create learning environments that make children feel safe and build positive social interaction for the students, so they feel supported by their peers. To conclude, there are numerous causes of student disengagement that should be considered by educators to solve the problem of disengagement in their classroom.

**Special educational needs (SEN).** Students with SEN will most likely have challenges in being engaged in the classroom and may have behavioral, emotional, and social issues that will hinder their academic success (Moreira et al., 2015). There are students who struggle with inattention and hyperactivity who may struggle with engagement and may need support, such as receiving rewards, to help keep their interest (Olivier & Archambault, 2017). One SEN, attention/deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), is a neurodevelopmental disorder prevalent that relates to students struggling academically in school, possibly caused by a decrease in student engagement (Zendarski, Sciberras, Mensah, & Hiscock, 2017). ADHD is considered a SEN, with students often struggling to be engaged in learning as a result of their challenge to be attentive (Moreira et al., 2015). As noted, students who have been diagnosed with ADHD will often show signs of disengagement during classroom instruction (Tegtmejer, 2019). Their

“inattentive behavior is usually attributed to underlying deficits in sustained attention rather than escape/avoidance behavior” (Orban, Rapport, Friedman, Eckrich, & Kofler, 2018). In other words, students with ADHD may have difficulty staying engaged as a result of their neurodevelopmental disorder. Another important issue of students with ADHD is often they have difficulty with their peers, having feelings of rejection as a result of their classroom behavioral, such as “being off-task, troublesome, rude, and incapable of self-control” (Capodieci, Rivetti, & Cornoldi, 2019, p. 282). Peers in school play a role in providing others with support to do well academically and to be engaged in learning (Gremmen et al., 2018). Specifically, students who feel accepted by their peers will most likely be emotionally and socially more adjusted, resulting in higher levels of engagement in school and being academically successful (Gallardo & Barrasa, 2016). This research showed educators the value of developing positive peer relationships for students with ADHD to promote acceptance and higher levels of student engagement.

Unfortunately, students are sometimes faced with traumatic occurrences in their lives, resulting in mental health issues that often cause disengagement in school; these students are considered at-risk for academic failure (Hutchinson, 2015). The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) stated that in 2018 the most critical issue that principals in the kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade were facing was emotional health issues (Franks, 2018). Mental health issues are a growing concern in school with students who struggle with depression, mood disorders, and possible aggressive behavior that result in students acting out in a negative manner and not being engaged in their education (Marsh, 2016).

## Engagement

Students' disengagement is a problem; therefore, the objective is to have students engaged, so it is important to look at what research has implied about student engagement to help solve the problem of disengagement. Barta (2018) explained that educators view student engagement as a key for student achievement and success: "Student engagement is often considered to be among the better predictors of student learning and development" (Burch, Heller, Burch, Freed, & Steed, 2015, p.224). One may conclude that educators realize that student engagement is an indicator that students will do well academically in one's classroom. Specifically, student engagement includes maintaining good attendance, having a desire to learn, being prepared for learning, and participating in learning activities (Cipriano et al., 2019). Students who are engaged may be more eager to learn and usually achieve higher levels of academics, with long- and short-term implications (Cipriano et al., 2019). A study based on 14 universities, using Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores and National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) pointed out that "Student engagement is linked positively to desirable learning outcomes such as critical thinking and grades" (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006, p. 23). Also, students with lower academic abilities benefited from engagement (Carini et al., 2006). In other words, students who are engaged are doing what they are supposed to be doing in the classroom, having a desire to learn, and actively participating in a positive manner in the classroom.

Student engagement has been defined in numerous ways in research, and many studies have linked engagement with motivation; therefore, for this study it was important to differentiate between motivation and engagement. Teachers have expressed that student engagement is measurable since one can see signs of students working on projects, asking

questions, and responding to the class academics, whereas motivation is internal for a student (Lee & Reeve, 2012). Motivation may be defined as students finding within themselves meaning for learning and personal value in achieving academics (Yilmaz, Sahin, & Turgut, 2017). Motivation may be the result of desire to succeed and not do poorly in school or the desire to master their understanding of what they are learning (Carrabba & Farmer, 2018). Primarily, motivation comes from within a student, but engagement has outward signs of students' involvement in learning. Student motivation may often be a forecaster of a students' engagement in the classroom (Lee & Reeve, 2012). One study with fifth graders in a math class expressed the opinion that when students' motivation decreased in mathematics, the result was a decline in their engagement (Deveci & Aldan Karademir, 2019). Undoubtedly, student motivation will impact student engagement.

Student engagement encompasses many areas, such as how students feel about others in their school and how they feel others think about them (Booker, 2018). Student engagement is defined as students placing their energy and devotion into learning during class time and out of the classroom (Burch et al., 2015). Research has shown that students who have higher levels of engagement in class receive more engaged interactions with the teacher and with their peers (Vollet et al., 2017). To summarize, students who are engaged in learning generally have a positive feeling about learning and focus their energy because of a desire to learn; the result is getting positive attention from their teacher, which promotes higher levels of engagement.

Classroom engagement is viewed in three different areas: behavioral engagement, where students demonstrate that they can stay on task; cognitive engagement, where students are able to focus on learning concepts; and emotional engagement, based on the positive or negative responses with people in their learning environment (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Engagement is

multidimensional, consisting of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagements that often overlap each other (Quin, Hemphill, & Heerde, 2017). Therefore, disengagement, according to the research, may be evident in very different ways with students; in addition, some students may have a combination-type of disengagement. Hence, as a result of three types of disengagement, this review will discuss each one in greater detail.

**Behavioral engagement.** Behavioral disengagement often results in students' decline in attendance and participation in the school (Anderson et al, 2019). Behavioral engagement is viewed in three ways: first is conduct engagement, how students socially interact and follow the classroom rules; second is students' involvement in the learning taking place in the classroom; and third is their involvement in other school activities (Hughes et al., 2008). Following Astin's (1984) student involvement theory, the research pointed to the importance of students being involved in school to promote student engagement. Another view of behavioral engagement is students having positive behavior in the classroom: doing what they are supposed to be doing, actively participating in class, and staying involved with the school (Balwant, 2018). Most importantly, teachers and administrators desire to have their students engaged in ways the engagement is easily seen by teachers that work with their students daily. One may conclude that students' social interactions and students' compliance with rules may be indicators for a teacher to evaluate students' behavioral engagement. The value of student involvement for behavioral engagement aligns with Astin's (1984) theory of students being more engaged and achieving higher academically when they are involved in their school activities. According to Lee and Reeve (2012), teachers identify students being engaged by their attentiveness to being on-task and having determination to complete the learning activities.



Detrimental behavioral issues in elementary school students have been shown to be a predictor of middle- and high-school students achieving lower academically, not attending school, and displaying criminal behavior (Anyon et al., 2016). Students with early academic problems are at-risk for later academic issues such as dropping out (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011). Students who are disengaged may have behavioral issues, poor attendance by not attending school or being suspended, failing grades, and negative social interactions (Quin et al., 2017). Considering the problem of disengagement in the younger grades, it is important to research disengagement to promote positive academic outcomes. Behavioral engagement is evident when students are participating with the learning, asking questions, following the rules of the classroom, and are actively involved in other activities of the school (Balwant, 2018). Therefore, this research may benefit schools by suggesting multiple activities to involve students, thereby allowing them to develop connectedness through participating in these various activities.

**Cognitive engagement.** When students have cognitive engagement, they have “psychological investment in and effort directed towards learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills or crafts” (Balwant, 2018, p. 395). Cognitive engagement is viewed as students feeling they understand skills and have the knowledge to do the work (Barta, 2018). Furthermore, cognitive engagement aligns with the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which states students have a need for competency. Cognitive engagement has been defined as students being invested in learning, with a desire to master the information (Balwant, 2018). Students who are cognitively engaged set goals and develop strategies to take on academic challenges to learn and grow in knowledge (Balwant, 2018). Overall, cognitive engagement is valued in education and needs to be researched to find better solutions to help students succeed.

**Emotional engagement.** Emotional engagement is evident when a person shows an interest, has a feeling of being connected with others, or displays excitement to be a part of learning; on the other hand, disengagement is seen when a person shows signs of being bored or aggravated (Pentaraki & Burkholder, 2017). Balwant (2018) defined emotional engagement as “feelings of energy, enthusiasm and other positive affective states” (p. 392). The definition for emotional engagement is conceptualizing on how students feel about being in school and learning. Students who are engaged will often have feelings of “interest, enjoyment, happiness, hope and pride” (Balwant, 2018, p. 395), while students who are disengaged may show signs of “boredom, sadness, frustration, anger and anxiety” (Balwant, 2018, p. 395). Therefore, teachers should be able to identify students’ emotional engagement and develop classroom practices to promote healthy emotional engagement.

A study was conducted in Finland with urban high-school students to see how emotional engagement and student burnout influenced their academic achievement (Wang, Chow, Hofkens, & Salmela-Aro, 2015). The results of this study indicated that emotional disengagement may not be a predictor of students’ academic achievement; instead, this study concluded that behavior and cognitive disengagement may be better predictors of students’ academic achievement (Wang et al., 2015). This study implied that a student’s emotional disengagement may not necessarily predict a student’s academic failure; however, students who are more engaged will enjoy their school experience more than the students who are emotionally disengaged (Wang et al., 2015). Emotional engagement may be an indicator of a student’s liking or disliking school (Quin et al., 2017). Emotional engagement may be measured by asking students how they feel about school, their relationship with their teachers, and how they feel about their schoolwork (Quin et al., 2017). In other words, students’ positive or negative feelings may be indicators to the teacher of

the students' emotional engagement. Students who enjoy and are interested in learning show signs of emotional engagement (Barta, 2018).

### **Interventions**

Since research has verified the problem of disengagement and the importance of engagement, consideration needs to be given to research promoting student engagement. Students who are disengaged must be challenged to change their pattern and actively engage in learning (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015). The purpose of this applied research was to solve the problem of student disengagement for an elementary school in a low socioeconomic district in central New Jersey and to formulate a solution to address the problem. For this reason, this study needed to consider interventions that promote student engagement.

**Learning environment and climate.** A school's climate consists of such factors as the safety in a school, the support students feel to achieve academically, and the discipline, the physical environment, and personal interaction (U. S. Department of Education, 2009). (Animosa, Lindstrom Johnson, & Cheng, 2018, p. 53). According to Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral, (2009), school climate consists of the values, the practices that are part of the norm of the school, the organization of the school, and the various school-life experiences. Furthermore, "school climate includes academic, community, safety, and institutional environment dimensions that 'encompass just every feature of the school environment that impacts cognitive, behavioral, and psychological development'" (Cornell, Shukla, & Konold, 2016, p. 1). By understanding reasons for student disengagement teacher, may develop a classroom environment which promotes higher levels of student engagement (Hanna, 2014). Undoubtedly, classroom environment is important when encouraging student engagement. Additionally, research implies laughter in the classroom is another means for supporting student

engagement (Hanna, 2014). According to Pentaraki and Burkholder (2017), humor increases student engagement by reducing stress. These studies reveal there are many factors that contribute to developing healthy learning environments and climate.

Teachers influence student engagement by the culture they develop in the classroom through their classroom management and instructional practices (Hamm, Farmer, Lambert, & Gravelle, 2014). When teachers do not have lessons that engage the students, negative classroom behavior may result in a classroom environment that does not promote engagement and academic achievement (Hamm et al. 2014).

Also, research points out that a classroom is considered effective when “students are actively involved in learning processes, feel comfortable, and their efficacy and adaptive patterns of engagement are promoted” (Brekelmans, Mainhard, den Brok, & Wubbels, 2011, p. 17). Effective classroom management is evident when teachers give clear expectations, develop routines, and manage appropriate behavior in the classroom, all of which develop a respectful learning environment (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). Classroom management may be defined as “the actions teachers take to create a supportive environment for the academic and social-emotional learning of students” (Korpershoek, Harms, de Boer, van Kuijk, & Doolaard, 2016, p. 644). In other words, a well-managed classroom may provide a safe environment where students clearly understand the expectations for the class, resulting in higher levels of student engagement.

In an effective, well-managed classroom environment the teacher should establish the opportunity for students to do independent learning and use organized teaching practices (Yilmaz et al., 2017). Indicators of a teacher’s having a quality classroom environment may include a classroom where students feel teachers care for them, the teacher’s lesson maximizes learning, the teacher has established rules and procedures that provide a safe, encouraging learning

environment, the teacher encourages students in their social skills, students are provided interventions when needed to help regulate their behavior, and students take responsibility for their actions (Korpershoek et al., 2016). A study about school environment provided data showing that students are highly engaged when the school has a strong and consistent authoritative environment (Cornell et al., 2016). Authoritative school environments consist of rules that are fair but strictly enforced, and “student support refers to student perceptions that their teachers and other school staff members treat them with respect and want them to succeed” (Cornell et al., 2016, p. 2). Another study indicated there may be a higher rate of disengagement when discipline has been harsh (Fredricks et al., 2019). However, the emphasis on the research about authoritative learning environments suggests the importance of consistency and fairness, not harshness in discipline. Centrally, to promote student engagement, the teacher needs to maintain a well-managed classroom that has consistency, fairness, and respect; the classroom needs to be a place where students feel safe in the learning process.

**Instructional strategies.** Cooperative learning (CL) is defined as students working in small groups to collectively work together, which requires “skills like decision making, communication management, and conflict resolution” (Capodieci et al., 2019). CL allows students with behavior and social impairment such as ADHD to develop social skills and develop better relationships with their peers, increasing their attentiveness and engagement in learning (Capodieci et al., 2019). Additionally, teachers who provide engaging activities for students in doing projects and working in groups with their peers will promote student engagement (Cooper, 2014).

Research was conducted in a math class in Sydney with 12<sup>th</sup> graders to see if task values, students seeing a value in what they are learning, will make a difference in student engagement

or disengagement (Phan, 2014). The results showed that students not seeing a value in what they were learning had an influence on their being disengaged (Phan, 2014). One may conclude from this research that teachers need to include in their lessons why what the students are learning is valuable for them to know. Similarly, collective argumentation is another teaching strategy that promotes collaborative discussions where “students are comparing, explaining, justifying, and agreeing, the teacher listens to and observes the students before asking questions, or seeking explanations and justifications” (Marshman & Brown, 2014, p. 73). Students that were disengaged in a high-school mathematics class participated in a research study where collective argumentation was the framework for the class, with the students being able to collaborate and seeing the real world application of the math being learned; the outcome was engaged students when the teacher used collective argumentation strategies in the classroom (Marshman & Brown, 2014).

Students who are motivated to learn will most often be connected to higher levels of student engagement and academic success (Hornstra, Kamsteeg, Pot, & Verheij, 2018). Motivation can be defined as “a set of beliefs that drive and sustain behavior and is an important precursor to learning and success in school” (Kiefer et al., 2015, p. 1). The goal of educators is for students to develop intrinsic motivation, which is promoted according to the self-determination theory when they feel autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Students are considered to have intrinsic motivation when they desire to learn because they love to learn, think learning is fun, enjoyable, and stimulating (Zainuddin & Perera, 2019). Autonomy allows a student to feel in control of their learning (Doctoroff & Arnold, 2017), which happens when the classroom is student-centered versus teacher centered (Fredricks, et al., 2019). When using

strategies for teaching autonomy, the educator may do the following suggested by Ulstad, Halvari, Sorebo, and Deci (2018):

Listen to students perceived problems and/or challenges with school work and discuss potential solutions with them, respond to questions, offer choice, minimize external control, recognize and respect their feelings, provide meaningful reasons for activities, prepare information that is necessary for making decisions and executing defined task, and facilitate training in the use of selected learning strategies (p. 498).

This research implied that teachers may benefit by using teaching strategies to promote student autonomy. The next area educators should consider is how to help students have a feeling of competency, meaning they believe they will be successful and master their understanding of their work (Doctoroff & Arnold, 2017). Teachers may foster competency in their students by providing academic challenges and giving quality feedback to their students (Doctoroff & Arnold, 2017). A teacher who promotes competency is focused on the student showing improvement in mastering their understanding of the information rather than just completing work (Fredricks et al., 2019). Finally, relatedness refers to students feeling as if they belong, they have value, and they feel accepted in the learning environment (Doctoroff & Arnold, 2017). Teaching strategies to promote relatedness may include students working in small groups with their peers and allowing social interaction within the classroom (Zainuddin & Perera, 2019). This research revealed the importance of teachers including strategies that would promote students to have a sense of autonomy, competency, and relatedness to increase student motivation and engagement in the classroom.

Another important instructional strategy is project-based learning, where students work in a collaborative environment, making decisions with their peers on their project, promoting

growth in autonomy, competency, and relatedness, allowing higher levels of student engagement (Carrabba & Farmer, 2018). Research revealed that students given the opportunity to take part in project-based learning will find it to be student-centered learning environment where students are able to be creative, to develop critical thinking, and to act on what they are learning, resulting in an increase in student engagement (Carrabba & Farmer, 2018). A teacher who is conducting a project-based teaching strategy will present a challenging problem to the students, engaging the students by allowing them to collaborate on solving the problem (Thys, Verschaffel, Van Dooren, & Laevers, 2016). Furthermore, project-based learning not only increases student engagement but also prepares students with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills needed in the workplace such as communication, application of their learning, critical thinking skills, and the ability to work with others (Hunter & Botchwey, 2017). The evidence in the research showed the value of teachers using project-based learning in their classroom to increase student engagement.

