DOES A SCHOOL’S MISSION MATTER?
EXPLORING CHANGES IN STATEMENT CONTENT, USE AND UNDERSTANDING, AND LINKS TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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Crafting a mission statement is a common practice in schools, but we know little about how and when faculty, staff, and parents put these statements to use or whether these statements yield tangible effects. The school improvement literature suggests that a common element effective schools share is a clear and focused school mission, and articulating a school’s mission is thought to align members of a group toward a common purpose, to bring coherence to a group, to inspire commitment, to drive individual and group action, and to effect change. Despite the widespread nature of the practice, evidence surrounding its effectiveness is scarce. What mission statements contain, how they are developed and used, how well they capture the underlying shared beliefs of teachers and principals, and the extent to which these shared ideas influence student achievement are open and under-studied questions. In this dissertation, I present three analyses examining different aspects of mission using a variety of data and methods.
In the first analysis, I examine the content of mission statements prior to the enactment of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program and seven years later to consider how mission statement topics may be changing in the presence of choice policies. In this exploratory and descriptive analysis, I use structural topic modeling to code a representative sample of mission statements in Indiana from two time points into topics. I investigate differences in statement topics between school sectors, over time, and within sectors over time to consider how school choice policies may be influencing the content of mission statements. I find distinct differences between sectors but few differences over time and within sector.

The second analysis considers how teachers and school leaders understand and use mission statements in the school, based on interview and focus group data from 17 schools in one community. Using these data, I developed a measure of mission statement familiarity for each principal and group of teachers in order to examine variation across roles and schools. I then analyzed the data in an abductive manner, looking for plausible reasons for mission familiarity as well as where the statement content was salient and had opportunities for resonance, drawing on concepts from cultural sociology. I find that mission statements were familiar and salient within more than half of the schools, and schools leaders and teachers described moments of resonance for the mission statement in roughly one third of the schools in the sample.

In the third analysis I explore possible links between school mission statement content and student achievement. Using mission statements from a state representative sample of schools in Indiana, I use measures of topic proportions within school mission statements calculated through structural topic modeling. I focus on four academic-
focused topics—*academic success, achievement and standards, believe children can learn,* and *every child*—and test whether there is a relationship between having a high focus on one of these topics in the school mission statement and student achievement outcomes. To do so, I analyze longitudinal student achievement data, using grade level fixed effects models and a matched sample comparing students who used a voucher to move to a private school with students who stayed in public schools. I find that schools with mission statements that contain a high focus on *academic success* and *every child* demonstrate positive relationships with achievement outcomes for students using a voucher to attend a private school.
For Max, Oliver, and Leo,

may you always have the courage to do hard things.
CONTENTS

Figures................................................................................................................................ vi

Tables..................................................................................................................................... viii

Acknowledgments.............................................................................................................. ix

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................1
  1.1 Overview ............................................................................................................1
    1.1.1 Content Analysis Study ......................................................................5
    1.1.2 Interview and Focus Group Study ......................................................6
    1.1.3 Quantitative Study ..............................................................................7
  1.2 References ..........................................................................................................8

Chapter 2: Does Choice Change Mission? Examining School Mission Statements
  Between Sector and over Time in Indiana ...............................................................11
  2.1 Overview ..........................................................................................................11
  2.2 Background ......................................................................................................13
    2.2.1 School Mission Statements ...............................................................13
    2.2.2 School Sector Differences in Mission...............................................15
    2.2.3 School Choice Policies in Indiana ....................................................17
    2.2.4 Impacts of Choice on Schools as Organizations...............................19
      2.2.4.1 Market Competition .......................................................... 20
      2.2.4.2 Institutional Isomorphism ................................................. 22
      2.2.4.3 Structural Inertia ............................................................... 24
  2.3 Data and Methods ............................................................................................25
    2.3.1 Structural Topic Modeling ................................................................28
    2.3.2 Model Decisions and Data Analysis .................................................29
  2.4 Results ..............................................................................................................37
    2.4.1 Summary of Topics ...........................................................................37
    2.4.2 Comparisons by Sector .................................................................40
    2.4.3 Differences Over Time .................................................................50
    2.4.4 Differences Within Sector Over Time ..........................................51
  2.5 Discussion ........................................................................................................54
    2.5.1 Mission, Choice, and Policy .............................................................59
    2.5.2 The Role of Mission in Choosing Schools ........................................60
    2.5.3 Whom Do Schools View as Competition? .......................................60
    2.5.4 Future Research ................................................................................61
Chapter 3: Do Schools Use Mission? Mission Statement Familiarity, Salience, and Resonance in K-8 Schools across Sector

