IMPLEMENTATION OF RACHEL'S CHALLENGE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF THE CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM ON RESILIENCY, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY IN A SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL

A Dissertation
Submitted to
The Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

by
Lynne Blair
May 2014

Examining Committee Members:

Dr. Joan P. Shapiro, Advisory Chair, Educational Leadership
Dr. Steven J. Gross, Educational Leadership
Dr. Joseph DuCette, Educational Psychology
Dr. Michelle Chaplin Partlow, Psychological, Organizational, and Leadership Studies
Dr. Portia Hunt, Counseling Psychology

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examines the impact of a character education program, Rachel's Challenge, in a high school to determine if the implementation of the program promotes resiliency, improves school culture, and supports an increased sense of community within the school. I examine, in rich detail, a suburban high school which implemented Rachel's Challenge, and the research thoroughly formulates a description of the school prior to the implementation of the program and following the implementation of the program to determine the impact of the character education initiative on the school's culture, the resilience development of the school community members, and the sense of community within the institution.

I collected the data in a suburban high school located in a Mid-Atlantic state. Limiting my study to one school provided me the necessary and advantageous opportunity to gain a rich description of the possible impacts of the program while also allowing me to deeply immerse myself into the realities of the participants. In-depth interviews were carried out with students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers to gain a rich understanding of any need for and value of the program and of any impacts of the program on the school's culture, the development of resilience, and a sense of connection and community. Constructs of Turbulence Theory are used to dissect the value of the character education program; I examined what need induced the implementation of the program in the school community and any positive impacts of the program on the school culture, resilience development, and sense of connection and community. Constructs of Resilience Theory are used, as it has been applied to

individuals and organizations, to analyze the possible impact of the character education program on the resilience levels within the school community.

Interviews were carried out with the various key players within the high school who offered a wide interpretation of the effects of the character education program on the overall school culture and the level of resilience within the school community. A thorough document review was also carried out to further explore any impacts of the program on school culture, resilience development, and sense of community to clarify and further add to the interviews. The data provides educational leaders with a practical understanding of the impact of character education, namely the Rachel's Challenge program, on school culture and the development of resilience within a school community to help leaders formulate a value of its implementation in their schools. The research provides evidence that the Rachel's Challenge program did improve school culture in this particular school by encouraging a community built on acceptance, inclusion, kindness, respect, and compassion. The program encouraged pro-social behavioral changes within the school as well as promoted an anti-bullying message to the members of the school community. The research also provides evidence that the Rachel's Challenge program did promote the development of individual and community resilience at this particular school as demonstrated by an enhanced ability to stand up against peer pressure as well as the promotion of strength in the face of adversity and a sense of connection and unity within the school community.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Rachel Scott. Rachel's legacy will forever live on and her faith in the power of a chain reaction of kindness and compassion carries on in others the very moment one learns of her story. Rachel is truly an inspiration and she befriended students who were marginalized, she spread compassion and believed in random acts of kindness directed towards strangers, she believed in the good nature of humanity, she dared to dream and was empowered by her vision of a kinder world, and she was relentless in her pursuit to challenge the status quo of selfishness, bullying, exclusion, and isolation. Rachel believed in a world where love and kindness can triumph and prevail and through learning her story, so do I.

I also dedicate this work to my Dad and chief editor, George J. Blair (1942-2012). My Dad passed away before I completed this process, but his support throughout was consistent and unconditional. This paper discusses the importance of resilience and my Dad modeled strength and resilience in both his life and throughout his illness that I can only hope to emulate. His theory was that all we need to be strong are the four Fs—faith, family, friends, and fortitude. He told me to trust in a power much bigger than myself, value the love we have all around us, and always remain dedicated to learning all the lessons that both the good and the bad experiences entail. My Dad's strong sense of hope always really inspired me and thinking about it will continue to keep him alive in my heart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of the school community in which I did my research. The students, parents, teachers, administrators, and counselors graciously supported my efforts and shared their thoughts and perspectives about the value of this program in their school and in their overall character development. I am grateful for their time and candidness. I would especially like to thank LC, who went above and beyond in her efforts to organize the interviews and model Rachel Scott's way of random acts of kindness and helping someone for no other reason than to be kind. LC has already done extraordinary things in her work and she is inspirational to so many. Her relentless dedication to her students and her genuine good heart are impossible to describe.

I would like to thank the members of the Scott Family, especially Darrell Scott. Rachel's vision of a positive chain reaction has continued beyond the length of her lifetime and that is in no small part due to the efforts of her family. After the horrific loss of his daughter, Darrell was faced with a level of grief that is incomprehensible to most of us. Darrell's daring choice to find forgiveness in his heart and use the violence of April 20, 1999, as a catalyst to promote a democratic and dynamic vision in schools across the world through his creation of the Rachel's Challenge program is absolutely epic and heroic. He defines, for me, what it takes to be an educational leader.

I would like to thank my family and friends for their support as well. To my Mom, thank you for being my biggest cheerleader and for never losing your own drive to keep me motivated and positive throughout this process. You have always believed in me more than I have believed in myself and I could not have gotten here without your

support. To my sister, Patty, thank you for believing in me and helping me move along in my professional accomplishments. And to my niece, Zoe, because of you I am really passionate about character development in schools because I want you to have a life filled with kindness and compassion and overall goodness because that is who you are to your core. I love you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Page

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The one certainty that all leaders within the education field can be sure of is that a day in a school is always uncertain. Whether invited or not, death and trauma will come to a school and educational leaders need to be equipped to deal with the problems that a school will inevitably encounter. Can character education help school leaders address the needs that surface within their school communities? Is character education, and more specifically Rachel's Challenge, a tool within an educational leader's toolbox to rely on to support students? Can the program create a common set of values to support an increased sense of connection and community? School leaders need to harbor an understanding of the characteristics of resilient schools that ensure healthy, successful recovery because trauma is going to surface. School leaders need to be dedicated to creating environments that promote adjustment, emotional stability, health, and success for all of their students. The characteristics that lead to the development of successful and healthy students need to be thoroughly explored, given the realities of the experiences of high school students today. As an educational leader, I see a need to lead within schools in which the culture promotes resilience and connection; a sense of community is necessary to support the needs of our students.

Rachel's Challenge is a character education program that emerged as a response to one of the worst school shootings in American history that ended the lives of 12 students and 1 teacher at Columbine High School in Colorado on April 20, 1999. Rachel Scott was the first person killed in the school massacre; Rachel was known for her

kindness and compassion and she often befriended students who were marginalized. The program was developed by Rachel's father, Darrell Scott, to inspire students to make changes in their lives and in their schools by treating each other with kindness and compassion in an effort to promote Rachel's legacy. It is a comprehensive approach to character education with two components: an assembly program delivered to the entire student body and parents, and the teaching of a character education curriculum to a selected group of student leaders. These student leaders are trained to start a Rachel's Challenge Club within their school to continue the development and promotion of the values of the Rachel's Challenge program. The program speakers are either family members of Rachel Scott, victims of the tragedy who were fortunate enough to survive, family members of victims of the tragedy who lost their lives, or other individuals chosen by and trained by Darrell Scott. The general assembly for the high school students involves showing a video of the Columbine tragedy and a message from Rachel Scott delivered by the speaker about hope and the deliverance of a challenge to students to make a positive difference in their schools. It is a powerful message for students designed to touch their hearts and encourage them to care about one another. A similar presentation is delivered to parents in the evening. Following the all-school assembly program, a selected group of student leaders attend a training workshop with the assembly facilitator. The curriculum used for the training of the student leaders focuses on looking for the best in others, dreaming and setting goals, choosing positive influences, demonstrating acts of kindness, and starting a chain reaction of positive, kind actions. The students are trained for future work within the school through the

development of a Rachel's Challenge Club to create a culture of kindness and compassion; the leaders are encouraged to critically analyze organizational structures, develop student interactions and relationships, appreciate diversity, make kindness and compassion the norm, and create a more democratic culture within their schools. Students are trained to implement projects throughout the school year to reinforce the messages of the program; the Rachel's Challenge presenter provides a framework for the club to get started, but the individual schools develop and foster their own club as they see appropriate. The workshop facilitator provides students with suggested activities designed to maintain the momentum of the program's message after the deliverance of the assembly. What the school does to maintain the program's message is ultimately left in the hands of the student leaders, the school personnel, and the Rachel's Challenge Club within the school. The program's basic tenet is:

> The most discouraging symptom of American life today has been the growth in the last ten years of social intolerance. We need the schools to bring about recognition of the problems…things which the American people have got to work out together in a spirit of unity and cooperation…one act of kindness and compassion can start a chain reaction and, with nurturing, transform the culture in schools. (Hollingshead, Crump, Eddy, & Rowe, 2009, p. 112)

The program is established to transform the culture of a school by valuing diversity, giving all students a voice, making kindness and compassion the norm, reflecting on social injustices within the school, focusing on personal growth and development, valuing service to the school and the larger community, recognizing one's own power of influence, setting personal goals, removing prejudice and bias, and promoting a positive sense of community (Hollingshead et al., 2009). This study is

designed to examine whether or not the program had its intended impact on this particular school and how the school's community members perceive the program's impact and what the school's community members believe contributed to or inhibited the program's success.

This qualitative case study examines the role that a character education program, Rachel's Challenge, had on school culture and school resilience at a deep, rich level. I first explore the obstacles that are plaguing our high school students today and the significant repercussions that can follow tumultuous times for adolescents, proving that character and resilience development is imperative. I then discuss that the goal of my research was to explore the impact of the Rachel's Challenge program on improving school culture, fostering resilience within the school community, and enhancing a sense of connection. My specific research questions are then defined, as well as pertinent terminology relevant to this research. Next, I discuss the delimitations of the study that restrict generalization and explore the logistical parameters of the study that influence the generalizability of my findings. I also explore how I utilized my setting to address my research questions. Next, I justify the significance of my proposed research by reinforcing the seriousness of the phenomena of crises and resilience within schools and by explaining why I believe my proposed research leads to an influential contribution to the field of educational leadership. Finally, I discuss Turbulence Theory and its relevance to the value of character education within high schools and Resilience Theory and its relevance to the Rachel's Challenge program. Following these introductory components of this study, I then provide a thorough synopsis of a literature review, discuss my

methodology and procedure for the research, and briefly summarize my key points. The data are then provided and conclusions and recommendations for future research are delineated.

Statement of the Problem

Though in an ideal world high school students would live a charmed, pain-free life, it is a fact that high schools across the nation are being forced to recover from crises. School leaders have a responsibility to recognize this fact and to support the development of community resilience as part of the school culture. A sense of connection and a value for character are crucial. "Suicide and sudden death have become a routine crisis for today's schools" (Thompson, 1995, p. 264). The grief following a death leaves adolescents feeling isolated, confused, and depressed; the impact of a peer death is drastic and has the potential to be life-altering for students. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's website, during the 2007/2008 school year, 78,997 Student Assistance referrals were made; of these referrals, 2,160 (2.73%) were for suicidal gesture, ideation, or attempt (Retrieved on November 13, 2009, from http://www.sap.state.pa.us/uploadedfiles/JQRSexecsummary-2007-08.pdf). The website also states that approximately 1 out of every 1,500-2,000 students die or are killed each year, with the incidence of deaths being the greatest for high school students. An average-sized high school can expect to encounter a death-related crisis each year. The most frequent causes of student death are accidents, homicides, and suicides (Retrieved on November 13, 2009, from http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/neat_poland.aspx). The same website

provides information from a 1994 annual summary report put out by the Center of Disease Control stating that 4,000 deaths of children under 20 years of age were caused by motor vehicles, 4,000 deaths of children under 20 years of age were caused by homicides, and 3,800 deaths of children under 20 years of age were caused by suicides. Adolescents are being forced to deal with death during their high school years and school leaders cannot ignore this reality; this demands their careful attention and planning. "Suicide is currently the third leading cause of death among 10- to 14-year-olds and 15- to 24-year-olds" (Westefeld, Jenks Kettmann, Lovmo, & Hey, 2007, p. 31). Westefeld et al. (2007) further describe the significance of suicide in the lives of adolescents by explaining that 3,994 completed suicides occurred in the year 2000 for individuals of the ages 15 to 24. Furthermore, Thompson (1995) explains that adolescents who experience the suicide of a peer are at a greater risk of committing suicide as well; this is known as the copycat syndrome and is an issue that consistently comes to the forefront when a school faces a suicide. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's website, once a suicide in a school occurs, the chances of another death by suicide increases approximately 300% (Retrieved on November 13, 2009, from http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/aftersuicide.aspx). According to Swihart, Silliman, and McNeil (1992), a survey of 190 randomly selected college students revealed that 63% of the sample experienced the death of a peer during their high school years. According to Nickerson and Zhe (2004), a study conducted of 197 randomly selected school psychologists indicated that the second, third, and fourth most common

reported crises in high schools were serious illness/death of a student, unexpected student death, and suicide.

Today's adolescents are struggling and school leaders will absolutely be forced to address these struggles. Schools need to be prepared to face crises and how a school can be prepared needs to be formally investigated. These statistics clearly illustrate the need for schools to be prepared for trauma and to create communities in which students have the resources and skills necessary to respond effectively. Schools need to establish a culture of resiliency so that the students are prepared to tackle any traumas that may occur. As educators, we need to prioritize fostering a sense of community to support our students and helping students develop their character so they can face their realities. Educational leaders cannot be oblivious and assume that the role of the school is to solely teach academic curriculum; the responsibilities of a school go beyond that and the school community must develop students who are able to recover from trauma and who are able to be good people. Educational leaders need to lead within school communities that can effectively respond to the events that will inevitably occur and need to foster resilient environments and a sense of connection and cohesiveness within the school. If schools are going to face crises, it is important for leaders to know how a school can be prepared. Character education programs are implemented in an attempt to make positive changes within a school's culture and to promote resilience within the members of the school community. Character education programs are intended to support environments that promote healthy recovery from trauma. Is the Rachel's Challenge program an effective

tool at improving school culture, developing resilience, and promoting a sense of connection and community?

Purpose of the Study

The past decade has shown an increased professional, public, and political interest in crisis prevention and intervention within schools, and character education programs are often targeted as a mean to the prevention and intervention. As has been shown, it is indisputable that schools will face crises and school leaders must prepare their students for this. Does the implementation of Rachel's Challenge have the capacity to make positive changes in a school's culture, foster resilience development within the school community, and create a sense of connection to help support the needs of our students? The school is a system—an academic system, a system of activities, a system of curriculum, a system of struggles, and a system of successes. Because the school is a system, it must be treated as one and the holistic development of the students must gain importance. The entire school community, not just the separate individuals, is impacted when trauma occurs and successful ways to promote coping and healing must be addressed. Character education programs implemented within the school have the capability to promote universal values throughout the school community.

Is one of these values resilience and is it promoted via the implementation of Rachel's Challenge? Does Rachel's Challenge promote a sense of community and a shared system of values? Because the school is a system, the individual reactions of students to the death of a peer or other such trauma can only be understood in the context of the greater school entity; the future functioning of the school is impacted by the

adjustment of all of the individuals within the system. If a school is going to recover from a trauma, it must be resilient and must be prepared to face the trauma. This study examined the role of a character education program, Rachel's Challenge, on the culture and the development of resilience in one particular high school. This study examined the impact of the Rachel's Challenge program on the students and the characteristics that lead to a healthy, successful response to trauma. It examined the relationships, if any, between Rachel's Challenge and resilience, between Rachel's Challenge and a positive school culture, and between Rachel's Challenge and a sense of community and connection. School trauma cannot be eliminated, but the factors and characteristics that prepare a school for a successful recovery will be investigated to see if Rachel's Challenge is a positive resource for school leaders leading in an era of inevitable struggles for adolescents.

Research Questions

This research study addresses the following questions:

Does the school community perceive that the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative has improved school culture?

Does the school community perceive that the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative has helped develop individual and organizational resilience within the school community?

Definitions

The following are key terms pertinent to this study:

Character Education—A comprehensive approach that incorporates values into school curriculum to promote student development.

Crisis/Traumatic Event/Trauma—"Sudden, uncontrollable, and extremely negative events that have the potential to impact an entire school community" (Nickerson et al., 2004, p. 777). For the purposes of this study, these terms will be used interchangeably to signify the death of a student, through suicide, disease, or accident.

Protective Factors—"Conditions that buffer, interrupt, or prevent problems from occurring" (Greene, Galambos, & Lee, 2003, p. 76).

Rachel's Challenge—A character education initiative developed by Darrell Scott after the death of his daughter, Rachel Scott, in the Columbine High School massacre in April of 1999.

Resilience—"Coping effectively with difficulties that might otherwise lead to anxiety, depression, withdrawal, physical symptoms, or poor achievement" (Harvey, 2007, p. 10); "hardiness" (O'Neal, 1999, p. 1); "the ability to overcome adversity and be successful in spite of exposure to high risk, the ability to sustain competence under pressure, and the capacity to recover from trauma" (Greene et al., 2003, p. 77).

School Culture—The patterns of inherent behaviors, ideas about what school life is about, expectations, work ethos, stability, conflict, quality of the teaching and learning, and interpersonal relations within a school (Harris, Brown, & Abbott, 2006).

Student Assistance Program (SAP)—According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's website, SAP is

> administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's division of Student and Safe School Services in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Health's Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Programs and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare's Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to assist school personnel in identifying issues including alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and mental health issues which pose a barrier to a student's success. The primary goal is to help students overcome these barriers in order that they may achieve, remain in school, and advance. (Retrieved on November 13, 2009, from http://www.pde.state.pa.us/svcs_students/cwp/view.asp?a=141&Q=117449&svcs_studentsNav=|5366|&svcs_studentsNav=|)

Successful Recovery—A school's response to trauma that involves healthy and appropriate coping and processing, followed by the school community being able to move forward.

Delimitations and Limitations of This Study

This study is not designed to result in broad generalizations, but rather is designed to enlighten school leaders to the impact of a specific character education program, Rachel's Challenge, on the school's culture, the level of resilience within the school community, and a sense of connection within the school. The perceptions of the various members of the setting will be analyzed to understand if the school community members gained an increased sense of connection and association with one another, if the program contributed to the development of resilience, and if the program fostered the development of a common set of values. I will look to see if the students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers gained a strong sense of community, defined by a common set of values, characteristics, and principles. Resilience, in this case, will be analyzed as it

relates to the separate individuals within the school community and as it relates to the overall school as an organization.

The Rachel's Challenge program, initially developed after the Columbine shooting in 1999, has not been implemented in schools for a period of significant longevity; therefore, in-depth studies on its effects are minimal at best and this study aims to provide some research into the value of this specific program on individual and community resilience and school culture. Having an understanding of the impacts of this program will provide leaders with an understanding of the effects of this specific program, but this study is not presuming to identify the impact of all character education programs or their general ability to endorse resilience or improve school culture. This study will provide educational leaders with a roadmap for implementing the Rachel's Challenge character education program specifically within their school, but is not enforcing that this one particular character education program accurately represents all character education programs or that the effects of this program on this one high school accurately portrays the impact of Rachel's Challenge everywhere. It will, however, help highlight any connection between Rachel's Challenge and resilience in this specific school, providing educational leaders with pertinent knowledge on the usefulness of this character education program to promote a healthy response to future anticipated crises within a school community. It will also highlight any notable connection between Rachel's Challenge and positive school culture changes and the development of a common set of values. The characteristics and traits of effective character education

programs, resilient schools, and positive school cultures will be examined, but the study will not exhaust all qualities.

The study closely examined one suburban high school in a mid-Atlantic state that implemented the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative; perspectives from various members of the community were analyzed. Within the school, a variety of individuals were interviewed so that I was able to clearly comprehend the elements of the school's culture and environment and any impacts the program had on the school community and individuals; I interviewed students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers within the high school. I hope that the study will provide insightful information to school leaders on the impacts of this specific character education program on school culture and school resilience through thorough data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation carried out for this in-depth, qualitative study.

Significance of This Study

According to Westefeld et al. (2007), a survey was given to 167 high school teachers from 5 different high schools in 4 different districts in the upper Midwest region of our country. Seventy-eight percent of the teachers surveyed knew an adolescent who attempted or completed suicide and 73% of the teachers surveyed had concerns about a student being suicidal at the time the survey was issued. The survey indicated that a significant percentage of high school staff members are uninformed about suicide and how to best deal with it when it occurs in their school. As previously discussed, an average-sized high school can expect to have a student death once each year, according to the statistics about adolescent death. It is a fact that death will occur within our high

schools, no matter how diligent schools are about trying to prevent it, and schools need to develop programs and strategies to help students respond to the traumas and prepare students for the traumas. The focus of school leaders should be on how to establish environments that promote resiliency so that students can heal successfully. Simply trying to prevent trauma is not enough because no matter how careful school leaders are at trying to keep trauma out of their school communities, they do not have the power to prevent the inevitable. Building a strong sense of community and promoting a common set of positive values needs to become the priority because students require the support.

The cultural undertones of a school that support healthy, competent, positive, hopeful adolescents need to be identified and supported. The role of character education on these qualities needs to be examined. It is imperative that school leaders better understand how to establish resilient school communities because our high school students are facing the inevitable disadvantage of losing a peer and the impact of losing a peer is significant. Losing a peer can result in depression, isolation, and confusion for an adolescent and can also lead to risky and fatal behaviors for the survivors.

Maladjustment following a trauma for an adolescent can lead to lifelong struggles and issues. Creating a school environment that fosters resiliency will prepare the adolescents for the rest of their lives because, unfortunately, traumatic loss is not isolated to the high school years and will be faced throughout the course of an individual's life. This study examined the role that the Rachel's Challenge character education program had on fostering resilience within the school community. According to Swihart et al. (1992), a case study of a Midwestern high school revealed that 18 months after the death

of a 16-year-old from leukemia, 52% of the students thought of the deceased once in a while and 15% thought of the deceased frequently. Sixty-four percent of the students believed that they were permanently changed because of the peer's death. Our students need support to move through these crises situations and this support needs to exist both prior to and following the death of a student; character education programs have the power to offer this support. Westefeld et al. (2007) explain that according to the National Institute of Mental Health, one element of a comprehensive suicide prevention plan is to build resiliency. Resiliency, therefore, prevents student death; it needs to be clearly characterized and developed. I did this study to better understand if and how school leaders can establish resilient environments through character education, specifically through the Rachel's Challenge program.

Our nation's adolescents are facing situations that are emotionally exhausting and difficult; it has been shown that the occurrence of school trauma is significant. In order for high school students to become productive, healthy, emotionally adjusted members of our greater society, school leaders need to establish curative environments where the students can thrive and grow. The students will inevitably face unavoidable adversity; it is the job of the school leader to ensure a successful recovery. This study closely examined the success of Rachel's Challenge on helping a school develop a positive and resilient culture that promotes successful recovery to past and future traumas through the development of a common set of shared values and the promotion of a sense of connection and community.

Theoretical Base

Turbulence Theory

The following explains Turbulence Theory as it relates to this study:

Gross's Turbulence Theory (Gross, 2004, 2006; Shapiro & Gross, 2013; Shapiro, Gross, & Shapiro, 2008) provides a lens into predictions, suggestions, and recommendations for leaders, including character education, following a past incidence or era of trauma or future anticipated incidence of trauma within their school community. It provides a process for how leaders can manage turbulence; namely, a past or future anticipated trauma, or series of traumas, within their organizations. Gross's Turbulence Theory is an appropriate metaphor "…for both episodic and continuing forces that we live with each day in our organizations" (Shapiro & Gross, 2013, p. 49). In this case, the force is trauma and trauma can come in isolated episodes or in a series of crises. "Educational leaders…must navigate rationally through challenging and complex circumstances while under considerable emotional stress. One approach we think can help educational leaders make decisions is…turbulence theory" (Shapiro, Gross, & Shapiro, 2008, p. 3). This theoretical approach can be used to help educational leaders manage a trauma and its aftermath within their school community or address the need to prepare students for future anticipated trauma; it helps leaders make decisions that will prioritize the best interest of their entire school community and alleviate the level of turbulence within their school community. "Challenges can help strengthen a plan by giving it [an organization] a much more solid foundation" (Gryskiewicz, 1999, p. 10).

The research and data prove that stressful situations are inevitable in school communities; this theory helps us understand how leaders can help steer the community through the crisis and even use the turbulence to improve the organization. Schools either destruct in eras of trauma or surmount the crises and overcome the barriers; reoccurring trauma only makes this chance of survival all the more difficult. The role of the leader is crucial in determining the future success or demise of an organization.

> [Organizations] that view turbulent environments as an ominous whirlpool must learn to see it as a reservoir teeming with new ideas. The challenge is to sort through and channel the turbulence and turn it into a positive force for renewal. (Gryskiewicz, 1999, p. 9)

Turbulence, if viewed positively, has strategic potential for an organization. Gross (2008) articulates that "under turbulence theory, individuals have an enhanced ability to calibrate the severity of the issue at hand. It further aids them in their attempt to contextualize a given problem as they construct strategies to move to less-troubled waters" (Shapiro, Gross, & Shapiro, 2008, p. 5). In this study, the action plan implemented to address or alleviate the turbulence is the implementation of Rachel's Challenge. This lens helps leaders identify the severity of the crisis and create interventions that will lessen or intensify the level of turbulence within the organization. It can be viewed as a problem-solving tool for administrators in times of crises.

The implementation of character education, namely Rachel's Challenge, is one such problem-solving strategy and can be used as an attempt at lessening the level of turbulence facing a community after an incidence or era of trauma, or as an attempt at strengthening the school through the development of resilience and through the promotion of a sense of community and a shared value system before an incidence of

trauma strikes. Leaders can use Gross's theory to assess their current level of turbulence and can weigh and measure various response and prevention strategies and their impact on the defined level of turbulence. The response and prevention strategy in this case is Rachel's Challenge.

The theory provides leaders with a systematic approach to how an organization can successfully navigate through tumultuous times; in this case, namely past or future anticipated trauma within the school community. First, the theory suggests that leaders analyze the contextual variables surrounding the situation; the relevant issues of context include cascading, positionality, and the current stability or volatility of the organization. Consider each of these variables and their relevance to trauma within a school community as the turbulence.

> Cascading helps leaders understand the impact of a series of turbulent conditions.
>
> > The concept describes the impact that one turbulent condition has on subsequent episodes of turbulence…the next such instance is likely to cause a greater disturbance in the minds of students than if there were no recent history of such events. (Mitra & Gross, 2009, p. 537)

The history of repeated crises within a school community will worsen the trauma students are forced to face; each occurring traumatic event will aggravate the situation within the school community. I will be looking to see if the implementation of Rachel's Challenge can help stop the destructive damage of cascading in schools and/or provide schools with the strength necessary to minimize the damage of cascading crises. The culture of the school needs to be resilient enough to fight off the disastrous effects of repeated crises. The construct of cascading can be best understood when using an example of a river; Gross (2013) explains that "the turbulence of the water is easily increased as it moves

from one down turn to the next" (Shapiro & Gross, 2013, p. 46). The parallel here is that each traumatic event in a school in turn escalates the level of turbulence facing the school community. Students often face one trauma after another, and students and overall school communities often struggle to heal; the opportunity to foster resilience and for the turbulence to create positive outcomes needs to be capitalized upon by school leaders. Each student death or student crisis has the capacity to drive the level of turbulence within a school upward and can heighten the emotional intensity within the school community, creating significant emotional struggles for adolescent students. The cascading construct of this theoretical lens illuminates the increasing damage done to a school community with the reoccurring episodes or trauma. Interventions need to be designed to stop the increasing strength of the flowing river within a school.