According to Cooper (2014), teachers who develop rigorous lesson plans will have slightly higher student engagement as a result of the work being challenging, with the teacher showing a value and passion for student learning of their subject matter. Also, research has shown students' motivation and engagement is strengthened when teachers have expectations that are realistic for student achievement (Kiefer et al., 2015). Furthermore, studies have shown the impact teacher expectations have on student engagement and academic achievement; therefore, it is important for teachers to have appropriate expectations with support systems to promote student success (Pantaleo, 2016).

**Teacher and student relationships.** Multiple research studies have been conducted about the importance of teacher-student relationships, with evidence has shown positive teacher-student relationships will promote student engagement (Yang et al., 2018). On the other hand,



research has also indicated that negative teacher-student relationship will increase student disengagement (Roorda, Jak, Zee, Oort, & Koomen, 2017). After all, students will most likely spend more time with their teachers than any other adults. A student who has a positive relationship with his or her teacher will most likely have a positive school experience that results in good behavior and academic achievement (Cook et al., 2018). Teachers' attitudes, behavior, and belief systems may positively or negatively influence students' attitudes toward learning in school (Yilmaz et al., 2017). A key role in the student's feeling successful and having a sense of enjoyment for learning in school is predicted by the teacher and student engagement in the classroom (Booker, 2018). Research indicates because younger students are very malleable the teacher's relationship with the student should promote a love and curiosity for learning while giving positive emotional support to the student (Koca, 2016). Teachers' caring and involvement with their students are indicators of students being emotionally and behaviorally engaged (Nie & Lau, 2017). Student engagement and motivation for learning increases when the students feel their teacher genuinely cares for them, the teacher has respect for the students, with a desire to hear their opinions, and shows concern for how the students feel (Ruzek et al., 2016). Therefore, the value of teacher-student relationships should be considered to promote student engagement.

Teachers who create an environment where students feel accepted and cared for by the teachers will most likely have good behavior in the classroom because the students have a desire to meet the expectations of the teacher (Hughes et al., 2008). Booker (2018) conducted research with five middle-school teachers to get their perspectives on how they created a healthy learning environment that promoted students feeling as if they belonged. The teachers that participated in the interviews stressed the importance of the teacher to role model honesty, to show respect, to

develop a positive rapport with the students, and to articulate their expectations for student behavior and academic achievement (Booker, 2018). The teachers encouraged the students to be caring for one another and provided opportunities to collaborate to build positive peer relationships (Booker, 2018). Certainly, teachers need to be role models for their students and develop a caring environment where students desire to do well. Students feeling that teachers care and have a positive relationship with them will promote higher academic achievements for the students (Cunsolo, 2017). On the other hand, students who feel opposition and a lack of support from their teachers will often have lower academic scores (Cunsolo, 2017). Research conducted in Delaware consisting of 25,896 students participating in a study with students from elementary through high school revealed the importance of teacher-student relationships, as well as student-student relationships being cultivated, to be positive, promoting higher levels of academic engagement (Yang et al., 2018). As a result of this research, one could conclude that teacher-student relationships play a key role in student engagement, behavior, and academic achievement.

Another relevant study was conducted using a mixed-method approach that included interviewing 18 middle-school students about teacher and peer influence on student engagement, motivation, and students feeling connected with the school (Kiefer et al., 2015). Data collected from students' perspectives was important to consider for this literature review. This study found that students feeling respect from their teachers and having a positive perception of belonging in the classroom translated into students being engaged in the classroom (Kiefer et al., 2015). Developing a respectful classroom and school environment should be considered by teachers and administrators to increase student engagement.

Teachers need to develop a learning environment where students have autonomy, which allows them to take ownership of their learning, and which promotes higher levels of student engagement (Kiefer et al., 2015). Autonomy is one of the psychological needs noted in the theory of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Allowing students to have autonomy in their learning promotes student motivation, increases their desire to master their understanding, and increases their engagement (Ruzek et al., 2016). Although research has suggested that autonomy promotes student engagement, a balance is needed, according to other research on monitoring students' work. Students who participated in an interview commented on the value of teachers monitoring and supporting their engagement; monitoring was viewed as teachers checking on students' understanding, giving feedback and listening to the students (Kiefer et al., 2015). Based on this information, teachers should consider how well they are monitoring their students by listening to them and providing appropriate feedback, while still allowing the students to take ownership of their learning.

Another study was conducted to determine the accuracy of teachers being able to accurately estimate a student's classroom engagement. The results showed teachers' estimates were accurate (Lee & Reeve, 2012). Student engagement is measured by students listening, participating, taking notes, asking questions, and interacting with the teacher (Fuller et al., 2018). According to Lei et al., (2018), student engagement is evident when students are "actively involved in their learning tasks and activities" (p. 517). The results of the research by Lee and Reeve (2012) cautioned that the teachers may do a disservice when they believe their students were disengaged; rather they should focus on how to provide instruction that would improve their students' engagement. To put it another way, teachers should be careful not to just label students as being disengaged since their belief may impact students negatively.

Research has also confirmed the value of teacher-student relationship. Research by Kiefer et al., (2015) was based on giving surveys to middle-school students, teachers, and an administrator; the results showed that teacher relationships, which included making connections with the students and being available to give them support, promoted higher levels of classroom engagement as well as a sense of belonging. Another study stated that students who were considered at-risk desired their teacher to create a safe environment, making them feel connected to the classroom (Hutchinson, 2015). Even if the students did not respond positively in the beginning, they still desired the teacher to show she cared about them (Hutchinson, 2015). Students who are disengaged often do not receive the positive interactions with their teachers or feel the teachers care because of their negative responses in class; however, they are the students that may benefit the most by having a positive teacher-student relationship (Fredricks et al., 2019). The research confirms the importance of connections for students, which aligns with the theory of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Teachers build positive relationships with students by modeling respect, promoting a safe learning environment, and doing whatever they can to promote their students' learning (Ginsberg, 2015). Research findings showed the importance of teachers in "modeling appropriate social interactions, providing meaningful opportunities for positive social interactions, developing personal relationships with all students" (Fredricks et al., 2019, p. 519). By developing an understanding through research of the importance of teacher-student relationships, teachers may find ways to promote positive relationships with their students.

**Student and peer relationships.** Astin's (1999) student involvement theory was based on the value of students having positive peer relationships in school to promote engagement and academic achievement. Peer relationships play a crucial role in a student's behavior and

outcomes in school (Booker, 2018). Students have a desire for their peers to understand and accept them, which may build a sense of their feeling connected with their peers (Pendergast, Allen, McGregor, & Ronksley-Pavia, 2018). Often the discussion of peer influence concerns the impact peers have on unacceptable behavior; however, peer influence may also impact the peers in a positive manner, inspiring them to have positive social interactions, encouraging them to do well academically, and promoting engagement in learning (Ruzek et al., 2016). Students form a culture within their grade as a result of their shared experiences and the desired behavior among their peers (Hamm et al., 2014). Since students desire to fit in with their peers, the result is that behavior occurs based on the expectations of behavior that has been established by the culture of the classroom (Hamm et al., 2014). Friendships and positive peer relationships strengthens students' feeling of being connected to school and increases academic engagement (Gallardo & Barrasa, 2016). The challenge is facilitating positive peer relationships among students since building these relationships may result in higher levels of academic engagement (Xerri, Radford, & Shacklock, 2018). A study by Kiefer et al., (2015) indicated that all the participants believed that positive peer academic support promoted classroom engagement, improved academic achievement, and increased a sense of belonging.

Teachers play a crucial role in developing a learning environment that promotes students developing positive peer relationships (Ryan, Kuusinen, & Bedoya-Skoog, 2015). "Peers can inspire prosocial or antisocial behavior, make a student feel safe and valued or threatened and victimized, and can serve to bolster motivation and engagement or distract and lead to off-task behavior" (Ryan et al., 2015, p. 148). For example, students may fear judgement by their peers by answering questions or asking for additional help (Hamm et al., 2014). When the learning environment has promoted peer support and the classroom culture developed is one that accepts

students making mistakes and being encouraged by their peers, students will grow in engagement and achievement (Hamm et al., 2014).

Since peer acceptance plays such a critical role in students' engagement and academic achievement, schools should provide programs that will support positive peer relationships (Gallardo & Barrasa, 2016). A study was conducted on how students' seating arrangements in an elementary school would influence student engagement and academic achievement (Gremmen et al., 2018). The results showed that students sitting next to friends who were academically engaged and who had higher levels of academic achievement had positive influence on their peers; however, students sitting near a peer who was not their friend had a negative influence and the dissimilarities grew wider (Gremmen et al., 2018). Therefore, this study implied that when teachers have students who are high achievers sit by low achievers who are not friends, their differences in engagement and academic achievement will only increase, whereas if the students become friends, there may be a positive influence that will result in higher engagement and academic achievement (Gremmen, 2018). Therefore, research confirms the influence peers have on one another. Thus, it would benefit schools to promote healthy peer relationships to have positive influences to increase student engagement.

**Connected in school.** Student engagement is important so that teachers can promote an effective learning environment. When students believe the teachers and their peers care they will feel a greater sense of connectedness in school (Cunsolo, 2017). Furthermore, "students who feel connected to their school are more likely to have better academic achievement, including higher grades and test scores, have better school attendance, and stay in school longer" (Cunsolo, 2017, p. 91). Teachers play the key role in helping students to feel connected by purposefully building positive relationships with them to make all students feel emotionally connected to the

class (Cooper, 2014). Students who do not feel a connection to school will often not see the value in what is being taught in the classroom (Hannah, 2014). Research conducted with 275,000 high-school students who participated in a student-engagement survey showed that students believed they had higher levels of classroom engagement when the teachers made each student in their classroom feel a sense of connectedness by making them believe they cared for the students and by giving positive affirmation (Cooper, 2014).

The self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985) discussed the value of students feeling a sense of relatedness, or belonging, and competence as basic psychological needs. Students who are not interested in what is taking place in the classroom or school may not have social interactions with their peers, and they may not feel connected to their learning environment, possibly resulting in lower engagement in learning (Ruzek et al., 2016). Students who do not have academic competency may feel they do not belong and do not have a sense of connectedness (Ruzek et al., 2016). One could conclude that students who have a sense of connection at school will promote higher levels of student engagement. Additionally, providing lower levels of stress for students will promote school connectedness and positively influence school engagement (Cunsolo, 2017). Also, since social behavioral problems provoke stress, encouraging student connectedness is an important factor in helping to relieve stress (Cunsolo, 2017). Since it is important for students to feel connected in school, there should be emphasis placed on promoting healthy social behaviors to provide a higher level of connectedness in the classroom.

**Technology.** Some research has indicated that the key to engaging students academically is “using social media critically and intentionally to optimize learning outcomes” (Dassa & Vaughan, 2018, p. 44). A two-week study in Taiwan with middle-school students was conducted

to see if using an interactive response system (IRS), which is considered gamified learning, would improve student engagement and motivation in learning English (Chih-Yuan Sun & Pei-Hsun, 2018). Gamification is a term that is used to indicate electronic or digital games used for the purpose of education (Ling, 2018). The IRS provided students with instant feedback; students felt challenged since they desired to master the games, which resulted in improvement in classroom participation and increased engagement (Chih-Yuan Sun & Pei-Hsun, 2018). The conclusion was that for students participating in the IRS, using gamified learning increased behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during the two weeks of the program (Chih-Yuan Sun & Pei-Hsun, 2018). Gamification embraces Deci & Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory since students feel challenged by building their competency; students are given opportunities to try new games, promoting autonomy; and students have a sense of connection with their peers and teacher, supporting relatedness (Ling, 2018).

Furthermore, research was conducted over 10 years on how using technology, specifically using tablets, impacted student learning; the results were that students had higher grades with higher levels of student engagement since the tablets gave opportunity for peer learning (Robson & Basse, 2018). Student engagement increases when students take ownership of their learning and see real world applications, which using technology in the classroom provides, allowing them to participate in learning beyond the classroom, preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Varier et al., 2017). A study was conducted with 18 different classrooms from elementary through high school to evaluate if every student having a technology device, such as tablet or computer, would impact student engagement and motivation (Varier et al., 2017). Teachers and students who participated in the study believed this technology improved the students' motivation and engagement since students stated that technology made learning more



enjoyable and assignments easier to complete (Varier et al., 2017). Since it seems technology has much to offer for student learning and research implies that technology enhances student engagement, it would benefit schools to include appropriate technology within the school's curriculum.

**Parent involvement.** Research conducted by Park and Holloway (2017) revealed the importance of parent involvement in their children's education is related to higher levels of student achievement and engagement in school. An intervention program for students with behavioral problems in school, called Check-In Check-Out (CICO) required parents' involvement by them receiving daily reports from the school, resulting in students having an increase in their engagement and a decrease in their behavioral problems (Bunch-Crump & Lo, 2017, p. 224). Parental involvement at school and at home both showed evidence of supporting an increase in student engagement and motivation to learn (Wong et al., 2018). When parents are actively involved with the school and have developed good communication with the teachers, a stronger teacher-student relationship promoted (Wong et al., 2018). Research was conducted to determine the impact and influence parents' expectation of their child's education would have on students' academic performance (Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017). The research concluded that children are especially influenced by their parents' expectations, especially in primary and elementary years (Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017).

In addition, parent involvement and engagement in their child's education supports student engagement in school and higher academic achievement (Jeynes, 2018). When parents check their child's homework, the child usually will have a higher rate of completing their work and increased learning engagement (Jeynes, 2018). Therefore, it is important for administrators and teachers to stress the importance of parents being involved in their child's education based

on the research that involved parents promote higher levels of academic achievement and student engagement (Kuru Cetin & Taskin, 2016).

**Social emotional learning (SEL).** The concept behind SEL is to help students to improve their behavioral, emotional, and social skills or everyday living (Martinez, 2016). Teacher-focused interventions have proven by research to be an effective means of promoting better student behavior (Anyon et al., 2016). SEL is a means to improve the school environment and provide support for students in the classroom since research has shown that “improving student engagement in school is to change the educational climate” (Cipriano et al., 2019, p. 2). Classroom management increases in effectiveness when students learn how to effectively handle their social and emotional development (Korpershoek et al., 2016). SEL inventions promote growth in the areas of “cognitive, affective, and behavior competencies” (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017, p. 1157). Students’ engagement is malleable, allowing students to improve engagement and have higher academic achievement; therefore, “student engagement can be improved by SEL interventions” (Cipriano et al., 2019, p. 5).

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was formed in 1994 with the purpose of developing and promoting SEL programs in schools (CASEL, 2019). It has been a leading organization in promoting SEL training, defining SEL as “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2019, para. 1). Indeed, SEL has become an important part of education. SEL promotes skills that will guide students in managing their emotions and develop critical thinking skills and positive behavior choices that will help improve their academic achievement (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). SEL has five different areas as part of its framework.

The first area is self-awareness, where students learn to distinguish their emotions; the second is self-management, teaching students to control their emotions; the third is social awareness, teaching students to have empathy; the fourth is relationship skills, showing students how to develop positive, healthy peer relationships; and the fifth is learning responsible decision-making and teaching students to make good choices in life (CASEL, 2019). The objective of teaching SEL skills is to help students manage their emotions and behaviors to be more engaged in school, with higher levels of academic achievement (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Research in Delaware with 25,896 students participating in the study from elementary through high school revealed that students considered the skills they learned from SEL promoted emotional- and cognitive-behavior engagement in school (Yang et al., 2018). Additionally, research showed that SEL programs when implemented properly promote students to be successful in school at all grade levels, including college and in all different school districts, including rural to low socioeconomic communities (Taylor et al., 2017). In conclusion, SEL may provide the needed emotional and behavioral support to equip students to handle their emotions and have greater understanding for others, resulting in higher levels of student engagement and academic achievement.

### **Summary**

Chapter Two began with establishing two theoretical frameworks that will guide this research about the problem of student disengagement. The self-determination theory, by Deci and Ryan (1985), explained that people have psychological needs that, when met, will promote motivation and engagement. The student involvement theory, by Astin (1984), explained how student involvement influences student engagement. Based on research, there is evidence that student engagement promotes academic achievement in school and in the students' future

(Wang, Kiuru, Degol, & Salmela-Aro, 2018). Consequently, disengaged students perform lower academically, which may result in negative outcomes during their time in school and later in life (Peixoto et al., 2017). Because of the research that shows the value of student engagement in school, this research was important to gather data to find a solution for disengagement. Specifically, the literature review included various causes of student disengagement and research-based solutions that have promoted student engagement. According to research, students living in low socioeconomic school districts have additional challenges in being engaged with learning because of the stresses in the students' homes and by families not putting emphasis on education (Jenson, 2009). As a result of the importance of student engagement and the additional needs of students living in low socioeconomic communities, this research may provide a solution for disengaged students to become students engaged in their learning in a low socioeconomic school district located in New Jersey.

## **CHAPTER THREE: PROPOSED METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this applied research study will be to solve the problem of student disengagement in an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district in central New Jersey and to formulate a solution to address the problem. The problem statement is: How can the problem of disengaged students be solved at Beacon Charter Elementary School located in central New Jersey?

Disengagement has been an issue in education, so it is a problem that needs to be addressed by administrators and teachers. Disengagement is defined as students displaying behaviors to avoid being on-task for learning, resulting in negative academic outcomes (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Students' disengagement in the classroom may impact their learning and can have negative, long-term influence on their futures. This chapter will begin with establishing the research design, presenting the research questions, establishing the setting, the participants, the researcher's role, the procedure that will be followed, the data collection, the analysis, and the ethical considerations.