3.1 Overview

3.2 Background

3.2.1 Mission Statement as Educational Practice

3.2.2 Mission Statements as Cultural Objects

3.2.3 Familiarity, Salience, and Resonance

3.2.4 School Sector Differences in Mission

3.3 Research Questions

3.4 Data and Methods

3.4.1 Sample

3.4.2 Data Collection

3.4.3 Data Analysis

3.5 Results

3.5.1 Statement Familiarity by Role and Sector

3.5.2 Familiarity

3.5.2.1 Age and Focus of Statement

3.5.2.2 Daily or Weekly Recitation

3.5.2.3 Lack of Use

3.5.3 Salience

3.5.3.1 Use of Statement Language

3.5.3.2 Continued Discussion of Statement

3.5.3.3 Personal Connection to Statement

3.5.3.3.1 Public Magnet Schools

3.5.3.3.2 Catholic Schools

3.5.3.3.3 Independent Schools

3.5.4 Resonance

3.5.4.1 Making Important Decisions

3.5.4.2 Building School Culture

3.6 Discussion

3.7 References

Chapter 4: Is Mission Statement Content Related to Student Achievement?

4.1 Overview

4.2 Background

4.2.1 Voucher Policies and Student Achievement

4.2.2 School Culture, Mission Statements, and Achievement

4.2.3 School Sector Differences in Mission Statements and Achievement

4.3 Hypotheses

4.4 Data

4.5 Measures
FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Number of students participating in school choice in Indiana 2009-2018. Source: Catt & Rhinesmith (2017), updated with recent data (Glander 2017; IDOE 2018a, 2018b). .................................................................18

Figure 2.2: Word cloud images of high probability words in each topic .................34

Figure 2.3: Topics and expected topic proportions for the entire corpus of statements...38

Figure 2.4: Regression plots for topics with few statistically significant differences by sector. Outcome is the expected proportion of the topic in mission statements .................................................................41

Figure 2.5: Regression plots for topics with the highest point estimates for public schools. Outcome is the expected proportion of the topic in mission statements .................................................................45

Figure 2.6: Regression plots for topics with the highest point estimates for charter schools. Outcome is the expected proportion of the topic in mission statements .................................................................47

Figure 2.7: Regression plots for topics with the highest point estimates for Catholic and other private schools. Outcome is the expected proportion of the topic in mission statements .................................................................49

Figure 2.8: Interaction effect of sector and year for Topic 14: Faith Formation. Results in green are for the Catholic sector, orange for other private, red for charter, and blue for public .................................................................52

Figure 2.9: Interaction effect of sector and year for Topic 15: Know Christ. Results in orange are for the other private sector, green for Catholic, red for charter, and blue for public .................................................................52

Figure 3.1: Example of mission statement in the present study coded into topic segments .................................................................85

Figure 3.2: Calculated familiarity measures by role and school ................................88
Figure 4.1: Topics and expected topic proportions in the entire corpus of statements....134

Figure 4.2: Word cloud graphic of high probability words generated by structural topic model for “Academic Success” topic…………………………………….135

Figure 4.3: Word cloud graphic of high probability words generated by structural topic model for “Achievement and Standards” topic…………………………..136