Positionality looks at relationships within an organization. It examines the past history, whether supportive or combative, that defines the relationships between key individuals within an organization and supports that different groups and individuals within an organization experience the turbulence in different manners. I will be looking to see if the implementation of Rachel's Challenge can help unify the various members of the school community by fostering a sense of connection and shared responsibility. Looking at the example of the river again, Gross explains positionality by stating:

> A moving river did not have the same impact on twigs and leaves at its center as it did on those similar objects at its edges. In fact, careful examinations caused [him] to see that the impact of the water's flow had many varying levels of impact, all depending upon the position of the object relative to the stream or its banks. (Shapiro & Gross, 2013, p. 44)

An individual's position within an organization is important and a factor in their response to the stress, as are the relationships between members of the organization. Does Rachel's Challenge promote a sense of community and improve the school's culture so that the various members of the school support one another's position? It is imperative that leaders understand and value the perspective of the various individuals and groups within the organization because they will each experience turbulence differently; the significance of the event will vary, depending on the position within the organization. The death of a student will impact the teacher group and student group very differently. Counselors, friends, classmates, teachers, parents, and administrators will all have a different response to a trauma and all have varying levels of resilience. The trauma will impact the teammate, the best friend, and the enemy entirely differently. A student who has faced other deaths in their life will be impacted differently than a student who has yet to experience loss and pain. Leaders must recognize and individualize the response for the varied experiences within their school community and need to recognize that the entire community is impacted in different ways. Fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility can help support school leaders in this recognition, and I looked to see if Rachel's Challenge demonstrated the ability to support the school community. The relative situation of individuals and groups within the organization must be understood in a multidimensional fashion because their perspectives will be authentic. Grade level will impact emotional maturity and resilience, as will social networks, religious and ethical values, and school groups. Leaders must see "…individuals in each of their group

affiliations and, simultaneously, as separate beings" (Shapiro, Gross, & Shapiro, 2008, p. 45).

As a leader, one must pay attention to the different groups that exist within the organization and how the current level of turbulence will impact them. Educational leaders must identify different student groups and understand that their responses, as a group, will vary. School leaders need to encourage and support strong relationships between the various groups and individuals and need to grasp the impact felt on all members of the school. Character education programs maintain the ability to instill an overarching set of values over the entire school community, yet also can be individually catered to specific student needs. Character education programs, if successful, can result in a connected and unified school community and can foster this needed set of relationships between groups.

Additionally, the level of stability an organization has going into the turbulence is critical in understanding how it will respond. A leader must consider whether or not the turbulence is an exception or part of a larger pattern of disruption. In schools, the first crisis serves as an exception; latter crises begin to define a school community that is caught in a repetitious cycle of chaos and trauma. The community can become unstable and the instability will continue to grow over time, making the response process all the more difficult to navigate for a school leader. Character education programs maintain the ability to help schools defined by repeated crises redefine themselves with a more positive set of characteristics. A common set of shared values can help define the school community and can help stabilize the culture. Does the implementation of Rachel's

Challenge create a shared set of common values and a unified sense of purpose and community? I looked to see whether or not the program alters the defining qualities of the school culture; a shift can be made away from defining the school community by a series of crises and moving toward defining the school community by an overarching set of shared values and priorities instituted via the character education program.

The next step a leader needs to take, after analyzing the contextual variables surrounding trauma, is to estimate the current level of turbulence facing the school community and consider the possible consequences of changing the levels of turbulence. In this study, I looked to determine if the participants perceive a shift in their level of turbulence following the implementation of Rachel's Challenge in their school. Turbulence Theory helps the leader make relevant predictions that can guide the decision-making processes and action plans because the construct of turbulence is not static. Shapiro and Gross (2013) suggest creating a Turbulence Gauge. A gauge, from the perspective of a school leader, for all schools facing inevitable trauma is illustrated on page 23.

Table 1

Turbulence Gauge from the Perspective of a School Leader

Degree of Turbulence	General Definition	Turbulence as it is Applied to this Situation
Light	Little or no disturbance; subtle signs of stress	The school will not face significant future trauma and loss.
Moderate	Widespread awareness of an issue with specific origin	The school will experience future trauma and loss, but the students will have the necessary resiliency skills to respond successfully.
Severe	Fear for the entire organization and a feeling of crisis	The trauma or repetitious traumas are putting the school into a state of crisis and creating a widespread need for resilience.

Table 1

Continued

Degree of Turbulence	General Definition	Turbulence as it is Applied to this Situation
Extreme	Destruction of an organization; structural damage or collapse of organization is likely	The school does not implement any initiatives to foster a sense of connection within the building; the school ignores the trauma and its impact on the school community, enabling more trauma to occur; the school does not prioritize resilience building to help students have the internal strength to respond successfully to trauma; repetitious trauma continues to occur.

As illustrated by Gross's gauge, as the levels of turbulence escalate, the emotional strength of the situation intensifies. I suggest that the level of turbulence a school faces is

severe because schools face inevitable trauma, which creates a sense of crisis through the entire organization and the future functioning of the school is definitely in jeopardy. Predictions can be made based on careful thought into what the school community would look like if the turbulence level was increased or decreased, and these predictions can help school leaders create action plans. I analyzed the impacts of the Rachel's Challenge program implemented as an action plan in schools to minimize or decrease the perceived level of turbulence. If the community ignores the issue of inevitable trauma and does not work to improve the resilience and emotional stability of the student population through the development of a common set of shared values and a sense of connection, trauma will prevail and the school could be permanently damaged or destroyed. If the school community works together to lessen the level of turbulence through the development of a common set of shared values and a sense of connection, the students could then successfully respond to future traumas. If leaders implemented initiatives (character education programs, for example) that prioritized resilience building, students would be able to successfully navigate through future trauma, thereby lessening the level of turbulence within the school community. The gauge helps leaders understand the future of an organization by highlighting the current state (severe due to inevitable future trauma) and the impact of efforts done to alter the current state. Character education programs, if successful, have the capability to reduce the level of existing turbulence within the school communities and I want to determine if the implementation of Rachel's Challenge at this one particular school lessened the level of perceived turbulence or

changed the school so that the level of turbulence in the future following an inevitable trauma would lessen.

It is important to note that the application of Turbulence Theory here has been taken from the perspective of the school leader(s). I have noted that the level of turbulence is evaluated by the school leader and the intervention strategies are assessed and instituted by the school leader. I assigned the challenge to turn the turbulence into a positive source for renewal for the school community to the school leader and the Turbulence Gauge is formulated from the perspective of the leader. The students, parents, and staff might evaluate and address the turbulence entirely differently. The introduction of a character education program as an attempt to address an assessed level of turbulence may very well minimize the significance of the impact of positionality within an organization because the program may aid in unifying the members of the school community under one mission and one shared philosophy. The turbulence may then be addressed or ignored and lessened or enhanced by the entire school community, not just the school leader. Character education programs have the potential to force school communities to share the responsibility of addressing the turbulence because they maintain the possibility of unifying the various individuals.

It is essential to recognize and value, as educational leaders, that turbulence can lead to new possibilities for the organization. The "…ebb and flow of life from seemingly instability to renewed and transformed models of stability" (Shapiro & Gross, 2013, p. 48) can be modeled following a tumultuous era within an enterprise.

> Turbulence is generally associated with some kind of trouble—at best an annoyance, at worst a tragic disaster. Yet that chaotic, swirling, frenetic

> environment that threatens to drown us all is also where new trends are incubated. Out of the disruption, change and chaos brought about by turbulence always comes useful information. *(*Gryskiewicz, 1999, p. 8)

Leaders should strive to utilize turbulence as a means for improvement. Gryskiewicz (1999) writes, "Turbulence by its nature is a variable force, with the ever-present potential for it to turn negative. Skillful, knowledgeable, astute leadership can make the difference between turbulence being negative or positive" (Gryskiewicz, 1999, p. 104). Implementing a character education program as a means to support healthy responses to anticipated future traumas and to improve school culture and foster resiliency is a way to utilize the turbulence, namely anticipated trauma, as a tool to make improvements within a school community.

> There are still certain steps they [leaders] can take to ensure that the turbulence they shepherd into their organizations remains positive: …test the waters to gauge the effect of the turbulence, keep sensors attuned to the needs of customers and the opportunities presented by crises, and devise alternative action plans that take into account future eventualities. (Gryskiewicz, 1999, p. 105)

I looked to see if the intention of the implementation of Rachel's Challenge in this one particular school was to develop something positive out of something dire. Was the program implemented as a response to turbulence? Did the program lessen the perceived level of turbulence? Gryskiewicz (1999) further states, "when crisis hits an organization that already has a creative climate, it is often the catalyst for significant innovation" (Gryskiewicz, 1999, p. 109). Leaders need to strive to translate turbulence into a working asset for their organizations and I wanted to determine if implementing Rachel's Challenge in this one school is an example of such a translation.

Resilience Theory

The following explains Resilience Theory as it relates to this study:

According to Krovetz (1999), Resiliency Theory is the belief in the ability of individuals to overcome adversity if important protective factors are present; these protective factors include, but are not limited to, a sense of being cared for, an expectation to perform well, active supports in place, faith in the future, and active involvement in life. Resiliency Theory is a construct for explaining why individuals are able to recover from adversity within their lives. I believe if we can understand what allows some individuals to function well in the context of adversity, we will be able to incorporate this knowledge into new practice strategies within schools; character education programs targeted to develop these particular traits can benefit the entire school community. Interestingly, Rachel's Challenge does not specifically identify itself as a program that promotes resiliency per se, but it does prioritize developing a culture in which all members feel connected and cared for, setting up supports and mentoring for all members of the community, having students set personal goals for themselves, and asking students to appreciate people for their role in their lives; all of these aspects of the Rachel's Challenge program can be connected to the qualities that Krovetz (1999) outlined as the defining qualities of a resilient individual. If these are the qualities associated with resilient individuals and these are the aspects of the Rachel's Challenge program, is it appropriate to infer that Rachel's Challenge is a successful means to developing resilience within a school community? Do the members of this particular

school community believe that the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge program strengthened their resilience?

Resiliency Theory, as applied to individuals, supports that individuals maintain certain characteristics that contribute to their ability to endure hardships in their lives; I believe this same theory can be used to support that schools need to strive to maintain certain characteristics that contribute to their ability to endure hardships within their communities. After all, a community is just a large group of many separate individuals. Resiliency Theory attributes the ability of individuals to recover to internal and external factors that exist prior to a trauma; I believe this same theory can attribute the ability of schools to recover to internal and external factors that exist prior to a crisis, and I want to examine if the character education program fostered these such factors.

The construct of resilience can be considered applicable at the individual, group, or organizational level. It is a phenomenon that is pertinent to education, business, mental health, medicine, and social welfare. Developing or locating an instrument to measure resilience is no simple task, primarily because of the many factors underlying the definition of resilience. Delving into and understanding the characteristics associated with resilience require an in-depth look at the traits of the individual, group, or organization. Resilience Theory has been thoroughly examined relative to individuals and somewhat applied within the realm of organizational behaviors. The application of Resilience Theory to schools has yet to be thoroughly examined, though I believe the principles applied to individuals and organizations can most certainly be examined within school settings. I carried out careful investigation to see if the qualities associated with

individual and organizational resilience are prioritized and genuine aspects of the Rachel's Challenge character education program.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As mentioned, the construct of resiliency can be applied to individuals, groups, and organizations. The research and information available on individual resilience is the most prevalent. Resilience, for individuals, is defined in terms of internal and external factors that exist pre- and post-crisis. Similarly, the research on organizational resilience identifies qualities of an organization that exist within the organization before and after a crisis as the basis of the definition of organizational resilience. The available research on resiliency and schools is prevalent, yet very narrowly focused. The construct of resiliency, as applied to schools, is mostly focused on the successful elements of a response to a trauma and ignores and devalues the traits and characteristics of a school that exist prior to a crisis that build resiliency. When school leaders are attempting to increase resiliency within their communities through character education, they need to identify programs that have the capability to foster the qualities found to be linked with individual and organizational resilience before and after a crisis, and I determined whether or not my participants believe that Rachel's Challenge enhances resilience.

Individual Resilience

Research has been conducted to identify and analyze the various factors contributing to individual resilience. It is important to note that of the various factors found to be influential over individual resilience, some of the factors are characteristics of the individual that existed prior to facing adversity and others are factors that develop post-crisis. According to Thompson (1995), when adolescents experience the death of a

family member or a peer, their ability to adjust to the loss depends on their individual coping skills, the assistance they receive during the grieving process, and the resources they access during and after the loss. The individual coping skills are qualities that a resilient individual maintains prior to facing a crisis. According to Harvey (2007), individual resilience results from having positive social relationships with friends, relatives, and neighbors, having a positive attitude, having the ability to control one's own behaviors, and having feelings of competence. Again, these are characteristics of an individual that exist prior to the onset of adversity. These are the qualities that a character education initiative should be targeting to promote, and I will examine what the perspectives of my participants are about these characteristics following the implementation of Rachel's Challenge.

> Highly stressed persons who stay healthy possess to a greater extent than highly stressed persons who get sick the belief that they can control or influence the events of their experience, an ability to feel deeply involved in or committed to their activities of their lives, and the anticipation of change as an exciting challenge to further development. (O'Neal, 1999, p. 2)

O'Neal (1999) identifies 12 skills and abilities used by resilient people to cope with stress. Some of these skills and abilities are evidenced following a trauma and others are traits of the individual that existed prior to the trauma. These skills are rapid response to danger, maturity, disassociation of affect, information seeking, formulation and utilization of relationships, positive anticipation, decisive risk-taking, the sense of being loved, the idealization of competence, cognitive restructuring of painful events, altruism, and optimism and hope. Krovetz (1999) suggests four factors that contribute to individual resilience. First, resilient individuals are socially competent; that is to say that resilient

individuals have the ability to elicit positive responses from others and maintain positive friendships. Second, resilient individuals are master problem-solvers. They believe they are in control and are willing and able to seek help from resources when necessary. Third, resilient individuals are autonomous and are able to act independently. Finally, resilient individuals have a sense of purpose and a sense of hope for the future. The available literature thoroughly identifies the pre-existing conditions, traits, and qualities that help foster a resilient individual, and this study will investigate whether or not the Rachel's Challenge program in this particular setting is linked to these traits.

Organizational Resilience

Organizational resilience has been defined as "the capacity to adapt to change" (O'Neal, 1999, p. 10). It is "an enterprise's capacity to respond rapidly to unforeseen change, even chaotic disruption. It is the ability to bounce back and in fact to bounce forward, with speed, grace, determination, and precision" (Bell, 2002, p. 1). Resilient organizations will

> display a sense of security and self-assurance that is based on their view of life as complex but filled with opportunity, have a clear vision of what they want to achieve, demonstrate a special pliability when responding to uncertainty, develop structured approaches to managing ambiguity, and engage change rather than defend against it. (O'Neal, 1999, p. 10)

As with individual resilience, organizational resilience is described by pre-existing factors and qualities. Bell (2002) maintains that resilient organizations have leaders who set priorities appropriately, allocate resources, and make commitments to balance risk taking and security. The goals of the organization and of the individuals within the organization must be aligned. Bell (2002) believes that resilient organizations

have a culture defined by empowerment, purpose, trust, and accountability. This culture did not emerge after a crisis but rather is the tone of the organization before it faces adversity. Bell (2002) believes that resilient organizations have members who are heroes, are self-initiators, are willing to make sacrifices for the good of the organization, and are motivated. These are the qualities of the workers prior to a crisis. The environment of a resilient organization is safe and secure.

It is interesting that there is an overlap of the factors that contribute to individual resilience and the factors that contribute to organizational resilience. Character education programs that foster the development of individual resilience would naturally have an impact on the resilience level within the overall school organization as well. For example, both the individual and the organization need to have a clear sense of purpose and strong initiative. The individual and the organization both need access to resources and need to be flexible to respond to the demands of the change process. Resilient individuals know who they are and what they want to achieve in life; resilient organizations have a clear set of core principles and a clear purpose. Resilient individuals remain focused on what they can do and what they cannot do; resilient organizations operate under a sense of empowerment and shared decision making. Resilient individuals have a supportive network of family and friends; resilient organizations foster a positive working community so that the workers can formulate meaningful relationships. Resilient individuals are flexible and easily adapt; resilient organizations are able to face change and handle adversities. Resilient individuals maintain a sense of competence and a sense of overall control over their lives; resilient organizations promote this same sense of

capability and proficiency. Resilient individuals and resilient organizations both welcome healthy risk-taking based on a balance between autonomy and security. Resilient individuals and resilient organizations both demonstrate an ability to be effective problem-solvers. Though the language and terminology may be different, resilient individuals and resilient organizations are both defined, according to the research, as maintaining a sense of competence, being committed to a sense of purpose, welcoming change and being willing to take risks when appropriate, maintaining the ability to think creatively and solve problems, and having a sense of hope. The defining criteria for both resilient individuals and resilient organizations are factors that consistently exist, whether in the face of adversity or success and happiness. These factors are not dependent on the onset of a trauma, and many of the defining characteristics exist prior to the onset of any misfortune.

This study examines whether or not Rachel's Challenge can claim success at promoting individual resilience and resilience within the overall school community. Using Thompson's (1995), Harvey's (2007), O'Neal's (1999), Krovetz's (1999), and Bell's (2002) work as a gauge of resilience, an investigation into the impact of the character education program on individuals and the school community-at-large occurs. Relying on the discussed research, I investigate whether or not Rachel's Challenge promotes a utilization of resources, promotes a sense of competence and control, promotes a willingness to embrace change, and builds security and autonomy which, together, encourage risk taking. Taking the factors associated with individual and organizational resilience, I explore whether or not Rachel's Challenge develops a

problem-solving community, promote a sense of purpose for individuals, help connect the members of the community under a shared mission of hope and optimism, and promotes social competence, altruism, positive relationships, and connection. I set out to learn if Rachel's Challenge instills a sense of trust within the community and serves as a means to empowerment and accountability for the students.

Schools and Crises

We have seen that individual and organizational resilience are dependent on external factors and internal factors, some of which are characteristics that preempt a crisis situation. The questions I raise here are how can practitioners in education reinforce the theoretical assumptions regarding individual resilience and organizational resilience within the school through character education programs? Does Rachel's Challenge enhance resilience? The research on school resilience is very targeted and narrow in scope because it focuses on how a school should respond to a crisis, such as a student death or a student suicide. All of the available information explains what a school can do to promote resilience *after* a crisis occurs within the school community. The available research is actually geared towards recovery and sheds little light on pre-existing characteristics of a school that contribute to resilience. I believe that since crisis situations in schools are ongoing and inevitable, it is important to identify the characteristics of a school's culture that help foster resilience and see if the implementation of Rachel's Challenge enhances the culture to support characteristics linked to resilience. Can resilience be developed before the onset of a crisis through character education and, more specifically, through Rachel's Challenge? Research indicates that resilience is partially

defined on characteristics that exist before a crisis, and I believe it would be beneficial to identify the qualities of a character education program that encourage resiliency, not just the characteristics of a successful response and recovery plan. Sarason (1990) writes about one superintendent's thoughts; "Who has time to think about preventing problems when we don't have enough time to deal with existing problems. Think preventively? Come off it. That is a luxury school systems cannot afford" (Sarason, 1990, p. 45). It is an unfortunate reality that a preventive focus has been linked with being a luxury for an educational leader. Schools are ineffective at dealing with the rising difficulties and until prevention becomes a routine approach, school communities will continue to struggle. Preventive action must replace remedial action. "It seems that successful organizations evolve appropriate structures and processes for dealing with the challenges of their external environments" (Morgan, 2006, p. 54). Our students are coming to school with pressures and struggles and the school must address, not ignore, these realities and adapt according to what the needs of the students are at any given time. Doing so will help prevent crises and will also help ensure ongoing successful recovery.

One explanation for why school leaders are minimizing their focus on prevention is the pressure that leaders face regarding academic achievement. As McGhee and Nelson (2005) state, "High stakes accountability has the potential to poison the culture of public education" (McGhee & Nelson, 2005, p. 372). Standards-driven education has become the norm and the focus of many school districts; the drive for higher results and top performance permeates school cultures. "The teacher feels far less responsibility for the school as a social-educational setting than for his or her classroom" (Sarason, 1990, p.

62). Students are feeling this focus on competition and performance. The robotic, routine approach to education undermines the need for relational elements within the school community. The rigidity is alienating and blind to the need for the holistic development of our students and it replaces the need to foster resilience and character development. This narrow focus invites the potential for drastic and life-altering repercussions. Spady (1988) writes,

> I encourage districts to develop exit outcomes that go far beyond the narrow subject matter emphasis… our emphasis [should be] on the broad opportunities and challenges students will face when they leave school and assume adult responsibilities. We want students to be equipped to lead enriched and successful lives—not just to meet conventional curriculum demands or college admissions requirements. (Spady, 1988, p. 6)

We are presently in an era where teaching decision making, concern, respect, tolerance for others, kindness, compassion, and security are important. As Mullen (2008) suggests, leaders need to incorporate citizenship, ethics, and social justice into student learning. Schools need to become more humane and socially just places; schools need to value a sense of community, connections, relationships, and inner-strength. To respond to the traumas that schools will inevitably face, we need to move away from the bureaucracy and begin to work towards developing the resiliency skills needed within the school community members.

> In [other] successful organizations facing more uncertain and turbulent environmental conditions, the mechanistic approach to organization tended to be abandoned; more organic and flexible approaches to organization were required for successful operation. (Morgan, 2006, p. 46)

High performance and academic rankings are school-based needs; the needs of our students are those of care, connection, relationships, resilience, and emotional

strength. All of these needs must be integrated and supported within the enterprise and integrated into the school-based needs. To do this, the culture of a school must shift to one that prioritizes these constructs. Culture is synonymous with values, ideologies, and styles, and the issue at hand is whether or not a school values resilience and proactive, preventive interventions or just reactive responses. What role, if any, does Rachel's Challenge have in supporting schools with this issue?

I believe a school needs to establish patterns and strategies that are incorporated into its routine functioning that support relationships, connection, and resilience rather than just implementing a step-by-step crisis response plan following a trauma. This routine functioning defines the school's culture. Resilience development should become a normalized aspect of the school culture and part of its everyday actions and goals. We have seen that resilience relies on relationships. Sharkey, You, and Schnoebelen (2008) emphasize the crucial role that mutually respectful relationships with teachers play in student engagement in school. These relationships need to be valued on a daily basis, not just following a crisis. The value of relationships needs to be a predominant factor of the school's culture. The establishment and maintenance of resilience should be incorporated into all aspects of the school on a consistent basis, and it is the job of educational leaders to create a nurturing culture within their communities. "Schools [also] need to attend to psychological engagement in terms of relationship building, school spirit, activity involvement, school climate, and school safety in order to promote a variety of positive outcomes" (Sharkey et al., 2008, p. 403). Mitra and Gross (2009) discuss a study that found that students placed a stronger emphasis on family and personal issues, rather than

academic issues, when they were asked to describe a quality of teenage life that they believed was important for adults to understand and one in which adults were completely ignorant about. This illustrates the needs of today's students; they are craving support and they value their emotional development just as importantly, if not more, than their academic learning. A school's culture needs to reflect these needs and this is a responsibility of school leaders. Leaders need to listen to their students. Mitra's and Gross's (2009) work also demonstrates that students report they are aware of the social cliques within the school community and the inconsistent treatment of different individuals from different social groups. This supports the importance and influence that relationships can have on the development of our students. As leaders, we need to ensure that all students are connected and respectfully treated. We need to create school communities where all students, regardless of subgroup or social circle that they belong, feel respected, welcomed, valued, cared for, and connected. "School connectedness early in secondary school predicts better outcomes in adulthood" (Sharkey et. al, 2008, p. 402). The connectedness aspect of school culture is proven to be of value. The students need to see resilience and connection modeled from the staff members and need to participate in activities that teach them the skills to be resilient and connected. The subcultures within the school, namely the various social groups and cliques, need to be integrated, not fragmented. The ability of a leader to create such an environment will directly impact the school's ability to respond to trauma and crisis. No matter what we do, we will not be able to stop trauma from rearing its damage within a school. What we can and what we should do is establish cultures that drive successful recovery.

Systemized efforts at schools for crisis intervention are relatively recent phenomena in research, but notable studies have been carried out to document what are effective intervention strategies. Again, this research addresses what a school should do to promote resiliency after a crisis occurs, leaving a leader with limited knowledge on how resilience can be developed as part of the overall culture. The past decade shows an increase in the publication of manuals and guides for school personnel focused on interventions to be used following school crises. Legislation has been passed that requires school districts to take remedial measures to address crises within schools. The Pennsylvania Department of Education's website maintains that "the major tasks for suicide postvention are to help students and fellow faculty to manage the understandable feelings of shock, grief, and confusion" (Retrieved on November 13, 2009, from http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/aftersuicide.aspx). Resilience-driven postventions are defined by actions taken to support the responses to a crisis. Actions taken before a crisis are ignored. The American Association of Suicidology enforces that a "delay of action [following a crisis] also can promote anger on the part of faculty, students, and their families" (Thompson, 1995, p. 265). The focus of the available research is on what schools can and should do following a crisis. The research is not adequately considering the necessary focus on the preemptive qualities that foster resilience, and I am investigating the role that this character education program has in promoting the traits of individual and organizational resilience that have been researched and defined.

Research has been carried out to delineate what the effective elements of a trauma response plan are within a school and the available research supports schools formulating a comprehensive crisis management plan and formulating a multi-disciplinary crisis response team. Again, the focus here is on response and recovery rather than prevention and development. All efforts in schools regarding crises tend to be narrowly focused on response rather than resilience development within the school's culture. Nickerson et al. (2004) relay that crisis response teams are the most commonly employed intervention used in high schools for crisis prevention and are viewed to be the most effective. I find it ironic that the terms "response teams" and "prevention" are linked. The response teams kick into action following a crisis, so where is the prevention component in this model? Schools are labeling their crisis team interventions as preventive, but are they really preventing anything or just reacting? The crisis team goes into action following a trauma; schools most utilized tool in promoting resiliency is activated after a crisis. Are the schools promoting resiliency or recovery? These two entities should not be confused with one another as they are two entirely different constructs. According to Swihart et al. (1992), successful trauma response plans designed to promote resiliency set into motion following a student death should include individual, special attention given to the close friends of the victim, attention to students that may be reminded of a previous experience with death, a scaled down expectation of academic performance based on the changed energy and emotional levels of the students, the opportunity for staff to process their own grief, the understanding that some students will need and want to talk through their grief while others will want to avoid the issue, the opportunity for students to participate in

physical activities to release their frustrations and emotional energy, the diffusion of groups that include and exclude certain students based on the perceived closeness of the individual to the victim, the opportunity for structured discussion and unstructured discussion, a linkage between the school, the families, and the community so that students can be supported after the school day ends, and an opportunity for follow-up discussion for those students that need or want more support. I would argue that these actions support recovery, not resilience development. The focus is not on the characteristics of the school before the crisis, but is on delineating the necessary elements of the response plan. The focus here is not on the overall school culture, but rather a specific litany of actions a school should take immediately following a crisis. This further illustrates the gap in the literature that leaves school leaders struggling to develop resilient individuals and resilient communities.

Charkow's (1998) research is again targeted on response to tragedy. According to Charkow (1998), teachers and counselors play significant roles in the response to a student death because children need support from caring adults to achieve resolution to their pain and grief. Counselors, administrators, and other school personnel must provide the curative environment to help students engage in the healing process. Charkow (1998) explains that teachers should help students feel safe and acknowledge the reality of the death, should promote an inviting environment in which students can talk openly about their emotions, should provide appropriate learning opportunities about death, should help students create an appropriate memorial honoring the deceased, should be aware and expect changes in behavior, should foster links with the parent community, and should

create comfortable settings for students to process their grief. This research is much aligned with Nickerson et al. (2004) and Swihart et al. (1992). According to Charkow (1998), counselors should offer individual therapy, should run groups for grief and coping, should display empathy and unconditional acceptance of emotions, should answer questions about death, dying, and funerals, and should help students come up with an appropriate way to express their good-byes to the deceased. Again, this raises the questions: can the counselors, teachers, and administrators help create a resilient school community before a crisis? Why is resilience solely defined in the literature by actions taken after a crisis? Is this truly resilience or is it recovery? Can character education programs implemented by counselors, teachers, and administrators help develop individual and organizational resilience as a norm rather than as a response? It is obvious that adults within the school community have great influence over the lives of the students; the influence and impact these adults can have before a crisis to establish a culture of resiliency has been ignored within the available research. This study aims to examine the potential influential role of a specific character education program on both individual and overall school resilience.