### **Design**

An applied research multimethod research design will be used for this applied study. Applied research is designed to look at a problem and find a solution for that specific problem (Bickman & Rog, 2009). This research seeks to solve the problem of disengaged students at an elementary school in New Jersey and to formulate a solution to address the problem. An applied research multimethod design will be the most appropriate choice for this study because it will provide data through means of narrative and numerical to formulate a solution to address the problem of disengaged students in an elementary school located in New Jersey. The problem of

disengagement will be addressed through conducting an applied research study by collecting qualitative and quantitative data at an elementary school in central New Jersey. The issue of students being disengaged is considered critical since engagement is believed to be a key in students having academic success (Wang & Degol, 2014). The purpose of this multimethod approach will involve collecting and analyzing data through qualitative and quantitative methods to uncover solutions to the problem statement (Bickman & Rog, 2009). This research will gather information from one school and ask the teachers their opinions about student disengagement in their classroom and ask for possible solutions. Because credibility is strengthened when research uses triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018), three forms of data collection will be used to triangulate the data: interviews, a focus group, and a survey. The research will be designed to gather information from one school that has disengaged students, which makes the data useful and feasible.

Applied research focuses on gathering information about a problem that can be changed and influenced (Hedrick, Bickman, & Rog, 1993). Student engagement is “a good predictor of children’s long-term academic achievement” (Furrer & Skinner, 2003, p. 149). Connections with student disengagement have been made with students dropping out of school, having behavior issues, and having negative outcomes in their lives (Moses & Villodas, 2017). The impact student disengagement may have on a student’s life is the reason this research will be conducted to solve the problem of disengagement in an elementary school located in New Jersey. Engagement is malleable, provided students are given a positive learning environment that promotes engagement, with support from the teachers, and strategies to improve their engagement (Wang & Degol, 2014). One qualitative approach used for this research will be conducting interviews with teachers who have disengaged students in their classrooms. These

interviews will use open-ended questions as a means of collecting detailed information from the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The second approach will be qualitative, conducting a focus group with the teachers and an administrator because focus groups allow the researcher to gather data on the participants' experiences (Check & Schutt, 2012). The final approach will be quantitative, using an on-line survey taken by teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals to gather information about solving the problem of disengaged students in the classroom.

Quantitative surveys collect data by giving numbers to the participant's opinions on a subject (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In summary, data will be collected through the means of interviews, a focus group, and an on-line survey to address the problem of disengaged students.

### **Research Questions**

**Central Question:** How can the problem of disengaged students be solved at Beacon Charter Elementary School, located in central New Jersey?

**Sub-question 1:** How will teachers in an interview solve the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey?

**Sub-question 2:** How will teachers in a focus group solve the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey?

**Sub-question 3:** How will quantitative survey data inform the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey?

### **Setting**

The setting for this research will be an elementary charter school located in central New Jersey in Ocean County. A pseudonym, Beacon Charter, will be given to the school participating. The school is a public school which is considered a Title I school, meaning the school has been given a federal grant that provides funding for students attending from low-

income families (U. S. Department of Education, 2018). Students who attend the Beacon Charter Elementary School, which has been open for three years, with 280 students from kindergarten through the fourth grade, all come from a low socioeconomic community. In addition, the school will be adding one grade per year until reaching the eighth grade.

The demographics of the school specify that 45% of the student population is English language learners (ELL), and 18% of the student population have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). There are approximately 20 students per classroom, with approximately 60 students per grade. Each class of 20 students has a full-time teacher with one paraprofessional for in-classroom support. Students whose first language is not English receive ELL support. Also, students with an IEP receive support from the special education teacher.

Beacon Charter Elementary School was founded by a small group of educators who saw a need to open a charter school in a low socioeconomic community in New Jersey to provide students with an option of a smaller number of students in the classroom environment to promote higher levels of academic achievement. Two of the founders became administrators of the school, with one being the head of the school and the other serving as an administrator; they share a passion for reaching all the children and helping them to be engaged to meet their highest academic potential. Academic engagement is important to the administrative team since they personally share the desire to have all their students engaged for the purpose of promoting higher levels of academic achievement.

Student engagement is considered a key for student academic success since engaged students are actively participating in class, feel connected, and place optimal effort into academic activities (Yang et al., 2018). Beacon Charter Elementary School is in a district that has very low scores on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)



assessment, which is a state-required test with the district being in the bottom five percent of the lowest schools in New Jersey. The charter school located in a low socioeconomic district understands the importance of providing strategies to support students being engaged to succeed academically (Palumbo & Kramer-Vida, 2012). Furthermore, there are several reasons the Beacon Charter Elementary School will be chosen for this study. The first reason is teachers have identified students in their classrooms who are disengaged in learning. The second reason is that the school is in a school district that serves low socioeconomic students. The third reason is the school is a relatively new charter school with the administration open to suggestions on how to improve student engagement.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study will be teachers from the Beacon Charter Elementary School. They will be chosen by purposeful sampling; the head of school will ask five teachers to volunteer to participate in the interviews and one administrator and four teachers to volunteer for the focus group. The head of school will ask for 15 volunteers from teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals to take the survey. It is important that people participating in a research study be volunteers and not mandated (Check & Schutt, 2012). Purposeful sampling is selecting participants who have knowledge about the problem being researched (Check & Schutt, 2012). Being knowledgeable about disengaged students, the teachers will have at least one student they are able to identify as being disengaged in learning at various times during their class time. The teachers willing to participate with the interviews and focus group will be the primary classroom instructors for students between kindergarten and fourth grade. Teachers will be given the definition, in writing, of disengagement, which will be the following: students exhibiting behavioral issues in the classroom, avoiding being on task for learning, and having lower

academic achievement (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Researchers consider three areas for student engagement; these areas include behavior, the student's participation in learning activities; cognitive engagement, referring to the student's ability to establish their own strategies for learning; and emotional engagement, dealing with their consecutiveness in the classroom (Lei et al., 2018). Therefore, the teachers will be asked to consider students they believe are disengaged in one of the three areas--behaviorally, cognitively, or emotionally. The students only need to be disengaged in one of the three areas. Research has shown that student engagement promotes student learning, while also developing critical thinking skills and good communication skills (Fuller et al., 2018). The school administration desires to see every student in their school develop critical thinking skills and good communication skills through student engagement in the classroom. Also, the teachers who will participate in the research are concerned for students who are disengaged in their classroom.

This research will include collecting quantitative data by asking for 15 volunteers from the Beacon Charter Elementary School to take an on-line survey. Participants involved in the survey will include two administrators, 10 teachers, and three paraprofessionals who have worked with disengaged students. Participants taking a survey need to understand the questions that are being asked to have accuracy in the data results (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Therefore, definitions will be provided, where necessary, to clarify the meaning of the question. The participants involved in the research will be stakeholders, or representatives of the stakeholders, who are directly involved with the problem of disengaged students in the school.

### **The Researcher's Role**

Researchers' backgrounds influence their research, so consideration of their background will be relevant to understanding the topic selected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I have had the

privilege of being an educator for 38 years, spending 32 years in Christian education as a math/history teacher, administrator, and principal. I have spent six years in a public-school district located in a low socioeconomic school district, where I currently serve as vice principal. I have seen that disengaged students have been an issue in private Christian education as well as public school. Also, disengagement is at a high level in my present school district, where the students come from low-income families. Since student engagement is linked to student academic achievement and indicators of learning, it is an issue that needs to be dealt with to help promote success for students in school and to prepare them for success as adults (Wang et al., 2018). As an educator, it is my passion to see that every student receives a good education so he or she will have the opportunity to have choices for a career.

As an educator, this research ties to my Christian worldview since I believe that one must do his or her best to reach every student and to equip the students with an education that will prepare them to fulfill God's plan for their lives. Since student engagement in the classroom is related to higher levels of academic achievement, students being more involved with learning, and students feeling as if they belong at the school (Estell & Perdue, 2013), it is exciting to see students engaged with learning; and as educators, we must work to also help all the students who are not engaged find strategies that will allow them to fully participate in their education. It is my belief that educators have a responsibility to reach each individual student who is in their care.

Researchers also need to consider ethical issues throughout their research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A researcher must be transparent in the relationships with the participants as well as conscious of any personal bias when conducting the research. Therefore, purposeful sampling will be used to select participants who are regarded as being good sources of information for

collecting data based on the research problem (Galvan & Galvan, 2017). I know the Beacon Charter Elementary School head of school, but do not know the teachers at the school. I had the opportunity to visit the school on one occasion.

My role as the researcher will be to conduct individual interviews, asking the teachers open-ended questions. Also, the role of the researcher will be to develop respect and trust of the teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018) for them to feel comfortable sharing their views on student disengagement. The researcher will conduct one focus group meeting with four teachers and one administrator to expand and build on information about student disengagement. Finally, a quantitative survey will be given to a total of 15 staff including teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals from the Beacon Charter Elementary School.

Researchers need to carefully consider any bias that would impact the reliability of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The bias will be not to have preconceived ideas about possible solutions to the problem. For example, my present school has placed an emphasis on social emotional learning (SEL) to help promote student engagement. When analyzing data, I will need to take into consideration any bias that I may have that SEL is the solution for the problem of disengagement since the responsibility of the researcher is to allow the participants' views to be constructed to provide the data for the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My role as the researcher will be to gather and allow the data to provide the solution for the problem of students who are disengaged.

In this applied research multimethod design, I will be conducting individual interviews and focus group for data collection and data analysis. My role as a researcher will create an environment that participants feel safe to respond to the questions to provide quality responses. As the researcher my role will continue by analyzing coding and developing themes from the

interviews and focus group. The survey will be given on-line using the Likert-scale to analyze the results to formulate a solution for an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district in central New Jersey.

### **Procedures**

Dissertations are to follow guidelines and procedures to reach the expected finished product (Joyner, Rouse, & Glatthorn, 2013). Therefore, I will follow a specific procedure for this research study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) was established as a result of the National Commission in 1974 under President Nixon, for the purpose of protecting human subjects in research being conducted (Greenwald, Ryan, & Mulvihill, 1982). First, the application for the IRB must be fully completed and submitted for approval. Permission from the IRB will be obtained (Appendix A). Collecting data will begin after the approval from IRB is secured. Written permission to conduct the research will be obtained from the Beacon Charter Elementary School board of trustees and the head of school (Appendix B).

Once the site has been approved, teachers will be asked to volunteer to take part in the research. As a researcher, I must carefully make my evaluation, making sure the teachers will not have any negative repercussions or harm come to them or their careers. According to Check and Schutt (2012), the research must not cause any harm to the people involved. People participating in a research study need to be volunteers and not mandated to be part of the research (Check & Schutt, 2012). During the staff meeting, the head of school will read the recruitment letter (Appendix C) during a staff meeting requesting volunteers. The teachers who will participate will be volunteers from the Beacon Charter Elementary School Elementary School and will sign a consent form acknowledging they are volunteering to take part in this research (Appendix D). The head of school will ask teachers to volunteer and allow the teachers

to have professional development time to be used for the interviews, focus group, and completing the survey. In addition, the participants' identity will be kept confidential (Check & Schutt, 2012). To do this, the teachers will be given pseudonyms to be used for the research to keep their participation confidential. Consent forms will be signed by all participants prior to collecting and analyzing data. The interviews and focus groups will be recorded using two devices

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data will be collected using three different approaches; the first two approaches will be qualitative data and the third approach will be quantitative data. Triangulation, using more than two methods to collect data allows for more credibility with the results (Check & Schutt, 2012). First, in-person interviews will take place with five teachers from the Beacon Charter Elementary School. Second, a focus group will be conducted with the four teachers and one administrator. Third, a quantitative survey will be used, with the 15 staff members including teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals from the Beacon Charter Elementary School taking the on-line survey. Data analysis will utilize the process of triangulation through collecting data by the use of three methods and the content analyzed through coding to develop themes.

### **Individual Interviews**

The first sub-question of this study explored how teachers in an interview would solve the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey? Semi-structured individual interviews consisting of open-ended questions will be used for this research. According to Check and Schutt (2012), individual interviews provide powerful data on experiences and viewpoints of the participants of a research study; therefore, five teachers will be interviewed during face-to-face meetings in a private conference room at the

Beacon Charter Elementary School. The semi-structured interview questions will collect data on teachers' opinions about disengagement, challenges with students who are disengaged, and possible solutions to promote higher levels of student engagement. The data will show the results using a table for each question and a reflective narrative. Prior to the interview, the teachers will be given the written definition of disengaged and engaged students. Procedures for the data collection will begin with individual teacher interviews and two audio recorders will be used during the interview. Interview participants will be asked 12 open-ended semi-structured questions (Appendix D). Interviews, lasting approximately one hour each, will be semi-structured, which will allow for additional ideas to be discussed. When the interviews are completed, the audio recordings will be transcribed verbatim by an academic transcription service. The first read of the transcript will be for the purpose of reading for the overall content and checking for accuracy. This will be followed by a second read, where the inductive coding process will be conducted. "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2016, p. 4). The hand coding will be completed by going through the transcript line-by-line to highlight key words and phrases. Finally, a third read will verify the coding, and notes will be written in the margins. Coding involves organizing the common words and themes by placing them in categories to develop themes (Creswell, 2018). Once the coding is completed, the similar codes will be placed into categories; then the categories will be developed into themes since themes are derived from analyzing the coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The themes will be organized using a tabular format with rows and columns followed by a written narrative of the results. The following is the list of questions that will be asked at each of the individual interviews.

### Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please describe your experience working with a disengaged student.
2. What behavior have you seen in your classroom from a student who appeared disengaged?
3. What do you believe are the top three causes for student disengagement?
4. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the words *student disengagement*?
5. Please describe your view of the degree you feel students are disengaged behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively.
6. Explain in detail how living in a low socioeconomic community impacts student engagement in the classroom.
7. What do you think are the negative behaviors that students display in the classroom when they are disengaged?
8. What would effective professional development look like to promote higher levels of student engagement?
9. How, if at all, did the student who was disengaged impact other students in the classroom?
10. What specific strategies did you use to support the student who was disengaged?
11. What classroom strategies have you integrated to promote student engagement in the classroom?
12. What do you believe is the solution to the problem of student disengagement?

The first and second question will be included to gain understanding from the teacher's perspective of the impact disengaged students have on the classroom because these students are at-risk of having negative results with behavioral issues and lower academic success (Nicholson & Putwain, 2015). Question three will be for the purpose of teachers to identify what they view



as possible causes of disengagement. According to Duffy and Elwood (2013), many be caused by multiple reasons including students not feeling connected to their learning environment, having behavior issues, having negative relationships with peers and/or teachers, and other behavior issues. Question four and five will be to verify the understanding of the main topic we will be discussing during the interview (Bickman & Rog, 2009) because the participants need to be able to identify that disengagement is displayed by students whose behaviors avoid being on-task for learning, resulting in negative academic outcomes (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). As noted previously, disengagement includes three areas: the first is behavioral, how a student is displaying disengaged behavior in school; the second is emotional, how a student feels about school; and the third is cognitive, involving the students' motivation to master information in the content area (Demagnet & Van Houtte, 2014).

Question six will address teachers' insight about students that are living in a low socioeconomic community and how their environment may impact student engagement as research suggest that students living in low socioeconomic communities may have unpleasant circumstances that will impact their engagement in school (Jensen, 2009). Question seven will gain insight into the teacher's perception about the negative actions that are being caused by the students being disengaged since research indicates they will often have disruptive behavior and perform lower academically (Reyes et al., 2012). Question eight will identify teachers' opinions on effective professional development that could provide them with support, an important area to investigate since research expresses the value of professional development to increase teachers' implementing interventions to support students (Anyon et al., 2016). Question nine will address the issue of students that are disengaged having a negative influence on other students in the classroom as research has shown that peer relationships may influence students' behavior

(Booker, 2018). Questions ten through twelve will address strategies that teachers have used or feel they could use to help promote student engagement in order to gather information about the teacher's opinions and attitudes about strategies (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Since schools have a tremendous influence on promoting or impeding student engagement (Wang et al., 2018), teachers are keys in developing an effective classroom environment to promote motivation for learning and student engagement (Opdenakker & Minnaert, 2011).

### **Focus Group Interview**

The second sub-question of this study will explore how teachers and an administrator in a focus group would solve the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey? Using a focus group is another means of conducting an interview with a small group of people for the purpose of gathering information about their opinions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus group will meet a week after the individual interviews have been completed, coded, and themes developed. The focus group will consist of five participants with four teachers and one administrator who will meet in a private location in the school conference room. Focus-group questions (Appendix F) will be designed to facilitate open discussion among the group. The discussion will last approximately one hour, with teachers being asked to build on each other's comments. The focus group will use two audio devices to record; afterwards, the session will be transcribed verbatim by me. Then the focus-group transcription will be read through completely for the first time for accuracy and an overview. In the second reading, line-by-line coding will highlight words and phrases. This will be followed by a third read to verify the coding and to write reflection comments in the margin. Categories will be developed by combining similar codes. The categorization will develop the themes. The results of the analysis will be placed in a tabular format with rows and columns followed by a

reflective narrative. The following is the list of questions that will be asked during the focus-group interview.

#### Open-Ended Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What factors cause student disengagement?
2. How does student disengagement impact academic achievement?
3. How does student disengagement impact behavior in the classroom?
4. How does student disengagement at the primary and elementary level impact students in middle school, high school, and their future careers?
5. How does living in low socioeconomic conditions impact student engagement?
6. What barriers hinder student engagement in your classroom?
7. What instructional techniques promote student engagement?
8. Please describe how you develop a learning environment that promotes connectiveness with students' peers to increase student engagement?
9. What would you consider the top three interventions that promote student engagement?
10. During what activities are students most engaged in learning?