Figure 4.4: Word cloud graphic of high probability words generated by structural topic model for “Believe Students Can Learn” topic. .................................137

Figure 4.5: Word cloud graphic of high probability words generated by structural topic model for “Every Child” topic…………………………………………138
TABLES

Table 2.1: Descriptive Statistics for Analytic Sample of Statements.......................31
Table 2.2: Topic Model Solution (K=17).................................................................35
Table 2.3: Descriptive Statistics Related to Topics......................................................39
Table 2.4: Regression Estimates for Sector and Time (N=902).................................42
Table 2.5: Regression Estimates for Statistically Significant Interaction Effects
(N=902).......................................................................................................................53
Table 3.1: Sample of Schools.......................................................................................80
Table 3.2: Familiarity, Salience, and Resonance Compared by School and Sector.......90
Table 4.1: Previous Inductive Coding of Mission Statements.....................................123
Table 4.2: Topic Model Solution for Learning-Focused Topics.................................139
Table 4.3: Descriptive Comparison of Matched Analytical Sample of Low-Income
Voucher and Public School Students in Indiana......................................................144
Table 4.4: Replicated Effects of Indiana Voucher Program on Student Achievement
(W&B) Using the SEI Sample of Schools and Students...........................................149
Table 4.5: School Descriptive Information (N=534, 92.5% of SEI Schools)..............152
Table 4.6: Math Achievement Differences for Voucher Students Calculated in
Comparison to Matched Public School Peers.........................................................154
Table 4.7: ELA Achievement Differences for Voucher Students Calculated In
Comparison to Matched Public School Peers..........................................................155
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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

How schools are organized shapes opportunities for student learning and achievement (Bryk et al. 2010). When schools are organized around a shared mission, a set of educational priorities is thought to inform practice toward achieving the school’s goals. For this reason, school mission is often considered a key indicator of school improvement and serves as an important connection point for other elements in the school improvement process (Goldring and Berends 2009; Hallinan 2005). Within the school environment, to the extent that the school’s leaders and teachers share a common mission, they may be more likely to focus their policies, instruction, and interactions with stakeholders with the mission in mind, which can contribute to improved organizational conditions and result in greater student outcomes. Research on effective schools supports these ideas; when teachers hold personal goals similar to the organization and share common beliefs and values with their colleagues, these goals, beliefs, and values act as reinforcing norms for actions (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Rosenholtz 1985; Teddlie and Reynolds 2000).

While crafting a mission statement is a common practice in schools, we know little about how and when faculty, staff, and parents put these statements to use or whether these statements yield tangible effects. The school improvement literature suggests that a
common element effective schools share is a clear and focused school mission (Goldring and Berends 2009; Purkey and Smith 1983; Teddlie and Reynolds 2000). Articulating a school’s mission is thought to align members of a group toward a common purpose, to bring coherence to a group, to inspire commitment, to drive individual and group action, and to effect change (Newmann 2007), and nearly all accrediting agencies require schools to create a mission statement to summarize goals and objectives (Stemler, Bebell, and Sonnabend 2011). Despite the widespread nature of the practice, research-driven evidence surrounding the practice is scarce. What mission statements contain, how they are developed and used, how well they capture the underlying shared beliefs of teachers and principals, and the extent to which these shared ideas influence student achievement are open and under-studied questions.

From a sociological perspective, mission statements can be thought of as an expression of social solidarity for a school community. Social solidarity, with roots in the writings of Durkheim (1893/1984), Parsons (1937), and Sorokin (1947), can be conceptualized as human interactions “on the basis of some shared identity, interest, or beliefs” which can be directed toward the good of the individual and/or the wider community with the potential to motivate individual action in the best interests of the larger community (Smith and Sorrell 2014:236). To the degree that mission statements capture shared objectives of the collective community, including norms, values, and beliefs, they likely contribute to social cohesion in the school, the bonds that tie the group together. In this sense, mission statements have the potential to assist in developing a communal orientation within schools, which has been found to have multiple benefits for
both teachers and students, including higher levels of engagement and academic
achievement (Bryk and Driscoll 1988).