One frequent category of literature available concerning school resilience is narratives from school leaders concerning a trauma in their schools and their opinions on what made their schools resilient. All of the school leaders, in these narratives, shared elements of their response plans and none of the school leaders identified factors of their schools that existed prior to the crises. In my opinion, the narratives illustrate a documentation of their recovery, not of their efforts to promote resilience. Claiming that

recovery is synonymous with resilience ignores the preemptive qualities that define the construct of resilience entirely. The narratives all equate school resilience with successful recovery. As we can understand from the studies on individual and organizational resilience, it is not the recovery process that defines resiliency. It is the characteristics and traits that underlie the school going into the crisis; it is what comprises the school's culture. For example, according to Coopman (2009), the Clark-Pleasant School Corporation in Whiteland, Indiana, underwent a significant trauma when a car accident in the morning before school one day claimed the lives of two Clark-Pleasant students and critically injured one other student. When news of the accident came to the attention of the school leaders, they immediately sprung into action. This school district had a comprehensive crisis plan in which each school in the district has an individual crisis team. The teams meet two times per year to review procedures and discuss needed modifications to their crisis plan; the attention is on the response. Since the high school was the school in crisis at the time of this motor vehicle accident, a command center was set up at the high school immediately. The administrators prioritized the need to address the students' emotions. A faculty meeting was held before school and after school to prepare the staff for the difficult day and to debrief with the staff after the school day ended. The district brought in clergymen from the community and additional counselors from the district to the high school to meet with students in need in either small groups or individual meetings. The whereabouts of all students in the building were closely monitored. Siblings of the victims that were students in other buildings within the district were immediately attended to. The principal made an announcement about what little

information he had to the students immediately to minimize false information from spreading; the rumor mill can be disastrous in times of a crisis in high schools and the problem is worsened in today's world of text messaging and cell phone internet access. The superintendent also held a press conference with the local media and pleaded with the reporters to respect the students at this difficult time and refrain from loitering at the school and conducting student interviews; he cooperated with the media but also made all efforts to keep the media's involvement on his terms. The district's auto-dialer system relayed a message to the families in the district to help enable parents to be prepared for this information and for the need of support when their student returned home.

The following school day, the principal made every attempt to restore some type of normalcy to the lives of the students by balancing support with structure and routine. A funeral director was brought in to discuss what a funeral and viewing are like for any student that had not been exposed to death prior to this catastrophe. Staff members and counselors were assigned shifts at the viewing and funeral to further support the grieving peers. Two weeks later, the principal sent a survey to the staff to learn whether or not the district's crisis plan was meeting their needs. The principal learned that the staff really valued the visible presence of the school district's leaders and valued the open, complete communication that was delivered to them as timely as possible. The staff was appreciative of the fact that the administrators prioritized the emotional needs of the staff and the students and appreciated the role of the outside, non-impacted clergymen who were, at times, better able to provide support because of their emotional distance from the victims and the grieving students. The staff did suggest that the internet access be cut off

in the building to help eliminate the emails between students on their cell phones that expedited the rumor mill and the staff also wanted a better plan for the onslaught of parents that flocked to the school to pick up their children. Though this narrative serves as a helpful tool for school leaders in the design process of a successful crisis response plan, it does not provide information about the preemptive characteristics of the school's culture before the accident occurred. There was no mention of school culture or character education.

Havlland (2008) describes a tragedy at Penncrest High School in Pennsylvania. The principal from Penncrest delineates numerous suggestions for any school leader facing a student death. First, the school leader should focus on convening a team to plan and implement the school's response and game plan immediately. This team should include the administrators, counselors, and leaders from central administration. A plan should be created that accounts for what will be said to the students, when the students will be informed, in what manner the students will be informed, the hiring of additional substitutes to support grieving staff, the incorporation of outside mental health experts to support the in-house counseling team, and how to best support the family of the deceased student. The principal goes on to explain that faculty, students, and parents should be notified of the death as soon as possible because one must stay ahead of the circulating rumors. Faculty meetings should be convened before and after school to relay the plan and solicit suggestions. A letter should be sent home to the community and should provide information to families on tips for helping their grieving students. Faculty members should be encouraged to talk openly with the students and the outside supports

should only be used when the in-house, familiar supports are exhausted. Long-term supports, in addition to short-term counseling, should be readily available. The family of the deceased should be paid a visit and shown respect and support from the school community. Administrators should be sure to prioritize the emotional stability of the staff during the crisis. Staff members and students should be given the opportunity to share their perceptions of the school's success in trauma response; this information should be gathered after a significant amount of time has passed following the death. Most importantly, the school community should be dedicated to growing and learning together from the tragedy. Again, this narrative provides excellent insight into a successful trauma response plan, but offers no knowledge on how to develop resiliency within a school prior to the onset of adversity. As in the prior narrative, no mention of school culture or character education is made.

Carey (2008) describes the crisis response plan of West Middle School in Auburn, New York, following the sudden death of a student. The school's two goals, following the loss, were to decrease the pain level of the bereaved and to decrease the student vulnerability to further incidents. The six suggestions offered by Carey (2008) are to have designated roles for each member of the crisis response team, to engage in effective communication with faculty, staff, students, media, the victim's family, and families of the students, to hold grade level assemblies and allow for easy access to counselors, to have a strict security plan that accounts for all students in the building at all times, to honor all student requests to see a counselor, and to plan follow-up activities to honor the deceased and support the victim's family. Like the other narratives, the literature

provided bases the construct of resiliency on the response plan and not the pre-existing traits and qualities of a school. Carey (2008) claims to be providing information on how to decrease student vulnerability to further incidents, but the six suggestions are steps of a response plan; we again see decreased student vulnerability being linked with recovery, not resilience.

I was only able to find one piece of literature that delineated preemptive characteristics of a school as aspects of school resiliency. It was an opinion article and not a qualitative study. Harvey (2007) does make a contribution to the definition of a resilient school based on pre-existing traits. Resilient schools have adults that convey care through mentoring, nonjudgmental listening, and fairness. The faculty forms positive relationships between themselves and with the students. The students witness positive relations between teachers and administrators to serve as a model for them. Resilient schools encourage effort over ability and value determination, drive, and attempts at problem solving. Love and gratitude comprise the school's mission. Students are respectful and well-mannered; they are considerate of self and others. Students attribute their successes in academics, athletics, and the arts to their own efforts. Every student has at least one adult with whom they can trust and confide. Praise is given publicly while criticism is given privately. Pro-social behaviors, such as volunteering, sharing, and cooperating, are encouraged while competition is minimized. Proactive and regular formal and informal communication exists between the school and the home. Mistakes and imperfections are tolerated and the consequences for inappropriate behaviors are defined; clear expectations exist for all students. The academic programs are structured

so that all students can attain success most of the time; the assignments are appropriate and manageable. Competency-based measures are used as assessments rather than group norms. Students construct their own learning goals and teachers treat students as collaborators in their learning process. Individual interests and passions are indulged and explored and the extracurricular activities are vast. Good physical health is supported through the serving of healthy food, the offering of noncompetitive athletics, and active engagement in physical education classes. Harvey's (2007) work is an excellent springboard for me to launch my study and Harvey's (2007) work reflects many of the qualities that Thompson (1995), O'Neal (1999), Krovetz (1999), Bell (2002), Nickerson et al. (2004), and Swihart et al. (1992) identified as qualities defining individual and organizational resilience. She begins to identify the preemptive characteristics of a school that contribute to school resilience and provides a litany of traits to examine as they relate to the Rachel's Challenge character education program. What role, if any, does Rachel's Challenge have in developing care, compassion, fairness, positive relationships, mentorships, determination, love, problem solving, gratitude, respect, consideration, trust, safety, altruism, cooperation, and collaboration within a school's culture? I hope to further investigate these qualities in my research and expand on the list, if appropriate.

Character Education

"Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations alike" (McDonnell, 2008, p. 25). Character development programs contribute to a significant increase in relationship building and connectedness. Character education is a

comprehensive approach that incorporates values into curriculum, and the need for it dates back to the times of John Dewey. Dewey said,

> We have got to recognize this social responsibility and I would even say that educators should arrogate to themselves the assumption that their responsibility is greater than that of others…Schools have a moral obligation to improve the health and culture of the community and in spreading liberty and justice and happiness throughout it. (Hollingshead et al., 2009, p. 115)

Historically, character development programs have taken place at the elementary level and not in high schools. Hollingshead et al. (2009) illustrate in their work that because of the changing structure and role of today's American family and the current societal struggles, adolescents are coming to school with problematic behaviors and attitudes. Character education is becoming necessary in our schools to combat the issues and pressures within society, and our students are struggling to develop an appropriate ethical code of conduct. High schools are filled with social groupings that further jeopardize student resilience. Hollingshead et al. (2009) write, "Secondary campuses [are]…spaces where self-doubts and mistrust of others are common among students and where students interact with one another in groups whose boundaries are highly defined" (Hollingshead et al., 2009, p. 112). A sense of connectedness within high schools is absent. Compelling empirical research indicates that a positive and sustained school climate promotes students' academic achievement and healthy development; a positive school climate promotes meaningful staff, family, and student engagement and enhances the social, emotional, ethical, civic, and intellectual skills that contribute to overall success in school and in life (Cohen, Pickeral, & McCloskey, 2009). Brannon (2008) found that character education programs in schools can have a positive effect on

achievement, classroom behavior, and long-term test scores, and found that character education programs reduce the risk factors associated with school failure in middle and high schools. Data suggests many successes to this intervention strategy thereby encouraging my interest in further exploring the implications of one particular character education program. Brannon's (2008) work showed that following character development programs, students were found to be more accepting and respectful and the students had an increased sense of responsibility. These factors correlate with the factors that Harvey (2007) delineated as factors contributing to resiliency. A link between character education and resilience can be seen when combining the various aspects of the current literature.

Character education programs can be tricky for school leaders to implement. Hollingshead (2009) emphasizes that character development programs are only successful if the district is interested and genuinely committed to making change; the amount of cooperators, implementers, and resisters to the program is crucial in its success. Hollingshead (2009) explains that education initiatives live or die by the amount and quality of assistance that the users and implementers receive, and as an educational leader one must ensure that the staff is properly prepared, trained, and informed about character development initiatives, and the school community must understand that change is a gradual process. Romanowski (2003) further explains that many school districts pay little attention to a program once it is established and teachers tend to minimize and undermine the program's goals. This research will help frame my interview questions for my participants. According to Romanowski (2003), in a 2003 Gallup Poll,

90% of teachers said schools should teach courage, caring, acceptance, and honesty. Teachers see the need but they need to be motivated to support the efforts; the motivation begins with a willingness and commitment and involves consistent thorough support from educational leaders. This literature can help leaders understand the process of character development program implementation.

In 2005, Romanowski interviewed 16 teachers from Ohio and inquired about their views of character education in schools. Romanowski (2005) found that teachers were often frustrated by the programs because character development cannot be assessed and teachers are very accustomed to evaluations and assessments to address their success and efforts. The teachers did all agree that character education of high school-aged students is crucial at this time due to our changing society; the teachers also agreed that the character education programs they implemented helped them grow and develop as they began to examine their own behaviors. The teachers supported that good, moral behavior needs to be a part of the entire school culture and implemented from everyone in the school community, including administrators, teachers, and students. Romanowski's (2005) work emphasized the importance of community support for a character development program to be successful in a school; he writes, "…until you get buy-in from home, character education will never be completely successful" (Romanowski, 2005, p. 16). The research shows that teacher support, student support, and community support are all required for a successful initiative. This information furthers an educational leader's understanding of how to successfully implement a character education initiative within their school and will be incorporated into my research.

Romanowski (2003) researched what adolescents want in a character education program and found that 60% of students said that a formal high school class for character education is ineffective because some students that need it would not be willing to learn or change or take the class. High school students supported character education programs that do not talk down or belittle the students with elementary activities or words and that do not assign homework. Romanowski (2003) emphasized that students favor discussion-based activities and appreciate guest speakers that bring real-life experiences to share. Romanowski's (2003) work complemented Hollinghead's (2009) work by reiterating that teacher buy-in is crucial in character development program success. This available research on the various aspects of effective character education programs will serve as the foundation of my exploration into the Rachel's Challenge program.

Like Romanowski (2003), deLara (2000) learned what students want and see as necessary in any school-based intervention to foster resiliency and safety. Since the character education programs are designed to support students, I believe the research that targets student perceptions and student ideas are crucial when trying to explore the effectiveness of any given character education initiative. Students said they wanted "…a personal commitment from both students and teachers to make the school environment better by being nicer to everyone at school…character education or other life skills courses that center on treating others with respect" (deLara, 2000, p. 21). deLara (2000) questioned students about their perceptions of their school; students reported they did not believe the adults in the building genuinely cared about them nor had a clue what was going on inside of the school. This is a startling reality for all educational leaders to

tackle. deLara (2000) set out to show that adolescents actually crave and want adult supervision, intervention, and awareness. The student perspectives are loud and clear. Educational leaders need to listen to the student voices. Again, deLara's (2000) work provides a foundation to my interviews in this study; this research helps identify the necessary components of an effective character development program.

Rachel's Challenge

I find it interesting that the goals defined by the creators of Rachel's Challenge are very aligned with the qualities that Thompson (1995), Harvey (2007), O'Neal (1999), Krovetz (1999), Bell (2002), Swihart et al. (1992), and Nickerson et al. (2004) delineated as aspects of individual and organizational resilience. The defining characteristics of individual and organizational resilience and the aspects of Rachel's Challenge that seem to overlap include the promotion of kindness, the development of compassion, the value of making a change and welcoming change, the charge to make a positive difference, the value of care and concern, the necessity to have purpose and goals, the importance of positive relationships, the role of altruistic actions, the importance of autonomy, the spirit of cooperation and aspect of social competence, and the sense of control. This study investigated whether this overlap in the characteristics of individual and organizational resilience and the aspects of the Rachel's Challenge program truly exist or whether it is just superficial verbiage. There is also a distinct overlap between the aspects that Hollingshead (2009), Romanowski (2003), Romanowski (2005), and deLara (2000) delineate as aspects of a successful and effective character education program and the aspects and goals of the Rachel's Challenge program. For example, the research indicates

that successful character education programs promote a positive culture, value respect within the school community, train the implementers of the program, rely on ongoing support from cooperators, anticipate the development of character as a gradual process requiring consistent and ongoing efforts, maintain a common vision and mission shared by all members of the school community, value the importance of family support and parental involvement, incorporate open discussion, involve dialogue that is mature in nature and on the level of high school students, and incorporate a speaker sharing real-life experiences with the students. All of these qualities of a successful character education program are described to be elements of the Rachel's Challenge initiative. Again, is this a genuine overlap or is it superficial verbiage? If the Rachel's Challenge program can be found to truly support the defining characteristics of individual and organizational resilience, and if the program does indeed sincerely incorporate the aspects of a successful character education program, educational leaders will gain knowledge on a means to developing resilience within their school communities to help them prepare their students for future anticipated trauma. This investigation is the aim of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

This study is not looking at quantitative outcomes of a particular intervention, but rather is looking to investigate the impact of the Rachel's Challenge program on the complex social phenomena of resilient individuals, resilient communities, and school culture. I immersed myself into the realities of students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers to explore the impacts of the program. The study occurs in "real life" and not in an experimental setting because I went into a school that chose to implement the Rachel's Challenge program and closely investigated any impacts of the program on the school's culture and any potential changes in the resilience levels of the students and the general school community. Because the participants described their lived experiences and I searched for meaning in their descriptions, this study is phenomenological. I was focused on learning about the experiences of my participants and was looking to gain as much insight as possible into the experiences of the participants as they are, without having an external influence over their lives or their school culture. I wanted to gain a clear understanding of their perceptions about the impact of the Rachel's Challenge program. I collected data and analyzed data focused on the factors that are embedded within the culture of the school after the character education program was implemented in comparison to what the school culture and community was like before the program and I looked at any potential impacts the program had on individual resilience, community resilience, and the culture of the school;

I did not conduct an experiment with my participants. How the school culture changed following the implementation of the program, if at all, was my primary focus. I investigated whether or not my participants believed the program helped their school community foster resilience. I analyzed my participants' perspectives using the literature that delineates the characteristics of resilient individuals and resilient communities to see if the character education program did have an impact on individual and organizational resilience. I analyzed my data to determine if my interviews told the story of the development of resilient individuals and a resilient environment that will later support a healthy response to future anticipated trauma following the implementation of Rachel's Challenge. I analyzed the data in an attempt to discover any positive changes in the school's culture as a result of the Rachel's Challenge program.

This study is designed to determine the effects of the Rachel's Challenge program on the characteristics that create a resilient school culture because I recognize a need to help students prepare for a successful response to future trauma. The literature describes the qualities of a resilient individual and a resilient organization; in this study, I am striving to determine if the Rachel's Challenge program is linked to these qualities. The program has been a strong interest and passion of mine and I am intrigued to examine the potential impacts of the program. As an educator, I am a strong proponent of holistic education; I believe that educators have a responsibility to help students develop and learn beyond the academic and scholastic criteria and we have a responsibility to foster character development and citizenship. I did not begin my research with a proposed preconception or explanation, but rather hoped to induce a theoretical understanding

through the process of my research. Collecting data through interviews allowed me to simultaneously collect and analyze data to generate a theoretical framework through the reoccurring themes that emerged; I was able to formulate an understanding of the success of the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative at developing individual resilience and resiliency within the culture of the school community and discover any long-term effects of the program on the school community. I looked to discover patterns in my data that helped me understand if the characteristics and traits linked to individual and community resilience were brought about as a result of the program's implementation and if the program induced any changes in the school's culture. I was not looking to control anything; the questions that I asked my participants during their interviews were focused on the individuals and their perceptions and interpretations of the program and their school culture. The end goal was not to quantify any aspects of their stories but rather to describe and understand them to gain an understanding of the potential impacts the program has on school culture, individual resilience, and community resilience. The data collected were words, not numbers, which describe the characteristics of the school culture and the potential impact of the program on individual and community resilience. The end result of my research is a richly descriptive synopsis of the individuals and their school.

Ultimately, this qualitative case study was able to offer valuable information to the current literature because of its own merit; I explored the phenomenon of school resilience as it relates to this particular character education initiative that seems to be missing, and yet critically important, within the context of the current research. The

Rachel's Challenge program is a fairly new character education initiative, and research has not been done on the large scale impacts the program has on school culture, individual resilience, and organizational resilience. This study has a heuristic goal in that it develops the reader's understanding of the factors and traits of resilient individuals and school communities that may be fostered through the Rachel's Challenge program. The research may force school leaders to rethink their current knowledge on the traits and characteristics of resiliency and on their current trauma response plans designed to enhance resiliency when they are really just promoting recovery. The study may compel leaders to consider the implementation of character education programs to foster resiliency among their students and overall school community.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research demands that the researcher is the instrument of data collection and I believe that my education, professional experiences, and personality all contributed to me being a successful qualitative researcher. As a former high school counselor, I was provided with a great amount of practice in learning the art of asking "good" questions. I have an inquiring mind and in my daily work currently and in the past, I consistently utilize open-ended questions in my conversations with students. I have also learned how to be a good listener, how to filter out preconceptions that I may have, how to maintain unbiased notions, how to be a careful and systematic observer, how to create a comfortable environment where individuals are willing to divulge and share, and how to constantly stay attune to the non-verbal affective elements of communication. I am also sensitive to detail, am a non-judgmental communicator, and am very intuitive. I

have a strong understanding of confidentiality and value the necessary steps needed to protect my participants and their stories. In my daily work, I strive to build trusting, comfortable relationships with my students and I needed to harbor these qualities in the relationships I established with my participants; I am confident that I was successful at doing so. Personally and professionally, I strive to ensure that all of my actions and behaviors are grounded in a strong code of ethics, which proved to be very important when working with participants and collecting data. In my professional work, I am forced to be flexible and adaptable. I am able to tolerate ambiguity and adapt plans and procedures and revise and restructure when necessary; qualitative research requires that the researcher is able and willing to tweak and revamp plans and the processes of data collection and analysis as the study develops. I am also highly organized, thorough, driven, and self-motivated.

This topic fits my personal, practical, and intellectual goals. I find resiliency, school culture, and character education to be very interesting constructs and I have a curiosity to learn more about them, making the topic very intrinsically motivating to me. As a former school counselor, I experienced school trauma and have seen the disastrous potential that adversity can have on students. As a leader in education, I am passionate about defining and fostering traits and characteristics that preempt a crisis which promote resiliency so that as a school leader I can diligently work to prepare my school community for the onset of a crisis, possibly through the implementation of character education initiatives. As a leader, I prioritize the establishment of a healthy, successful, and balanced school culture. As a leader, I also prioritize a holistic focus on student

development; I believe academics and character should be enhanced within a school each and every day. I prioritize the need for schools to foster a sense of community and to help students develop socially and scholastically. I am very passionate about the messages of the Rachel's Challenge program, on a professional and personal level, and continue to be very invested to learn about any potential long-term impacts of the program. I am excited about continuing to gain a better understanding of the phenomena of individual and community resilience within schools and I believe this understanding has the potential to make strong implications to the field of educational leadership. As an educational leader, I believe this study will enhance my performance and success. My intellectual curiosity and hunger for knowledge concerning resiliency and school culture were very helpful in my research pursuits.

Participants and Setting

I examined the impacts of the Rachel's Challenge program in one suburban high school. I believe that intense involvement and interviews with students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers in the high school provided me with the necessary data to construct potential theoretical contributions concerning the impact of the program on the overall school culture, individual resilience, and community resilience; I gathered information to help me formulate an understanding of how, if at all, this program supported and improved a particular school community.

I interviewed the students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers from a co-educational, Catholic, college-preparatory school. The Pallottines established the school in 1954 and it opened with 90 ninth grade boys. In 1972, the Board of Trustees

voted to enroll female students and, currently, the school has students from grades nine through twelve, with approximately 180 students enrolled in each grade. Not all of the students attending the school are Catholic. Since the first graduating class in 1958, over 98% of the students pursed a post-secondary education. The school consists of seven buildings on a 32-acre campus. It is a thriving school community currently offering the students 20 co-curricular activities and 30 varsity level sports. The school is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and is a member of the National Catholic Education Association. The student population of the school is described as predominately Caucasian, middle-class students with some economic and racial diversity. The most recent data on the racial diversity of the school are as follows: approximately 90% of the students are Caucasian, 5% of the students are Asian, 3% of the students are African American, and 2% of the students are multi-racial. The school openly prioritizes a rigorous academic curriculum and a dedication to community service. Rachel's Challenge character education program was initially instituted within the school in the Fall of 2010, and the school has continued programs and activities for the initiative ever since.

The school used in this study is a Catholic school which will indeed impact the generalizability of the findings. Because Catholic schools also incorporate theological-based curricula and service learning into their teaching and learning, a program like Rachel's Challenge fits in differently than one would see it mesh within a public school in which the development of character and the promotion of citizenship are not necessary components of the holistic educational design. In a Catholic school, students are hearing

the messages of kindness, acceptance, inclusion, and tolerance in their religion classes, and they are required to practice altruism and empathy through their service-learning projects. In a public school, a program like Rachel's Challenge may very well stand on its own when trying to introduce and promote such values. I used this particular Catholic school as my setting because I had access to interview the students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers and because they were looking for feedback on their implementation of the program and was willingly interested in participating in this process.

Limiting my number to one school allowed for my involvement to be ongoing, consistent, and thorough because I interviewed a large number of individuals from each particular subgroup in small focus groups or individually. With only one school to closely investigate, I was able to thoroughly work with students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers. Limiting my setting to just one high school minimized the discrepancies that exist within the cultures and environments of different level schools based on student age and allowed me to dissect the factors of the particular Rachel's Challenge program that is delivered to high school students. (Rachel's Challenge does have programs intended for students of other ages, but I focused solely on the high school program for the purposes of this study to maintain consistency and to answer my previously delineated research questions.) Limiting my setting to just one high school also helped me, as the researcher, systematically define the constructs of resilience and trauma that may be defined differently, depending on the level of school. Limiting my setting to one suburban high school minimized the discrepancies based on geographies

that may exist in the resources school districts may or may not have when implementing the character education program and the ways in which resilience is defined and perceived. Convenience, with respect to access and geographic proximity, certainly contributed to the particular school that I chose. My professional experiences as a former school counselor and current school administrator and my connections to the founders of Rachel's Challenge provided me with access to information about schools that implemented the program in the recent past, so the selection of the particular high school that I used was very manageable for me. I had no difficulty in identifying a high school to serve as my setting. It is important to note that I was willing to add more individuals to my participant list or add additional schools to my setting if it was proven to be beneficial as I moved through the progression of my research.

I interviewed my participants individually or in small focus groups to provide me with the opportunity to gain the perspectives of many individuals. I interviewed 25 students in 5 focus groups, 7 female parents individually or in a focus group, 5 counselors in a focus group, the 5 members of the administrative team in a focus group, and 10 male and female teachers individually or in focus groups within the school.

Data Collection

My data were predominantly collected via interviews. I interviewed students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers from the high school community to enable me to gain a thorough understanding of their perceptions concerning the impact of Rachel's Challenge on their school culture, on their level of individual and overall school resilience, and on their perceived levels of confidence in being able to successfully deal

with future trauma. This triangulation approach of interviewing a wide array of participants enabled me to gather many different perspectives through my interviews with the varied participants because the various subgroups of interviewees all had different points of view based on their role within the overall school community. The interviews, as a tool for data collection, provided me with the rich description that I needed to formulate contributions to the literature on the connection between Rachel's Challenge character education initiative and school culture, individual resilience, and school-community resilience. The interviews took place in the environment of the participants in face-to-face meetings and the interviews occurred using a focus group design or individually to enable me to collect data from a large number of individuals. The interviews were designed to gain as many details as possible to allow me to fully understand the perceptions of my participants. All of the interviews were audio recorded and were transcribed to support me in my analysis of the data. Detailed field notes were immediately written after each interview and the field notes were consistently and systematically scribed. Each participant was informed prior to the interview about the goals of my study and the means used to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

I also utilized document review in my process of data collection. Newspaper articles about the school, articles about the implementation of Rachel's Challenge character education initiative, curriculum documents, program summaries, and activity notes were found to be excellent resources for me to validate or further investigate the information that I attained during my interviews. The document review did not prove to introduce any new material, but it did support the information I gathered in the

interviews. I asked the various participants to supply me with whatever documents they believed were relevant to my study and all such documents supported my findings from the interviews. For example, the teachers who shared how they incorporate values into their teaching shared some of their lesson plans with me to highlight the connections they make in their classes between their academic content areas and the values promoted through the Rachel's Challenge program. The staff and students shared documents with me that summarized the projects that the Rachel's Challenge Club had facilitated within their school community and provided me with agendas and meeting notes from the club meetings as well. Having documents, in addition to interviews, helped me avoid the threat of making chance associations because I had multiple sources of evidence that provided me with the opportunity to understand the constructs of individual and organizational resilience and cultural changes attained via character education and how the values of Rachel's Challenge were promoted within the classrooms and through the Rachel's Challenge Club in this particular school. The documents further enhanced the understanding I gained from my interviews concerning the connection between Rachel's Challenge and school culture, individual resilience, and community resilience. The documents served as a means for checking for understanding the information that I gained during my interviews, but, again, they did not introduce any new ideas and they did not conflict with any of the information I gathered through my interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an ongoing process and it began immediately following my very first interview. I constantly compared each subsequent interview session with the data

collected from the interviews preceding it. Themes emerged from the data that allowed me to establish categories that offered insight to my research questions. After all of the data were coded into the various categories, overarching categories were identified that connected the various subcategories. This categorical, constant comparative analysis continued until all of the data were addressed. I analyzed all of the data for tendencies in the descriptions and perceptions to identify trends in the data. Outlier data were anticipated and will be addressed and explained below as well. The reader will notice that the focus of the findings of my research is on the themes that emerged that seemed to summarize most of the collected data.