The first four questions will be designed to engage the teachers in discussing the problem of disengagement, the impact disengaged students have in their classroom, and the long-term impact on students who are disengaged. These questions will bring out important ideas since teachers' decision-making in the classroom is often based on their beliefs and their opinions about educational issues (Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, & LaParo, 2006). Therefore, teachers' opinions may reveal their classroom practices. Disengagement in the classroom is a good predictor of students having behavior issues and having lower academic achievement

(McDermott et al., 2017). Additionally, student engagement is considered an important factor in a student's future success in life (Moses & Villodas, 2017).

Question five will be designed to help gain insight from the teachers about their view of the impact of their students' living in a low socioeconomic community and, specifically, the impact that it may have on student engagement. Studies have shown that poverty may affect students with stress emotionally and socially that could impact their engagement (Jensen, 2009). Many times, students living in low socioeconomic communities' struggle, often with cognitive issues such as retention and making connections in education (Payne, 2005). Payne's (2005) research reveals the significance of teachers discussing how they feel students' living in low socioeconomic communities affects student engagement.

The purpose for question six will be to see if the teachers are able to identify anything that is hindering them for implementing interventions that would promote student engagement. Questions seven, eight, and nine will allow the teachers to discuss techniques and interventions that could promote student engagement, which is connected to students' being positively active in school, completing assignments, and performing higher levels academically (Moses & Villodas, 2017). Teachers want students to be motivated and engaged in learning to be effective in the classroom (Nayir, 2017). Question 10 will offer the teachers an opportunity to reflect on activities that influence students to be most engaged in learning.

When the focus group discussion is completed, the audio recording will be transcribed verbatim. The focus group transcriptions will be analyzed by coding to develop the themes for each question. The themes for each individual question will be presented in a table format followed by a reflective narrative.

## Quantitative Survey Questions

The third sub-question of this study will explore how teachers, administrators, and paraprofessional will in taking a quantitative survey inform the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey? Quantitative research will analyze and interpret information through numbers (Check & Schutt, 2012). The questions on the survey using this method will be based on opinions that will provide a numerical value to the data collected (Check & Schutt, 2012). For this research, a survey (Appendix G) will be given to 15 participants; all will be stakeholders within the school who daily work with the students and will be able to offer insight into reasons the students are disengaged. The participants will include ten teachers, three paraprofessionals, and two administrators. The Likert scale, used for the statistical analysis of the mean of the responses (Boone & Boone, 2012), will be used for the survey. The teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals will receive instructions on accessing the survey through their school email. The participants will be given ten days to complete the survey at home or at the school. The quantitative survey data will be analyzed by using the mean from the Likert scale. Finally, the results of the survey will be displayed using a bar chart. The survey will use two different 5-point Likert scale for the 20 statements that have been derived from the literature review.

## Survey

**Instructions:** Choose the answer that best describes how you feel about the question.

1. Students are disengaged because of their disadvantaged background.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. Student are disengaged because parents do not show support by attending parental meetings and conferences.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Students are disengaged because of anxiety, which may cause them to feel as if they are failures.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. Students are disengaged because of a lack of proper nutrition.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. Students are disengaged due to lack of proper sleep.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. Students are disengaged as a result of an academic gap between other students in the classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. Students are disengaged as a result of poor social skills among their peers.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. Students are disengaged because they are bored.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

### Survey

**Instructions:** Choose the answer that best describes your opinion.

9. How important is parental involvement in promoting student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

10. How important is it to use technology to promote student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

11. How important is developing peer relationships to promote student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

12. How important is humor in the classroom to promote student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

13. How important is classroom management to promoting student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

14. How important is students' receiving immediate feedback from the teacher to promoting student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

15. How important is developing a positive teacher-student relationship to encourage student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

16. How important is students' feeling autonomy in learning to promoting higher levels of student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

17. How important is professional development training about student disengagement for teacher success in promoting student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

18. How important is students' feeling connected to their school to developing student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

19. How important is giving students choices in their assignments to encourage student engagement?



1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

20. How important is teaching students to handle their emotions to encourage student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

Questions one through eight will be designed to interpret the teachers' opinions about possible reasons for their students being disengaged since this problem is complex with various reasons that prevent student engagement (Nam, Frishkoff, & Collins-Thompson, 2018). These questions may show how teachers use data to guide classroom practices (Nelson, Demers, & Christ, 2014). Questions nine through twenty will ask teachers their opinions on interventions they feel will promote student engagement. These questions are important because teachers create learning environments for their students that may affect a student's engagement and motivation for learning (Opdenakker & Minnaert, 2011). Importantly, teachers have the responsibility of creating learning environments that will promote student engagement for all students (Davis, 2012). The data collected from this survey may help teachers to evaluate their classroom practices and implement strategies to better promote student engagement for all students.

### **Ethical Consideration**

There are codes of ethics that need to be followed for all research that is being conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The IRB board has the responsibility of protecting participants involved in research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research will not be conducted until the IRB has given its approval. Once the IRB approval has been secured, the gatekeepers where the

research will take place must give permission. A pseudonym will be used throughout the study to protect the identity of the school. The participants will also be given pseudonyms to protect their identities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, participants will be given full disclosure of the research being conducted, will be volunteers, and will sign a consent form prior to participating. The interviews and focus group will be conducted in a private conference room to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The research will be conducted in a manner that will promote a safe environment for participants to respond with honest and open answers. Further, the questions being asked will be worded as not show any bias and the researcher will not influence the participants responses by remaining neutral throughout the research process to “avoid going native” (Creswell, 2013, p. 94). The recorded interviews and data collected will be stored on a password-locked computer. Finally, procedures will be outlined for collecting and analyzing the data to be able to check for accuracy. The integrity of this study is important so protecting confidentiality of each participant will have the upmost priority.

### **Summary**

Chapter Three will explain the methods that will be used for conducting the research. The design of the study will be applied research, using triangulation to validate the results. The central question that will be addressed is the following: How can the problem of disengaged students be solved at Beacon Charter Elementary School, located in central New Jersey? The research will involve five teachers for the interviews and a focus group, with an additional 10 stakeholders from the school participating in the survey. The research will be conducted in one school location in central New Jersey. Procedures will be followed and approved by the IRB. Ethical decision-making will be considered throughout the research process. Procedures will be established for collecting and analyzing the data. Coding will be used to develop the themes and

statistics used for the survey. The methods used for this research will address the problem of student disengagement and provide a solution based on the data collected. This applied research will look for solutions for promoting student engagement in the Beacon Charter Elementary School.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of this applied research was to solve the problem of student disengagement in a low socioeconomic school and to formulate a solution to address the problem. The problem is students' disengagement may negatively impact their academic achievement. The specific problem at Beacon Elementary Charter School concerned student disengagement resulting in students performing lower academically. Chapter four has addressed the data that were collected and the analysis of the data for this research. Three methods were used to collect data: five teachers were interviewed individually, a focus group was formed to discuss student disengagement, and finally a survey was given. According to Bickman and Rog (2009), applied research identifies a problem and seeks to find a solution to the problem. Since student disengagement was a problem in schools, the applied research method was chosen for this research.

Chapter four revealed the possible solutions for student disengagement at Beacon Elementary Charter School. The chapter began by giving the background of the participants for the interviews and the focus group. The results were analyzed for each of the three sub-questions using triangulation to determine the common themes from the interviews, focus group, and survey. Triangulation was used to provide credibility in the results by using multiple methods (Check & Schutt, 2012). The three themes that were developed through analyzing the three methods used to collect data included:

1. Parents
2. Instructional Practices
3. Teacher-student relationships

Chapter four concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and empirical literature to confirm, corroborate, and shed light on the present research with the literature review.

### **Participants**

The participants for this research were teachers, administrators and paraprofessionals who were full-time employees at Beacon Charter Elementary School. The individual interviews were conducted with five teachers who were all female. The participants for the interview were teachers in the first through fourth grade, with an average of eight years of teaching experience and an average age of 32 years. The focus group consisted of five participants with four full-time teachers and one administrator. There were two male teachers, two female teachers, and one female administrator. The participants in the focus group were teachers in the first through fourth grade with an average of 2.5 years of teaching experience and an average age of 32 years. The administrator who is the head of school has been involved in education for 43 years. The participants for the survey consisted of ten teachers with an average age of 35.6 and an average of 5.5 years of teaching experience. There were also three paraprofessionals with an average age of 31 years, with an average of 3.6 years working in the field of education, and two administrators with an average age of 66.5, with an average of 35.5 years working in education.

### **Kimberly**

The first teacher to be interviewed, Kimberly, entered the conference room with a cheerful attitude. She was articulate and eager to share her experiences as an educator. Kimberly, 49 years old, has been an educator for a total of 14 years and a second-grade teacher in her present school for the past three years. Previously she had been an elementary teacher and took some time off to have children. When she returned to teaching, she was a long-term sub for a few years until joining her present school. Her focus in education has been on

language, reading, and writing. Her passion for language arts has helped her students develop strong writing skills. She was very informative on supporting students who are disengaged in the classroom.

### **Alyssa**

The second teacher to be interviewed was 38 years old with 10 years of teaching experience. Alyssa had spent three years teaching in Korea and was a director of a pre-school in Pennsylvania. She moved and worked in a charter school in North Carolina before moving to New Jersey, where she has been teaching for two years in the second grade at her present school. She was enthusiastic in sharing about her teaching experiences. Her responses revealed her love and concern for students to achieve academically. Alyssa was exposed to Whole Brain teaching while working at the charter school in North Carolina. Whole Brain teaching is a teaching approach that is based on understanding how the brain works (Biffle, 2013). She was very excited discussing how whole brain teaching promotes student engagement. She has been using the whole brain techniques in her classroom with success. She has shared several of the techniques with the school administration and seeing results, the school provided professional development training for all the teachers in Whole Brain teaching. The school has not implemented all the practices from whole brain teaching, but has adopted several of the technique, which are now used in all the classrooms.

### **Deborah**

The third teacher to be interviewed was Deborah, who was 30 years old with eight years of teaching experience. She has been at the present school for three years. Her previous teaching experience was at a Catholic school. Deborah has her special education certification and she is the special education teacher for the first grade. She has developed a math program at

the school that encourages math talk among the students. Deborah expressed during the interview that every year she has taught she has had at least one or more students disengaged for various reasons.

### **Amber**

The fourth teacher who was interviewed was 29 years old, taught the third grade, and has been teaching for a total of six years. Amber and her family were immigrants from Russia. She speaks fluent English and Spanish, which has been an asset to the school with the high percentage of students being from a Hispanic background. She was very personable during the interview. Amber noted many programs she has implemented in the classroom to promote student engagement. She expressed the importance of technology to engage students in learning. She has a very good relationship with her students. She feels strongly that the role of the teacher and the relationship the teacher develops with the student play a major role in students' academic success.

### **Helen**

The final teacher to participate in the interview was a little nervous about the interview, being concerned that she might give a wrong answer. She was reassured that there are no wrong answers. Helen is 33 years old; this is her second year as a teacher. She taught sixth grade for one year; then she and her husband moved to Colorado, where she did not teach. She moved back to New Jersey last school year, where she was hired as a paraprofessional; this school year she was hired as the fourth-grade teacher. She had a sweet personality.

### **Jay**

Jay is 27 years old and is in his first-year teaching, but he had been a paraprofessional for two years at the school prior to becoming a full-time teacher. He was a participant in the focus

group. Before working at his present school, he was a long-term sub in an elementary school. Last year as a paraprofessional, he headed the school yearbook and decided to host a fundraiser so every student in the school would be able to have a yearbook. His fundraising efforts were successful. Jay was very articulate, with good comments on the issue of student disengagement.

### **Daniel**

Daniel was very eager to share in the focus group. He spoke with enthusiasm as he discussed the various questions. Daniel is 24 years old, and this is his first-year teaching. He spoke like a very experienced teacher. He just graduated this past spring with his master's degree. His degree is for high-school history and special education. He volunteered at the school last year for their Read-Across-America program; for the program, he came to the school with a guitar and banjo, using music to encourage students to read. He connected with the students, and the Head of School expressed how he had a positive impact on the students. Daniel was eager to share his opinion during the focus group and was so humorous at times that the group responding with laughter.

### **Lisa**

Lisa is the third-grade teacher; she is 48 years old and this is her first year as a full-time teacher. She had worked as a sub for over 10 years. She substituted for multiple grades and often filled the position of a long-term substitute when teachers were on various types of leave. She has a very easy-going personality and had multiple experiences working with disengaged students in her various substitute roles, which added good conversation in the focus group. She spoke with an understanding of dealing with disengaged students.

### **Makayla**

Makayla is the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. She has five years of



teaching experience from a larger school district. She showed enthusiasm as she spoke during the focus group. Makayla is 29 years old and teaches ESL to the first-through-fourth grade students. She speaks fluent English and Spanish. She has been trained in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and has used her knowledge to train other teachers in using the SIOP model. She also works with a literacy program to support Latino families. She had a lot to contribute to the focus group with her responses to the questions.

### **Millie**

Millie is 71 years old and has been involved in education for 43 years. Her educational journey began working at a Christian K-12<sup>th</sup> grade school, where she taught and later became the principal of the school. After serving at the Christian school for 35 years, she was the co-founder of a charter school. After five years serving as the Head of School, she supported starting a second charter school, where she presently serves as the Head of School. She had a wealth of information that contributed greatly to the focus group.

Table 1

### *Participant Demographic Data*

Participant	Gender	Age	Years of Experience	Position	Grade	Participation
Kimberly	F	49	14	Teacher	Second	I, S
Alyssa	F	38	10	Teacher	Second	I, S
Deborah	F	30	8	Teacher	First	I, S
Amber	F	29	6	Teacher	Third	I, S
Helen	F	33	2	Teacher	Fourth	I, S
Jay	M	27	3	Teacher	Third	F, S
Daniel	M	24	1	Teacher	First-Fourth	F, S

Lisa	F	48	1	Teacher	Third	F, S
Makayla	F	29	5	Teacher	First-Fourth	F, S
Joyce	F	49	5	Teacher	First	S
Kristin	F	33	6	Para	Kindergarten	S
Rachel	F	32	2	Para	Second	S
Samantha	F	28	3	Para	First	S
Millie	F	71	43	Administrator	K-4 <sup>th</sup>	F, S
Donna	F	62	28	Administrator	K-4 <sup>th</sup>	S

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*Note:* All names are pseudonyms. Paraprofessionals are referred to as Para. Participation has three areas: I: Individual Interviews, F: Focus Group and S: Survey.

### **Results**

The purpose of this applied research was to consider the problem of students who are disengaged at Beacon Charter Elementary School, located in central New Jersey. The research consisted of collecting data through individual interviews, a focus group, and an on-line survey (Appendices E, F, and G), which were created to align with the central question. During one after-school staff meeting, teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators were given the information about the research and given the opportunity to sign up to participate. Five teachers signed up for the interview, four teachers and one administrator signed up to participate in the focus group. There were a total of fifteen participants, including ten teachers, three paraprofessionals, and two administrators who took the on-line survey.

The qualitative portion of the research included the individual interviews and focus group. In the semi-structured interviews with five teachers, the questions were designed to gain information and develop themes from their understanding of students who are disengaged, the

behavior that is seen in the classroom, and the causes. The focus group consisting of four teachers and one administrator; the questions were designed to gain information about their opinions on the impact of student disengagement and possible interventions to improve student engagement in the classroom, using the results to develop themes. The quantitative portion of the research consisted of a twenty-question, online survey with 10 teachers, three paraprofessionals, and two administrators participating. The questions were designed to measure the data of the educators' opinions on reasons for disengagement in the classroom and interventions to increase student engagement.

### **Sub-question 1**

Sub-question one for this study was, "How would teachers in an interview solve the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey?" Interviews were conducted with five teachers from Beacon Charter Elementary School in order to find themes related to student disengagement. The themes that were disclosed in the qualitative analysis were parents' impact on students' disengagement or engagement levels in learning, instructional practices, and the value of teacher-student relationships.

Table 2

#### *Disengagement: Parents, Instructional Practices, and Teacher-Student Relationships*

Themes	Code Word	Frequency
Parents	Basic needs not met including hunger	10
	Home environment	4
	Language Barrier	4
	Parents absent from home	3
	Parents lack of education	3
	Children going to work with parents	1
	Lack of medical care	1
	Parental support	1

Instructional Practices		
	Connectedness	6
	Hands-on activities	5
	Scaffolding	5
	Technology	5
	Proximity Control	3
	Assignment modifications	2
	Awards	2
	Content Chunking	2
	Small-group instruction	2
	Whole Brain teaching	2
	Develop independent learners	1
	Embrace mistakes	1
	Storytelling	1
	Redirection	1
	Visuals	1
Teacher-Student Relationships		
	Knowing your students	4
	Understanding student's home life	3
	Giving words of encouragement	3
	Being kind and caring	2
	Having one-on-one interaction	2
	Showing an interest in their lives	2
	Believing in student success	1
	Teaching with excitement	1
	Using student's name	1

**Parents.** Teachers presented several reasons they believed would cause student disengagement in the classroom as a result of their parents. In regard to the parents' responsibility, the most common reason the teachers believed students are disengaged was students' basic needs not being met. Deborah spoke about one student who was disengaged in her classroom: "she's hungry; she doesn't have food, and that's more of what she focused on during the day." Another top reason, according to the teachers being interviewed, was the home environment. According to Kimberly, "Something so devastating is happening at home, like my dad's not home or my mom is not in the house." Deborah explained how some of her students

are disengaged as a result of losing a family member. Alyssa's response was concerning "violence in the home ... maybe in the house nearby."