Within the sociology of education, mission statements are thought to capture the
norms, values, and beliefs shared by a school community (Hallinan 2005) and provide
one entree into understanding a school’s culture due to the widespread adoption of these
statements in the field and their availability as public statements. The concept of school
culture can be traced back to Waller’s (1932) discussion of rituals, ceremonies, and
values in schools. Although previous research has attempted to measure individuals’
perceptions of the aspects of the school environment, referred to as school climate, and
their links to achievement through a number of validated scales (Fraser 1998; Hoy 1990),
an explicit look at the culture of individual schools—the norms, values, and beliefs that
schools promote (Hallinan 2005; Hoy 1990; Van Houtte 2005)—is warranted in order to
better understand how the social context and organization of schools may be more or less
effective at promoting shared assumptions related to positive academic and non-cognitive
outcomes.

From a policy perspective, it is important to examine how increased schooling
options for families through state-funded school choice policies, has influenced the
mission of schools. As more diverse groups of students have the opportunity to attend
private schools, understanding how schools across sector represent and enact norms,
values, and beliefs is important information for families considering where to send their
children to school. These school communities in turn may be experiencing changes in
context and demographics as a result of choice policies as they are now able to enroll
students from a growing number of backgrounds (Austin and Berends 2018). Thus an
examination of the different types of schools is needed along with an understanding of how these schools may be changing in the presence of these policies as well as how students perform in these schools. School mission and mission statements provide opportunities to consider both internal and external pressures related to the enactment of choice as well as how they relate to the academic performance of students.

Indiana is an important site for school and educational sector research for several reasons. First, Indiana is home to the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program, which was instituted in 2011 and has become the largest and fastest-growing school voucher program in the U.S. (see Berends, Primus, and Springer forthcoming; Berends, Waddington, and Schoenig 2019). Open to both low- and middle-income families, over 35,000 students participated in the program during 2017-2018 using a voucher to attend private schools (Indiana Department of Education [IDOE] 2018). Indiana also has 95 public charter schools, designed to offer innovative and increased educational options for parents within the public school system, and more than 48,000 students attend public charter schools in Indiana (IDOE 2018; National Alliance for Public Charter Schools 2018). From a student achievement perspective, Indiana is unique because public and private schools administer the same standardized achievement test, allowing for direct comparison of student math and reading outcomes between school sectors.

In the set of papers presented in this dissertation, I provide a mixed method consideration of school mission, applying a range of research approaches—content analysis, qualitative interviews and focus groups, as well as statistical analysis—to investigate questions related to school mission, applying the respective method that can best answer the questions at hand. In addition, I have sought to use innovative methods
for analysis within these broad research approaches, each of which is described briefly below.

1.1.1 Content Analysis Study

In Chapter 2, I examine the content of mission statements prior to the enactment of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program and seven years later to consider how mission statement topics may be changing over time in the presence of choice policies. I use structural topic modeling (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2012), an unsupervised topic model based on a statistical model of language, to code a representative sample of mission statements in Indiana from two time points into topics or themes. I investigate differences in statements between school sectors, over time, and within sectors over time to consider how school choice policies may be influencing the content of mission statements.

These within state comparisons provide an exploratory and descriptive analysis of changes within Indiana and suggest that while there are significant differences in statement topics by sector, there are few changes over time and only two within sector changes during this period. The within sector changes are in religious themes for both the Catholic and other private sectors, which suggests that these schools may be clarifying or focusing the messaging related to the religious aspects of their schools in order to attract families interested in religious schooling and to be fully transparent about the religious nature of these schools for prospective parents.
1.1.2 Interview and Focus Group Study

Chapter 3 considers whether and how principals and teachers use mission in the school environment. I gathered data from 17 elementary and middle schools across school type and sector in one community, interviewing school leaders and holding focus groups with teachers. Within the focus group, I had teachers participate in a productive activity (McDonnell 2014) where they were asked to describe the school’s mission individually and as a group and then evaluate how well the mission statement captured the ideas they generated.

