Influences of High School-Aged Student Success: An Exploratory Case Study of a Rural South Texas School District

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ABSTRACT

Minimal research has been conducted regarding the success factors associated with high school students in rural school districts, leaving a gap in our understanding of the elements that influence students' academic, technical, and life success. This study's purpose was to identify factors that contribute to the success of juniors and seniors enrolled at San Perlita high school in South Texas. This study utilized a mixed methods design, which involved the collection of qualitative data first and quantitative data second. Researchers accessed the public records of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to examine the difference in achievement scores between juniors and seniors at the subject school compared to other junior and senior students in the same Education Service Center (Region One). A holistic approach was implemented during observation and semi-structured interviews to assess students' perceptions of support systems and the campus environment. The results of this study may be beneficial to San Perlita Independent School District by identifying potential positive factors contributing to student success. The findings may also transfer to districts of similar size, composition, and TEA classification to achieve higher levels of student success and accomplishment in their own communities.

INTRODUCTION

- Student success has often been described as achievement in academic pursuits (Dyer et al., 2022; Sutherland, 2018).
- Beyond test scores, social and "soft" factors, though difficult to measure, influence student achievement (Hearn, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
- A holistic approach measuring student success acknowledges students as the overarching sum of their institutions (Cuseo, 2014; Hearn, 2006; Tinto, 2017).
- The idea of holistic development can be found in Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Mcleod, 2023).

PURPOSE

Identify factors that influence or contribute to success in academic and/or workforce aspirations in high school-age students.

METHODS

Qualitative Methods

- We conducted semi-structured interviews of 16 students (8 juniors and 8 seniors). Semi – structured interviews focused on student perspectives of campus culture and resources.
- Observations of the student body were conducted following the semi – structed interviews. Physical, social interactions, language, culture, and interpersonal relationships were the focus of observations.

Quantitative Methods

Aggregated data from 5 school districts of similar size, TEA rating, and classification were compared to San Perlita.

- Accountability ratings from other Region 01 districts were compared to San Perlita.
- Descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS was conducted to determine the mean difference (MD) between San Perlita and five comparison districts