Deborah's opinion was parents have a lot to do with student disengagement. According to Deborah, "I have kids who leave here and go to work with their parents for hours, or they go home, and it's just random people watching them until their parents get home from work. Kids go home and it's like other kids watching them." Helen noted that many of the students do not speak English as their primary language and do not understand vocabulary words, resulting in students being disengaged by not understanding what is being discussed in the classroom. This is a result of the parents not speaking English in their homes. Helen believes that children get frustrated as "a good way of showing that I need help." Amber stated another problem is "whatever is being taught in the classroom isn't necessarily reinforced at home." She felt this was a result of the parents' lack of education, making parents unable to provide academic support for their children.

**Instructional practices.** One of the main emphases of instructional practices was the importance of developing a sense of community in the classroom, providing the students with a feeling of connectedness with the school. Deborah expressed by developing a sense of community the students "look to help each other." Amber used a buddy system to develop peer support and a sense of community.

Sometimes I'll pair them up with somebody if that person has done reading. I have somebody next to them that's not so strong, but they'll benefit also from reading it. So it gives them the practice, and it helps their peers or helping each other.

The teachers interviewed recognized that students who feel positive about their learning environment and have a sense of connectedness increase student engagement.

The teachers had additional comments on instructional practices they have personally used to increase student engagement and to support students who are disengaged. Kimberly expressed when students are disengaged it is important for a teacher to reflect on their instructional practice: “When a student is disengaged, then I start questioning, what can I do that can improve so that they’re not disengaged?” Kimberly believes that having “more hands-on material” is an important component to improving student engagement. Alyssa had been previously trained in Whole Brain teaching, which she believes supports an increase in student engagement: “It forces teachers to chunk their lessons and break them down into smaller portions.” Amber also commented on the value of chunking lessons, scaffolding, and providing visuals whenever possible to improve student engagement.

Using proximity was suggested to support student engagement. Kimberly stated, “I use proximity; I like tap them on the shoulder or tap the desk.” Kimberly also uses a reward system, where students earn points for prizes; she believes this system increases student engagement. Helen spoke of the value of providing small-group instruction. Helen believes the use of technology promotes student engagement: “I do try to use a lot of technology, like showing them videos and stuff to get them more engaged.”

**Teacher-Student relationships.** Developing a positive teacher-student relationship was a theme teachers expressed that promotes student engagement. Kimberly felt that a teacher knowing their students was very important for student engagement.

Knowing your students is also really important. You really have to be devoted to understanding every learner for their individual needs, and who they are because we're all different. So, knowing your students is like the biggest thing as a teacher. Deborah thought teachers should spend time getting to know more about the environment where

their students live. She expressed, “It would give us better eyes to see like, and more specifically how these kids are maybe living. Like help cleaning a house or something like that, just to see specifically how these guys are living.” Amber expressed the value of creating a caring learning environment: “Everyone's important; you're going to come into my classroom and we're all going to feel welcomed and cared for and free to say how you feel and with nobody judging you or laughing.” Alyssa stressed giving students one-on-one time and Helen expressed “speaking positive” to the students.

### **Sub-question 2**

Sub-question two for this study was, “How would educators in a focus group solve the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey?” A focus group was conducted with four teachers and one administrator from Beacon Charter Elementary School. The focus group had a lot to say about the parents or family environment contributing to student disengagement. Also, the focus group had input on instructional practices they believe would improve student engagement and how teacher-student relationships is a key component for student engagement.

Table 3

#### *Disengagement: Parents, Instructional Practices, and Teacher-Student Relationships*

Themes	Code Word
Parents	Believing education is not necessary Families move a lot Basic needs not met at home Lack of academic conversations at home Lack of emphasis on the importance of education Lack of exposure to reading when young Lack of learning experiences to build on learning Lack of sleep Parents don't speak English

	Parents unable to help students academically Poor nutrition habits Trauma within family of family members
Instructional Practices	Academic Games Autonomy Brain Breaks Building interest in the topic Developing student group leaders Growth Mind set Hands-on activities Independent work Partner work Physical movement in the classroom Social Emotional Learning Technology Understanding learning styles Visuals
Teacher-student relationship	Praise and encouragement Work with individual students Know your students Know your students' interest

**Parents.** Parents was a topic of discussion as the group expressed many concerns for the lack of parental support and for most of the parents living in a low socioeconomic condition. As a result of the school being located in a low-socioeconomic community, most of the parents are faced with issues that often are associated with living in poverty. All the participants had comments concerning students' basic needs not being met by the student's that may cause disengagement. There were several comments about students coming to school hungry and extremely tired. Daniel stated that students often have a "lack of sleep or lack of nutrition." Students might be eating, but not health foods. Students' facing various types of trauma in their lives may also be a cause for student disengagement. The focus group participants all felt that students' living in low socioeconomic community face a lot of trauma, but only Lisa gave specific examples of trauma. According to Lisa, examples of trauma that students have faced are



parents that have been deported. Also, often families move a lot, “just not being in one place for very long would make it very difficult to catch that child up or engage them.”

Another area stressed within the group was the lack of experiences children have with their parents as an outcome of living in low socioeconomic communities, which may result in disengagement since children are not being exposed to experiences where they can build their knowledge. Also, Lisa stressed that often the parents are working so much that the students are not exposed to academic conversations. She stated:

I know that the more you speak with your children about anything, the more they're going to pick up vocabulary and such. But if the parents are always working, if there's always someone working, they're not having as frequent conversations. They're not building vocabulary, and therefore it will impact them in that way.

Millie discussed that often the parents are on a survival mode just to provide food, electricity, and shelter for their children. Millie stated:

The first thing is survival. So, parents may not, number one, they don't travel because they can't afford to. They can't afford to expose them to lots of fun experiences. And education may not be a topic, where the parents are conveying how important it is. The parents are just working to survive.

Daniel discussed how some of the students who are disengaged are living in homes where the parents do not speak English. Daniel commented:

English, a knowledge of the English language, if it doesn't really apply to their situation, and on top of that the parents can't understand it or help them with it, then it really just comes across to the kids it is sort of nonsense, almost like, what's the point?

Parents are unable to help their children with their schoolwork and cannot afford to get their children tutoring services. The focus group's opinion was that parents' living in low socioeconomic conditions contributes to the possibility of students struggling more with being disengaged in the classroom because they are concerned with their basic needs, perhaps have trauma in their life, and the lack exposure to academic experiences.

**Instructional practices.** The focus group discussed various instructional practices that would help students who are disengaged to increase their engagement with learning. Jay commented on the importance of having hands-on activities for the students. Lisa agreed, "I would agree with that manipulatives help a lot. Acting things out also help a lot. Getting them to move helps a lot." Lisa stressed, "Change it around, have a brain break, have a physical movement, stand up, do things differently, instead of you being at the front of the room."

Another instructional practice was brought up by Millie about the importance of using technology. All participants in the focus group agreed that technology is very important to support student engagement. Makayla commented, "I feel like technology is essential in today's classroom." The group brought up various ways technology is used from promethean boards in the classroom, chrome books, iPad, and various online programs they use to support engagement in the classroom.

Students' having a feeling of autonomy came up during the focus-group discussion. Teachers commented that part of instructional practice is to provide opportunities for student autonomy with learning. Daniel stated:

I think any activity which you give the student, you make the students feel like they are in control, that is really important because all, I think, a lot of disengagement comes from they come to school, they sit in the class and they have an adult tell them what to do and

what not to do all day. And that's not very conducive, not very good for a growth mindset. And I think if you let the kid think that they're in control of what's happening there, they're just naturally going to be more engaged, because it's that much more personal to them, and actually applicable to their situation.

It appeared through the conversation that teachers were using various technology sources to support students having autonomy in their learning.

There was also discussion about the value of using visuals for student engagement. Makayla commented, "I know that seems like a small thing, making it colorful or something, but making it, for me visually pleasing." She continued to state, "Most kids look through books and they pick the picture book because that's what they want. So, learning through those visuals is very important to me." Lisa brought up the importance of praising the students and encouraging the students. She also noted the importance of having a growth mind set, giving an example of how she supports a growth mind set in the classroom:

We have journals that we do in third grade about growth mindset and about people that have experienced it and did it before. I think these are important that they realize that not everything is easy for everyone, that some people had to really, really work at what they were trying to accomplish.

Makayla added to Lisa's comments by emphasizing the value of teaching SEL. She stated, "It's very important to know where they are at, and however they're thinking about school, and tap into that of getting them engaged." Millie felt it was important to give students brain breaks by having them get up out of their seats to move around. Daniel commented on teaching to students' different learning styles. He said, "knowing the learning types that you have in your classroom, if your lesson is not working, try appealing to a different sense." The focus group

agreed with each other's comments on instructional practices to promote student engagement and built on each other's comments.

**Teacher-Student relationships.** The focus group acknowledged that teachers play a vital role with student engagement in the classroom. Makayla expressed that students need "praise and encouragement as often as possible." Millie built on Makayla's comments about knowing each student individually. Millie stated, "It's very important to know where they are at, and however they're thinking about school and tap into that to get them engaged." Millie continued to explain that when you know the students' interest, you should find opportunities to include the interest in topics the students are learning. The importance is to know each student. Jay commented on the value of working with small group of students to strengthen the teacher-student relationship.

### **Sub-question 3**

Sub-question three for this study was, "How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School in central New Jersey?" A survey was given to 10 teachers, three paraprofessionals, and two administrators from Beacon Charter Elementary School. The survey consisting of 20 questions was conducted using the Likert scale. The data were analyzed by using the mean and ratio. The first eight questions were designed to analyze the data on the participants' opinions about the reasons for disengagement and the next twelve questions were interventions that the participants believe could promote student engagement. A bar chart was provided showing the mean for each question. Also, for questions one through eight, a bar chart was provided to show the ratio of disagree and agree for each question. For questions nine through twenty, a bar chart shows the mean and the ratio if the participants believed the question was non-important or important.

Chart one represents the data results for questions one through eight. The Likert scale used a 5-point scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The mean was calculated for each question. A calculation was shown of the number of participants that either disagreed or agreed with the question. The comparison of the category disagree to the category of agree revealed the weight of participants' response to the questions.

**Table 4**

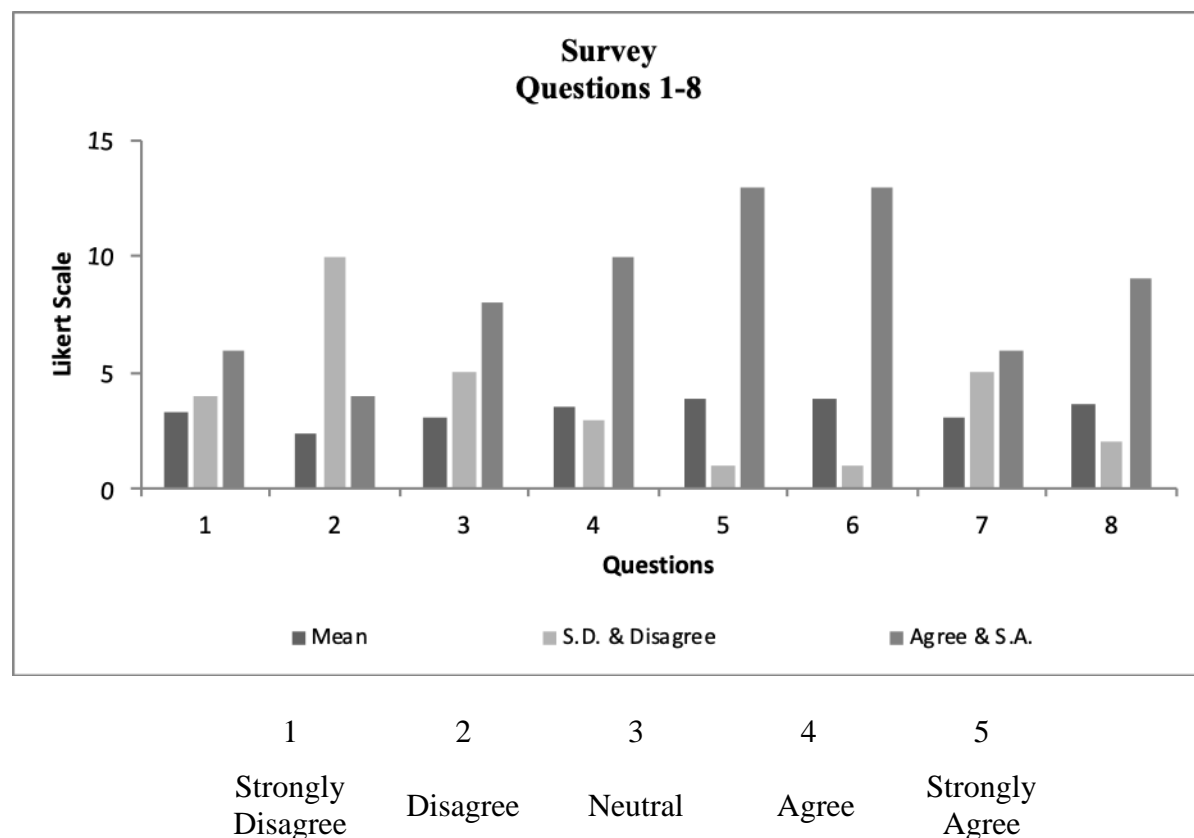
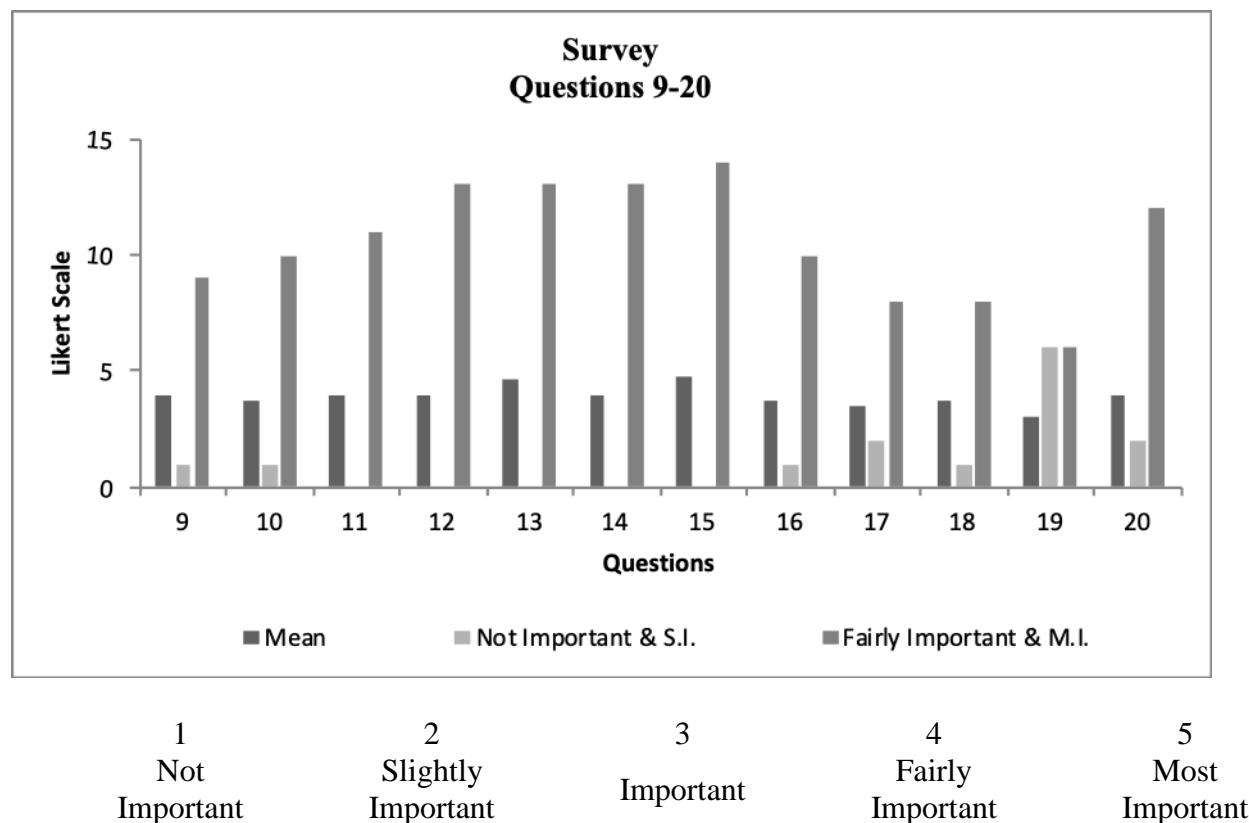


Chart two analyzed the data results for questions nine through twenty. The Likert scale used a 5-point scale that ranged from not important to most important. The mean was calculated for each question. A comparison was shown of the number of participants that sided with not important or slightly important compared to the participants who responded to the questions as fairly or most important.

Table 5



**Parents.** Results from the survey revealed the participants believe that the parents have some of the responsibility for student engagement. Question nine addressed the importance of parent involvement; only one person stated slightly important, and the other 14 participants considered important to most important. Question two addressed the importance of parents attending parental meetings and conferences contributing to student engagement. The mean was 3.3 as the results showed the group was close to being neutral. For parents not providing the primary needs of their children, the results showed that the majority considered this as a reason for student disengagement. Also, the majority of the participants indicated that a lack of proper sleep and nutrition impacted student disengagement in the classroom. In addition, a slight majority of the participants believed that parents coming from a disadvantaged background will

often result in their children having poor social skills among their peers, which could also be a cause of disengagement. The majority disagreed that parents support by attending parental meetings and conferences had impact on student engagement.

