

Research Brief #7: Toward an Organizational Model of Achievement in High Schools: The Significance of Collective Efficacy

IMPORTANT QUOTE:

“When collective efficacy is high, a strong focus on academic pursuits not only directs the behavior of teachers and helps them persist but also reinforces a pattern of shared beliefs held by other teachers and students” (p. 81).

What is this study about?

This research took place in high schools in Ohio in 2002 and was conducted by Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith from the Ohio State University. Socioeconomic status (SES) is a characteristic of the school and community that is often used to explain student achievement. Recently, collective efficacy has been identified as a promising predictor of student achievement. Collective efficacy is defined as the perceptions of teachers in a specific school that the faculty as a whole can execute courses of action required to positively affect student behavior and learning. Past research establishes strong links between teacher efficacy and student achievement and in this study, the researchers are concerned with teacher efficacy at the collective level. Questions posed were: Does what works at the individual level carry over to the collective level? If so, why and how?

WHAT’S IMPORTANT?

The theory is that when collective efficacy is high, teachers in a school believe they can reach their students and that they can overcome negative external influences. This shared perception of group capability influences teachers’ behavior in positive ways. In other words, when collective efficacy is high, a strong focus on academic pursuits directs the behavior of teachers and helps them persist. Strong collective efficacy leads teachers to be more persistent in their teaching efforts, set high and reasonable goals, and overcome temporary setbacks and failures. The researchers hypothesized that the collective efficacy of a school would be positively associated with school achievement in mathematics.

One of the basic assumptions of this study was that the norms of a school influence teacher behavior. School norms that support academic achievement and norms of collective efficacy are particularly important in motivating teachers and students to achieve.

THE DETAILS OF THE STUDY

Participants/Method and Procedures

The sample for the current study consisted of 97 high schools in Ohio that were urban, suburban, and rural schools from diverse geographic areas of the state. High schools were defined by grade configurations that included Grades 9-12 and Grades 10-12 and schools in the sample were representative in terms of size, SES, and urban-rural balance. Data for collective efficacy were collected from the faculty of each school during a regularly scheduled faculty meeting via a valid and reliable collective efficacy questionnaire. Ohio Department of Education records were used to obtain SES and proficiency test data for each high school.

Results

The researchers found that collective efficacy was more important in explaining school achievement than SES. In fact, it had the strongest independent effect of achievement than any other variable in this study. Furthermore, the researchers found that academic press (the extent to which the school is driven by a quest for academic excellence) was most potent when collective efficacy was strong. In other words, when collective efficacy was high, a strong focus on academic pursuits not only directed the behaviour of teachers and helped them persist, it also reinforced a pattern of shared beliefs held by other teachers and students. This finding is of practical significance because it is easier to change the collective efficacy of a school than it is to influence the SES of the school.

Finally, the researchers noted that: “the consequences of high collective efficacy will be the acceptance of challenging goals, strong effort by teachers, and persistence in effort to overcome difficulties and succeed. Of course, the opposite is true. Weak collective efficacy is likely to lead to reduced effort and a propensity to give up when things get difficult. Our research findings in high school are consistent with this theory of collective efficacy and its impact on school achievement” (p. 91).

Limitations

This study took place in high schools only and, therefore, the effects of collective efficacy need further testing at other levels, including elementary and middle schools.

Citation

Hoy, W., Sweetland, S., Smith, P. (2002). Toward an organizational model of achievement in high schools: The significance of collective efficacy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 38(1), 77-93.