The first step of the process of analyzing my data was that I had the audio tapes of each focus group or individual interview transcribed. I then reviewed each transcription individually as the interviews were being conducted and subsequently transcribed. I read each transcription and recorded tallies to summarize how many times particular responses (themes) were shared by the interviewees within a particular subgroup. As I conducted more interviews and read the corresponding transcriptions, I continued to add to the tallies for the particular interviewee subgroup and expand the list of responses/themes as new ones surfaced. All of the responses/themes are discussed in my data summary and the frequency of the responses is also indicated. Once all of the data were coded for the individual interviewee subgroups, I then compared the themes across the various subgroups to see the similarities and differences in the data shared by the students, parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators. To thoroughly draw conclusions across subgroups, I again created tallies about common themes shared by the various subgroups

as well as varied themes shared by the subgroups. I simultaneously reviewed any relevant documents provided to me by my interviewees as I read, analyzed, and tallied the themes from the transcriptions of the interviews to ensure that all of the analysis of the data from the interviews accurately reflected that which I read in the document review.

Methods of Verification

For my research to make valuable contributions to the current literature and the field of educational leadership, I needed to protect the validity of my study. For my findings to be valued within the profession, I needed to address the various threats that may dissuade my readers from supporting my data collection and data analysis. My involvement with my participants was very intensive and long term. Many different participants at the school were interviewed in small focus groups or individually to ensure a strong understanding of the school culture, the implementation of Rachel's Challenge, and the perceived levels of individual resilience and community resilience within the school's culture from multiple perspectives. Data were collected, via interviews, until the findings became saturated. Data were collected until the same themes were constantly occurring and no new data were emerging. This plethora of data gained during this long-term involvement helped me avoid the threat of researcher bias. Since I have implemented the Rachel's Challenge program in my career, I had to guard against having a biased perspective about the impact of the program. I worked with a school that I had no connection to in order to avoid any possible biases. Interviewing a large number of participants helped me gain a complete collection of data and prevented me from selecting data that matched my preconceptions or that stood out to me; it helped

me address my inevitable subjectivity on the topic. This surplus of data also prevented me from formulating theories too prematurely. The reader will see a direct, linear relationship between my data and my conclusions, indicating that no biased inferences were made. Immersing myself in the data collection and data analysis for a prolonged amount of time also enabled me to identify and address alternate hypotheses.

The reader will see that my data consist of as many details as possible and direct quotations from the participants are incorporated into the findings and the conclusions; the transcriptions and audio recordings ensured accuracy of my participants' responses. The examples in the data are used to operationalize the perceptions of my participants and quotations are used to develop themes during the data analysis. The interview protocols were structured to probe about details to enable me to gain a vivid understanding of the interpretations of the participants and the questions and probes were neutral. Consistent field notes were collected immediately following each interview.

I asked my participants to review my data to ensure the accuracy. Respondent validation ruled out the possibility that I misinterpreted the meaning of what my participants shared during their interviews and their perceptions. My participants were able to recognize their ideas in my interpretations and were asked to suggest any necessary revisions to better capture their thoughts and perspectives. Soliciting feedback from my participants enhanced the validity of my research. I frequently checked for understanding throughout my interviews and also sent my interpretations to the participants following the interviews.

I looked for alternate cases and evidence throughout the process of data collection and data analysis. During the data collection process, I ensured that I interviewed all pertinent informants, not just individuals who would all share the same perspective and either all be positive or all be negative by selecting my participants at random. I accounted for everyone in the school that could shed light on potential effects of Rachel's Challenge on the school's culture, individual resilience, and community resilience. During the process of data analysis, I rigorously examined both the supporting and discrepant data to determine whether or not I should retain or modify my themes and conclusions. Looking at these discrepant data highlighted any deficits in my categorical analysis. When I defined my categories and themes, I accounted for any outliers in the data and I modified my initial themes based on the occurrence of discrepant data.

I utilized the concept of triangulation by collecting data through multiple interviews with varied respondents and by simultaneously engaging in a thorough document review. Using multiple sources of evidence provided me with the opportunity to have multiple measures of the same phenomena. Chance associations were not made because my multiple sources support one another. Relying solely on interviews would have allowed me to be criticized for researcher bias impacting my interviews; relying solely on documents would have allowed me to be criticized for using inaccurate information and ignoring the affective elements and perceptions that I needed to address my research questions. I used the two methods of data collection in conjunction to formulate a theoretical understanding of any impacts that the Rachel's Challenge program had on school culture, individual resilience, and community resilience.

I used the definitions of the constructs of individual resilience, community resilience, and character education from the available literature to help avoid against my own bias of the phenomena. Basing my research on the already defined and accepted criteria available in the literature helped ensure consistency and helped avoid potential bias.

Finally, I often utilized the process of expert review to provide me with feedback throughout my data collection, data analysis, and dissertation writing. The feedback that I received from my academic advisor, committee members, and colleagues was highly valued and I was dedicated to making revisions based on the suggestions provided to me. I relied on my supports to help me assess whether or not my conclusions accurately flowed from my data and whether the strong linear relationship between my data and my conclusions is transparent.

Ethical Issues

Before interviewing all of my participants, I fully disclosed the purpose of my research to them and I reinforced the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Pseudonyms were consistently used. My goals, motives, and intentions were clearly relayed to them before the interviews. I went to all necessary means to protect my participants and fostered comfortable environments for them to disclose their narratives about Rachel's Challenge, their school culture, and individual and community resilience, ensuring their well-being as the utmost priority at all times throughout my interviews. The collected data was always protected and secured and remained locked during and after the study. I stayed constantly self-aware of my own biases related to school culture,

resilience, and Rachel's Challenge and worked to maintain a neutral stance throughout all stages of the research process.

Summary

High schools will inevitably face crises; this is a reality that all school leaders need to accept and not ignore. The implications of a crisis on an adolescent have the potential to be disastrous. Further crises can follow an initial school crisis and the emotional repercussions of a trauma on a teenager can be extreme. It is a responsibility of all educational leaders to address this reality and to instill a sense of resiliency among their student population as part of the school's culture. Though schools need to establish strong crisis response plans to spring into action immediately following a trauma, schools also need to foster resiliency within their school culture prior to the onset of adversity for the students. Research on the characteristics and traits of a school that preempt crisis situations that foster resiliency leading to a healthy response and recovery from trauma is missing and necessary. The role of character education, specifically Rachel's Challenge, as a tool to develop individual and community resilience needs to be examined to help prepare students to be responsive to the inevitable adversity. The potential for this study to make a contribution to the field of educational leadership is significant simply because of the significance of trauma on an adolescent.

The literature shows that individual resilience has been closely examined and various factors have been identified that promote resiliency for individuals, which will help the individuals be prepared for adversity in their lives. Similarly, the literature shows that organizational resilience has been closely examined and various factors have been

identified that promote resiliency for organizations which will help the organizations be prepared for adversity. The research done on the construct of school resilience has been focused on the trauma response plans and has ignored the preemptive qualities and characteristics. Research connecting character education to resilience is also lacking. Research on the long-term effects of the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative is also absent.

This qualitative case study within this one suburban high school was designed to address these literature gaps; this study was specifically designed to analyze the impact of one particular character education program—Rachel's Challenge. An understanding of the characteristics and qualities that contribute to school resiliency, for individuals and the overall community, prior to the onset of a trauma and if it can be developed through this character education initiative is informative to educational leaders because the preemptive qualities can define the difference between a healthy response and recovery and an unhealthy response and recovery. One individual can survive the onset of the flu virus while another individual dies because of his or her pre-existing health characteristics. One marathon runner finishes the race and another runner quits partway through because of the training that occurred prior to the race. One politician wins an election and another politician loses an election because of the efforts of their campaigns prior to the casting of the ballots. One school recovers from trauma and another school does not because of the pre-existing conditions of the school's culture that contributed to the development of a resilient environment. Can character education, namely the Rachel's Challenge program, be the key to school resilience?

CHAPTER 4

DATA

Rachel's Challenge is a character education program that emerged as a response to one of the worst school shootings in American history that ended the lives of 12 students and 1 teacher at Columbine High School in Colorado on April 20, 1999. Rachel Scott was the first person killed in the school massacre; Rachel was known for her kindness and compassion and she often befriended students who were marginalized. The program was developed by Rachel's father, Darrell Scott, to inspire students to make changes in their lives and in their schools by treating each other with kindness and compassion in an effort to promote Rachel's legacy. It is a comprehensive approach to character education with two components: an assembly program delivered to the entire student body and parents and the teaching of a character education curriculum to a selected group of student leaders. These student leaders are trained to start a Rachel's Challenge Club within their school to continue the development and promotion of the values of the Rachel's Challenge program. The general assembly for the high school students involves showing a video of the Columbine tragedy and a message from Rachel Scott delivered by the speaker about hope and the deliverance of a challenge to students to make a positive difference in their schools. It is a powerful message for students designed to touch their hearts and encourage them to care about one another. A similar presentation is delivered to parents in the evening. Following the all-school assembly program, a selected group of student leaders attend a training workshop with the assembly facilitator.

The curriculum used for the training of the student leaders focuses on looking for the best in others, dreaming and setting goals, choosing positive influences, demonstrating acts of kindness, and starting a chain reaction of positive, kind actions. The students are trained for future work within the school through the development of a Rachel's Challenge Club to create a culture of kindness and compassion; the leaders are encouraged to critically analyze organizational structures, develop student interactions and relationships, appreciate diversity, make kindness and compassion the norm, and create a more democratic culture within their schools. Students are trained to implement projects throughout the school year and beyond to reinforce the messages of the program; the Rachel's Challenge presenter provides a framework for the club to get started, but the individual schools develop and foster their own club as they see appropriate. The workshop facilitator provides students with suggested activities designed to maintain the momentum of the program's message after the deliverance of the assembly. What the school does to maintain the program's message is ultimately left in the hands of the student leaders, the school personnel, and the Rachel's Challenge Club within the school.

I examined the impacts of the Rachel's Challenge program in one suburban high school. I gathered information to help me formulate an understanding of how, if at all, this program supported and improved this particular school community. The goal of my research was to answer the following questions:

Does the school community perceive that the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative has improved school culture?

Does the school community perceive that the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative has helped develop individual and organizational resilience within the school community?

I interviewed eleventh and twelfth grade students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers from a co-educational, Catholic, college-preparatory school. The Rachel's Challenge character education program was initially instituted within the school in the Fall of 2010, and the school has continued programs and activities for the initiative ever since through the actions of the Rachel's Challenge Club. I interviewed 25 students in 5 focus groups, 7 parents individually or in a focus group, 5 counselors in a focus group, the administrative team in a focus group, and 10 teachers individually or in focus groups within the school. I also utilized document review in my process of data collection. Newspaper articles about the school, articles about the implementation of Rachel's Challenge character education initiative, curriculum documents, program summaries, and activity notes were found to be excellent resources for me to validate or further investigate the information that I attained during my interviews. The document review did not prove to introduce any new material, but it did support the information I gathered in the interviews. I asked the various participants to supply me with whatever documents they believed were relevant to my study and all such documents supported my findings from the interviews.

Student Interviews

I first interviewed 25 randomly selected eleventh and twelfth grade students divided among 5 focus groups. Out of the 25 students, 14 were female (Students 1

through 14) and 11 were male (Students 15 through 25). The students voiced a consensus opinion on why the Rachel's Challenge program was brought into their school. All of the focus groups spoke of the intent of the program using the word "awareness." The students in each focus group highlighted that they believed the school leaders wanted to create a level of awareness for students; an awareness, to some degree, of the bullying issues facing adolescents; but the students felt the awareness was more targeted on how the impact of kindness can go a long way. They took a more positive message from the program—a message of what behaviors are expected and a message telling them how they *should* act, as opposed to what they *should not* do. Rather than viewing the program as an anti-bullying program, they saw the program to be more pro-kindness. One male student stated,

> We always talk about bystanders and I feel like a lot of other anti-bullying programs put a lot of pressure on kids and try to give them the job as the disciplinarian and this is more like saying just be kind. (Student 17)

Each focus group discussed the implication of doing the little things for someone else, such as holding a door, saying hello, or smiling at someone in the hallway. Each focus group discussed the idea of a chain reaction of kindness that starts with one person doing a nice and little thing for someone else and that choice creating a series of random acts of kindness. A female student stated,

> I would say it was definitely more pro-kindness than anything. And I think the main idea was the chain reaction and how doing one small thing, Rachel believed, would motivate the person who received that gesture to go and then give another gesture and start the chain reaction. (Student 3)

Numerous students shared the idea that the program made them think about instances when they could be hurting someone's feelings unintentionally. The students in

each focus group agreed that the Rachel's Challenge program made them stop and think about their impact on others, be it positive or negative. Student 24 stated, "Rachel's Challenge strengthens your conscience where you always have it in the back of your mind and think should I say that to somebody?" Student 4 added,

> I just think about why one person thinks they're superior than someone else, that they have the right to put someone else down. All those things start making sense in my head now. I think I matured out of it a lot because I just try to be a better person from now on. Every so often I'll think about the program again and I'll just remind myself that I should just try to be a better person. It's who you are that really matters. I think about this stuff now. (Student 4)

Three students agreed that the program encouraged them to stop being hurtful and specifically shared that the program forced them to think about making new friends and including everyone. All of the students attested to gaining some level of self-awareness about how their actions impact others.

The students also agreed that the program was not only brought to their school to promote this awareness and to encourage kindness, but it was also trying to enlighten them to the issue of bullying, both in schools and in the greater society. There was an anti-bullying component to the program that was recognized by the students, but it was not the primary intention of the program, in their opinion. They agreed that bullying was an inevitable reality and they believed this program was a proactive attempt to decrease the incidents within their school. One female student stated,

> They're making everyone aware of this because we are the next generation. We're going to be the people going into the new jobs coming up. We can be future teachers, principals, doctors, whatever, and if all of us are aware it's a lot easier to share the love, the kindness, and just open everyone up to this and hopefully the bully will eventually—I'm not going to say stop—but there's going to be a definite decrease of it. (Student 5)

The students also took from the program the message that people can never understand what the thoughts are of another person. The students had conversations about not knowing how bullying might affect someone. The two shooters in the Columbine tragedy were drastically impacted by all of the bullying that was done to them and the students I interviewed identified their realization that one can never know how far people will go to retaliate the wrongdoings that were done to them. In a way, they demonstrated a sense of sympathy for the shooters because they recognized that they were the victims of bullying and that was a factor that drove them to carry out this massacre. The students agreed that the video clips from inside the school taken during the shootings scared them, but helped them realize that bullying can drive people to do unfathomable things. The program helped them identify with the role of the bullying victim. They agreed that Rachel's Challenge was brought into their school to proactively try to control any negative backlash created as a result of bullying. The level of self-awareness that they gained from watching the Rachel's Challenge program and their insight into the minds of the bully and the victim forces some of these students to think before they speak and they attested that doing that can make all the difference. A male student stated,

> People just try to deny it, like oh I'm not going to drive a kid to bring a gun into school. They sometimes say to themselves I won't do that. I'll just mess with them a little bit. I won't drive them over the edge, but really they don't know what will drive someone over the edge. For some, they're on the edge already. It's the thought of all those words and the impact to me. The people who came in and killed Rachel Scott, the way they were bullied, that affected me a lot because someone making someone get to that point, I never ever want to be someone who makes someone else that upset. (Student 16)

I got some of the best and most enlightening information from the students when I asked them about what personal impact the program specifically had on them. I asked them to share with me their emotions and thoughts about the program, as it directly related to them. Student 18 shared a very personal impact. He said,

> I was bullied kind of severely when I was younger and I know when kids are bullied they don't really know the impact that it has on them. I never told my parents. I never told anybody. It just kind of sat with me for a while and I know that it can make a child feel guilty when they're bullied, like why am I being bullied? Is there something wrong with me? So when I saw this, it really opened my eyes and I was like wow. Nothing really was wrong with me at all. It makes me want to help others like me when I was younger. It made me reevaluate my entire life. I know it sounds dramatic, but that's for real. (Student 18)

This student was the only student I interviewed who shared the perspective from a student who had been bullied. Six students shared personal stories about being a bully and how this program changed them. For example, one male student said,

> Sometimes I come off condescending, rude, like overly blunt. Sarcastic. Some people who don't know me, they take it the wrong way. If you get to know me, I'm usually just kidding. You know what I mean. I don't really mean what I'm saying, but I think sometimes you have to take a step back and be like wow; I really shouldn't have said it that way or my attitude. I'm not going to change overnight but somebody who I don't know could get offended. That's why I am working to control that and change. Rachel's Challenge made me want to change. (Student 19)

A female student shared a similar re-evaluation of her own actions by stating,

> I started realizing a lot of little comments like the littlest things can really help someone; they can really hurt someone too. Just a mean little comment can totally ruin someone's day. I try not to do that anymore. There's always the better option. I just try to do something better rather than worse now. It made me step back and say okay, you're no better than anyone and nobody's better than you. Everyone's equal. Treat everyone with respect because everyone deserves it. Everyone is a person no matter what. I stopped being mean. (Student 8)

Another student shared a similar perspective because she stated,

> I feel like the program just makes you; whenever you look at somebody, you look at them different now. You think you've got to be nice to them. Just because they're a different person than you are doesn't mean you have to make fun of them or bully them. The program makes you do random acts of kindness towards others. Even just opening a door for somebody makes their day better; like saying thank you or have a good day or something like that makes them have a better day. I know it sounds cheesy, but treat others as the way you would want to be treated. (Student 11)

Student 14 shared her perspective about wishing she would have handled a situation differently. She stated,

> I remember not having a Rachel's Challenge moment and I felt bad about it after it. I felt so bad about it actually. It was a stupid Pollyanna party during Christmas last year and this one girl I do not particularly like and I didn't invite her and I should have invited her. I still feel bad about not inviting her and I know that Rachel would have put her prejudices aside, and I should have been the bigger person in the situation and invited her. It was like three hours of my life. What's the big deal? I still feel really bad. (Student 14)

Eleven of the students also thoroughly described the impact the program had on them as a bystander to bullying. They did not identify themselves as the victim of bullying or as the bully, but they shared the perspective of being a silent observer of bullying. They shared that Rachel's Challenge gave them the courage to step in and intervene when other people are bullying. The program made them want to stop being the silent observer. One student said,

> I just don't understand in my head how people can, after hearing these horrible stories and seeing the families affected, how they can do certain crazy mean things. If someone sees the problem happening, you should say something about it. It frustrates me a lot. When I see something like that, it makes me so angry. I try and say something now. (Student 1)

Another female student shared being similarly impacted by the program. She stated,

> I was never really bullied and I never really bullied anyone, but I was with people that would make fun of people and I really just think to myself I always had a gut feeling like I don't feel good about this and then just seeing Rachel's Challenge made me think I shouldn't be just like sitting there and watching my friends make fun of other people or put them down, and it's just kind of like I should say something to them and stick up for people. That was the impact it had on me; not to just sit back and go along with things and do something about it. Now I am just like seriously, guys, that's mean. I just make them aware of what they're doing and maybe give them that feeling like am I doing something wrong? (Student 2)

A male student in the same focus group added to this idea by saying,

> Last night I was with one of my friends who goes to another school. He never saw Rachel's Challenge. He said something about this kid that we grew up with. We hadn't seen him in four years probably. He said something about the way he dresses and the way he looks. And I got really offended. I was like why would you say that? And we got into a big argument and I was like look, what difference does it make how he dresses? Who are you to pass judgment? I got really mad and left. (Student 20)

One student talked about how she saw the impact of the program on her friends from another school who did not even see the program. Because of the personal impact it had on her, she saw the impact resonate among her friendship group. Student 12 stated,

> I could tell that I just changed the way I talked to just about everybody because of that [Rachel's Challenge] and from then, you can notice my friends really changing with me saying when I was kind to them and then they'd be kind to other people and so on and so on; a chain reaction started because of me. They got the idea that just being kind to others was the better idea than just being dumb teenagers. (Student 12)

The students I interviewed provided me with a range of perspectives; each of the 25 students either shared the impact that Rachel's Challenge had on them as the student who was bullied, the student who acted as the bully, or the student who stood by and

watched the bullying of another. The intent of the program is to impact all types of students and the student interviews indicate that the program was able to hit students in all different roles through the promotion of self-awareness.

Students also shared more details about how the program inspired them to be nice to others and to be involved in random acts of kindness. The program helped some students work to engage and connect with other students. The program strives to promote inclusion and acceptance and 19 students shared this type of personal impact. Student 23 described a recent situation in which he sat with a new autistic student in the cafeteria after seeing her sitting alone at lunch and hearing other students making fun of her lunchbox. He confidently stated that Rachel's Challenge was the driving force behind his decision to step up and sit with his classmate. That new student now has a lot of people sitting with her at lunch and he shared a great amount of pride in his role in creating that change. A male student stated,

> You can find yourself, before, like you could walk into the lunchroom and you see somebody sitting by themselves. You just brush them off. Go to your table with your friends. But now, it seems like you go to the library or the lunchroom, you see someone lonely, and you notice them now. I've had instances last year where me and my friends were like, hey, you can come sit with us or something like that. Or we'd go sit with them. It's just like someone who probably needs a little bit of comforting or something. (Student 21)

A female student shared a similar personal impact by stating,

> What kind of hit me is not that someone's going to come and shoot me, but you want to live a life that you can be proud of. You want to be Rachel Scott. You want to become that way. It sounds stupid but I actually smile at more people now and that kind of stuff because I realized that the person that you just don't pay attention to, even if you're not being mean by just ignoring them, can be affected if you're nice to them. (Student 9)

I then asked the students to discuss what impact, if any, they believe Rachel's Challenge had on their overall school community, shifting away from the impact it had on them personally and looking more at the larger scale implications. One male student described an incident in their school in which students stood up and spoke out against bullying. He stated,

> There was this recent huge bullying issue of this one girl over Twitter recently. The school, so many people, stepped in and stopped it. It was a pretty big deal actually. Everyone was involved. Before the program, people wouldn't have cared as much. Everyone said this is really wrong. Our school doesn't allow this anymore and Rachel's Challenge had a lot to do with how people got involved. The kids doing the bullying were freshman and they didn't know that after the program has been to our school, we don't allow this stuff anymore. We don't stand for it at [name of school]. Everyone got all fired up about it. We don't let people bully anymore. (Student 23)

The students unanimously agreed that there was indeed a larger impact evidenced throughout their school. Another male student stated,

> You never really saw communication between everybody, but now you can see every grade level just talking with each other, not feeling like it's a bad thing to communicate with everybody and just being kind to everyone. Freshmen and seniors now talk to each other. Before, that never happened. Now, it just doesn't matter who you are or what grade you're in. (Student 18)

They shared the belief that the program helps students formulate the courage to include others and it makes it acceptable and desirable to be nice and not ostracize others. This prioritization of acceptance and inclusion is a change within their school community that they believe is a result of the implementation of the program.

The students agreed that their peers are not as mean and are just nicer since the program, but they also all agreed that the impact was the strongest immediately following

the program. They shared the belief that immediately following the program, there was a significant visible difference within their school, but it has dwindled over time. The students believe that though their school is better because of the program, the intensity of the change was most prevalent immediately following the delivery of the program. But they do believe that a majority of the students still model some of the ideas of the program on a regular basis. The students shared the idea that immediately after the program came to their school, they saw their peers holding doors, smiling at strangers, and being nice and more inclusive. A female student summarized this perspective by stating,

> I feel like after a few months, it kind of faded out a little. I just wish it was still just as engaging I guess with everyone. That was so cool when everyone was feeling it so much. I just feel like I wish there was a better way to keep it going after the first few months, the way it was. It's definitely still with us and definitely still here, but it needs to be refreshed or something sometimes. Just remind everyone. (Student 12)

All of the students agreed that though the school tries to keep the message of the program alive through reminders and activities, they wish more was done to promote the messages of the Rachel's Challenge program. They shared the desire to maintain the momentum and intensity that they saw within the school immediately after the program came in. Student 21 said, "If we could bring it up more, it would stay alive in people's minds more often and people would stay really aware like they were right after the program". The school has a Rachel's Challenge Club with over 200 members and the students agreed that for those students the messages of the program are more heightened and practiced because they are involved in activities and they participate in meetings in which Rachel's messages are reviewed and discussed. They agreed that being a member

of the club helps those students keep thinking about Rachel Scott and her philosophies, and all of the students I interviewed wished that the club would design programs that more frequently impact the entire school community. The students want the club to bear more responsibility to keep the messages of the program at the forefront of the school's culture and current for all of the school community members, not just the club members, as they saw it was immediately following the program. The consensus among the focus groups was that the program had a strong and obvious impact immediately, though that impact has declined over time but not to the point of being completely forgotten. The students agreed that a more active effort on the part of the school to promote the main ideas of the program on a regular basis would be welcomed and beneficial, though they are very aware that any school-wide, long-term changes take a long time to create and maintain. A male student stated,

> I don't want to make it sound like after this program came in there was just like this crazy change where everyone was nice to everyone all of the time because that's not going to happen. It will happen over time and I think in the long run it could do lot of good things for sure. (Student 17)

Student 13 said, "People are in ruts and you can't change personality and actions overnight. We have to find a way to work on it every day to break the cycle of cliques and get everyone to be friends." The students believe the program has the potential to make changes; the club at their school can keep the momentum going throughout the entire school community through more school-wide activities. The club members are the students who seem to be the most deeply impacted by the program and the students in the focus groups all want to see that richer impact permeate through the entire school community.

I asked the students if they could identify any negative aspects of the program and all of the students unanimously agreed that there are no negatives about the delivery of the program. In fact, the students instead highlighted a positive of the program. They discussed the emotional impact of showing some video clips from the Columbine High School shooting and agreed that including these clips in the presentation helped students become emotionally invested in the presentation. The students believe that the vivid videos help the students remember the messages of the program and help them connect with the program because it happened in a high school just like their high school. The students all agreed that the intensity of the program helped them commit to listening to the presentation and commit to reflecting upon it later. All 25 students agreed that the intensity of the program helped the messages of the program really resonate on a deep and long-lasting level.

I was interested to see if the students felt that the program helped strengthen their own individual resilience or the resilience level of the overall school community. When asked how the students would define someone who is resilient, the students said "someone who keeps going" (Student 1), "someone who can take a mental punch" (Student 12), "someone who just lets it roll" (Student 4), "someone who doesn't really care how the odds are stacked against them and they just keep fighting" (Student 23), and "someone who can adapt to change" (Student 18). Many of the students also defined a resilient individual as "a person immune to people around them" (Student 5), "a person who knows what is right and wrong" (Student 10), "a person who is set in their own ways and doesn't give in to peer pressure" (Student 7), "a person who has their own character

and personality" (Student 13), and "someone who doesn't care what other people think and isn't self-conscious" (Student 2). I found it interesting that a majority of the students defined resilience using the concept of peer pressure and referencing the notion of distinguishing between right and wrong. For these students, resilience was synonymous with someone who has their own set of values and beliefs and is not easily swayed by the pressures or actions of others. Using that definition of resilience, many of the students did share that they believe the Rachel's Challenge program gave them the courage to not silently observe as a bystander when bullying is going on around them; it helps normalize inclusion and acceptance and gives them something to reference when they try and intervene. A male student stated,

> I've seen it where it's been referenced where someone will say something mean to someone else and I heard, actually one of my friends surprisingly, bring up Rachel's Challenge and say how they shouldn't do that. It's weird. It gives you sort of strength against peer pressure or something. (Student 25)

The students shared that they believe the program helps students stand up for what is right and overcome the tendency to give into the pressures to bully or exclude others. When defining a resilient individual as a person who can bounce back or who can overcome great adversity, the majority of students did not in any way connect Rachel's Challenge to the development of resilience on a personal and individual level or a school-wide level. Student 11 stated, "It is experiences, not programs or assemblies that make people resilient." Only 1 of the 25 students voiced that the program helped him foster internal strength or the ability to cope with adversity. This male student stated,

> We all have those people that we don't like. Rather than kind of striking back with anger, which is kind of like an easier route, now I try to forgive

> them and try to not have that animosity, and so I think that [Rachel's Challenge] kind of made me a little more resilient and helped me get stronger. How to forgive them and to get past the issue. How to let it roll off my shoulders and move on. (Student 22)

For the other 24 students, the program seems to have an impact on individuals giving into peer pressure and it helps motivate students to stand up for kindness, but it does not appear to impact the development of individual or community resilience in the eyes of the students.