**Instructional practices.** Student engagement was linked to instructional practices. Classroom management had a mean score of 4.6, indicating the participants believe the effectiveness of managing a classroom is very important. Providing immediate feedback to students had a mean score of 4.0; the majority agreed that feedback promotes student engagement. Teachers using humor in the classroom had a mean score of 3.9, with two indicating humor is neutral while 13 implying they agree it promotes engagement. Technology in the classroom had a mean score of 3.7; teachers providing opportunities for students developing positive peer relationships had a mean score of 3.9; promoting student autonomy had a mean score was 3.7. Additionally, 3.9 was the mean score for teaching students how to handle their emotions to promote student engagement in the classroom. On the other hand, question 19 on how important to give students choices in their assignments to encourage student engagement was equal in participants' opinion, not or slightly-important compared to fairly or most important. Professional development training about how to promote student engagement was considered important to the majority of the participants. Professional development would support instructional practices.

**Teacher-Student Relationship.** Fourteen out of the fifteen participants indicated they felt teacher-student relationships were fairly or most important to promote student engagement. The mean was 4.7, indicating that the majority's opinion was most important. The teacher-student relationship had the highest mean score of all the questions asked, indicating the importance of the teacher-student relationship. Also, developing a sense of students feeling a

connectedness with the school had the majority believing it was important, which is another indicator of relationships being valued.

### **Discussion**

This part of the research will review the results of this study in relationship to the theoretical and empirical literature found in chapter two. The research study findings will show the connections to the theoretical framework for this research, which was based on the self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985) and the theory of student involvement by Ausin (1984). The empirical evidence in chapter two of the literature review with the current research has described student disengagement, causes of disengagement, interventions to promote higher levels of student engagement, the importance of teacher-student relationships, and possible impact of student disengagement.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory was based on people having basic psychological needs and when those needs are met it promotes motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (2017), motivation is linked to students having higher levels of engagement. The three areas of psychological needs as defined in the self-determination theory are competency, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). All five teachers when they were interviewed individually suggested in different ways that their students did not feel competent with doing their work, which was a cause for disengagement. The teachers mentioned students feeling of frustration and a lack of understanding. During the focus-group discussion, one of the teachers discussed how students who are disengaged are often self-defeating as they believe they cannot do the work.

During the focus-group discussion, one of the interventions to promote student



engagement was allowing students to have autonomy with their learning. According to Booker (2018), autonomy is giving students the opportunity to make personal academic decisions about learning. Two of the teachers stressed that students in their classrooms are more engaged when they are given the opportunity to take control of their learning. Fourteen out of fifteen participants taking the survey showed that it is important for students to feel autonomy in learning to promote higher levels of student engagement. Relatedness is the third psychological basic need. The survey revealed that fourteen out of fifteen participants felt that students who feel connected to their school will develop higher levels of student engagement. During the individual interviews, the teachers discussed the value of developing peer support and a sense of community in the classroom, promoting higher levels of student engagement.

Astin's (1984) theory on student involvement was the second theoretical framework for this research. The theory of student involvement is based on students actively involved within the school events, extracurricular activities, and social interactions (Astin, 1984). The research was conducted in a kindergarten-through-fourth-grade school, where the school does not have extracurricular activities outside of school hours, but most activities are structured for the entire classroom. All fifteen participants taking the survey believe that developing peer relationships and positive teacher-student relationship is important to promote student engagement. The participants taking the survey confirm that social interactions play a role in promoting higher levels of student engagement. Research evidence showed that positive teacher-student relationship will encourage students to be more engaged with learning (Klem & Connell, 2004). This research conducted on student disengagement aligned with the self-determination theory and the student involvement theory.

## **Empirical Foundation**

There has been minimal research on student disengagement in the primary elementary grades (Strambler & Weinstein, 2010). Research has shown that the long-term impact on student disengagement may result in negative academics in higher grades, with possibility being heightened for students dropping out of school and having other at-risk behaviors (Yang, Bear, & May, 2018). Therefore, this research was conducted to gather information from educators working in an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district about the problem of disengagement. Students living in low socioeconomic school districts often have higher levels of student disengagement due to factors that are related to poverty (Washor, Mojkowski, & Kappan, 2014). The educators involved in this study had first-hand experience working with disengaged students who are living in a low socioeconomic school district. The research supports current literature on the behaviors and impact of student disengagement in the classroom. Also, the research corroborates with causes and interventions to promote higher levels of student engagement in the classroom. A predictor of academic success is students being engaged in learning in the classroom (Anderson et al., 2019). This research contributes to the current research to consider early interventions in the primary and elementary grades to promote higher levels of student engagement.

## **Parents**

Teachers interviewed during this research expressed their beliefs on the various causes of student disengagement that related to the parents or home environment. All the teachers participating in this research had at least one comment concerning students' basic needs not being met, which contributed to the students not being engaged in learning. Students within their school often come to the classroom hungry and tired for a lack of sleep. The results of this

research revealed that the teachers felt there were numerous causes for student disengagement, such as the student's home environment, lack of skills to do the work, language barrier, parents' lack of education, student being bored as a result of not understanding the material, student feeling frustrated, and trauma in the student's life. Students living in a low socioeconomic community, according to the teachers, have an impact on student engagement as often there are additional stresses in their homes. Families living in low socioeconomic conditions may have unhealthy home environments, basic needs not being met, and a lack of academic support (Jensen, 2009). In addition, teachers commented on parental involvement at home being important to support student engagement, but whether or not the parents show up for conferences or other school events was not an indicator.

**Instructional practices.** A dominant theme emerged from the interviews and the focus group on instructional practices that the educators have used to promote higher levels of student engagement as well as their ideas of what they felt could increase student engagement. Some suggestions were hands-on activities, educational games, and the use of technology. These suggestions from the participants are validated with the current literature. Project-based learning, which involves hand-on activities, allows students to have more autonomy, while keeping students more engaged in learning (Carrabba & Farmer, 2018). Teachers indicated they were tech savvy and named a few different technology programs they use in the classroom which they indicated kept their students engaged. Using technology was discussed in the literature review, but the participants in this research shed more light on all the availability of technology programs to promote student engagement.

Physical movement in the classroom and having students taking brain breaks, which also involves movement, were other ideas commented on by the majority of the teachers as being

important to keep the students engaged in learning throughout the day. Physical movement and brain-breaks are areas where more research is needed. Also, teachers commented on the importance of using proximity control to support student engagement, for example by touching a student's shoulder or tapping their desk to get them back on focus. Scaffolding lessons, chunking the content, and working in small groups were all techniques the teachers believe helps their students stay more engaged. Furthermore, teaching children about SEL was a tool that one of the teachers mentioned that supports student to be more engaged. SEL training is teaching students how to manage their emotions, establish goals for their lives, to make positive decisions, and to learn to develop positive peer relationships (CASEL, 2019). SEL promotes a healthier school environment, which results in higher levels of student engagement (Cipriano et al., 2019).

In addition, humor was an area in the survey which all the teachers believe supports student engagement. Also, classroom management was a significant component in student engagement. One of the teachers stated that when students are disengaged, a teacher needs to evaluate the learning environment and make necessary changes to support student engagement. According to Hanna (2014), teachers that build a healthy, trustful learning environment, and infuse laughter in the classroom will create a learning environment that enhances student engagement.

This current research revealed that peer relationships were important for student engagement but was limited in the discussion. The current literature review emphasizes the importance of creating peer relationships to promote student engagement. Research supports that students developing positive peer relationships will increase student academic success and higher levels of student engagement (Kiefer et al., 2015). Peer influence increases as students get older, so the current research being on kindergarten-through-fourth grade is the possible

reason that more discussion was not given to the influence of peer relationships. Teachers indicated that working with small groups and working on projects together help promote positive peer relationships. Establishing a sense of community in the classroom was also discussed by the teachers. Several of the teachers commented to the value of creating a safe learning environment, where the students felt a sense of belonging.

**Teacher-student relationships.** Current research stresses the importance of teachers developing positive relationship with their students to increase student engagement, academic success, and have positive behavior in the classroom (Cook et al., 2018). This research confirmed that teachers believe it is absolutely crucial to develop positive relationship with the students. All the teachers stressed the importance of knowing their students, their interests, and gaining understanding of their home environment. The teachers also commented on the value of speaking encouraging words to their students that had substance, to be kind, and also to be caring about the student individually. One teacher commented about believing that the students can be successful. Believing a student can be successful aligns with current research that teachers with high expectations will have higher levels of student engagement verses teachers with low expectations who will have higher levels of student disengagement (Barajas-Loez, 2014). Teaching with passion will often get the students excited and engaged in learning. Teacher-student relationships were considered a priority in the research conducted.

**Additional information.** This research revealed the teachers had various and numerous experiences working with disengaged students. The results documented behavior such as students being disruptive in the classroom and talking during classroom instruction. Additional behaviors observed were students being off task for learning, randomly walking around the classroom, fidgeting with various items, and at times being disrespectful to the teacher.

Therefore, teacher observations aligned with the current research on indicators of student disengagement. Disengaged students will often display misconduct in the classroom and perform lower academically (McDermott et al., 2017). Students who are disengaged in the classroom may often display behavioral issues and will find other things to do to avoid participating in academic work (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

Teachers reported that disengaged students are at times very quiet in the classroom, seeming as if they are paying attention but are disengaged since they are daydreaming or clueless in what the class is learning. The school studied had a large percentage of ESL students, with teachers explaining that some of the students have limited vocabulary understanding; the students will be respectful and quiet in the classroom but are not engaged in learning. Also, teachers said they have students who appear engaged, but when asked a question they have not been engaged at all with the classroom instruction. This adds to the current research since the literature review focused mostly on students having behavioral issues in the classroom. Also, disengaged students may often have poor attendance records, improper behavioral issues, and inappropriate interaction with their peers (Cipriano et al., 2019). The disengaged students do not have to display behavior issues, but may be just sitting quietly in their seats, yet not engaged in learning. On the other hand, students who are engaged in the classroom are dedicated to learning during the class time as well as outside the classroom (Burch et al., 2015).

The teachers participating in this research commented on learning disabilities as being a possible cause of student disengagement, but the teachers did not elaborate on the issue of disengagement with students with a disability. Research reveals special educational needs may cause a decrease in student disengagement (Zendarski et al., 2017). However, the current literature review indicated research was limited on students with learning disabilities causing

impact on student engagement in the classroom. There appears to be a lack of data and research concerning students with special educational needs and how their needs impact student engagement in learning. Also, students' having anxiety issues was expressed as a cause for student disengagement within the school being researched. The teachers' comments on anxiety aligned with the current research that anxiety disorders may result in students being disengaged and a lack of feeling connectedness in the classroom (Cunsolo, 2017).

The results of this research showed that teachers and the administrator were very concerned for the short-term and long-term impact student disengagement has on the school and the students. This confirms the current research that suggest there are long-term and short-term impact on students being disengaged, with the possibility if impacting their future by having lower academic success, behavioral issues, and poor peer relationship (Cipriano et al., 2019). Students that are disengaged are forming bad habits, and they are not learning, which will result in expanding any academic gap in learning. The teachers shed new light as they see students who are disengaged starting to believe at a young age that education is not necessary. Also, the teachers believe that students who are disengaged rob other students of learning at times as a result of misbehavior. Both the current research and current literature support that student disengagement is a problem that may have a negative impact both short and long term in a student's life.

### **Summary**

The purpose of chapter four was to present the results of the data collected from this research and present the findings. The participants' background was given to add validation of the participants in the study having an educational background to be able to give opinions about the problem of student disengagement. Data were collected from teachers, paraprofessionals,

and administrators. Semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and an on-line survey was used to address the problem of student disengagement in a school located in a low socioeconomic school district. Results from this study revealed three common themes: the first, parental involvement; the second; instructional practices; and the third, teacher-student relationships. The results confirmed and corroborated the current research. Parents not providing their children with basic needs, not being able to support their children academically, and possible trauma in the home may contribute to student disengagement. Analyzing the data on instructional practices corroborated with the current literature. Teachers added additional information that included the importance of physical movement, proximity, and scaffolding lesson plans to promote student engagement. Teachers were honest in stating that much of the responsibility of student disengagement lies with the teacher since the teacher has a responsibility to create an inspirational learning environment. All participants believe that the development of positive teacher-student relationships have the potential to optimize student engagement. This research data analysis both confirmed the current literature and added additional insight from the educators at Beacon Elementary Charter School.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this applied research was to solve the problem of student disengagement in an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district located in central New Jersey and to formulate a solution to address the problem. The problem was that Beacon Elementary Charter School was concerned with students being disengaged, recognizing the negative impact on academic achievement. Chapter five starts with the restatement of the problem followed by the proposed solutions. Based on the themes that were developed through the data collection, there are five areas that are being recommended to implement at Beacon Elementary Charter School. Following the proposed solutions is the resources required, funds that are needed, responsibilities to carry out the plan, a timeline, and solution implications. The final part of the chapter is the evaluation plan that covers delimitations, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

### **Restatement of the Problem**

The general education problem is students who are disengaged in the classroom often have negative short and long-term impact on the students' academic achievement. Research has shown the impact of student disengagement goes beyond the classroom as students often develop poor work habits, develop behavioral issues, negative social interactions, and low academic achievement (Cipriano, 2019). Student disengagement is a concern for the student, school personnel, families, and society. Students living in low socioeconomic communities often have higher levels of disengagement due to factors that often are accompanied by poverty (Washor, Mojkowski, & Kappan, 2014). The possible negative impact on student disengagement made this research significant by gathering information from a charter school having students who are

disengaged, students attending a school located in a low socioeconomic community. The value of focusing on elementary-age students to solve the problem of disengagement is that the solutions may positively impact their future years in education and life.

### **Proposed Solution to the Central Question**

The central question: How can the problem of disengaged students be solved at Beacon Charter Elementary School, located in central New Jersey? A detailed solution based on the central question has been provided based on the data collected at the school and analyzed. Each theme was examined when providing the proposed solution. This proposal has presented five specific areas to solve the problem of disengagement at Beacon Charter Elementary School.

#### **Proposal One: Parent program**

This current research revealed that teachers felt strongly that a cause of student disengagement was a result of the home environment, including basic needs of the students not being met and parents' lack of education. Theme one concerning parents pointed to the importance of developing a parent program to help solve the problem of disengagement. Parental involvement in a child's education promotes higher levels of student motivation and engagement (Wong et al., 2018). Two parent programs were proposed to support parents' involvement in the school and to support their children academically. The first program is for the school to offer the Strengthening Families Program sponsored by RWJ Barnabas Health. The program runs for 14 consecutive weeks, and parents and children attend the program together. Dinner is provided, and the families will go through the strengthening family curriculum. Parents will be given resources to support building a healthy family environment, including knowing the availability of outside resources for food banks or other needs. The second parent program will be to offer English speaking classes one night a week to parents who

do not speak English as their first language. These two programs will provide support to the families with the goal of building a stronger and healthier home environment for the students.

Students' basic needs not being met by the parents was one of the major causes the teachers believed students were disengaged in their classroom. The school has free breakfast and lunch programs, so the school has been able to provide for students since it was stated some students come to school hungry. In addition, RWJ Barnabas program provides information on the importance of nutritional meals and making sure children get their proper sleep. Strengthening Families Program provides training that supports families meeting children's basic needs. The goal will be strengthening families to strengthen the students' involvement in school, which may result in higher levels of student engagement.

### **Proposal Two: After School Program**

Proposal two is to provide an after-school program for two hours a day to provide extra support for students' academic needs. Teachers who participated with the current research expressed several reasons why students are disengaged in their classroom, which included students lacking academic skills, students having a language barrier, and boredom as work was too hard. Also, teachers commented that some of the disengagement is a result of parents' lack of education to be able to support their child academically. The after-school program supports theme one by providing students with academic support that parents are unable to provide and theme two by providing additional instructional support. Providing additional support to assist students in developing their academic skills, or developing understanding of vocabulary words for ESL students, or providing homework support most likely will promote higher levels of cognitive engagement for the students participating in the program. Cognitive engagement means students being invested in learning and understanding skills (Balwant, 2018).

The after-school program will begin with students having 20 minutes of active play time followed by a 10-minute snack time. This allows students to have movement and also meet their need if they are hungry. The students will be in small groups of no more than five students working with a teacher. Data from the research revealed that small groups promote higher levels of student engagement. Students will be in groups based on their academic need. The students will have three centers in which to rotate. One center will be working with a teacher on specific skills, another center will be using the chrome book on a program that is reinforcing what the student is learning, and the third center will be homework help. Students will set personal learning goals, which build a student's autonomy with learning, on the technology program they are using, Autonomy in learning supports a student's engagement and motivation to learn (Ruzek et al., 2016). The goal is to take the academic gaps in skills and provide extra support to strengthen the student's skill level. Also, the goals are to cultivate students wanting to achieve by setting goals during their technology time and, finally, to support families by providing homework help time.