Figure 1. San Perlita ISD campus marquee

Figure 2. San Perlita city limit sign

RESULTS

We found an overarching family dynamic present at San Perlita High School and formed a word frequency cloud of semi-structured interview responses (Figure 2).
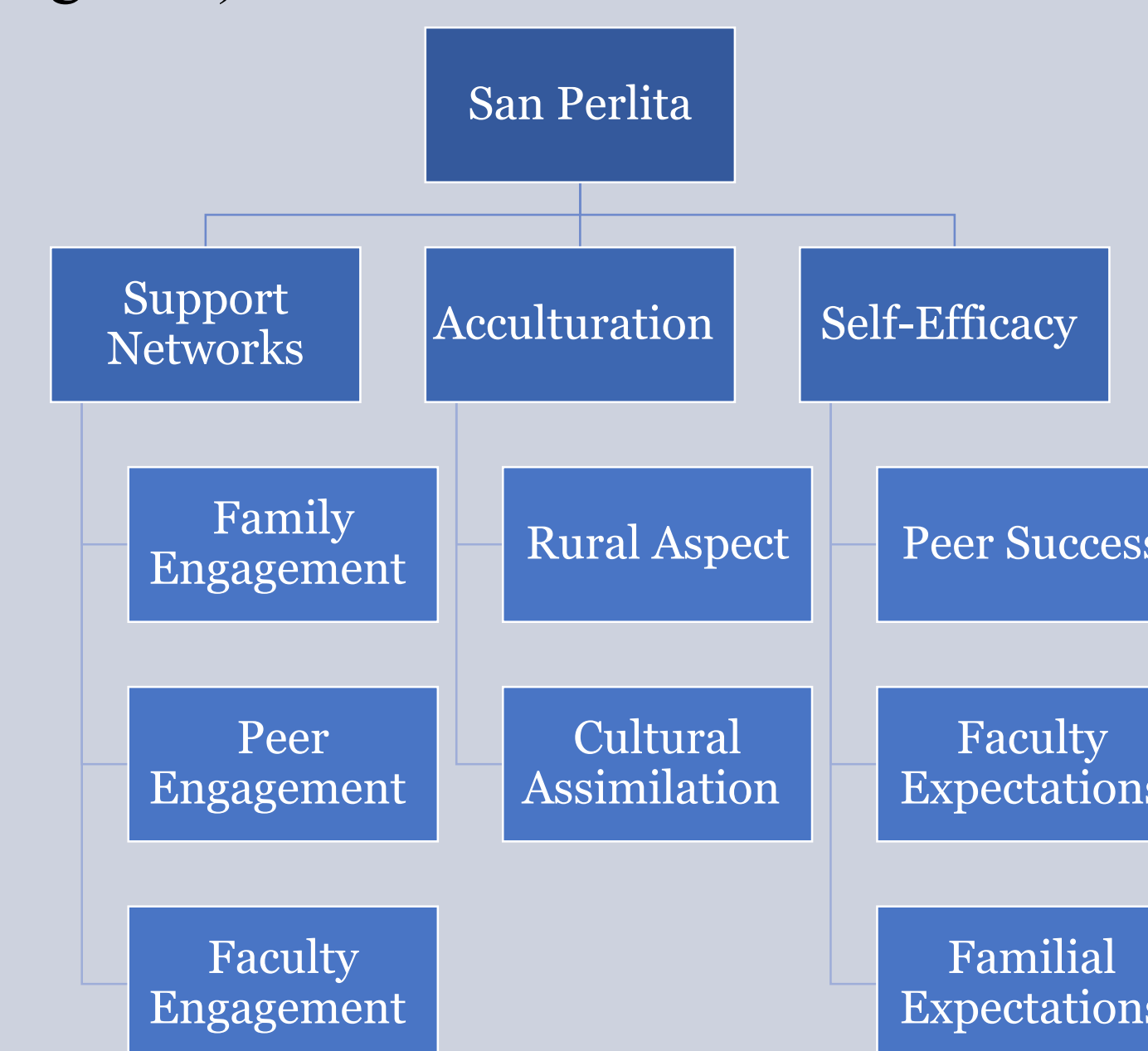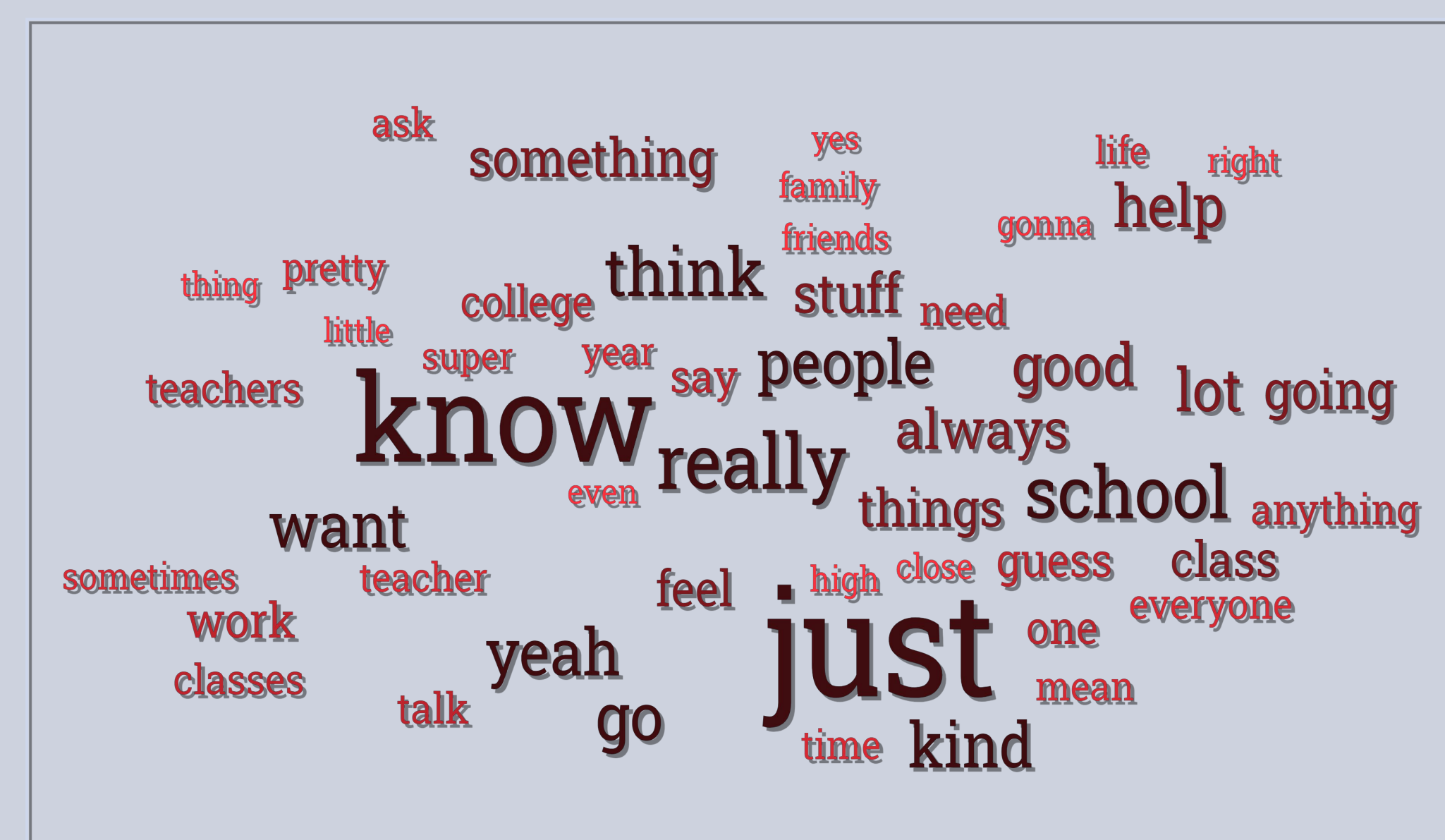