I was also interested in the students' perspective on whether or not Rachel's Challenge helps support their individual or community response to tragedy. The students and I discussed if they felt that Rachel's Challenge helped connect members of the school community and helped unify them in a way that would strengthen their ability to deal with difficult times within their school, either in the past or in the future. The students unanimously attested that the program did instill a strong sense of connection. As examples of how the program helped support a positive response to tragedy within their community, the students in each focus group referenced recent deaths that impacted members of their school. A female student said,

> A girl's brother passed away and the whole school seemed to come together for that one person. Another kid graduated last year and he had an older brother pass away too, and the whole school came together and the funeral was huge with everyone wanting to be there to show love and support. So many people. Rachel's Challenge helped create this feeling of helping people when they are in a bad place. We are all there to help. (Student 11)

Student 13 added that the program created "this subconscious feeling that maybe we should all come together and be supportive." The students all agreed that the program instills a message to be there for others and it helps build a community that makes people

feel less alone during difficult times. The students agreed that the values of the Rachel's Challenge program are instilled in them now; they all agreed that the program helped them mature to the point that they now have support as a core value and way of being. One of the five focus groups discussed that if anything bad ever happened to anyone in their school, they believed that if that student came to a Rachel's Challenge Club meeting, the student would have instant friends and support. They discussed that the club members would immediately rally around anyone who was struggling. They agreed that the club was a safe and welcoming place for all students. Again, the positive impact of the club is highlighted.

My last question for the students asked them to discuss their thoughts on the lasting impact of the program on them as individuals and on the members of their school community. I encouraged the students to think about if they believed this program would have any impact on them in college or beyond. The students unanimously agreed that the details of the program and the details of the Columbine shooting might become less vivid in their minds but the messages of the program will be with them forever. They all agreed that the program becomes a way of life because it impacts your character. One female student said,

> In high school, you are figuring out who you are and dealing with those big life questions. For these characteristics to be instilled in us now, I think is really important because your character formed in high school a lot of times will carry you on forever. (Student 7)

They talked about how the program forced them to adopt good ways of being and they voiced that being nice and kind is habitual. The shared opinion was that though the details of the assembly will be forgotten in time, the personal changes that occurred as a

result of the program will last forever because the program altered ingrained traits of character. One male student stated,

> You forget other programs. You don't remember what they said. You can't remember half of what they actually talked about, but with Rachel's Challenge it actually stuck with me. I won't forget any of it. It is still in my mind all the time and it's something good I will carry with me forever. It is kind of like a story with a moral at the end of it. When something bad happens, like all those kids getting shot, you have to learn from what the outcome was. I think it's too hard to say that I'm going to remember Rachel's Challenge when I'm 30 years old, but I feel like the impact it had on me in high school doesn't change in time. I might not remember all of the details of the assembly, but what it did to me will stay with me. (Student 18)

Another student added,

> I think Rachel's Challenge is always going to be in the back of my mind, wherever I am. Whether I'm in a career or in college or with my friends or family or whatever, it's always going to be there. I mean now I've been exposed to it so there's no way I can erase it from the past and say it never happened. Not that I want to. There's definitely going to be a little something saying—in the back of my mind—just saying you should do this or think before you speak. I think for the school, there's going to be that lasting impact where the little extra time or action is going to go a long way. (Student 12)

Parent Interviews

After my student interviews, I interviewed five parents using a focus group design and two parents individually because they were unable to attend the focus group session. I interviewed four mothers of senior students (Parents 1 through 4) and three mothers of junior students (Parents 5 through 7). Though the unanimous consensus among the parents was that the Rachel's Challenge program was a very positive experience for their children, the parent interviews were less informative for me than the student interviews in my process of data collection because the parent subgroup is farther removed from the

implementation of the program in the school. The parents were less able to provide me with specific details and narratives to support their perspectives and opinions about the program and its overall effects because they are not direct members of the school community. When I interviewed the students, they provided detailed examples of how the program impacted them as individuals and how the program impacted their overall school community; the parents were not able to provide similar data, with such rich descriptions, because of their distance from the day-to-day interactions and activities of the students and the school community.

When asked why the Rachel's Challenge program was brought into the school, the seven parents all shared the same perspective that the intent of the Rachel's Challenge program was to educate the students about bullying as a significant societal issue. Parent 2 stated, "I think they brought it [Rachel's Challenge] in just because they wanted to make children aware of incidents that happen in other places." Parent 4 added, "I think primarily there was so much going on with bullying and kids not respecting each other, and I think that was one of the strongest reasons, in my opinion, of why it was brought to this school." The focus and intent, for the parents, was to educate students about the implications of bullying. The parents discussed extreme instances of bullying plaguing the news today and the overall growing concern facing our society and facing individuals of all ages. Parent 3 stated,

> The program helped our kids open their eyes that there are bad people out there. The town we live in, it can happen here. It could happen anywhere. You read it in the newspaper but you don't grasp the concept that there are people out there who are just bound to hurt someone. (Parent 3)

The majority of the parents believed this awareness of the issue of bullying was the primary rationale for the implementation of the program. Parent 1 spoke of another motivating factor in the school deciding to implement the program. She stated, "I think the school thought this was another tool to maybe help foster a sense of community." Unlike my interviews with the students, none of the parents discussed the pro-kindness, inclusion, and acceptance intentions of the program; the focus was primarily on the anti-bullying message. The students believed the program was brought to their school to support an awareness of the causes and effects of bullying, but they believed the principal intention was to promote positive social behaviors. The parents all believed that their child's school implemented the program with the primary intention of promoting awareness about bullying in their school, bullying in schools across our country, and the long-lasting implications of bullying. Parent 7 validated this discovery by saying, "When I called it [Rachel's Challenge] anti-bullying she [her daughter] said 'no Mom, it's more to promote kindness.'" For the students, the intent was more about developing positive social skills; for the parents, the intent was more about promoting an awareness and educating people about bullying. The students discussed the intent of the program as being a positive message about what they should be doing and the parents discussed a message about what they should not be doing. The students are more privy to the positive demonstrations of the program in the school modeled through acts of kindness and inclusion whereas the parents are left out of the direct positive pro-social changes within the school as a result of the program.

When asked what the key elements of the Rachel's Challenge program are, the parents then began discussing the themes of spreading a chain reaction of kindness and compassion for others. The discussions then began to shift to the pro-social behaviors. As in the case of the student interviews, the parents did recognize a promotion of positive social skills, rather than just a deliverance of an anti-bullying educational program; the parents identified and discussed the positive social skills as the key elements of the program but just not as the intent of the program, as I saw in the student interviews. The parents, like the students, discussed the general idea of the program that no one can presume to be better than anyone else and we all need to treat one another with respect. Parent 4 stated,

> I think they wanted to teach all of our children to maybe understand that everyone is a little bit different and you need to be a little more accepting of the new kid, the tall kid, just to understand that everyone's unique and everyone needs to be embraced. (Parent 4)

Though the pro-kindness, respect, and caring elements were shared by both the students and the parents, my question about what the key elements of the Rachel's Challenge program are did expose one main difference between the perspectives of the parents and the students. The seven parents all discussed the subtle theme of forgiveness that is evidenced in the Rachel's Challenge program, and this theme was not discussed in the student interviews at all. The seven parents whom I interviewed all self-identified with the parents of Rachel; they discussed their genuine admiration for Rachel's family because they were able to turn their personal tragedy into a powerful and inspirational tool to try to change the lives of others. They shared their personal thoughts on the strength it must take, as Rachel's parents, to forgive the murderers of their daughter.

Though the presentation does not directly encourage students to forgive others as one of its main principles, the parents were eager to share that forgiveness was a value that they took from Rachel's Challenge when they attended the presentation. The ability to forgive was a key talking point in my parent interviews, yet this theme was overlooked by the students. Perhaps the parents and students related to different people in Rachel's story and this is why they gained different perspectives and values from the program. In the interviews, the students tended to self-identify with Rachel and/or the victim or perpetrator of bullying while the parents tended to self-identify with Rachel's parents. When relating to the different roles, the messages and the themes of the program differ slightly. The students, when identifying with Rachel, victims of bullying, or bullies, felt that the messages of the program were inclusion, acceptance, and kindness. The parents, when identifying with Rachel's parents and other family members, felt that a key message of the program was forgiveness.

I asked the parents what their role was in the implementation of the program and the endorsement of its impact. Six of the seven parents whom I interviewed attended the evening parent program sponsored by the school in which they heard a presentation delivered by Rachel's brother similar to the program given to their children. All of these parents valued the parent program and attested that hearing the program first-hand, rather than just hearing about it from their student, helped support dialogue within their homes about the messages of the program. They all expressed appreciation for the school's attempt at including parents in the development of the impact of the program by hosting the evening parent program. One of the seven parents expressed a desire to have the

school do more to include parents; this parent discussed an interest in somehow participating in the Rachel's Challenge Club for students because she believes that will continue to foster dialogue within the home. The other six parents had an entirely different perspective on this. Parent 7 stated, "[Name of her daughter] brought the program to us at home. We didn't bring it to her. She brought it to us. That's why it works." They expressed that the school should not include parents in the club because they believe the organization should be free of parents because they think that students are more likely to receive the positive messages of acceptance, inclusion, kindness, and anti-bullying if the parents are not involved. They shared their belief that students are more likely to accept the positive social behaviors if their parents are not present and are not interfering. They were not looking to have further involvement beyond the evening parent program. Parent 3 summarized the perspective of the majority by saying,

> It is better for our kids to have the Rachel's Challenge Club be a kid thing and for us to remain out of it. If we get involved, it is something else that we are telling them they should do. If we let them do their own thing, they will be more interested in it because we aren't interfering or forcing it. This is not something parents should be involved in. We want our kids to develop these values on their own. And they can tell us about it. (Parent 3)

All seven of the parents did agree that continual dialogue within their homes is important and something that they try and prioritize. They listen to their child's perspectives on the program and allow their child to independently process the messages of the program and internalize some of its values.

I then asked the parents to describe the impact they saw, if any, of the program on their son or daughter. Unlike when I asked this question to the students, the parents were not able to provide as many rich narratives about specific examples of a direct impact.

The students were more inclined and better able to provide specific examples of the impact. The parents described the impact in very general terms, saying the program had a "very strong" (Parent 3), "positive" (Parent 4), "great" (Parent 6), and "huge" (Parent 1) impact on their child. Parent 4 described the impact of the program by saying, "I think it was just very eye-opening for my son. He would bring it up when something triggered it for him on television or something." Three of the parents talked about essays that their children wrote about how the program was the most significant part of their high school experience. Parent 3 added,

> I know he [her son] was very sad after the program, but in a good way. He really thought about it and thought about the type of person Rachel was. He got different insight. It's part of the school and part of him forever. He's thinking. (Parent 3)

Though the impact was described in mostly in general terms, all of the parents did attest that the program did indeed have a positive impact. Parent 4 did state that her son talks about the program directly at least once every day. Out of the seven parents I interviewed, three parents went beyond a generalized description of the impact and expressed a specific example of the implication it had on their children. Parent 2 shared that her son is a commentator on the school's televised news channel and on one occasion, at the start of the school year, he misread his lines while being televised live throughout the school. After the showing of the news program, students who were supposed friends of her son publicly humiliated him by teasing him about his mistakes on the show. She shared that she believes her son, as a result of the Rachel's Challenge program, had the courage and strength to confront these bullies directly, rather than accept their criticism and harassment. She said that if her son had not been exposed to the

Rachel's Challenge program, she thinks he would have quit the news program as a result of the embarrassment and bullying. Instead, she explained that her son told the group of students, who he thought was his friends but actually proved to be bullies, that "a joke is something shared between two people" and he did not find their comments funny. His mother shared that he had the confidence to stand up for himself as a result of seeing the Rachel's Challenge program because he internalized the messages that no one has the right to make fun of other people and acceptance of people, regardless of the circumstances, is the utmost standard of behavior. Parent 5 shared a story about the impact the program had on her daughter. She said,

> I know my daughter, just this year, she was with a group of friends and heard that there was a boy who had recently transferred to the school and she heard that he didn't have any friends and he was talking about transferring out and she thought that was terrible. She went to find him with her friends. A couple of the girls went and found him in the library and sat with him and introduced themselves and told him not to leave the school. They told him he was really going to like it here. (Parent 5)

Parent 1 shared a specific story about how she sees the program's impact on her daughter. She said,

> My younger sons will call each other names and she [her daughter] will come right out of her room and tell them to stop right now. She starts yelling at them and telling them to think about Rachel's Challenge. My husband, the other day, was driving and said 'what an idiot' just to himself and she told him that wasn't very nice. She asked him how he would feel if someone said that about her. She forces all of us to reflect. She makes you stop and think. It was almost like my husband wanted to go and flag that person down and apologize for saying anything under his breath to them. I hope that always stays with her. She's so committed. (Parent 1)

When asked about the impact of the program on the overall school community, the parents again spoke in very generalized terms, as opposed to the specific narratives

provided by the students. Again, this is most likely a result of the fact that the parents are distanced from the school community and the daily interactions within it. The students are better able to provide the examples and specific narratives because they are the primary members of the school community. The impact on the school community, though again described broadly, was said to be a positive one by all seven of the parents. The parents talked about how they are proud that their children socialize with students who are positive influences and how they never see evidence of bullying within their child's friendship groups; they attested that they can see the impact of the program among their child's social circles, but provided no specific examples of a direct impact of the program.

One theme they did discuss in general terms, which was also highlighted by the students more specifically through examples, was the leadership potential that they think the program enhanced for their children and the school community. They think the program provided their children and other students with the courage to do the right thing and this was a theme that the students shared as well through their narratives. The parents and students both agreed that the program helped normalize acceptance and helped make kindness the new desirable norm; the program provides students with the courage to stand up for what is right. The parents and students both agree that the program promotes leadership, but the students were better able to justify this through specific narratives. Like the students, the parents believed the program helped students formulate the leadership and courage to include others and the program normalized acceptance and kindness. Parent 2 stated,

> I think the program brought an overall level of awareness and it gives kids the courage to stand up for things that they don't think are fair or right. And I think it made them feel like they can stand up for themselves too when they feel like there's something going on that shouldn't be going on. It helps kids stand up for the person who is potentially getting unkindness put on them. They have courage and I don't know that they would have been that way had they not been a part of this program. (Parent 2)

As I did in the student interviews, I asked the parents if they could identify any negatives to the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge program and they unanimously agreed, like the students, that there were absolutely no negative implications of the program on their child or the overall school community. And as I did in the student interviews, I asked the parents about the potential impact the program may have had on individual and community resilience. The parents defined a resilient individual as "mentally and emotionally strong" (Parent 1), "someone who doesn't care what others think" (Parent 2), "someone who has a sense of conviction" (Parent 4), and "someone who marches to his own drummer" (Parent 7); their definitions seemed to mirror the ability to defend against peer pressure that I saw in the student interviews. The parents defined a resilient community as one that is "strong and united under a common vision" (Parent 6) and one that is "connected" (Parent 2).

When asked if the Rachel's Challenge program had any impact on individual or community resilience, none of the parents believed this was a theme or effect of the program. As was the case in the student interviews, the parents did not attest that there was an individual or school-wide change in resilience as a result of the program. Interestingly, I found it ironic that the same parent who shared the specific example about how her son did not give up on his commentator role on the school's televised news

channel after being bullied about his mistakes during the live broadcast said that the Rachel's Challenge program did not promote resilience or "a sense of conviction" (Parent 2). During her interview, she explained how her son had the courage to confront the students who were making fun of him as a result of the Rachel's Challenge program rather than quit as a commentator. In my opinion, this is a direct example of the promotion of resilience through the Rachel's Challenge program, but this parent's perception of resilience clearly is not synonymous with my perception. I also found it ironic that the parents defined community resilience as "strong and united under a common vision" (Parent 6), yet they did not link the program with the development of community resilience. The parents agreed and shared that the program instills common values of inclusion, acceptance, and a chain reaction of kindness, but they did not attest that this common system of values constitutes the development of community resilience. As with the students, the parents did not verbalize a direct connection between Rachel's Challenge and individual and community resilience, but some of their stories and discussions seem to support the unstated connection. Semantics and verbiage may be an issue in understanding and interpreting the responses to this interview question.

As in my student interviews, I did ask the parents about their thoughts on whether or not Rachel's Challenge helps prepare their students and the school community for adversity and trauma. Parent 2 stated, "I think it [Rachel's Challenge] gives kids a tool, a way to think about things differently, that could help them get through a pretty hard time." Following the same trend, the seven parents unanimously agreed in very general

terms that the program strengthens the sense of support and community, but did not provide any specific examples or narratives.

I asked the parents to discuss their thoughts about whether or not Rachel's Challenge would have a lasting impact on their children. All seven parents agreed that the program helps instill an ingrained value system and they believe this supports the longevity of the impact. Parent 4 talked about the lasting impact she thinks the program will have on her son by stating,

> I definitely think he will take this program into his adult life. I watch him now and he's almost like a little bit older. More mature. He takes the initiative to talk to people now. He's putting that step forward that you have to make the effort to talk to others and learn about them. So I think he's learned that everyone is different and I think he looks for the core kindness in people. (Parent 4)

Parent 1 added, "It's ingrained in her [her daughter]. She is living it daily now. It's there."

Regarding the longevity of the impact, the parent interviews highlighted the significance of the club again. The sons and daughters of six of the seven parents that I interviewed are members of the Rachel's Challenge Club within the school. The parents all agreed that being a member of the club helps their students keep the messages of the program more current and forefront in their lives because of the constant reminders about the themes of the program discussed and modeled within the club and the activities. They shared that being a member of the club promotes more open dialogue about the direct impacts of the program, but the parent of the child who is not in the club said the impact was still strong but maybe just not as obvious. As I discovered in the student interviews, membership in the club seems to heighten the impact of the program. The shared

perspective of the students and the parents is that membership in the club seems to reinforce the values of the program. As in the student interviews, the important role that the club plays in maintaining a lasting impact of the program within the school community was highlighted by the parents. Parent 5 stated,

> My daughter is a leader in the club. She is so passionate about the program because of the club meetings and all that she does with the club. But I always wonder about what about the kids who may not be attending the meetings? How did the program impact them? I am not sure it is quite as strong. (Parent 5)

All seven parents attributed the lasting potential and longevity of the program's messages to the school's follow-through of the program; the students attested that they believe the club bares the responsibility to maintain the momentum following the deliverance of the program and the parents attested that the school bares the responsibility as well. Both the students and the parents have strong expectations for the school's role following the Rachel's Challenge presentation in maintaining the positive messages of the program. The students and parents all believe that in order for the program to have a lasting impact on individuals and the school community members-at-large, the school needs to promote the messages through activities and/or future presentations. They all agreed that the school has and needs to continue to promote the messages of the program to help maintain the intentions of its implementation.

Counselor Interviews

My next subgroup of interviewees was the five guidance counselors from the high school. I interviewed all five counselors (three female [Counselors 1 through 3], and two male [Counselors 4 and 5]) in one focus group interview. When I asked the counselors

why they believed the Rachel's Challenge program was brought into their school, they unanimously agreed that the school wanted to bring in a character education program to promote respect, inclusion, and acceptance within their community. The intention was one of a positive nature; the intention of the program, according to the counselors, was similar to what the students reported in their interviews. The counselors believed that the Rachel's Challenge program was not a deliberate effort to promote an anti-bullying educational program but rather was instituted to instill positive behaviors and philosophies. A female counselor stated,

> I think that's why I love this program so much. Because it addresses that [bullying] but in a way that's not in your face. It is more of how you should interact with people. And what your role is in interacting with others and how to extend yourself to be kind to people. And in that, I think that takes care of the bullying issue without saying it directly. Bullying is such a hot topic, but this was able to get to it in a different way—not to say this is about bullying but to get that message subtly across through these different avenues of Rachel's stories. (Counselor 2)

While the parents seemed to believe the primary intention of the implementation of the program at the school was to promote awareness about bullying, the students and the counselors saw the program as more of a pro-kindness, pro-inclusion, and pro-acceptance one. In their opinions, the program indirectly addresses bullying through its promotion of openness and tolerance of differences. Counselor 3 stated, "What this program brought…encompasses a lot of the things that we were looking for in trying to help our students be good to each other." Both the counselors and the students are involved in the day-to-day interactions within the school community, allowing them to first-hand see the positive intentions of the program.

As in the student and parent interviews, I asked the counselors what they believe are the key elements of the Rachel's Challenge character education program. In addition to their discussions about kindness, inclusion, and acceptance, the counselors shared with me the promotion of random acts of kindness, a theme that I heard in my student interviews as well. The counselors discussed how the program encourages people to reach out to others in a non-self-serving manner; the program urges individuals to purely give to others in need. A male counselor stated,

> What we're trying to get across to the kids [too] is like it's not these big, huge, monumental things. It's the small gestures and that's what we're trying to promote from the program. Small things consistently. It works. There are kids who appreciate and see that small things can brighten someone's day and that's what we are looking to instill in our kids. (Counselor 4)

The other key element of the program that the counselors focused on was the club and the follow-up to the program that the school carries out. As I saw in both the student and parent interviews, this theme emerged yet again. All five of the counselors strongly attested to the need of the school to have a thoroughly developed plan and a committed group of students and faculty members to maintain the momentum of the program. Without an ongoing effort to remind students of the basic tenets of the program, all of the counselors agreed that the potential strong impact of the program can be undermined. Counselor 2 stated, "A commitment within the community to keep the message going [is necessary]. You need to make that commitment. Otherwise, the program won't work." One of the female counselors reiterated this idea by stating,

> One of the greatest factors [about the program] is the follow-up. Oftentimes, when you have assemblies to address an issue, my sense is the first week or two is a positive feeling and impact. It's on the minds of

> everybody but then there's no follow-up. The club has been established here and they do different programs and activities to keep it on people's minds. This is really necessary. (Counselor 1)

The importance of the follow-up and the role of the club again seem to be highlighted as crucial aspects of the lasting impact of the program. The counselors, the students, and the parents all discussed the relevance of the follow-up to the Rachel's Challenge program. One of the male counselors added,

> Having a strong follow-up to the program means the school is saying this is what's important to us as a community. These values are essential. This is what we stand for and this is what we want you to be and this is how we expect you to act. Our school decided to value this program so highly and I feel very proud to be a part of it on that level. (Counselor 5)

Students, parents, and counselors all agree that being a member of the club helps enhance the impact of the program, and the impact of the program on the larger school community heavily relies on the commitment of the school, the students, and faculty to promote the messages of the program on an continual basis. The counselors shared that they incorporate the messages of the program, such as goal-setting, inclusion, acceptance of others, tolerance of differences, and the importance of kindness and compassion, in their daily interactions and meetings with students. They try and do their part at keeping the values at the forefront of the students' minds. The counselors shared that they often reference the principles of the program when they facilitate group discussions with students and in individual meetings. Again, the importance of the commitment of follow-through is evident.

As in the student and parent interviews, I asked the counselors how they would describe the impact of the program on their school community and the overall culture of

the school. As I saw in my student interviews, the counselors were able to provide specific narratives about positive changes they have seen within the school that they attribute to the program. Similar to the students and the parents, the counselors did attest to a strong and positive impact on both individuals and the larger school community and they were able to provide specific examples of this impact. For example, the counselors discussed how a group of students organized an effort (without adult prompting) to bring in baked goods and cards for the members of the maintenance staff of the school to show appreciation for their efforts. The students shared that they believed the maintenance staff were underappreciated and devalued by the school community and they wanted to extend their heartfelt gratitude. The counselors attribute this demonstration of genuine kindness and appreciation to the Rachel's Challenge program. The counselors also discussed that they currently believe their new students transition into the student population with more support and ease than before the implementation of the program. They believe that the school community is now more welcoming to the new students and tries to help them feel included and accepted as they adjust to their new school and neighborhood. The counselors also highlighted a change they have seen among the faculty.

This was the first subgroup to have a discussion of the impact of the program on individuals within the school community other than the student population. For over 20 years, the school organizes a candygram fundraiser during the holidays. Students can buy secret candy canes for their peers to be delivered to them in homeroom before the winter holiday vacation. Since the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge program, the counselors discussed at least five or six teachers who they know have bought extra candy

canes to make sure that every student in their homeroom receives at least one candygram. If a student in their class does not receive a candy cane from a peer, the teacher puts one into the pile for that student so they do not feel excluded. The faculty members have demonstrated a commitment to promote the priorities of inclusion and acceptance within their classrooms. The counselors all agreed that they could provide a countless number of specific stories that highlight the positive impact they feel the program has had on their school community and culture and the impact is seen among the students and the faculty.

When asked about any negative aspects of the program, the counselors, like the students and the parents, stated that they could not identify anything negative about the program or its delivery. I then asked the counselors, as I did with the students and parents, about the potential impact that the Rachel's Challenge program has on individual and community resilience. The counselors did attest that the program seemed to encourage the development of both individual and community resilience; this was a theme that I did not see in my prior interviews. The counselors defined individual resilience as "perseverance" (Counselor 3), "character" (Counselor 5), and "will" (Counselor 1). Counselor 5 stated that he believed that community resilience is "the ability to look long term." The counselors unanimously agreed that the program did encourage students to develop individual resilience because the program is targeted at enhancing character, a word they chose to define resilience. Counselor 2 shared her perspective on the potential impact that the program withholds on individual resilience. She stated,

> I'm hopeful and I think that for many students that Rachel's story was important to her hit home for a lot of students and that's why I think the

> program is so good. It gives very specific examples of her not giving up in her mission even though sometimes it can be hard in a high school setting to do some of the things that she did. It's hard to be good all of the time and to be kind in high school. It's a real challenge, unfortunately, for young people and her story is she didn't waiver from that. Overall, she had a real mission of being kind and compassionate to people and she did not stop doing that. This program can help students touch upon that within their own lives at some point. She was resilient. You have to think about what you're doing and persist in getting that across to people even though sometimes it can be a challenge when other people aren't doing that around you or back to you. So I'm hopeful and think that that's a big part of it for many students. (Counselor 2)

The counselors also commented on the development of community resilience. Counselor 5 shared his thoughts on how the program encourages the development of community resilience by stating,

> Every day, you're not always going to be at the top of your game and your school's not always going to be what you want it to be all of the time, but to be able to think big picture stuff and keep working to promote values, that is resilience. (Counselor 5)

The counselors shared the importance of commitment and dedication to the development and promotion of the value system provided through the Rachel's Challenge program and associated this commitment with community resilience. As leaders within the school community, they believe that they cannot be deterred by day-to-day missteps from the larger vision of the program. To keep focusing on the overall cultural changes that the program can initiate is what defines community resilience for the counselors. Students will make mistakes and there will be instances of bullying, non-acceptance, and intolerance, but the counselors are determined to continue to be patient as the values of inclusion, acceptance, and tolerance continue to permeate through their community. Though the counselors could defend their beliefs that the program does indeed encourage

the development of individual and community resilience, the students did not take this direct message from the program or define their own resilience or resilience within the school community in a similar fashion. If the promotion of resilience is a priority for the school, it seems necessary to more specifically make the connection between the program's values and resilience for the student population.