### **Proposal Three: Technology**

Research has shown that using technology in the classroom is motivational, engaging, and makes learning more exciting for students (Varier et al., 2017). Theme two, instructional practices, identified technology as a tool in promoting student engagement. During this current research, some of the teachers explained different technology programs they were using in the classroom that promoted student engagement, leading to this proposal, which has two parts. Part one is to give the teachers opportunity to share during their weekly staff meeting programs that they are using that are engaging the students and supporting their academic learning. One staff person could be assigned each week to give approximately a five-minute presentation on a

technology program the teacher has been using in the classroom. The teacher could show a quick demonstration of the program. This will allow teachers to share ideas on technology, as many programs are available with the objective of teachers using more technology in the classroom to promote student engagement.

Part two, which may require a two-to three-year plan, is to increase the number of technology devices available for student use. Presently, the school has three promethean boards being used in the classroom; the recommendation is adding promethean boards until each classroom has an interactive board. Presently, the school has five-to-six chrome books per classroom; the recommendation is to increase and provide one chrome book for each student. Placing an emphasis on adding devices to their present technology will give more opportunities for students to use technology and promote higher levels of student engagement.

#### **Proposal Four: Social emotional learning**

A risk factor for student engagement, as stated through this current research, is a student's home environment, living in a low socioeconomic community, and experiencing trauma in life. Students that live in low socioeconomic communities have issues that are "damaging to the physical, socioemotional, and cognitive well-being of children and their families" (Jensen, 2009, p. 7). Causes of disengagement included students feeling frustrated and a lack of experiences at home that would support student engagement in learning. One teacher mentioned that students need training in SEL to help support them in the classroom in handling their emotions and to develop better connectedness with other students, which supports theme two, instructional practices. SEL supports the current research that students need to feel connected to their classroom with a sense of a caring learning environment. SEL is a tool to support students in managing their emotions, choices in their behavior, encourage empathy for

others, and develop positive social skills (Martinez, 2016). The proposal has three parts that address issues from all three themes: parents, instructional practices, and teacher-student relationships. Part one will be requiring teachers to weekly place in their lesson plans time for SEL training and to integrate the teaching of SEL throughout the day with the students. Training students in SEL will hopefully support students in handling their emotions, develop empathy for others, make responsible choices for their behavior, and encourage positive social skills. Part two will be providing professional development training needed to provide the staff with the tools to optimize the SEL program for students. The goal will be to improve student engagement by providing SEL training and reducing students' frustration while building a caring learning environment where students support one another.

The third area came as a result of teachers commenting that they needed better understanding about the lives of their students. The teachers believe that when they have a greater understanding of the community, they will have a higher level of empathy, which will hopefully result in more care and understanding of the students. Part three would be making arrangements to take the teachers on a tour of the community and arrange for them to go see one of the apartment buildings where many of the students live, exposing the teachers to what life is like for students after the end of the school day. The goal will be to support teachers having a deeper level of understanding and care for the students.

### **Proposal Five: Student learning profiles**

Student learning profiles addressed the third theme of teacher-student relationships. Teachers identified behaviors of students they had observed were disengaged. There was a range of behaviors from talking, yelling, and disruptive behavior to the quiet, daydreaming student who did not disturb others but still was very much disengaged. Teachers need to first identify the

students that are disengaged in their classroom and know the specific behaviors the students are displaying. Once the teacher has identified the students who are disengaged, the first proposal is for the teacher to develop a student learning profile for each of the students who has been identified as being disengaged in the classroom. Based on this current research and current literature review, developing a positive teacher-student relationship is important to increase student engagement. The teacher-student relationship was the third theme where teachers expressed the importance of knowing their students and having one-on-one interaction. Teacher-student relationships play a significant role in students' success in school and engagement in learning as the positive relationships build a sense of the student feeling connected to the school (Booker, 2018).

The teacher will develop a student learning profile for each student and have a meeting with the student one-on-one. The profile will consist of the following:

1. Name of the student
2. Where they live and who is in their home
3. What the student's interests are
4. Their favorite subject
5. Their strength in learning
6. Their weakness in learning
7. One goal that the student wants to work on to improve their engagement in the classroom
8. The teacher will list one behavior they would like to see improved in the classroom.

The teacher is to allow the student to talk and answer the questions about their learning profile. Once the student's learning profile is developed, the teacher will make an academic/behavioral

chart. The chart will include the student's academic goal and the behavioral goal stated by the teacher. Stickers will be placed on the chart daily when the student has shown progress in the selected areas. At the end of the week, the teacher will meet one-on-one to review the student's progress and provide any additional support. Depending on what the teacher decides, an award may be earned for a certain number of stickers, such as having lunch with the teacher or possibly extra time on the computer. Teachers will be encouraged to integrate the student's interests into their learning. This proposal's goal is for teachers to have a deeper understanding of their students, strengthen the teacher-student relationship, build autonomy by giving the student ownership in creating goals, and develop the student's interest in learning.

### **Resources Needed**

There are five proposals; each proposal has its own set of needed resources. Proposal one is a parent program that contains two parts: The first part is offering the RWJ Barnabas Health Strengthening Families Program. This is a non-profit and is a free service. The only resource needed is two rooms within the school for the meetings to be held. There will need to be a staff member who will need to let them in the building and lock up afterwards. Strengthening Families Program usually runs from 5:30pm to 7:30pm and will provide all needed resources. A potential barrier is finding a RWJ Barnabas Health Strengthening Families Program that is willing to take on a new school to offer their program. The second part is providing English speaking classes to students' families who do not speak English. Adult curriculum for learning the English language will be needed. In addition, the program will need a teacher who will be able to teach English to adults. A room will need to be made available in the school to conduct the class. A potential barrier to implementing the adult English class is finding a teacher who is qualified and who is available in the evenings to teach the class. Another potential issue is



funding for the program.

Proposal two is an after-school program that will require extensive resources. Teachers or paraprofessionals will be needed to run the after-school program. One teacher or paraprofessional will be needed for every ten students. The students will be in two groups, rotating centers, so the students are placed in groups of five when working with the teacher or paraprofessional. Curriculum will be needed to support the skill-based learning and ESL curriculum to build student vocabulary. Snacks will need to be provided for the students attending the program. A technology program will need to be selected for students doing work at the computer center. Students' families will be required to provide their own transportation home. A potential barrier is finding teachers or paraprofessionals willing to run the after-school program and funding to pay for the program.

The third proposal is to focus on increasing the use of technology within the school. Part one will require the teachers sharing the various programs that they have used in the classroom to promote student engagement and learning. Part two will require the purchase of promethean boards for each classroom. Presently the school has 15 classrooms and three of the classrooms have promethean boards, so twelve additional boards are required to meet this goal. There are 20 students in each classroom, with an average of five chrome books per classroom. The proposal is to have one chrome book per student. An additional 15 chrome books are needed for each classroom for a total of 225 chrome books. A major barrier is finding the funding to purchase the promethean boards and chrome books.

The fourth proposal is to expand SEL training within the school. The first part will require renting a bus to take the teachers on a tour of the community. The potential barrier is finding funding for the bus. Part two will require the school to purchase a SEL program that will

provide professional development training to support the teachers in implementing SEL in their classrooms and provide the curriculum. Also, this will require an administrator to check teachers' lesson plans to verify they are including SEL training on a weekly basis.

The final proposal on developing student learning profiles will require a form to be made, a behavior/goal chart, and stickers. Also, Beacon Elementary Charter School has one teacher and one paraprofessional for each classroom. The paraprofessional will need to actively cover the class to allow the teacher to meet individually with each student who is disengaged in their classroom.

### **Funds Needed**

The funds needed for the five proposals vary greatly. The parent program consisted of two parts. Part one, Strengthening Families program, will not require any funding from the school. Part two, the evening class being offered to parents to teach them how to speak and read English, will cost approximately \$100.00 per evening of the program to cover the teacher and curriculum. The parents could be asked to pay a minimum fee to help offset the cost. Perhaps the Parent-Teacher Association would be willing to run a fundraiser to raise revenue for the program.

The after-school program will require paying teachers or paraprofessionals for their time. The number of students identified as being disengaged that qualify for the program will determine the teachers or paraprofessionals needed for the program. An estimation of two teachers or paraprofessionals will be required, considering the teachers who were interviewed indicated a small number of students being disengaged. The teacher or paraprofessional will receive \$35.00 per hour for two hours per day and approximately 20 days each month. The average cost per month will be \$1,400.00 and if two people are needed, the cost will be

\$2,800.00. Free on-line technology programs will be chosen to be used for the technology center. The cost of skill books will be approximately \$30.00 per book per student. Snacks will be provided through the breakfast and lunch programs, which will be reimbursed by the state. There is a Federal grant that would pay for an after-school tutorial program since Beacon Elementary Charter School is a full Title I school. The school would need to apply for the following school year. Without a grant, funding for the program would be a major barrier.

The technology proposal is the costliest. Promethean boards cost approximately \$4,500.00 per board, so twelve additional boards would cost \$54,000.00. The student chrome books cost approximately \$235.00 per chrome, so for 225 additional chrome books the cost would be \$52,875.00. The suggestion is to make this a three-year project by putting \$35,625.00 in the budget for the next three years to purchase technology equipment. The potential barrier is getting the school board to approve the budget item of increasing technology in the school. A possible revenue would be to look for a grant that could possibly help with the purchase of new technology equipment.

Taking teachers on a bus tour of the students' environment would cost approximately \$250.00 to rent a bus. Another option would be to have a few of the teachers who are willing to drive do so and follow each other to see the places in the community. Also, the school will need to purchase a SEL curriculum. SEL curriculum will cost approximately \$4,000.00 for the school, which will include professional development training, lesson plans, videos, library access to additional resources, and at-home resources. The investment is a lot, but it is needed to have the support when initiating a SEL program in the school. After the first year the teachers may not need the support and be able to use free SEL resources. If the school is unable to allocate money, the school could provide in-house training during their weekly staff meetings and use

free resources that are available. Finally, funds are not needed for the teachers developing the student learning profiles other than regular school supplies and printing.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

Parents and their home environment play a role in student engagement, so a parent program has been established to support the families. The Strengthening Families program conducted by RWJ Barnabas Health will be responsible for running the program. The organization will have full responsibility of providing the dinner, the classes, and communication with the families that are participating. A school administrator will contact the non-profit organization to make arrangements for the program to be a part of their school; then the administrator will serve as the liaison person between the school and the Strengthening Families program. The maintenance person will make sure the building is unlocked for the program and the building is secure at the end of the program. Classroom teachers will give their recommendation of families that would benefit from this program, with the goal of supporting students who are disengaged with learning.

In order to support families that are non-English speakers with students being disengaged as a result of not understanding English or receiving academic support at home because the parents do not speak English, an evening class will be held for families to learn to read and speak English. The school administration will have the responsibility of hiring a qualified person to teach English to the families. The requirements for the person teaching will be to have a minimum teacher substitute certification in English or ESL, a criminal background check, and approval of the school board. Recruiting and communicating with the families will be the school secretary who speaks fluent Spanish and English. The teacher will have full responsibility of preparing and running the class. The maintenance person will be responsible for opening and

securing the building after the program.

Providing extra support to students who are lacking academic skills or ESL students who are not understanding the English language supports students who are disengaged. These students will be asked to participate in an after-school program. The administration at the school will need to hire teachers or paraprofessionals to conduct the after-school program. The educators chosen will need to meet the qualifications of a substitute teacher in the state of New Jersey, have a criminal background check, and be approved by the school board. They will be responsible to plan and implement the program. Their responsibilities will include planning some physical activity immediately after school, handing out the snacks, preparing the skill lesson for the small group, teaching the students, providing the program the students are to work on during the technology time, and giving homework support. One administrator will order the curriculum, oversee the program, and be responsible to call for a substitute if the teacher is unable to come that day.

Research has shown that technology enhances student engagement and learning. Increasing technology within the school was chosen as an instructional practice to support higher levels of student engagement. Classroom teachers will have the responsibility to sign up for one staff meeting to present a technology program they have used in the classroom to promote student engagement. The administrator who conducts the staff meeting will have each staff sign up for a designated week. Beacon Elementary Charter School showed commitment to increase their technology by investing in promethean boards in each classroom. The school business administrator will be responsible to get the funding in the budget or a grant, ordering the boards, and arranging for the installation of the boards. The administration will arrange for professional development training with the company and teachers about using the boards. Promethean boards

are interactive, allowing classroom instruction and student involvement to have higher levels of student engagement. The school business administrator will be responsible to get funding in the budget or a grant, order the chrome books, and assign the books to each of the classrooms. The school secretary will assist with recording the inventory of chrome books and note to which classroom they are assigned. Increasing chrome books in the classroom will give each student the opportunity to use technology to increase student engagement.

In order to help teachers to have a greater understanding and empathy for their students about their home environment, the administration will be responsible to arrange for a bus or car pool to take a trip around the community to have more insight into the students' lives. Also, SEL training has been recommended to be implemented weekly in the classrooms to support students' frustrations, emotions, and to guide the student in making good decisions and develop positive peer relationships. SEL training will support the students in having higher levels of student engagement. The school administration will research and decide on curriculum that the school will use. They will also make arrangements for the professional development training with the staff and will check lesson plans weekly to verify integration of SEL in teachers' lesson plans. The school business administrator will work on the funding for the program. Teachers will be responsible for implementing the SEL program throughout their lessons.

In order to support students who are disengaged in learning, strengthen teacher-student relationships student profiles will be developed. Classroom teachers will have the responsibility to identify the students that are disengaged in the classroom. It will be the teacher's responsibility to meet individually with the students they have identified as being disengaged, develop the student learning profile, with the student with the student setting an academic goal and the teacher setting a behavior goal. The teacher will make an academic/behavioral chart

where the student will have the opportunity daily to earn stickers for meeting the goals. At the end of the week the teacher will give the student a reward that has been decided between the teacher and the student. The responsibility is with the teacher; the role of the paraprofessional assigned to the classroom will need to support the other students when the teacher meets with the students that have been identified as disengaged.

### **Timeline**

There are immediate things the school is able to implement. Most things implemented within the first two months are based on funding. Advancing technology will be over the next three years. The first item is to immediately have teachers identify the students that are disengaged in their classroom and within the first week meet with the students to create the student profile. One cannot work on student disengagement unless the teachers have identified those students who are struggling with disengagement. It is foundational for the teachers to make a plan to provide support for the students to strengthen teacher-student relationship and to promote higher levels of engagement. The after-school program and parent program will take some time since teachers need to be hired, money is needed for the program, and a request for the Strengthening Families program needs to be placed. Teachers are able to share immediately about technology programs that they have been using in the classroom but increasing promethean boards and chrome books will be a three-year process. Arrangements for the tour of the community can be arranged within the first month. SEL can begin within the first month, following a staff meeting where teachers are given guidance on the free resources while waiting for the purchase of curriculum and reviewing the requirement to include in their lesson plans. A bulleted list of a timeline needed to solve the problem of student disengagement at Beacon Elementary Charter School is found in Appendix H.

### **Solution Implications**

The following are the solution implications of this research derived from the central research question: how can the problem of disengaged students be solved at Beacon Charter Elementary School, located in central New Jersey? Possible results of students being disengaged may impact the students during school but may also reach outside the realm of school into their lives and their futures. Disengagement has been linked to low academic achievement in school, behavioral issues, negative relationships, and long-term unemployment (Duffy & Elwood, 2013). Additional studies have linked student disengagement with “substance abuse, depression, suicidality, aggression, early sexual activity” (Hart et al., 2011, p. 67). However, research has implied that students who are disengaged can be changed by making changes in the classroom learning environment (Cipriano et al., 2019). Identifying the students who are disengaged in their early years of education, establishing a specific plan for individual students, and providing various interventions to promote higher levels of student engagement may solve the problem for individual students at the school, having a positive impact on their future. The negative implications occur if after trying all the interventions the student is still disengaged with learning. If students do improve in their engagement in learning, the findings may be applicable to other schools having issues with student disengagement.

Positive implication to the parent program may result in parents developing skills to better support their children academically and providing for their children’ basic needs. Negative implications is the parents who need the programs do not participate or do not make needed changes. In addition, the after-school program may result in several positive implications by giving students the additional academic support if the students stay for the program. Technology and SEL positive implication should promote positive instructional practices, not just for



disengaged students but all students in the classroom. The success of the student-profiles solution will depend on the teacher developing a positive relationship with the student and prioritize the necessary time to check in with the student and reinforce with rewards.

The potential benefit to the school is having an increase in student engagement which may result in higher academic achievement. Beacon Elementary Charter School is evaluated by the state every five years to determine the effectiveness of their educational program at the school. The state determines effectiveness by state testing scores. Students that are engaged in learning are a good predictor of students having higher levels of learning and academic achievement (Burch et al., 2015). Students engaged in learning support a healthier and better learning environment. A learning environment where students are engaged will be evident by students being motivated to learn, working on assignments or projects, asking questions, and showing an interest in learning (Lee & Reeve, 2012). Creating an engaging learning environment supports all students in the classroom and creates a good environment to optimize learning. The pitfall is students who do not change their levels of engagement with the interventions being implemented.

Resources are needed to provide extra support for student disengagement. Funding is needed to offer the programs; also, additional responsibilities will be required from all the stakeholders working within the school. The stakeholders need to see why it is important to try and reach each individual student who is disengaged in learning within the school. When considering how disengaged students are hurting themselves by not learning, possibly impacting other students within their classroom, causing frustration from the teachers trying to educate the students in their classroom, wasting resources, money, and responsibility, the effort is minimal if the result solves the problem of student disengagement. The possibility of promoting higher

levels of student engagement may also be seen by other schools that will make the choice of implementing additional programs to increase student engagement within their schools.