Figure 2. A) The semi-structured interviews revealed a large support network, likely caused by the size and location of San Perlita ISD. B) Word frequency was calculated to gauge an understanding of student's perception of campus life.

- We found that all three major categories that emerged during the semi-structured interviews were corroborated during the campus observation period through physical and social peer interactions and student-faculty interactions.
- The three major categories were revealed to be interconnected, providing an overarching dynamic of family connectedness between the campus and the community.

	San Perlita's Scores	***M* of 5 Rural Schools**	***MD***
Overall Rating	95	82	+ 13
Closing the Gaps	100	70	+ 30
School Progress	93	82	+ 11
Student Achievement	92	74	+ 18

Figure 3. San Perlita ISD accountability scores compared to the mean of five other rural school districts

Using four individual scores, we found a significant median difference between San Perlita and five other Region 01 districts' scores.

DISCUSSION

- Initial analysis of San Perlita's outstanding accountability scores seems to be supported by the calculated mean difference of five other rural school districts in Region 01.
- The overall culture of student success was exemplified by student support networks, acculturation, and an increased sense of self-efficacy.
- The interpersonal relationships between students and faculty represent multifaceted holistic engagement not solely based on academics.
- The sense of belonging seemed to positively influence student persistence and motivation (Tinto, 2017).
- The fluid nature of the campus reflected a non-traditional student-centered classroom (Overby, 2011).
- Student-centered learning positively influenced academic and interpersonal pursuits (Overby, 2011).

FUTURE STUDY

- Further analysis of student achievement, closing the gaps, school progress, and overall rating for Region 01 is underway.
- To expand this research study, further investigation of the five comparison districts should occur.
- Teachers of San Perlita should be interviewed to gain their perception of student success factors.
- Explore differences in socialization of homeschooled students vs. public school students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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