As with the students and the parents, I asked the counselors how the program has or might impact the response to tragedy within the school community. The counselors shared similar stories to those shared by the students about the death of parents and other family members of some of the students and how the school community rallied around one another during these difficult times. The counselors also shared that they have no doubt that the Rachel's Challenge Club in their school would take on a primary role in helping the school cope with future tragedies within their community. Again, this powerful role of the club is highlighted.

Finally, I asked the counselors about their thoughts on the long-term impacts of the Rachel's Challenge program on the students. As seen in the other interviews, the notion that the values of the program become ingrained was discussed. The counselors all agreed that the students will be forever impacted by the program because it shapes who they are as individuals. Counselor 3 stated, "There's not a day that goes by that it doesn't impact me, doesn't impact us, and doesn't impact our kids. I think it emanates from all of us because it has become part of who we are forever". The counselors, like the parents, shared that they believe the students who will be the most impacted long term are the students who are members of the club in the school. I again saw that the involvement in

the development and promotion of the values of the program through membership in the club helps instill long-term effects. One of the male counselors stated,

> Once the fabric [the Rachel's Challenge program] is given, you need someone to design that kind of follow-up to keep it going long term. I think that's key. We are fortunate to have such a strong and dedicated club leader and student members. We have all the elements, but you need the energy to run with it. The passion. Otherwise, it could all fall apart. The follow-through helps guarantee long-term effects. The school decides how strong of an impact this program will have long term through its follow-up. (Counselor 4)

Again, this theme of the imperativeness of a strong follow-up to the initial implementation of the Rachel's Challenge program surfaces. The lasting impacts are associated with the involvement in the club for the parents and the counselors. Unlike the students and the parents, the counselors are privy to specific examples of the long-term implications of the program because of their professional role. For example, Counselor 5 shared,

> We have examples of the long-term effects already! We have a student up at [name of a university] who just called me and she's like 'I'm talking to people up here about Rachel's Challenge'. The idea of her strong connection to the program, that she called to tell me, is awesome. We have another student who told me she told her entire lecture hall class and professor at [name of a university]. It becomes a big part of who they are and their high school experience and I think they're going to be taking a lot of the messages and doing it at a bigger level when they go on within their personal lives and within their college life. (Counselor 5)

I think it is important to note that both of the students mentioned are taking the tenets of the program and discussing them within their college classrooms were members of the Rachel's Challenge Club when they were in high school. Again, this deeper impact for club members is emerging.

Administrator Interviews

My fourth group of interviewees was the administrative team at the high school, which comprised of the Principal, Assistant Principals, and the Disciplinarian and, again, this interview was conducted using a focus group design. Two of the administrators were female (Administrators 1 and 2) and three of the administrators were male (Administrators 3 through 5). When I asked the administrators why the Rachel's Challenge program was brought into their school, their answer reflected more of a leadership and policy-based rationale than I saw in the other subgroups. The administrators discussed state mandates, which require programming to be brought into schools to support both anti-bullying efforts and the development of character education. The parent subgroup voiced that the intent was to bring about an awareness of bullying and the student and counselor subgroups voiced an intent to promote positive social skills. Though the administrators' responses touched upon the issues of anti-bullying and the development of character, their primary drive to bring in the program was to adhere to the policy guidelines that they are required to address as a leadership team. Administrator 1 stated, "Our job is to support the protection of children and young adults and this program met that criteria." As a leadership team within the school, the administration takes on a wide lens perspective about the decisions driving programming within their school because they are required to adhere to particular policies and procedures that the students, parents, and counselors are most likely not privy to.

The same themes emerged from the interview with the administrators as I saw with the students, parents, and counselors when we discussed what the key elements of

the Rachel's Challenge program are, in their opinions. The leadership team discussed the tenets of kindness, compassion, and acceptance. As I saw in the other interviews, the administrators discussed the impact of the positive messages of the program. Administrator 3 stated, "It's nice that there is a positive slant not on what you shouldn't do but what you could do to make things better." The students, parents, and counselors all shared this perspective in their interviews as well. The promotion of positive social skills, rather than just the deliverance of an anti-bullying educational program, was noted by all of the interviewees when asked what are the key elements of the Rachel's Challenge program. Additionally, the administrators touched upon a theme that I saw emerge from the students and the parents—the development of leadership potential. The students and the parents discussed how the program supports students doing the right thing and being an individual in a sea of followers, and the administrators seemed to make particular note about this as well. Administrator 2 stated, "The program shows the students that it's okay to step up. In fact, it's necessary to step up. And it supports them figuring out how to do that in a way that they need to understand." Administrator 4 stated,

> It gives kids another opportunity for leadership in a way that's kind of unique. Not athletic. It's not academic and not in the governing of the school, but just as a person that has chosen themselves to stand for kindness and compassion. (Administrator 4)

The students were able to provide descriptive narratives of how the program supported their individual development of leadership skills, but both the parents and the administrators noted that the program did support emerging leaders within the school community. The program seems to provide a foundation for students to rely on as they

attempt to stand up for the right thing and promote kindness, compassion, and acceptance.

As I did with the other interviewees, I asked the administrators what their particular role was in the implementation of Rachel's Challenge. As one would expect, each subgroup of people who I interviewed self-identified their role in a different way. The administrators shared that their role was to support the funding of the program and the management of the actual deliverance of the assemblies; they discussed their involvement in scheduling the events, sponsoring the events, and ensuring that all of the protocol was followed when bringing in a guest speaker or when the club facilitates school-wide activities. Again, I saw a wide lens perspective from the leadership team because their direct involvement is further removed and is based largely on a project managerial role. The disciplinarian, Administrator 2, was the only administrator who did share her deliberate efforts to incorporate the tenets of the program into her daily work. When asked how she is involved in the promotion of the messages of the program, Administrator 2 stated, "As a matter of fact, I have a T-shirt on the back of my chair and it says, ''Try Kindness' and I have that there, on the chair, so that it's just something for the students to see when they come in and the message gets triggered in their minds". She discussed how as a disciplinarian she does have the opportunity to reference the program as it applies to behavior choices and good decision making.

Next, I asked the administrators how they would describe the impact of Rachel's Challenge on their school community and its culture. The students and counselors, when

asked this question, were able to provide descriptive examples of the program's impact. Administrator 4 shared a similar narrative. He stated,

> I'm thinking of one example, in particular, which happened right around the time we brought in Rachel's Challenge. A student had manifestations of Asperger's Syndrome and there were other students in the school who kind of began to pick on this student a little bit because of his issues and people in his own class went to them and said, 'we don't do that here.' As a result, I think, this young man had a really positive experience here at [name of school] and I think the entire school community was educated as to what really his limitations were and what his idiosyncrasies were. That's one specific example, but I think there's a lot of examples like that here in our school. (Administrator 4)

Though the administrators were not able to provide as many concrete narratives supporting the overall effect of Rachel's Challenge on their school as I saw emerge from my interviews with the students and the counselors, they all seemed to agree that the program enhanced and supported their mission. They believed the program added to their already strong and positive school culture and they stated that it is difficult to piece out the direct implications of the Rachel's Challenge program specifically. The administrators believe that the program is one part of a larger system supporting a positive school culture. As a leadership team, they believe that their school has numerous programs and activities that are designed to promote the messages shared by Rachel's Challenge; they attribute their positive school culture to a combination of all of these things. As another example of the effects of the program, one administrator discussed his conversation with a perspective student after she spent the day at the school. This student was visiting the school because she was considering attending. Administrator 3 stated,

> She went on and on about how she noticed that the teachers were friendly and the students were very open and friendly and nice. That was something that really impressed her…how nice everybody was here and

> how comfortable that she felt. I think this [Rachel's Challenge] just adds to strengthen the mission of our school. We were already a good place, but the program supports that and supports what we do and just adds something extra. (Administrator 3)

Administrator 2 added to this by stating,

> I do think our school community is a more accepting and a more welcoming school community. There's this tremendous sensitivity on the part of the entire school community in terms of how we address each other and how we deal with each other. Whether or not Rachel's Challenge plays a major or a minor factor in that, I'm not sure; although I think we're a better community now than we were a few years ago when we first brought in the program. It [Rachel's Challenge] plays some role, but I just can't say to what degree because of all the other things we have going on here. (Administrator 2)

The administrators all seemed to agree that at the very least the program enhanced their efforts at their school and supported the development of a positive school culture. Dissecting and pinpointing the exact amount of impact of the program is difficult because of all of the other factors that help support the development of a supportive school community. They see Rachel's Challenge as one piece of a much larger pie, but at the very least it fits into their pie as a means to encourage character development, kindness, compassion, and acceptance.

As I did with the students, parents, and counselors, I asked the administrators if they observed any negative aspects of the Rachel's Challenge program or found anything to be missing or lacking. The students, parents, and counselors all unanimously agreed that there were no negatives to the program, but I did see an emerging theme within all three subgroups about the importance of the follow-through following the assemblies on the part of the school. This same theme emerged from the administrators when I asked about any missing or lacking elements of the program. The administrators discussed the

likelihood that the program could be forgotten without a strong commitment made by the students, teachers, and overall school community to maintain the momentum of the program and its effects. Administrator 5 stated,

> I think the program is based highly on emotion. It's emotion-driven and once the emotion dissipates now that's where the club comes in because the club keeps that going. The danger is kids being nice the day of and then eventually falling back into their routine. I don't know how you sustain the emotion. It's like a pep rally. You can only have a pep rally for 20 minutes and then after that how do you sustain that energy? The club tries to keep that going, but even the club has a hard time to keep that energy and I think that any activity or program you put into a school you will have that difficulty. How do you keep it going? There is no answer to that. It is what it is. The first day, it's great. The second day, it's great. But then it wanes. (Administrator 5)

The strong role that the club plays in maintaining the efforts of the program was a common theme in all of my interviews, though the administrators did not delve as deeply into this issue as the other subgroups did.

As in my other interviews, I asked the administrators about their perspectives on whether or not the Rachel's Challenge program has any potential or demonstrated impact on individual or community resilience. The students mentioned they thought the program impacted individual resilience through the development of their leadership potential and their ability to stand up for what is right, but they did not note a change in community resilience. The parents did not directly note an impact on resilience at the individual or community level, but the counselors did note such an impact. Similarly, the administrators did note that the program had an impact on resilience within their community. Administrator 2 stated,

> My definition of resilience is looking at it as the ability to respond to adversity. The ability to handle tough situations, to address challenges and

> certainly these years, ninth through twelfth grade, are full of that. With that in mind, yes, I think certain individuals that I see in the school; I think they're a little better at that now. I'm not ready to go out and raise the flags and shoot the fireworks that they're all able to do that, to be strong in the face of adversity, but I think that the Rachel's Challenge program certainly helps to give students the ability to stand up and face challenging situations. (Administrator 2)

Administrator 3 added,

> It has created awareness. That is what Rachel's Challenge did for our level of resilience. I think it gave us a vehicle for students to be able to talk about some issues that otherwise might not have been addressed where they can now think maybe I'm not the only one struggling with this or feeling this. It connects people, I think, and provides a basis for strength in the face of adversity. The potential is definitely there. (Administrator 3)

The administrators went on to discuss that the program does support a sense of community that could be valued during times of adversity. They all unanimously agreed that they have no doubts whatsoever that their student body would connect and come together to support one another during times of tragedy. Again, the administrators discussed that they believe, as a school, they promote this sense of community through a variety of ways and Rachel's Challenge is just one piece of a series of efforts on their part. Dissecting the specific role that Rachel's Challenge plays among a plethora of school programs and cultural aspects is difficult, according to the administrators, but they all supported that the program certainly enhances all other aspects of their community and promotes a positive response to adversity.

I encountered one very strong outlier among all of my interviewees when I asked the administrators how they felt about the potential long-lasting impact that Rachel's Challenge would have on their students over time. The students attested to a very strong lasting impact and the parents and the counselors shared the belief that the potential for a

lasting impact was great, though the role of the club in supporting the longevity of the messages is significant. When I posed this question to the administrators, only one made a comment denoting skepticism and his response was unlike any other interviewee. When asked if he believed that Rachel's Challenge will have a lasting impact on his school community and his students, Administrator 5 stated,

> My first instinct would be 'no' because I think all of society has kind of jumped on this particular issue and it is one program and there will be others that come in and replace it. This is just a hot topic in education right now. As we get further and further away from her [Rachel's] life, she'll fade into memory because what's now in 10 years is going to be distant for the next generation of high schoolers. Ten years from now, will Rachel have significance? It's sad to say, but I think realistically I don't see it lasting more than 10 or 15 years because of distance of time. At some point, her legacy won't matter as much. (Administrator 5)

This perspective did not seem to be shared by the other administrators because no additional conversation was shared after this response by the other school leaders.

Teacher Interviews

My final group of interviewees was the teacher subgroup. I interviewed 10 teachers (Teachers 1 through 10) in groups of 2 or 3 or individually from various subject disciplines. When asked why they believed the Rachel's Challenge was brought into their school, the teachers all supported the prior information solicited from the other subgroups. The teachers voiced that the program was brought to the students as a back-door bullying prevention effort that promoted kindness, compassion, and acceptance. As I saw in the administrators' interviews, the teachers agreed that the Rachel's Challenge program enhanced the mission of the school and the other programs, curriculum, and activities that were in effect to promote similar philosophies and behaviors. The program

is a small piece of a much larger effort. Teacher 2 described the back-door approach to an anti-bullying agenda. She stated,

> It [bullying] does happen at our school so they wanted to bring this program in and make sure it would hopefully end and kind of make sure that students were aware that this goes on here, there are always ways to prevent it, there are ways to stop it. If you see something going on, you do have the ability to step in and make a change in a positive way. It was trying to make the community more aware, as a whole, of the issue of bullying and trying to make them more aware of what's going on around them on a daily basis. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 9 added,

> I think the reason it was brought in is because of all of the horror stories we hear about or read about on the bullying issues, the cyber bullying that's going on out there. I think our kids are not fully aware of the ramifications of their actions towards each other. There were tears. Lots of tears. There were kids second guessing themselves and their actions. (Teacher 9)

This promotion of awareness was a theme that emerged in my other interviews, especially in my student interviews. The teachers, like the students, parents, and counselors, all supported that the program was brought to the school to help educate students about the realities of adolescence through the development and promotion of positive social skills. The teachers all felt a strong need to foster this sense of awareness to support students in their effort to self-reflect upon their own actions, behaviors, and character.

When I asked the teachers what they believed were the key elements of the Rachel's Challenge program, they again shared similar perspectives to the other interview subgroups. The theme of random acts of kindness was the first and strongest to emerge during the teacher interviews and this is a theme which emerged in prior interviews as

well. The teachers discussed how the program explained that one person doing one good deed for another person can make a significant difference. This notion of a chain reaction of good actions and kindness will continue after it is kick started by one small deed. Teacher 1 stated,

> The program encourages showing kindness in small ways through actions rather than words. Our kids try and have some measurable activity every month that is kindness-related, whether it's doing lollipops at midterms or writing appreciation letters to people in the community or making bulletin boards with really cool messages on them. Just really anything that gets them to do something about it rather than just sit around and talk about being kind. It promotes doing kind things. It is very action-oriented. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 5 shared a key element that did not emerge from the other subgroups; she discussed the tenet of empathy. When asked what the key element of the program was for her, she stated,

> I want to say empathy. It kind of rolls it all together—Kindness, compassion, acceptance. If you're empathetic to someone, then kindness is going to come into play. Sensitivity is implied. Compassion and acceptance are there. Empathy is a good word for the program. (Teacher 5)

For this teacher, the word empathy included all of the other elements which I saw emerge throughout my interviews—those of kindness, respect, compassion, and acceptance. The teachers, as with the other interviewees, discussed that the program encouraged tolerance and respect for all people. The teachers also touched upon the underlying anti-bullying outcomes attained through the promotion of these positive social behaviors. Teacher 6 discussed how the program attempts to combat the rising prevalence of bullying. She stated,

> Not only is the bullying more prevalent now than it used to be, but now it just doesn't end. It goes on and on. You used to get bullied and then go home and you were in a safe haven. Now, with social media and Facebook and Twitter, you're tormented constantly 24 hours a day, so the program really put a face on what the effects of bullying could potentially lead to. (Teacher 6)

I then asked the teachers how they defined their role in the implementation of the program. This was an interesting and unique conversation with this particular interview subgroup because as opposed to the parents, counselors, and administrators, the teachers viewed their roles differently, depending on the curricular subject they taught within the school. Contrary to what I saw in my other interviews, the teachers within the same interview subgroup had different opinions about their individual roles. Some teachers found it very easy to incorporate the tenets of the Rachel's Challenge program into their instruction while other teachers found that the program did not impact their instruction at all. For example, the teachers of the service-learning course and the theology course at the school stated that they relied on the program and directly incorporated it into their instruction; the science and math teachers felt their role was less direct and obvious because they could not directly incorporate the tenets of the program into their instruction. All of the teachers stated that they try to reference the program and its philosophies whenever they can, but some of the curriculums allow a direct reference to occur more frequently or easily. The teachers provided me with specific examples of when they try and incorporate the program in their classrooms. For example, an English teacher (Teacher 3) discussed that she talks about Rachel Scott and her beliefs when her class discusses other heroes, such as Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr. Another English teacher (Teacher 5) said she incorporates the program into her instruction when the class

learns about carpe diem. They discuss how one never knows if this is the last day so if it is, strive to make good changes and strive to make the world a better place. Teacher 8 discussed how he incorporates the program when his social studies class discusses societal conformity; they discuss making choices and when it is appropriate to conform and when it is appropriate to go against the norm. A science teacher (Teacher 6) described her efforts to incorporate the program into her classroom. She stated,

> I have kids work together on labs. I have kids in the Honors class that are struggling. And others who aren't. And I try to tell them that they can help. They can make a difference and you need to work together. It isn't coming up as directly as in other classes, but if they're hearing the messages in different ways in a lot of different places, hopefully it works! (Teacher 6)

The teachers did all discuss a common role they all shared on the day of the Rachel's Challenge assemblies. All of the teachers stated that because the program delivery was so emotionally intense and powerful, the teachers of the class following the student assembly all reserved time to allow the students to discuss the program, ask questions, and talk about their feelings and thoughts about the program. The teachers agreed that the duration and significance of these post-assembly discussions varied from classroom to classroom, depending on the comfort level the teacher had in discussing off-subject material with students.

I then asked the teachers to describe their thoughts on how, if at all, the Rachel's Challenge program impacted their school community and its culture. Teacher 8 mentioned that the program is unique because it is designed to improve the situation within their school community, as opposed to bettering the greater society. It is focused on improving the small, individual school community. He stated,

> Our service efforts are often directed to the outside. I think the significance of this program and its great impact is because it impacts the overall atmosphere here at the school. Not elsewhere, but here within our own community. It helps to improve that we are a place where someone is physically safe and nurtured and that's a good thing. It takes our value of service and puts it on a real personal and individual level. (Teacher 8)

As was the case in some of the earlier interviews, a few of the teachers provided me with some specific examples that modeled the effects of the program. The students and counselors were able to provide many rich narratives about the effects, but like the administrators, the teachers were able to share some examples as well. Described in general terms, Teacher 7 stated, "I'm an alum here and I think it's better now. It's a better school environment than from 15 years ago. It's not perfect, but I think it's better than it was then partly because of this program." More specifically, Teacher 4 described,

> There was a new transfer student that just came in. A freshman. I happened to be walking by the library and the only reason I knew that she was a transfer student was because she wasn't in a uniform, and I had something to do like go to the copy room or my room and open it up or something like that and I saw this student sitting at the table by herself and I said let me do this and then I'm going back and find out who she is and welcome her because I personally was thinking about Rachel's Challenge and everything. By the time I went to my room and came back, she was already sitting with a group of freshmen so I didn't have to do anything. It was good to know that our students stepped in so she wasn't alone. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 3 shared a similar story about a new student to the school. She said,

> Actually, this week, I had a new student that transferred in and she was very nervous. Very uptight. You could tell she was uncomfortable and we were leaving class to go to lunch and I asked if she knew where the cafeteria was and she said she did. So I was like okay. I saw her walk to the door of the cafeteria and open the door and then shut it and turn around to leave. Like she got really nervous because she doesn't know anybody. So I walked up to her and I said, 'let me walk you in,' and I found a group of kids that were her age. I'm like 'let me introduce you to these girls' and the girls I was like 'do you mind taking her under your wing?' And they

> were all like of course! They sat with her the entire lunch period, showed her how to get her food, showed her everything. The next day, I was like 'thank you so much' to the girls I know for taking her under their wing. I told them that she was really nervous and that it meant a lot to me that they helped. I said that I appreciated what they did and they were like what? Of course! They were shocked that I even said thank you to them because they were happy to help and include her. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 7 shared a story about acceptance and kindness. He described,

> There was a senior and he was just very different than other students. He had outward ticks and stuff. In some schools, he would get swallowed up, but here his class knew him well, and when the freshmen came in here there were some instances where they kind of looked at him oddly and made fun of him and the seniors immediately took care of that situation. I mean they really ripped it in big and told the freshmen we don't tolerate that stuff here. It was amazing to see. The seniors believed he was one of them and that was it. That was all it took. (Teacher 7)

Teacher 2 went on to describe the fact that she has even noticed a positive change among her colleagues. This was a theme I saw emerge in the counselor interview as well. She attested to an impact on the staff as well. The students had mentioned a notable positive change in the staff too. Teacher 2 stated, "It affects the faculty as well. A student here recently couldn't take her midterms because her tuition wasn't paid. The faculty actually came together and raised the money to pay her tuition costs."

As I saw in the other interviews, the teachers discussed the importance of the club in supporting the effects of the program and ensuring that the program has an impact on the school community-at-large and students individually. Teacher 3 stated,

> I think that initially, after the presentation, you get that wake-up call. Everybody is really tuned in to other people's feelings and then it kind of dies down a little bit, but then you hear that the Rachel's Challenge Club is doing this or that and it kind of kick starts that feeling again. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 5 added that she thinks the program impacts the students who are club members more than the other students in the school. She stated,

> I think I've seen the greatest and most change in the students who are actively involved in the club. We're not in a situation with other students to see that type of impact as much I don't think. But I have occasionally heard students talking and you'll hear something come up, like kindness or small things here and there, but it is much more sporadic and not as obvious as it is with the members of the club. (Teacher 5)

The more significant impact on the club members is something we saw in others emerge in all of the other interviews as well, but interestingly Teachers 7 and 8 countered Teacher 5's statement. They discussed how the entire premise of the Rachel's Challenge program is to do good for others without broadcasting it and without an attempt to get recognized for it. Teachers 7 and 8 discussed that they think it is a good thing that the students are not outwardly broadcasting that their actions are a direct result of the Rachel's Challenge program. They believe that the program tries to instill a natural inclination to be kind and compassionate, but it is through silent actions that this is best accomplished. The students are not labeling their actions or calling attention to what they are doing. They, according to these teachers, are just silently adopting the ideas and living it. This then spurred a conversation similar to the one had with the administrators. The teachers believe that dissecting the implications of the Rachel's Challenge program specifically is difficult because it is one piece of a much larger pie. The teachers agreed with the administrators that trying to pinpoint the impact of this program specifically is challenging because there are many aspects within the school culture working together to support kindness, compassion, and acceptance. Are students being more accepting and kind because of the program, or was it some other aspect of the school that contributed to

these positive social behaviors? Does Rachel's Challenge play the most significant role in making change? Can anyone really ever know? Perhaps relying on the direct information from the students would be helpful when trying to dissect the specific impacts of the Rachel's Challenge program because the students attested to the specific rationale behind their choices and were able to provide rich narratives about the implications of the program on them as individuals and within their school community through direct references to the program. This information might aid the educators and leaders to make inferences about the direct implications of the program.

As I did with the other interviewees, I asked the teachers if they could identify anything missing or lacking from the Rachel's Challenge program. As was discussed, the teachers continued to allude to the difficulty of dissecting the exact impact of this program specifically. They voiced a desire to have concrete statistical data either supporting or negating the impact of the program. Collecting data on the impact of the program is a challenge, and the teachers wish they could have information that specifically details how this one program impacted their school community and individual students. Teacher 1 stated, "I wish we had a way to measure how we are doing. I am concrete and I like to see black and white results. I think we are doing our best but I would love to really know." The teachers are not privy to the information that I attained from the students about their individual perspectives and narratives about the implications that the program had on them as individuals and what they see among their classmates. I think these narratives could help validate the program for teachers and help disaggregate the impact of this specific program.

As I saw in some of the other interviews, a direct impact on individual and community resilience could not strongly be identified by the teachers. The teachers remarked that their students' resilience has never really been tested. They shared that, in their opinions, their students have not had to face great adversity or hardships and they believe that the impact on resilience can only be discovered when put to the test. They attested that they believe their students are resilient, but they are not willing to be entirely sure of that because they did not identify instances in which the students' resilience was tested. A few of the teachers discussed how they were impressed by the overwhelming support that their entire student body demonstrated when the Rachel's Challenge Club organized a kindness project done to honor the victims of the Sandy Hook school tragedy. The club spearheaded a kindness response and the teachers remarked that the school community came together to support this other school. For the teachers, this helped support their belief that their students are indeed resilient and would respond with strength and courage if faced with tragedy. Teachers 2 and 8 did provide direct examples of how they have witnessed their students support one another during difficult times. Teacher 2 stated,

> I saw overwhelming support in the school by kids. One of our graduates from last year's class, his father passed away. Just to see the large amount of support in the school by kids that never spoke with this student. I'd like to think that Rachel's Challenge had some impact on that. And that's just one example. A lot of times things happen in our community where kids rally together and get behind one another. That might be resilience. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 8 added,

> I have seen students on crutches and they don't have their classes on the first floor for whatever reason and they're up and down all day and they're

> carrying all their stuff. I always say let your friends help you, and more often than not they tell me that their friends are helping them. It seems as if kids now are letting others help them. And kids now are looking to help. It might seem small and silly, but this is just an example of what I see. This is my unscientific survey and observations. If there was a big tragedy here, more than just crutches, I really think our kids would stick together and rise to help. I really think so. (Teacher 8)

The teachers were not entirely willing to link Rachel's Challenge with the promotion of resilience, but they did seem confident that the program contributed to a sense of community which forcefully emerges during situations of tragedy.

Finally, I asked the teachers about their thoughts on the potential long-lasting impact of the Rachel's Challenge program on their students and within their community. The teachers agreed that, again, this program is a piece of the larger fabric of their school so the impact of the entire school experience at this high school will have lasting effects on their graduates. Again, they discussed not knowing how to particularly pinpoint to what effect this one program will have in the long run. As I saw in my other interviews, the teachers shared that the Rachel's Challenge Club plays a primary and crucial role in making or breaking this program. They noted that the students in the club are probably the most impacted and will probably be the most affected long-term because they made a choice to be more actively involved in the program and the deliverance and maintenance of its messages. They shared similar thoughts that I saw in prior interviews; the momentum of the program needs to be maintained and they discussed the challenges in doing that within a school. Finding student leaders, soliciting support from the staff, and finding the time to incorporate the principles of the program into the school's day-to-day functioning are all challenges faced by the school community. Teacher 5 stated, "I think

the potential for long-lasting impact is very possible, but in a school where maybe the club doesn't have as strong and dynamically interested participants and a leader, I don't know if the impact would be as great." Teacher 8 added to this and stated, "For the club members, they are aware and actively engaged in the program's ideas. The club members try and try and try. But for others, I hope the message doesn't wane off." Teacher 3 described how she would love to see the tenets of the program be intertwined more within the entire school and not just for the club members. She stated,

> We do need to work on Rachel's Challenge not being a club or thought of as a club because it needs to be totally integrated into our mission. We look at the Rachel's Challenge Club like what they said on NPR this weekend. They had a monetary drive and urged people to not just figure that their neighbors were going to make a donation. I think we still look at the club a little bit like that here. Like don't worry, the Rachel's Challenge Club kids will do it. We all need to be responsible and take ownership. We need to strive to integrate it more in all that we do. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 2 initiated a conversation within her focus group about the role that parents play in maintaining the momentum of the program. This was the first time that any interviewee placed the ownership of the success of the club and the longevity of its messages outside of the school community and into the homes. Rather than holding the club responsible for supporting long-term effects, she discussed how parents need to ensure that this program stays with their students and becomes part of their character. She stated,

> We really need to talk about parents. There is a problem that remains silent sometimes. I think kids are missing that component of character education at home much more than in previous generations. I think that's a really big part of ensuring long-term effects. At home, before, you were getting it pounded into you. Today, they are missing that piece at home. So even when we stand up and try and make a positive change and a statement about what is right and what is wrong, it's not necessarily

> always supported. It can't just all be left to the school. Kids need to get this stuff everywhere. (Teacher 2)

Summary of Themes

The table on page 133 summarizes the various themes that emerged during the interviews and each theme is linked to the appropriate participant subgroup(s) that shared each theme.