Stakeholders need to feel a buy-in and the importance of implementing the suggested solutions to solve the problem of disengagement. The school board needs to be committed to find the money within the budget to financially support the programs. Teachers need to be open to discuss the issue of disengagement and what solutions are working within their classrooms. Administrators need to be proactive in implementing the various solutions and checking on the progress. Parents need to be informed of the data on disengagement and be given opportunities to become supportive of promoting higher levels of student engagement. Finding the solution of disengaged students may make a difference in one life that may impact a community.

### **Evaluation Plan**

The proposal for solving the problem of disengagement in Beacon Charter Elementary School presented several different programs. The programs included: Adult evening programs, an after-school tutorial program, advancing the use of technology in the classroom, SEL implemented within lesson plans for the purpose of including during classroom instruction time, and student-learning profiles with daily accountability for the students. Each of the programs will have its own evaluation and at the end of the school year where the teachers will complete an outcome-based assessment to determine the effectiveness on the students who were disengaged. Then limitations and delimitations will be discussed with recommendations for future research.

### **Evaluation**

Strengthening Families will be evaluated by the RWJ Barnabas Health personnel who conducted the program. They will use a goal-based assessment by giving a survey to determine

if the families believed they benefitted from the program and the program helped them meet the goals they established. English classes that are held in the evening will begin by providing a formative assessment by giving the adults a pre-test to establish the base line. Attendance records will be kept to determine the consistency of adults attending. A summative assessment will be given to the adults to determine the amount of English they learned by attending the course.

The after-school tutorial program will begin by the teacher giving students a formative assessment based on skills or vocabulary words for the ESL students. This will be a written assessment given during the first day of the program. A summative assessment will be conducted at the end of the program by the students taking a written assessment that aligns with the pre-assessment given by the teacher. The results of the pre-assessment will be compared to the post assessment to evaluate academic growth in the areas of the skills being taught or their vocabulary words.

Technology implementation will use a goal-based evaluation. Teachers will be asked to set a goal for their classroom on integrating new programs to promote student engagement. The teachers, at the end of the school year, will take a survey to evaluate if the new technology programs encouraged higher levels of student engagement. The survey will include which programs the teachers believed were the most engaging for their students and yielded higher levels of academic outcomes.

SEL curriculum provides assessment tools to evaluate the impact of the program. Teachers will administer the SEL assessment, which is computer based and will give calculated results. The assessment will measure student competencies, self-management, self-efficacy, and the student's making responsible decisions. SEL growth should result in students being more

engaged with learning and higher academic achievement.

Student learning profiles will begin by the teacher reviewing the behaviors of disengaged students and determining the students that need the program. Students that are considered disengaged will have a formative assessment on their academic/behavior charts and their current grades in each subject to determine the baseline. The teacher will be responsible to record the number of behavioral issues in the past and record the student's average for each class. The teacher will conduct outcome-based assessment assessments weekly on the student's academic/behavioral chart to determine the effects of the program. The outcome-based assessment will be shared with the student weekly and will be measured by the number of stickers, indicating the student met their goals for the day. At the end of the school year, a summative evaluation will be given by the teacher by evaluating the behavioral charts and students' grades compared to the beginning of the program. A data sheet will show the behavior issues before and at the end of the program. Additionally, the sheet will note the grades prior to the program compared to the end of the program to determine if growth is evident. The teacher will calculate the results of the weekly academic/behavior charts on how many days the student met their goal compared to days the goals were not met.

At the end of the school year, an outcome-based evaluation will be given to each teacher and paraprofessional. The evaluation will cover all solution proposal projects, and each one will be individual evaluated by the teachers and paraprofessionals. The evaluation will be based on the targeted students who were disengaged and the outcome the teachers saw in their classrooms based on each individual program. School administration will evaluate the results from the teacher outcome-based evaluation, look at the behavioral logs to see if the misbehavior declined for the targeted group, and evaluate if there was academic growth with the targeted group.

**Delimitations**

The delimitations for selection of a school was that the school must be a charter school that was relatively new. A charter school was chosen since charter schools are generally much smaller in the number of students attending, and a new charter school was desired as the school did not have years of experience, thereby being open for suggestions for growth. Also, the charter schools needed to be located in a low socioeconomic community since students living in poverty have additional factors that attribute to student disengagement. According to Jensen (2009), students living in low socioeconomic communities have emotional challenges, have various stresses in their life, academic deficiencies, and often safety issues. The criteria for selecting a school were that it had to be a charter school, preferably less than five years old, and it must be located in a low socioeconomic community. Additionally, an elementary school was desired as limited research has been conducted in the lower grades on disengagement.

**Limitations**

Small sampling size and teachers with few years of teaching experience was a limitation to this research. Participants were all volunteers and since the charter school was only four years old, many of the teachers were young teachers. The average teaching experience for the individual interviews was eight years and the focus group average years was two and half. Lack of years of experience was a limitation, but they all had experienced disengaged students, so they had quality comments to give during the interview and focus group. The school has a student enrollment of 280 students, which is relatively a small school; therefore, the pool of teachers who participated was small. Nine teachers volunteered to participate in the interview or focus group. Seven were female and two were male.

Researcher bias has the possibility of being a limitation to research. At the time of conducting this research, I had 38 years of working in the field of education as a teacher and school administrator. Also, I was working in a low socioeconomic school district with high levels of student disengagement. I took precaution not to make any comments to interfere with the discussion during the interviews and focus group. I remained neutral for all responses and did not express any emotions to the responses. I tried to keep the environment friendly and relaxed without giving approval or disapproval for any of the responses.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendation for future research would be to conduct research on solving the problem of disengagement in a larger district school located in a low socioeconomic school district comparing the results with the small charter school. Additionally, I would recommend conducting research on solving disengagement in a larger school district that is not located in a low socioeconomic school district to compare the differences and similarities. Also, it would be good to have a selection of teachers with more years of teaching experience with disengaged students; these teachers might possibly add additional insight to promoting higher levels of student disengagement.

Another recommendation is for research in the area of disengagement with students with learning disabilities. There was limited research on how learning disabilities impact student engagement in the classroom. This current research was very limited in teachers discussing students with learning disability and their disengagement. Students with IEPs that are disengaged may possibly need different solution to help promote engagement in the classroom.

Additional research is needed in evaluating current programs to see if students have been positively impacted long-term in their lives. The literature review revealed many programs to

promote student engagement. Follow-up on the schools using those programs is needed to see if the schools are still using the programs and if data has been collected on the effects the programs had on the students long-term.

### **Summary**

Disengagement is an issue that educators will face at various times during their careers as educators. Student disengagement has many different ways that it is displayed in the classroom with various causes for the disengagement. One of the significant findings was the influence and impact parents and their home environment have on student disengagement. Parent involvement is important and includes such things as reading a book to their child, discussing the value of education, or making sure their children get ample sleep to be able to do well in school. It became apparent through this research that parents, especially those living in low socioeconomic conditions, need support and guidance on how to assist their children in doing well in school. Parental involvement in their children's education is a predictor of higher academic achievement and student engagement. However, there are parents who are lacking the skills who need support and to be taught how to help their children advance in education beyond what they have personally experienced.

Another significant finding was instructional practices promoting student engagement. The teachers involved in this research took ownership, indicating disengagement is often a result of a lack of instructional practices. Teachers gave several recommendations on instructional practices that they believe promote higher levels of student engagement. Teachers believe that developing a learning environment where students feel connected will support student engagement. Also, SEL was a suggested instructional practice for the classroom to encourage student engagement in learning.

Additionally, the importance of teachers knowing their students, having empathy for their situations, and providing a caring environment where students will desire to have higher levels of student engagement was noted. Teachers being provided with one-on-one time with the student and working as a team to support the student may be the difference in a student's success academically and the student's future in learning and life. This research confirmed that the teacher-student relationship is key for student engagement and achievement. For administrators, this provides important data to give opportunities to have teachers develop positive relationships with their students and to recognize that teachers' personalities can make a difference in a student's life.

Overall, the research highlighted the extreme importance of student engagement, and stressed the importance of an educator to do the very best to determine the cause of individual student disengagement and implement a plan with the student to support engagement and academic success.



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**APPENDIX A**  
**IRB Approval Letter**

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 31, 2019

Dawn M. Cobb-Fossnes

IRB Exemption 4024.103119: Student Disengagement in a Low Socioeconomic Elementary School: Applied Research

Dear Dawn M. Cobb-Fossnes,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101 (b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by "6.111(a)(7).

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

Research Ethics Office

**LIBERTY**  
**UNIVERSITY**

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**APPENDIX B****Permission Request**

7/26/2019

Board of Trustees [REDACTED]

Head of School  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear Board of Trustees and [REDACTED]:

As a graduate student in the Doctor of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting an applied research study as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree. The title of my research project is Student Disengagement in a Low Socioeconomic Elementary School: Applied Research. The purpose of my research is to solve the problem of student disengagement for an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district in Central New Jersey and to formulate a solution to address the problem.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Participants will be asked to be interviewed for one hour, take part in a focus-group interview for one hour, and take an on-line survey that will be sent to their school email. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Dawn M. Cobb-Fossnes  
Doctoral Degree Candidate



## Permission Letter

July 26, 2019

Dawn M. Cobb-Fossnes  
Doctoral Degree Candidate

[REDACTED]

Dear Dawn M. Cobb-Fossnes:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled Student Disengagement in a Low Socioeconomic Elementary School: Applied Research, we have decided to grant you permission to contact our faculty/staff and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following box as applicable:

We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Head of School

[REDACTED]

**APPENDIX C****Recruitment Letter**

September 25, 2019

[REDACTED]  
Head of School  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear Staff at [REDACTED]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for my dissertation. The purpose of my research is to consider the problem of disengaged students and formulate a solution to increase student engagement at [REDACTED], and I am writing to invite full-time teachers, paraprofessionals, and academic administrators to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, a full-time teacher, a paraprofessional, or an academic administrator, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to sign up today to take part in individual interviews, a focus group, or an on-line survey. It should take approximately one hour for each interview, an hour for the focus group, and approximately 30 minutes to complete the survey. Your name will be requested as part of your participation to sign up, but you will be given a pseudonym, so the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please write your name, your position, and email on the sign-up sheet, and you will be given a consent document that you will return to me.

The consent document is available when you sign up, and it must be signed prior to participating in the research study, including the interviews, focus group, and survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research; please sign the consent document and return it to me today or when I return to the school.

Sincerely,

Dawn Cobb-Fossnes  
Doctoral Degree Candidate

## APPENDIX D

The Liberty University Institutional  
Review Board has approved  
this document for use from  
10/31/2019 to –  
Protocol #4024.103119

### Consent Form

Student Disengagement in a Low Socioeconomic Elementary School: Applied Research  
Dawn M. Cobb-Fossnes  
Liberty University  
Doctorate Program in the School of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study about the problem of student disengagement. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a full-time teacher, a paraprofessional, or an administrator at [REDACTED]. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Dawn M. Cobb-Fossnes, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of student disengagement for an elementary school located in a low socioeconomic school district in Central New Jersey and to formulate a solution to address the problem.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. [Teachers] Participate in an individual interview that will last approximately one hour. You will be asked questions about disengaged students and strategies to promote student engagement. The interview will be audio recorded using two devices.
2. [Teachers and Administrators] Participate in one focus group that will last approximately one hour. The group will be asked additional questions about disengaged students and strategies to promote student engagement. The focus group will be audio recorded using two devices.
3. [Teachers, Administrators, and Paraprofessionals] Participate in an on-line survey about disengaged students and strategies to promote student engagement. The on-line survey will be sent through your school email and will take approximately 30 minutes to answer

**\*\*Statement:** To participate in this study, teachers and administrators may select one or two of the procedures. A total of five teachers may participate in the interviews; four teachers and one administrator may participate in the focus group. The survey will include 10 teachers, two administrators, and three paraprofessionals.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

Benefits to society also include gaining educational insight about how to better promote student engagement, resulting in the possibility of providing higher levels of academic achievement for students who have been previously disengaged.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and the researcher's faculty chair will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and the focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Dawn M. Cobb-Fossnes. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 609-707-8269 or [dmcobbfossnes@liberty.edu](mailto:dmcobbfossnes@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. R. Claxton, at [rlclaxton@liberty.edu](mailto:rlclaxton@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

**APPENDIX E****Student Disengagement in a Low Socioeconomic Elementary School***Open-Ended Interview Questions*

1. Please describe your experience working with a disengaged student.
2. What behavior have you seen in your classroom from a student who appeared disengaged?
3. What do you believe are the top three causes for student disengagement?
4. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the words *student disengagement*?
5. Please describe your view of the degree you feel students are disengaged behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively.
6. Explain in detail how living in a low socioeconomic community impacts student engagement in the classroom.
7. What do you think are the negative behaviors that students display in the classroom when they are disengaged?
8. What would effective professional development look like to promote higher levels of student engagement?
9. How, if at all, did the student who was disengaged impact other students in the classroom?
10. What specific strategies did you use to support the student who was disengaged?
11. What classroom strategies have you integrated to promote student engagement in the classroom?
12. What do you believe is the solution to the problem of student disengagement?

**APPENDIX F****Student Disengagement in a Low Socioeconomic Elementary School**  
*Open-Ended Focus Group Interview Questions*

1. What are the factors you believe cause student disengagement?
2. How do you feel that student disengagement impacts a student's academic achievement?
3. How do you feel student disengagement impacts the student's behavior in the classroom?
4. How do you feel student disengagement at the primary and elementary level will impact students in middle school, high school, and their future careers?
5. How do you feel students living in low socioeconomic conditions will impact student engagement?
6. What barriers hinder you from engaging all the students in your classroom?
7. What instruction techniques do you feel have been most beneficial in promoting student engagement?
8. Please describe how you develop a learning environment to promote student engagement?
9. What would you consider the top three interventions to promote student engagement?
10. During what activities do you see students most engaged in learning?

## APPENDIX G

### Student Disengagement in a Low Socioeconomic Elementary School

#### *An Applied Research Quantitative Survey*

#### Survey

**Instructions:** Choose the answer that best describes how you feel about the question.

1. Students are disengaged because of their disadvantaged background.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. Student are disengaged because parents do not show support by attending parental meetings and conferences.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Students are disengaged because of anxiety, which may cause them to feel as if they are failures.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. Students are disengaged because of a lack of proper nutrition.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. Students are disengaged due to lack of proper sleep.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree



6. Students are disengaged as a result of an academic gap between other students in the classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. Students are disengaged as a result of poor social skills among their peers.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. Students are disengaged because they are bored.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

### Survey

**Instructions:** Choose the answer that best describes your opinion.

9. How important is parental involvement in promoting student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

10. How important is it to use technology to promote student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

11. How important is developing peer relationships to promote student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Fairly Important	Most Important

12. How important is humor in the classroom to promote student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not	Slightly	Important	Fairly	Most
Important	Important		Important	Important

13. How important is classroom management to promoting student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not	Slightly	Important	Fairly	Most
Important	Important		Important	Important

14. How important is students' receiving immediate feedback from the teacher to promoting student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not	Slightly	Important	Fairly	Most
Important	Important		Important	Important

15. How important is developing a positive teacher-student relationship to encourage student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not	Slightly	Important	Fairly	Most
Important	Important		Important	Important

16. How important is students' feeling autonomy in learning to promoting higher levels of student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not	Slightly	Important	Fairly	Most
Important	Important		Important	Important

17. How important is professional development training about student disengagement for teacher success in promoting student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not	Slightly	Important	Fairly	Most
Important	Important		Important	Important

18. How important is students' feeling connected to their school to developing student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not	Slightly	Important	Fairly	Most
Important	Important		Important	Important

19. How important is giving students choices in their assignments to encourage student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not	Slightly	Important	Fairly	Most
Important	Important		Important	Important

20. How important is teaching students to handle their emotions to encourage student engagement?

1	2	3	4	5
Not	Slightly	Important	Fairly	Most
Important	Important		Important	Important

## APPENDIX H

### Timeline

- Week One
  - Teachers identify students that are disengaged in the classroom
  - Teachers meet with students to fill out the Student Learning Profile
  - Administration contacts Strengthening Families Program to see if they will be able to do their program in the school this year. If not, to begin the process to offer the program next school year.
- Week Two
  - Teachers design and begin implementing the academic/behavior chart
  - Teacher will meet weekly to review chart and give student rewards
  - Administrator will make a schedule of teachers presenting technology programs
- Week Three
  - Teachers begin presenting during Monday's staff meeting (a different teacher will present each week for the next 10 weeks)
  - Administrators will make arrangements to take the staff on a tour of the community where the students live
- Week Four
  - Administrator will use the Monday staff meeting to review SEL so teachers may implement SEL into their lesson plans. The teachers will begin the next week using free resources while waiting for board approval to purchase SEL curriculum.
- Week five
  - Administrator places on board agenda for approval of finances for the after-school tutoring program, adult evening class for ESL, three-year plan to purchase technology equipment, and the purchase of SEL curriculum.
- Week Six
  - Advertise for hiring an educator for the after-school program and the adult ESL teacher
  - Order curriculum for the after-school program, ESL class, and SEL curriculum
- Week Seven
  - Interviews for hiring staff
- Week Eight
  - Advertise after-school program
  - Begin recruiting parents for ESL
- Week Nine
  - Begin after-school tutoring program
  - Begin evening classes
- Summer
  - Order four promethean boards and 75 chrome books
- Second Year
  - Order four promethean boards and 75 chrome books
- Third Year
  - Order four promethean boards and 75 chrome book