In reviewing the data from all of the interviewee subgroups, there were three emerging themes shared by the students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers. First, all five subgroups agreed that the Rachel's Challenge program delivers a positive message through the promotion of pro-social behaviors. The interviewees all established that the program encourages kindness, inclusion, acceptance, and compassion. The students and the parents specifically mentioned the concept of a chain reaction of kindness that can be started by one individual, and the students and counselors specifically discussed the impact of random acts of kindness. The notion that the program strives to support what student *should do*, as opposed to what they *should not do*, surfaced within the conversations with each subgroup. Second, all five subgroups agreed that membership to the Rachel's Challenge Club within the school increases the impact and effects of the program on the students. The club keeps the tenets of the program more at the forefront for the members and impacts their choices and behaviors more than the students who are not members of the club. Additionally, the students, parents, counselors, and administrators targeted the club as the primary tool to keep the messages of the Rachel's Challenge program current and active within the school community. All five subgroups believe that the club members are the most significantly impacted students

Table 2

Various Themes That Emerged During the Interviews

Theme	Participant Subgroup(s)
The Rachel's Challenge program delivers a positive message through the promotion of pro-social behaviors.	Students, Parents, Counselors, Administrators, and Teachers
Membership to the Rachel's Challenge Club within the school increases the impact and effects of the program on the students.	Students, Parents, Counselors, Administrators, and Teachers
The Rachel's Challenge program prepares students and the school community for a positive response to tragedy.	Students, Parents, Counselors, Administrators, and Teachers
Rachel's Challenge can be categorized as an anti-bullying initiative.	Students, Parents, and Teachers
In order for the Rachel's Challenge program to have a lasting impact, there is a strong need for the school to follow-up the initial Rachel's Challenge presentation with activities and reminders.	Students, Parents, Counselors, and Administrators

Table 2

Continued

Theme	Participant Subgroup(s)
The Rachel's Challenge program does encourage the development of individual resilience.	Students, Counselors, and Administrators
Rachel's Challenge promotes the development of leadership.	Students, Parents, and Administrators
Rachel's Challenge maintains strong potential for lasting impact.	Students, Parents, Counselors, and Teachers
Rachel's Challenge had an impact on the adults within the school community as well as the students.	Counselors and Teachers
Rachel's Challenge promotes forgiveness.	Parents
Rachel's Challenge promotes the development of community resilience.	Counselors and Administrators
Dialogue within the home is necessary to support the long-term effects of Rachel's Challenge.	Parents and Teachers

Table 2

Continued

Theme	Participant Subgroup(s)
It is difficult to dissect the particular impacts of the Rachel's Challenge program because the program is one component of a much larger system within the school in place to support character development and strong citizenship.	Administrators and Teachers
It is difficult to determine the level of impact of Rachel's Challenge because the program supports the notion of engaging in random acts of kindness with no intention of being recognized or rewarded.	Teachers
The Rachel's Challenge program will not have lasting impact.	Outlier Data: One Administrator

within the school community and all of the interviewees, with the exception of the teachers, assert that the longevity of the program's impact relies heavily, if not entirely, on the actions of the club within the larger school community. Third, all five subgroups agreed that the Rachel's Challenge program prepares students and the school community for a positive response to tragedy. The students and the parents specified that the program

does this through the promotion of a sense of community and connection among its members.

The interviews also exposed five themes that emerged within three or four of the five subgroups. First, the students, parents, and teachers agreed that the Rachel's Challenge program can be categorized as an anti-bullying initiative. Not only does the program promote positive pro-social behaviors, but these interviewees also believe that the program encourages students not to bully students through demonstrating the drastic impacts bullying can have. Bullying drove the two shooters in Columbine to their devastating decision to commit one of the most significant school massacres in our nation's history. The students and teachers believe the program creates a sense of awareness for students about the realities of bullying and the realities of our current world. Second, the students, parents, counselors, and administrators all firmly supported that in order for the program to have a lasting impact on the students and the school community, there is a strong need for the school to follow-up the initial Rachel's Challenge presentation with activities and reminders. The program, in order to have strong effects, needs to be viewed as more than a one-day presentation. Follow-up within the school community is essential and determines the significance of the program in the lives of the students. Without the strong follow-up, these four interviewee subgroups attest that the program's potentially powerful impact could dwindle entirely. Third, the students, counselors, and administrators all supported that the program does encourage the development of individual resilience. The students specified that this individual resilience emerges as an ability to stand up against peer pressure and the counselors and

administrators specified that this individual resilience takes the form of strength in the face of adversity. Fourth, the students, parents, and administrators all shared that they believe the Rachel's Challenge program promotes the development of leadership. Again, the students shared narratives about how the program gives them a platform to guard against peer pressure. The parents also believe the program helps their children formulate the strength to do the right thing and stand up for what is right. The administrators discussed how the program provides opportunities for students who might not emerge as academic or athletic leaders to find a place where their leadership is highlighted and developed. Finally, the students, parents, counselors, and teachers all supported that the Rachel's Challenge program maintains strong potential for lasting impact. All four subgroups agreed that the program's messages become ingrained and become a new way of life for students. The program impacts value systems and overall character and, therefore, has the potential to impact students over a long period of time. Though students may not attribute their choices to the Rachel's Challenge program years from now, these interviewees agreed that the program has an impact on their core sense of self and, therefore, will change who they are and what they stand for over the course of time.

There are six themes that I saw emerge within one or two of the interviewee subgroups, but I think they are important themes to mention because they emerged as strong themes among the specific interviewee subgroup(s) and accounted for a great deal of conversation in the interviews. Though these themes were only found to emerge within one interviewee subgroup, they were not outlier notions because the other members of the interview groups shared in the exploration of the themes and validated their importance.

First, the counselors and teachers both highlighted the impact that the Rachel's Challenge program had on the adults within the school community. Both interviewee subgroups discussed the evidence of a positive impact made on their colleagues. This indicates that the program has the potential to make an impact on all of the members of the school community, not just the students. The pro-social behaviors of kindness and acceptance can alter the character and ways of being for adults as well as students. Second, the parents discussed that the Rachel's Challenge program promotes forgiveness. This theme emerged for this interviewee subgroup specifically because they identified with Rachel's father, Darrell Scott, who established the Rachel's Challenge organization following the heinous crime that impacted on his family through the death of his daughter forever. Darrell Scott found forgiveness in his heart for the two students who were the masterminds of the Columbine tragedy, and his choice indirectly promotes forgiveness in the parents' eyes. Third, the counselors and the administrators support that the Rachel's Challenge program promotes the development of community resilience. Both groups agreed that the program helps students build resilience at the individual level as well, but they also verbalized that the community, as a whole, became more resilient as a result of the program and its ongoing follow-up. As a larger school community, the program helped foster a sense of connection and unity. Resilience, in this case, should be viewed as a construct of degree and range; the program helped move students forward along the spectrum of levels of resilience. Fourth, the parents and the teachers shared the idea that the school does not bear the sole responsibility to keep the program's messages ongoing for the students; these two interviewee subgroups also supported that dialogue within the

home also needs to occur to foster long-term effects. If parents choose to involve themselves in the program and choose to incorporate the program's tenets into their conversations and actions at home, the potential long-term effects are greater. As a larger community, parents and the school need to work together to develop the character of the students. The fifth and sixth themes to emerge deal with the ability to define and defend the positive effects of the Rachel's Challenge program. The administrators and teachers both discussed the fact that it is difficult to dissect the particular impacts of the Rachel's Challenge program specifically because, in their opinions, the program is one component of a much larger system within their school in place to support character development and strong citizenship. It is difficult, if not impossible, to attest that the program is the specific reason behind the positive changes and the demonstration of positive pro-social behaviors seen within their school because there are many programs working together simultaneously to promote kindness, acceptance, inclusion, and compassion. Both groups agreed that the program has made a positive impact, but they believe they cannot assert to what degree taken on its own in isolation. Similarly, the teachers discussed that it is difficult to determine the level of impact the Rachel's Challenge program had on their students because the program supports the notion of engaging in random acts of kindness with no intention of being recognized or rewarded. Because the kindness and compassion are "silent" by nature and the students are encouraged to do good without being glamorous or ostentatious, the teachers believe it is difficult to ascertain how much of an impact the program had because students are not supposed to reference their actions as being based in duty. Students are encouraged to do small good deeds without seeking

recognition and this makes it difficult, in the opinion of the teachers, to find specific examples of the effects of the program on their students' actions and character.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of the Rachel's Challenge program at this one particular school. This qualitative case examined the impact of a character education program, Rachel's Challenge, in a high school to determine if the implementation of the program promoted resiliency, improved school culture, and supported an increased sense of community within the school, based on the perceptions of the members of the school community members. The research formulated a description of the school following the implementation of the program to analyze the perceptions of the members of the school community members to assess the impact of the character education initiative on the school's culture, the resilience development of the school community members, and the sense of community within the institution. The study was designed to answer two primary research questions:

Does the school community perceive that the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative has improved school culture?

The research provided evidence that the members of the school community feel that the Rachel's Challenge program did indeed improve the school culture at this particular school by encouraging a community built on acceptance, inclusion, kindness, respect, and compassion. All five interviewee subgroups agreed that the Rachel's Challenge program delivers a positive message and changes the school's culture through the promotion of pro-social behaviors. The interviewees discussed random acts of

kindness, an increased sense of community and connection, and chain reactions of kindness as means to a positive cultural change within their school. Additionally, the research indicated that the Rachel's Challenge program fostered a positive change in the school culture through the promotion of an anti-bullying message. The interviewees shared that the program encourages students not to bully through demonstrating the drastic impacts that bullying did have on the students in Columbine High School. The research demonstrated that the program created a sense of awareness about the realities of bullying, and this was an aspect of an improved school culture for the members of this school community. The data also indicated an impact on the adults within the school community as a result of the Rachel's Challenge program, indicating the potential cultural impact on all members within the school, not just the students. It is important to note that according to my interviews the overall impact on the school's culture is heavily, if not entirely, based on the follow-through on the part of the school and the families to the initial presentation. The primary role that the Rachel's Challenge Club plays in maintaining the momentum of the program was highlighted throughout the interviews. Without thorough follow-through and without a lasting commitment made by the students and the staff, this program, like others, has the potential to wane in impact overtime.

Does the school community perceive that the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative has helped develop individual and organizational resilience within the school community?

The interviews also provided evidence that the Rachel's Challenge program did indeed promote the development of individual and community resilience at this particular school, based on the perceptions of the members of the school community members. The students, counselors, and administrators all supported that the program does encourage the development of individual resilience. The students identified and specified that this individual resilience emerged as an ability to stand up against peer pressure, and the counselors and administrators specified that this individual resilience takes the form of strength in the face of adversity. The counselors and the administrators supported that the Rachel's Challenge program promotes the development of community resilience. Both groups agreed that the program helps students build resilience at the individual level as well, but they also verbalized that the community, as a whole, became more resilient as a result of the program and its ongoing follow-up. The research attributed this growth in resilience to an increased sense of connection and unity.

Theories

Rachel's Challenge and Resilience Theory

It is inarguable to say that there is an abundance of literature available about resilience as it relates to individuals and organizations, but there is not a great amount of research available on the tools that build resilience and that exist within a school's culture. The extensive literature and research available on individual resilience identifies numerous qualities and characteristics of an individual that exist prior to the onset of adversity for the individual that foster resiliency. Similarly, the extensive literature and research available on organizational resilience identifies numerous qualities and

characteristics of an organization that exist prior to the onset of adversity for the organization that fosters resiliency. Conversely, the literature and research available on school resilience identifies numerous action steps for a school to take after the onset of adversity that foster a healthy response to trauma; the identification of the preemptive qualities and characteristics of a school that exist prior to the onset of adversity that foster resiliency for the school represents a significant gap in the literature. I wanted to produce a case study to address this gap and to examine the perceptions of key school community members about the role that Rachel's Challenge has in establishing resilience within a school's culture. As a school leader, I believe it is incredibly beneficial to identify the qualities of a school that foster resilience prior to a crisis, rather than focusing solely on the qualities of an effective trauma response plan put into action immediately following the onset of a crisis.

School leaders need to understand the actions that can be taken as a means of preparation, not just the actions that can be taken as a means of response. Our goal, as leaders, should be to harbor the necessary tools within our schools' cultures to be prepared. The role that character education plays in fostering these preemptive qualities and characteristics is a gap in the current literature. Can character education, specifically the Rachel's Challenge program in this case, instigate the development of the traits and characteristics linked to individual and organizational resilience within a school community prior to the onset of adversity to help strengthen a school community? Can the program help influence the development of a positive school culture? This study examines whether or not the program is perceived to develop traits and characteristics

that foster resiliency within the school prior to the onset of adversity and whether or not the program is perceived to develop characteristics that help a school build a healthy culture prior to the onset of adversity. Additionally, because Rachel's Challenge was developed after the school shooting at Columbine High School in April 1999, qualitative studies specifically targeted at this particular character education program do not exist; this study addresses this additional gap in the literature that exists simply because of the newness of the program. Feedback on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of this particular character education program is lacking and this study makes a valuable contribution to this gap.

As mentioned, the literature available on individual and organizational resilience is abundant. I wanted to discover if the characteristics and traits of an individual and an organization that exist within the individual or organization prior to the onset of adversity and that have been found to contribute to resilience can be shown to be applicable for schools, and if these such characteristics are perceived to be fostered within schools via the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative. If so, I think this knowledge can greatly shape a school's culture and a school's mission and a school leader can better prepare his or her school community for the inevitable adversity it will face. Let us examine the research on the characteristics linked with individual resilience that exist within an individual prior to the onset of a trauma. In reviewing these characteristics found within the literature, I am interested to know if these same traits can enhance school resilience prior to the onset of a trauma and if these traits are perceived to be fostered by the Rachel's Challenge program.

I looked closely at the factors found to contribute to individual resilience in the literature and these are the characteristics that I delved into during my data collection and data analysis. For example, I looked to see if school resilience, like individual resilience, is established by the availability of resources, positive relationships within the building, positive attitudes, a controlled and disciplined environment, the development of coping skills, an appropriate value of risk-taking, a positive perception of the change process, a fostering of problem-solving skills, a sense of competence for the students, a deep commitment made by the school community members to the school, a sense of being loved and cared for, an altruistic involvement to service learning, a sense of optimism and hope for the future, and autonomous students. Do the members of the school community believe that Rachel's Challenge fosters these characteristics within this particular high school? I investigated if these factors of individual resilience have appropriate relevance to the construct of school resilience and if these factors were developed as a result of the implementation of the program.

Similarly, I examined the factors delineated in the literature that contribute to organizational resilience prior to the onset of adversity and focused on these during my data collection and data analysis. I looked to see if school resilience is established by an environment that welcomes change, a safe and secure climate, a culture built on trust, flexibility and adaptability, a clear and expected sense of accountability within the school, a sense of empowerment by all members of the school community, an equitable allocation of resources, a culture that promotes a balance between risk-taking and security, a well-defined sense of purpose, individuals who are self-initiators, individuals

who are willing to make sacrifices and give generously to the school, and a culture that encourages motivation and determination. I investigated to see if these factors of organizational resilience have appropriate relevance to the construct of school resilience and if the members of the school community believe that Rachel's Challenge again fostered these characteristics within this high school. The focus of the study and the expected contribution to the literature is to closely examine whether or not the factors linked to the development of individual and community resilience prior to the onset of adversity were perceived to be developed in the school's culture as a result of the implementation of Rachel's Challenge. This knowledge can aid school leaders as they prepare their school to face future anticipated trauma.

When looking at Resilience Theory in the available literature, individual resilience is defined as an ability to overcome adversity if important protective factors are present. These factors are defined to be having a sense of being cared for, holding an expectation to perform well, having a system of active supports in place, building faith in the future, and maintaining an active involvement in life. The interviews within this particular school demonstrated that the students, counselors, and administrators attested that the Rachel's Challenge program does support the development of individual resilience. Taking the components of resilience delineated as defining individual resilience, the program does address each criterion, according to the findings in my interviews. The program is perceived to promote the development of a caring community. Random acts of kindness, acceptance, inclusion, and compassion are the values that are brought to the attention of the students and encouraged through the program and through

the follow-up activities that the club initiates. The program is perceived to challenge the students to accept the expectation to treat others well; the students reported that they were encouraged to be kind and challenge all negative social behaviors within themselves and their peers to better their school culture and community.

The Rachel's Challenge program creates a club within the school community, which became a system of support and the means of maintaining the momentum of the program's messages. The interviewees shared that the club is a safe place and plays a very supportive role within the school. The program asks students to set goals for themselves, as Rachel was known to do, and to believe in their own individual potential in the future. According to my interviewees, Rachel's Challenge fosters an optimistic outlook for the future through this goal setting. Finally, the program was perceived to promote an active involvement in life through the design and implementation of school-wide activities that encourage connection, service, and action. The interviewees shared stories about how the students participated in activities that develop altruism and a sense of community. The interviews indicated a perception on the part of the interviewees that these five protective factors of Resilience Theory are fostered by the Rachel's Challenge program.

Thompson (1995), O'Neal (1999), Harvey (2007), and Krovetz (1999) all provide a litany of characteristics linked to individual resilience. A large majority of these characteristics are indeed fostered within the Rachel's Challenge program, according to the perceptions of the interviewees. The table on page 149 delineates the factors

associated with individual resilience in the current literature and any supporting perceptions offered in the interviews.

Table 3

Factors Associated with Individual Resilience in Current Literature and Supporting Perceptions Offered in the Interviews

According to the Literature, Individual Resilience is Linked to…	According to the Interviews, the Rachel's Challenge Program…
Positive social relationships with friends, relatives, and neighbors	Encourages acceptance and inclusion because members of the school community are asked to treat others compassionately and respectfully.
Having a sense of social competence	Forces members of the school community to self-analyze their actions towards others and build connections within the community.
Having a positive attitude	Encourages individuals to view others in a more positive light and encourages individuals to act in a kind, caring, compassionate, and positive manner.

Table 3

Continued

According to the Literature, Individual Resilience is Linked to…	According to the Interviews, the Rachel's Challenge Program…
An ability to maintain self-control and feelings of competence	Promotes the development of leadership and self-confidence to stand up for what is right.
Maturity	Includes emotionally intense but impactful content that helps students analyze the impacts of bullying from a mature lens.
The formulation and utilization of relationships	Creates a sense of community in which members support one another during difficult times.
Having a sense of being loved	Promotes inclusion and counters against social isolation and exclusion.
Having a spirit of gratitude	Asks members of the community to express appreciation for one another.

Table 3

Continued

According to the Literature, Individual Resilience is Linked to…	According to the Interviews, the Rachel's Challenge Program…
Being able to cognitively restructure painful events and to tolerate mistakes	Fosters forgiveness because the parents expressed admiration for Rachel's family because they were able to turn their pain and devastation into a world-wide character education initiative by accepting the tragedy that impacted their lives and forgiving the perpetrators of the violence committed against Rachel.
Altruism, sharing, and volunteerism	Encourages individuals to express their gratitude to others and to provide service to better their school community.
Having an attitude of hope and optimism	Encourages individuals to stay strong and guard against being a by-stander to bullying.
Having a system of caring adults	Encourages the development of a larger sense of community beyond just peer to peer connections.

Table 3

Continued

According to the Literature, Individual Resilience is Linked to…	According to the Interviews, the Rachel's Challenge Program…
Having an attitude of fairness and being non-judgmental	Encourages acceptance and inclusion because members of the school community are encouraged to avoid exclusion.
Having respect and a system of good manners	Encourages individuals to view others in a more positive light and act positively towards others and express appreciation.
Having a system of clear expectations	Asks individuals to accept and include everyone despite differences or social barriers.
Having a system of extra-curricular activities to promote the development of interests/passions	Creates a club to allow students the opportunity to meet new people and strengthen their school community and provides an outlet for students to excel beyond the academic and athletic scopes.
Having a strong value for the future	Encourages students to set goals for themselves to foster a positive outlook for their own futures.

Taking these separate components available in the literature, it seems clear that according to the perceptions of the interviewees, the development of individual resilience is a genuine priority and outcome of Rachel's Challenge. Many characteristics found to be linked to individual resilience were discussed in the interviews with the students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers, indicating that the Rachel's Challenge program can confidently be declared as an approach to develop individual resilience for members of a school community. It is important to note that not all of the factors described by Thompson (1995), O'Neal (1999), Harvey (2007), and Krovetz (1999) that are linked to individual resilience were highlighted in the interviews at this particular school. These include having a strong system of coping skills, encouraging a rapid response to danger, having a disassociation of affect, seeking information, developing decisive risk-taking skills, being strong problem solvers, favoring effort over ability, trusting others, offering public praise and private criticism, and operating under a democratic system of beliefs. Though the perceptions of the interviewees indicate that some of the factors are fostered through the implementation of Rachel's Challenge, there are other factors associated with individual resilience that are not linked to the program's implementation indicating that the program makes partial contributions to the development of individual resilience.

Bell's (2002) and O'Neal's (1999) literature highlighted the factors that are linked to organizational resilience. The counselors and administrators at this particular school did attest to the belief that the Rachel's Challenge program does encourage the development of community resilience. The research indicates that more than half of the

characteristics found in the literature associated with organizational resilience are indeed fostered within the Rachel's Challenge program, according to the perceptions of the interviewees. The table on page 155 delineates the factors associated with organizational resilience in the current literature and any supporting perceptions offered in the interviews:

Again, we see that taking these separate components available in the literature, it seems clear that according to the perceptions of the interviewees, the development of organizational resilience is a genuine priority and outcome of Rachel's Challenge. Many characteristics found to be linked to organizational resilience were discussed in the interviews with the students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers, indicating that the Rachel's Challenge program can confidently be declared as an approach to develop organizational resilience for members of the school community. It is important to note that not all of the characteristics described by Bell (2002) and O'Neal (1999) that are linked to organizational resilience were highlighted in the interviews at this particular school. These include maintaining the capacity to adapt to change, being flexible in uncertain times, being able to appropriately manage ambiguity, engaging change rather than defending against it, allocating resources efficiently, and balancing risk and security. Though the perceptions of the interviewees indicate that some of the factors are fostered through the implementation of Rachel's Challenge, there are other factors associated with organizational resilience that are not linked to the program's implementation, indicating that the program makes partial contributions to the development of resilience within the organization.

Table 4

Factors Associated with Organizational Resilience in Current Literature and Supporting Perceptions Offered in the Interviews

According to the Literature, Organizational Resilience is linked to…	According to the Interviews, the Rachel's Challenge program…
Having a clear vision and mission and a common set of goals	Encourages an engrained set of tenets and a value system that becomes a way of life.
Having a clear set of priorities	Encourages the development of character and the development of citizenship as a priority within the daily functioning of the school.
Having a sense of empowerment	Provides students with a foundation to stand on when fighting against bullying and trying to emerge as a leader against bullying.
Having a sense of purpose and accountability	Encourages students to evaluate their own actions and the actions of their peers and purposefully act in a kind, inclusive, accepting, and compassionate manner.

Table 4

Continued

According to the Literature, Organizational Resilience is linked to…	According to the Interviews, the Rachel's Challenge program…
Having a sense of purpose and accountability	Encourages students to evaluate their own actions and the actions of their peers and purposefully act in a kind, inclusive, accepting, and compassionate manner.
Having a hero	Encourages the promotion of Rachel Scott as an idol for good character and as a guide for who we should strive to be.
Having a system of motivated self-initiators	Encourages students to initiate the development of their own unique school club which will either thrive or fail dependent upon their commitment and dedication.
Having a system of individuals who are willing to make self-sacrifices	Forces students to go out of their way to promote inclusion or stand up against bullying.

Rachel's Challenge and Turbulence Theory

We saw that the contextual variables of Turbulence Theory blend very well with the implementation of a character education program in schools. The construct of cascading shows that each episode of trauma within a school has the potential to worsen the emotional well-being for students. The fact that the interviewees shared a perception that the program helped create a sense of unity within their community and that the program fosters a sense of resilience helps counterbalance the impacts of cascading with each episode of trauma. The construct of positionality shows that a sense of connection and community can help lessen the effects of turbulence; a sense of shared responsibility within the community for a resolution of turbulence is crucial. Again, the interviews highlighted a perceived sense of connection among the members of the school community. The construct of stability shows that having a common set of values helps alleviate some of the potentially disastrous effects of turbulence within a school.

The interviewees shared that the Rachel's Challenge Club plays a pivotal role in developing and maintaining a common set of values within the school community. The students in the club are driven to maintain the messages of the program and are responsible to keep the priorities of inclusion and acceptance active within their school community. In this particular school, the implementation of Rachel's Challenge was shown to be a response to a perceived level of turbulence. The interviewees shared that the program was brought in for a variety of reasons, but primarily to create an awareness of the repercussions of bullying. It was an action plan developed to counteract bullying as a form of turbulence within the community and it was implemented with the expectation

that it would encourage students not to bully through the demonstration of the drastic impacts bullying had on the students in Columbine High School. The program encourages pro-social behaviors as a means to counter the turbulence factors of bullying and social isolation. Bullying drove the two shooters in Columbine to their devastating decision to commit one of the most significant school massacres in our nation's history. The interviewees believed that the Rachel's Challenge program creates a sense of awareness for students about the realities of bullying and the realities of our current world. The interviews demonstrated a perception that the Rachel's Challenge program helped lessen the levels of bullying (turbulence) within the school. The interviewees provided rich narratives about the positive implications the program had within the community. Random acts of kindness, motions of inclusion, efforts of acceptance, leadership, and an intolerance of bullying were all demonstrated through examples shared by the interviewees. The Rachel's Challenge program, implemented to stabilize the school community through the promotion of a common set of values, was brought into the school to interfere in the cascading effects of bullying through the promotion of a sense of connection. The interviews validated that Rachel's Challenge helped lessen the level of turbulence facing this particular school.

It was noted that the administrators and teachers voiced a frustration that attempts to quantify the impact(s) of Rachel's Challenge in this particular school was a struggle because, in their opinions, the program is one component of a much larger system within their school in place to support character development and strong citizenship. Dissecting the effects of this one program in isolation is a challenge. As educators, we rely on

quantifiable data to support programming and it is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify changes in constructs like inclusion, kindness, compassion, a sense of community, resilience, and connectedness. Though they shared that they do believe the Rachel's Challenge program led to positive changes within their school community, the administrators and teachers expressed a desire to have black and white data to support or undermine the value of the program. The construct of positionality within Turbulence Theory looks at the relationships within an organization and supports that different groups and individuals within an organization experience turbulence in different manners. The interviews highlighted that not only does one's position within an organization impact the effects of the turbulence, but it also impacts the effects and value of the forces implemented to counter the effects of the turbulence. An individual's position within an organization is important and a factor in his/her response to the stress, but it also is important in determining how an individual can assess the changes in the stress. The significance of an event will vary, depending on one's position within an organization, and each individual and each group of individuals will experience the turbulence differently. Similarly, each individual and group of individuals will experience the effects of the efforts to minimize the turbulence differently as well. The interviews showed that the students were much more able to provide concrete data to support changes in their behaviors as a result of the program. The narratives provided by the students indicate real shifts in actions as a result of the Rachel's Challenge program. On the other hand, the administrators and teachers struggled to provide examples of changes as a result of the program because of their positions within the organization. The

students' perspective is different than the administrators' and teachers' perspectives and they were able to provide richer demonstrations of the impacts of the program. Students were better able to specifically target any changes in their behaviors to the Rachel's Challenge program, but the faculty could not differentiate or allocate the effects to Rachel's Challenge specifically. One's position within an organization impacts one's ability to assess the interventions. Not only do educational leaders need to understand that the relative position of individuals and groups within an organization must be understood in a multidimensional fashion because their perspectives and experiences related to the turbulence will be authentic and varied, leaders also need to understand that different individuals and groups will respond to the interventions to minimize the turbulence differently as well. One's position within an organization will impact both their response to the turbulence and their response to the interventions.

Rachel's Challenge and Character Education Programs

The research on trauma within schools indicates that the development of postvention plans in schools takes precedence over the development of preventive measures. Prevention plans are viewed as a luxury in schools when in reality the focus on preventive tools needs to take priority over remedial action plans and reactive responses. Today, standards and high stakes testing are taking precedence. Schools as social-educational settings are not what we are seeing and not what we are focused on as a society, but this is countered by the reality that students are facing trauma and need support to recover and develop resilience. The genuine reality is that educational leaders need to stop ignoring the holistic development of students. We need to shift away from

the bureaucracy and incorporate citizenship, character, social justice, resilience, and kindness into our schools' goals and objectives. We know that the occurrence of school trauma is inevitable and the repercussions are nothing less than significant. There is a great deal of research available on trauma response plans. What to do and what not to do *after* a crisis hits a school community is a well-researched area. Crisis response teams are the most utilized tool in promoting resilience and healthy responses following a crisis in schools, but in actuality these teams promote recovery rather than the development of resilience. We need to prepare students *before* the trauma occurs. Swihart et al. (1992), Charkow (1998), and Nickerson et al. (2004) all provide information on how schools should respond to a crisis, after the fact, leaving out a focus on what characteristics within a school community before a crisis occurs contribute to a healthy response. Coopman (2009), Havlland (2008), and Carey (2008) all provide narratives that are again focused on the response to tragedy. An identification of the elements within a school's culture before a crisis occurs is consistently lacking in the research. A claim that recovery is synonymous with resilience ignores the preemptive qualities that underlie a school community before a crisis occurs. Research into the role that character education programs can potentially play in a successful response to trauma is lacking and is important. Doing so shifts the focus away from remedial action and reactive response to prevention and preparedness. In this particular study, all five subgroups of interviewees (students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers) perceived that the Rachel's Challenge program prepares students and the school community for a positive response to tragedy through the promotion of a sense of community and connection among the

members of the school. All of the interviewees attested to the fact that they perceive that the Rachel's Challenge program has helped prepare them for future trauma. In this school, the Rachel's Challenge program serves as a prevention and preparation intervention through the promotion of positive character and connection within the overall community and through the development of individual and organizational resilience.

Through the available research on character education programs and school climate, we saw the importance of these constructs in our high schools. Hollingshead et al. (2009) emphasized that high schools are obligated to promote the development of good character and they highlighted a lack of connectedness found within our high schools today. Sharkey et al. (2008) highlighted the value of relationships for students. Research indicates that students are looking for a sense of community and connection. Mitra et al. (2009) found that teenagers want adults to help them with personal issues and provide support on more than just academic development. They concluded that students are openly struggling with the social divisions within schools. These experts are emphasizing the importance of connectedness and a need for integration and a disregard for fragmentation. The Rachel's Challenge program is based upon the tenets of social inclusion and social acceptance based upon a sense of community and shared connectedness and a dismissal of exclusion and hate. All of the interviewees in this particular study noted that the Rachel's Challenge program delivers a positive message and promotes connectedness through the promotion of pro-social behaviors. The interviewees established that the Rachel's Challenge program encourages kindness,

inclusion, acceptance, and compassion; their narratives detailed examples of more inclusive actions and an intolerance for exclusion. Cohen et al. (2009) validated that a positive school climate enhances achievement and contributes to overall success in school and in life for adolescents. Brannon's (2008) work found that character education programs have a positive impact on achievement, test scores, and behaviors through a reduction of at risk behaviors. He indicated that the inclusion of character education in school curriculum promotes acceptance, respect, and a sense of responsibility for students. All of this research combined supports the importance of a program like Rachel's Challenge. Our students need and benefit from the promotion of character and connectedness within their school climates. The key members of this particular school community did attest to a perceived enhancement of connection, a sense of community, and acceptance as a result of the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge program. It is important to note that all of the interviewees did emphasize the fact that the Rachel's Challenge Club plays a crucial role in maintaining the pro-social behaviors and values of acceptance and inclusion. The interviews make it clear that the Rachel's Challenge presentation to the students is not enough to support the development of character; the program's success relies heavily on the commitment made by the club's members and the actions of the club to promote inclusion and acceptance consistently.

In evaluating the value of Rachel's Challenge, it is important to look at the research which highlights the factors found to be linked to successful character education programs. Romanowski's (2003) work delineated the factors that students want to have in a character education program. Students want the program to be on their intellectual and

emotional level. During the student interviews, the participants shared that they felt the Rachel's Challenge program's serious and intense nature was beneficial to them. They appreciated that the speaker showed them film clips of the Columbine tragedy because they believed this helped them commit to the message and see the true significance of the devastation in that school. The intensity of the program matched their emotional developmental levels. Research indicates that students also value character education programs that incorporate real-life experiences. Again, Rachel's Challenge meets this criterion. The program is based entirely on the life of one of the victims of the Columbine school shooting in 1999 and the speaker's presentation is made up of a synopsis of the tragedy as well as real-life stories about the life of Rachel and how she demonstrated inclusion, acceptance, and kindness on a daily basis. The program is not fictional and is based on the true life story of Rachel Scott, an adolescent who the students at this particular school said they related to and identified with. Romanowski (2003) also found that students want a program that involves a guest speaker and an opportunity for discussion, and the Rachel's Challenge program consists of both. The presenter delivers an assembly-style presentation and the follow-up to the program involves discussion and the development and implementation of action plans. deLara (2000) added to the characteristics of a program that students value by indicating that students want to see programs that promote respect and encourage a personal commitment by everyone within the school community to be nicer. These are the two primary tenets of the Rachel's Challenge program identified by all of my interview subgroups. The interviewees all supported that the Rachel's Challenge program does meet the qualities available in the

current research that students want to have in a character education program, validating its potential success.

The interviews with the administrators and teachers at this particular high school highlighted a point of frustration that they encountered with the Rachel's Challenge program. The administrators and teachers discussed their struggle with not being able to quantify or determine the impact the Rachel's Challenge program had on their students. They expressed a desire to have black and white data supporting or undermining the potential of the program. They discussed the fact that it is difficult to dissect the particular impacts of the Rachel's Challenge program specifically because in their opinions the program is one component of a much larger system within their school in place to support character development and strong citizenship. This study was conducted in a Catholic faith-based high school and the school promotes character development through its religion classes and service-learning programs. It is difficult, if not impossible, for my interviewees to attest that the program is the specific reason behind the positive changes and the demonstration of positive pro-social behaviors seen within their school because there are many programs working together simultaneously to promote kindness, acceptance, inclusion, and compassion. Both the administrators and the teachers struggled with the fact that though they recognize that the program has made a positive impact within their school community, they believe they cannot assert to what degree. It is difficult to determine the exact level of impact of the program and as educators; we are accustomed to quantifiable data to support decisions and programming. Are the positive cultural changes the result of the Rachel's Challenge program, or are the

changes the result of the other character development programs, or are the changes the result of the combined effects of all of the parallel programs? Romanowski (2005) found that this was a common dissatisfaction with character education programs. The administrators and teachers at this particular school model a frustration that has been found to be shared among educators regarding the implementation of character education programs everywhere. Teachers often feel disappointed by these types of initiatives because they cannot really be assessed, studied, or quantified as many of the other educational and academic initiatives in a school can be. When examining curriculum or instructional strategies, for example, we rely on test score data to determine the success or failure of a particular action plan. But when it comes to character education, inclusion, kindness, compassion, a sense of community, resilience, and connectedness cannot be quantified to validate or counter a particular program. It is more difficult to collect and compare pre- and post-levels of these constructs. This lack of data is found to be a source of frustration in both the overall research and within this particular school. This lack of quantifiable data most likely contributes to the pattern we see in which schools minimize the importance of character education programs.

A common theme found in the research on character education programs was the importance of support for the program on the part of the school staff and families. Romanowski (2003) found that oftentimes schools pay little attention to a character education initiative once it is established, and doing so undermines the program's progress, success, and goals. Without continued follow-up, the effects of character education programs are short-lived at best. Hollingshead (2009) found that initiatives live

or die in a school based on the amount of support implementers and the community receives. Romanowski (2003) found that school leaders need to provide consistent and thorough support of a program once it is brought into a school, and that teacher buy-in is necessary. Romanowski (2005) also found that buy-in from the home is equally important; the teacher, the home, and the school all need to work in conjunction to support any character education initiative for the effects to be significant. All of this research was supported in my findings in this particular school that implemented the Rachel's Challenge program. The students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers all attested that the program's potential was threatened by a lack of follow-through on the part of the school. All of the interviewees discussed the key role that the Rachel's Challenge Club plays to maintain the momentum of the messages of the program. According to the interviewees, the club keeps the tenets of the program more at the forefront for the members and impacts their choices and behaviors more than the students who are not members of the club. The follow-through and the support of the program's messages are strongest for the members of the club. The students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers targeted the club as the primary tool to keep the messages of the Rachel's Challenge program current and active within the larger school community and the potential lasting impact was directly linked to follow-through efforts. All five subgroups believed that the club members are the most significantly impacted students within the school community and that the longevity of the program's impact relies heavily, if not entirely, on the actions of the club within the greater school community. In order for the program to have a lasting impact on the students and the

school community, the interviewees believed that there is a strong need for the school to follow-up the initial Rachel's Challenge presentation with activities and reminders. The program, in order to have strong effects, needs to be viewed as more than a one-day presentation. The follow-up, according to the interviewees, within the school community is essential and determines the significance of the program in the lives of the students; without a strong amount of follow-up, the potentially powerful impact of the program could dwindle entirely.

The interviews with the parents and teachers also highlighted the role of families in promoting and maintaining the efforts of the program. Both subgroups shared that the school does not bare the sole responsibility to keep the program's messages ongoing for the students. They supported that dialogue within the home also needs to occur to foster long-term effects. They stated that if parents choose to involve themselves in the program and choose to incorporate the program's tenets into their conversations and actions at home, the potential long-term effects are greater. They supported parents and the school working together to support one another in the development of character. The research conducted within this particular school community validates that follow-up to any character education program is crucial; without it, the lasting impacts of the program are threatened. The interviewees supported that the success of the Rachel's Challenge program relies predominately, if not entirely, on the efforts of the Rachel's Challenge Club following the initial presentation.

Implications and Limitations of the Study

This study was not designed to result in broad generalizations about the potential impacts of character education programs within high schools, but rather was conducted to enlighten school leaders to the perceived impact of a specific character education program, Rachel's Challenge, on this school's culture, the level of resilience within the school community, and the sense of connection and community within the school. The Rachel's Challenge program, initially developed after the Columbine shooting in 1999, has not been implemented in schools for a period of significant longevity; therefore, in-depth studies on its effects are minimal at best, and this study aimed to provide some research into the value of this specific program on individual and community resilience and school culture through an analysis of the perceptions of key members within this school community. Having an understanding of the impacts of this program will provide educational leaders with an understanding of the effects of this particular program, but this study is not presuming to identify the impact of all character education programs, or to endorse their general ability to develop resilience at the individual or community level, or to improve school culture. This study provides educational leaders with a roadmap for implementing the Rachel's Challenge program specifically within their schools, but is not enforcing that this one particular character education initiative accurately represents all character education programs or that the perceptions of the effects of this program in this one high school accurately portrays the impact of Rachel's Challenge everywhere.

Because this study was conducted in a religious school, there are other simultaneous programs supporting character development and citizenship at play that

may not be relevant in other institutions. It did, however, highlight the connection between Rachel's Challenge and resilience development and cultural changes in this specific school, providing educational leaders with pertinent knowledge on the usefulness of this character education program to promote positive changes within their communities. This study portrays the connection between Rachel's Challenge and positive school culture changes through the development of a common set of values. This study dissects the characteristics and traits of an effective character education program, resilient schools, resilient individuals, and positive school cultures, but the study did not exhaust all qualities of these constructs.

Recommendations for Future Research

Because the Rachel's Challenge initiative is fairly new and was developed after the 1999 tragedy in Columbine High School, it would be interesting to gather data about the long-term impacts the program has on the students who are presented with the character education program. Does the program impact behaviors and choices over the course of time? This study examined the thoughts of the students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers on the potential long-term effects of the program and their predictions on the role the program will have on the recipients later in life, but it would be worthwhile to explore this from an analytical standpoint and to dissect the long-term implications the program has or does not have over the course of time. One of the administrators interviewed shared his belief that as the Columbine tragedy becomes less current, the potential impact of this specific program will dwindle because the significance of this particular school shooting will lessen over time. Will this program

have the same impact as we move further away from the Columbine era? It would be interesting to carry out this research on students many years from now when the Columbine tragedy is less easily recalled. This study also asked the students, parents, counselors, administrators, and teachers to predict how the program may or may not support their response to future trauma, but it would be interesting to again explore this from an analytical standpoint and delve more deeply into this rather than just relying on their predictions and assumptions. Does the program encourage the development of lasting resilience for individuals and school communities? Do the recipients of the program rely on the tenets of the program years from now when faced with adversity and trauma? Researching the effects of the program after a trauma would help either validate or counter the predictions made in this research study.

It would also be interesting to compare the impacts of this program, designed on the premise of promoting pro-social behaviors, to other character education programs that are designed to promote anti-bullying messages. Does it make a difference if programs focus on how students should treat one another rather than focusing on how students should not treat one another? Do the impacts of the Rachel's Challenge program differ significantly from other character education initiatives? Is whether or not a program is positive in nature versus negative in nature significant? Furthermore, it would be interesting to carry out a comparison study and examine a school before the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge program and after the implementation to see if the perceptions of the members of a school community vary before and after the implementation of the program. Ratings of a sense of community, resilience, and a sense

of connection could be collected before and after the implementation of the program and compared to offer more of a quantitative analysis of the potential impacts of the program. It would also be interesting to compare the implementation of the program in a private Catholic school and a non-religious public school to help differentiate or determine if the simultaneous character development programming within a religious school impacts the significance of any potential impacts of the program. Finally, it would be interesting to compare the results of the Rachel's Challenge program in schools that implement strong and consistent follow-up activities to the program to schools that just rely mainly on the program in and of itself to make an impact. The data attained in this study highlighted a common theme that the follow-through to the program plays a critical role to the lasting impacts of its messages. Do schools that do not have a strong and consistent follow-up program to the Rachel's Challenge initiative demonstrate a lesser gain in positive cultural changes and the development of resilience when compared to schools with a strong and consistent follow-up program?

REFERENCES

Bell, M. A. (2002, January 7). The five principles of organizational resilience. Retrieved November 13, 2009, from http://www.gartner.com/DisplayDocument?doc_cd=103658&ref=g_SiteLink.

Brannon, D. (2008). Character education—A joint responsibility. *Educational Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review, 73*(8), 56-60.

Brock, S. E. (1998). Helping classrooms cope with traumatic events. *Professional School Counseling, 2*(2), 110-16.

Carey, D. P. (2008). Gone but not forgotten: Grief at school. *Principal Leadership, 8*(8), 36-39.

Charkow, W. B. (1998). Inviting children to grieve. *Professional School Counseling, 2*(2), 117-122.

Cohen, J., Pickeral, T., & McCloskey, M. (2009). Assessing School Climate. *Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review, 74*(8), 45-48.

Coopman, J. T. (2009). Responding to tragedy. *Principal Leadership, 9*(5), 6-8.

deLara, E. (2000). Adolescents' Perceptions of safety at school and their solutions for enhancing safety and reducing school violence: A rural case study. Paper presented at the National Rural Education Association Conference in Charleston, South Carolina in October, 2000. (ERIC Document Reproduction Identification number ED 471860)

Grant, L., & Schakner, B. (1993). Coping with the ultimate tragedy--the death of a student. *NASSP Bulletin, 77*(552), 1-9.

Greene, R. R., Galambos, C., & Lee, Y. (2003). Resilience theory: Theoretical and professional conceptualizations. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 8*(4), 75-91.

Gross, S. J. (2004). *Promises kept: Sustaining school and district innovation in a turbulent era*. Alexandra, VA: The Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Gross, S. J. (2006). *Leadership mentoring: Maintaining school improvement in turbulent times*. Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield.

Gryskiewicz, S. S. (1999). *Positive turbulence: Developing climates for creativity, innovation, and renewal*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Guthrie, S. H. (1992). Crisis intervention teaming: A participant's perspective. *School Counselor, 40*(1), 73-76.

Harris, A., Brown, D., & Abbott, I. (2006). Executive leadership: Another lever in the system? *School Leadership and Management, 26*(4), 397-409.

Harvey, V. S. (2007, January). Student Services: Schoolwide methods for fostering resiliency (pp. 10-14). Retrieved November 13, 2009, from http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/schoolresiliency.pdf.

Havlland, J. E. (2008). A season of sadness--responding to tragedy in school. *Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review, 73*(7), 61-66.

Hollingshead, B. (2009). The concerns-based adoption model: A framework for examining implementation of a character education program. *NASSP Bulletin, 93*(3), 166-183.

Hollingshead, B., Crump, C., Eddy, R., & Rowe, D. (2009). Rachel's challenge: A moral compass for character education. *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 45*(3), 111-115.

Krovetz, M. L. (1999). Fostering resiliency. *Thrust for Educational Leadership, 28*(5), 28.

McDonnell, S. N. (2008). America's crisis of character—and what to do about it. *Education Week, 28*(7), 25.

McGhee, M. W., & Nelson, S. W. (2005). Sacrificing leaders, villainizing leadership: How educational accountability policies impair school leadership. *Phi Delta Kappan, 86*(5), 360-372.

Mitra, D. L., & Gross, S. J. (2009). Increasing student voice in high school reform: Building partnerships, improving outcomes. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 37*(4), 522-543.

Moore, J. (2002). Death, grief and loss in classrooms: Teachers' stories. Retrieved November 13, 2009, from http://edtech.connect.msu.edu/searchaera2002/viewproposaltext.asp?propID=1224.

Morgan, G. (2006). *Images of organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Morrison, G. M., & Allen, M. R. (2007). Promoting student resilience in school contexts. *Theory into Practice, 46*(2), 162-169.

Mullen, C. A. (2008). Teacher leadership capacity-building: Developing democratically accountable leaders in schools. *Teacher Development, 12*(4), 329-340.

Nickerson, A. B., & Zhe, E. J. (2004). Crisis prevention and intervention: A survey of school psychologists. *Psychology in the Schools, 41*(7), 777-788.

O'Neal, M. R. (1999). *Measuring resilience*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association in November 1999. ERIC Document Reproduction Identification number ED 436574)

Pennsylvania Department of Education (2009, August). Student assistance program guidelines. Retrieved November 13, 2009, from http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/document/1278703/student_assistance_program-student_assistance_program_guidelines_doc?qid=15022686&rank=1.

Pennsylvania Student Assistance Program (2009). Mental health/drug and alcohol SAP data. Retrieved November 13, 2009, from http://www.sap.state.pa.us/uploadedfiles/JQRSexecsummary-2007-08.pdf.

Romanowski, M. (2003). Lessons for life. *American School Board Journal, 190*(11), 32-35.

Romanowski, M. H. (2005). Through the eyes of teachers: High school teachers' experiences with character education. *American Secondary Education, 34*(1), 6-23.

Sarason, S. B. (1990). The predictable failure of educational reform: Can we change course before it's too late? San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Shapiro, J. P., & Gross, S. J. (2013). Ethical educational leadership in turbulent times: (Re)solving moral dilemmas (2nd edition). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Shapiro, J. P., Gross, S. J., & Shapiro, S. H. (2008). Ethical decisions in turbulent times. *School Administrator, 65*(5), 18-21.

Sharkey, J. D., You, S., & Schnoebelen, K. (2008). Relations among school assets, individual resilience, and student. *Psychology in the Schools, 45*(5), 402-418.

Spady, W. G. (1988). Organizing for results: The basis of authentic restructuring and reform. *Educational Leadership, 46*(2), 4-8.

Swihart, J., Silliman, B., & McNeil, J. (1992). Death of a student: Implications for secondary school counselors. *School Counselor, 40*(1), 55-60.

The National Association of School Psychologists (2009, November 13). Death: Dealing with crisis at school practical suggestions for educators. Retrieved November 13, 2009, from http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/neat_poland.aspx.

The National Association of School Psychologists (2009, November 13). Responding to a death: Tips for administrators. Retrieved November 13, 2009, from http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/aftersuicide.aspx.

Thompson, R. A. (1995). Being prepared for suicide or student death in schools: Strategies to restore equilibrium. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 17*(3), 264-277.

Westefeld, J. S., Jenks Kettmann, J. D., Lovmo, C., & Hey, C. (2007). High school suicide: Knowledge and opinions of teachers. *Journal of Loss & Trauma, 12*(1), 31-42.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Below is a copy of my Interview Protocols to be used with high school administrators, counselors, teachers, students, and parents from the suburban high school:

My goals, intentions, and motives (shared verbatim with the respondent prior to the interview)

> I am conducting a qualitative case study about character education; namely, the Rachel's Challenge program, and its impact on the school culture and on individual and community resilience. I am striving to collect data that will help me answer my research questions: Does the school community perceive that the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative has improved school culture? Does the school community perceive that the implementation of the Rachel's Challenge character education initiative has helped develop individual and organizational resilience within the school community?
>
> I am interviewing key informants, including administrators, counselors, teachers, students, and parents about the Rachel's Challenge program and its impact on you as an individual and on the overall school community. Information about your school, your school's culture, the Rachel's Challenge program, your perceptions about your individual resilience, and your perceptions about the resilience within your school community will

all be discussed. All of the information that you provide to me will be kept confidential and anonymous. I will protect the identity of the respondents completely by using pseudonyms in the final write-up. I appreciate your candidness and cooperation and assure you that I am striving to make a contribution to the educational leadership field.

Logistics of the interview (shared verbatim with the respondent prior to the interview)

The interview is comprised of # open-ended questions that will provide a framework to the conversation that I will have with you. It will be audio recorded so that I am able to review and analyze the data at a later date. The audio recording will be protected and secure, as to maintain and protect your anonymity and confidentiality. I anticipate that the interview will last approximately thirty to forty minutes in duration.

Questions

Administrators

1. Why did you decide to implement Rachel's Challenge in your school?
2. What are the key elements of the Rachel's Challenge character education program?
3. What role did you play in the implementation of the program?
4. How would you describe the impact of Rachel's Challenge on your school community and its culture?
5. What elements of the Rachel's Challenge program do you believe helped strengthen your school community?

6. What do you believe is missing or lacking in the Rachel's Challenge program?
7. How do you define individual resilience? In your opinion, what are the characteristics that promote resilience for individuals?
8. How do you define school community resilience? In your opinion, what are the characteristics that promote school community resilience?
9. What impact, if any, do you believe Rachel's Challenge had on individual and community resilience in your school?
10. Has your school experienced any trauma since the implementation of Rachel's Challenge? If so, do you think the program has supported the response to the trauma in any particular ways? If not, do you believe that the program will support your community in their response to future anticipated trauma in any particular ways?
11. Do you believe that the Rachel's Challenge program will have a lasting impact on your school community? Why or why not?

Counselors

1. Why was the Rachel's Challenge program implemented in your school?
2. What are the key elements of the Rachel's Challenge character education program?
3. What role did you play in the implementation of the program?
4. How would you describe the impact of Rachel's Challenge on your school community and its culture?

5. What elements of the Rachel's Challenge program do you believe helped strengthen your school community?
6. What do you believe is missing or lacking in the Rachel's Challenge program?
7. How do you define individual resilience? In your opinion, what are the characteristics that promote resilience for individuals?
8. How do you define school community resilience? In your opinion, what are the characteristics that promote school community resilience?
9. What impact, if any, do you believe Rachel's Challenge had on individual and community resilience in your school?
10. Has your school experienced any trauma since the implementation of Rachel's Challenge? If so, do you think the program has supported the response to the trauma in any particular ways? If not, do you believe that the program will support your community in their response to future anticipated trauma in any particular ways?
11. Do you believe that the Rachel's Challenge program will have a lasting impact on your school community? Why or why not?

Teachers

1. Why was the Rachel's Challenge program implemented in your school?
2. What are the key elements of the Rachel's Challenge character education program?
3. What role did you play in the implementation of the program?

4. How would you describe the impact of Rachel's Challenge on your school community and its culture?
5. What elements of the Rachel's Challenge program do you believe helped strengthen your school community?
6. What do you believe is missing or lacking in the Rachel's Challenge program?
7. How do you define individual resilience? In your opinion, what are the characteristics that promote resilience for individuals?
8. How do you define school community resilience? In your opinion, what are the characteristics that promote school community resilience?
9. What impact, if any, do you believe Rachel's Challenge had on individual and community resilience in your school?
10. Has your school experienced any trauma since the implementation of Rachel's Challenge? If so, do you think the program has supported the response to the trauma in any particular ways? If not, do you believe that the program will support your community in their response to future anticipated trauma in any particular ways?
11. Do you believe that the Rachel's Challenge program will have a lasting impact on your school community? Why or why not?

Students

1. Why do you think the Rachel's Challenge program was implemented in your school?
2. What are the main ideas of the Rachel's Challenge program?

3. What impact did the program have on you?
4. How would you describe the impact of Rachel's Challenge on your school and the way people act?
5. What do you think are the positives and negatives of the Rachel's Challenge program?
6. How do you define someone who is resilient?
7. What impact, if any, do you believe Rachel's Challenge had on your resilience? Do you have any specific examples?
8. What impact, if any, do you believe Rachel's Challenge had on the resilience level of your peers? Do you have any specific examples?
9. Has your school experienced any other bad things since the implementation of Rachel's Challenge? If so, do you think the program has helped you deal with that in any particular ways? If not, do you think the program will help you later when you are faced with something bad?
10. Do you believe that the Rachel's Challenge program will have a lasting impact on you? Why or why not?

Parents

1. Why do you believe the Rachel's Challenge program was brought into your child's school?
2. What are the key elements of the Rachel's Challenge character education program that was brought into your child's school?
3. What role did parents have in the implementation of the program?

4. How would you describe the impact of Rachel's Challenge on your child?
5. What impact, if any, do you believe the Rachel's Challenge program had on the overall school community?
6. What do you believe is missing or lacking in the Rachel's Challenge program?
7. How do you define individual resilience?
8. How do you define school community resilience?
9. What impact, if any, do you believe Rachel's Challenge had on individual and community resilience for your child and his/her school?
10. Has your child experienced any trauma since the implementation of Rachel's Challenge? If so, do you think the program has supported his/her response to the trauma in any particular ways? If not, do you believe that the program will support your child in his/her response to future anticipated trauma in any particular ways?
11. Do you believe that the Rachel's Challenge program will have a lasting impact on your child? Why or why not?