Using these interview and focus group data, I developed a measure of familiarity for each principal and focus group in order to examine variation in familiarity with mission across schools. Moving beyond familiarity, I analyzed the data in an abductive manner (Tavory and Timmermans 2014), looking for plausible reasons for mission familiarity as well as where the data were salient (Guhin 2016) and had opportunities for resonance (McDonnell 2014; McDonnell, Bail, and Tavory 2017), drawing on concepts from cultural sociology. I find that mission statements were familiar and salient within more than half of the schools, and schools leaders and teachers described moments of resonance for the mission statement in roughly one third of the schools in the sample.

Mission statements seemed to be most integral to schools where all three conditions were present, with the mission statement serving as an aspect of ongoing practice rather than a one-time or annual activity. From a school type and sector perspective, evidence from this study suggests that individuals in Catholic and independent schools demonstrate the highest familiarity with the mission statement, and that these schools are more likely to provide conditions for the mission statement to gain
salience and to be used in ways that offer opportunities for resonance. However, variation exists across sector, which suggests that school sector alone is not an indicator of whether or not a school can successfully implement mission-related practice.

1.1.3 Quantitative Study

In Chapter 4, I explore possible links between school mission statements and student achievement. Using mission statements from a state representative sample of schools in Indiana, I use measures of topic proportions within school mission statements calculated as part of the structural topic model presented in Chapter 2. I focus on four academic-focused topics—*academic success, achievement and standards, believe children can learn,* and *every child*—and test whether there is a relationship between having a high focus on one of these topics within the school mission statement and student achievement outcomes within the school. To do so, I analyze longitudinal student achievement data, using grade level fixed effects models to compare achievement outcomes for students who used a voucher to attend a private school with a matched sample of students who remained in public schools, a method of nonexperimental evaluation of voucher students employed by Waddington and Berends (2018).

I find that how academic-focused topics are expressed in mission statements has implications for student outcomes as two of the topics—*academic success* and *every child*—had a moderating or positive relationship with achievement outcomes in math and ELA for students using a voucher to attend a private school compared to their matched public school peers.

Through these three studies, this dissertation investigates different aspects of school mission using innovative methods and new data, bringing together research and
theory from the scholarly literature on schools as organizations, effective schools, school choice, and school sector differences, with the goal of better understanding the role of mission statements in schools and the potential for mission to motivate teacher commitment and improve student achievement.

1.2 References


CHAPTER 2:

DOES CHOICE CHANGE MISSION? EXAMINING SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENTS BETWEEN SECTOR AND OVER TIME IN INDIANA

2.1 Overview

Introducing market forces into the field of education has been one impetus behind the creation of school choice policies (Betts 2009; Chubb and Moe 1990; Friedman 1962; Hoxby 2001, 2002; Levin 2009). While scholars have considered how choice policies and competition affect student achievement (Belfield and Levin 2002; Jabbar et al. 2017), less attention has been paid to how these policies influence the mission and organization of schools (Austin and Berends 2018; Berends 2015; Berends et al. 2010). As these policies were designed in part with the intention of disrupting business as usual in education, it is important to understand which aspects of schools and schooling may be shifting and to what degree in order to provide some evaluation of these policies from an organization-focused rather than a student-focused perspective.

Different strands of organizational thought predict that schools may respond to competition in varying manners and degrees. Market theory would predict that competition might result in schools seeking to differentiate themselves from other schools in order to attract new students, seeking specialization or innovation to appeal to
market niches (Davies and Quirke 2007). However, schools exhibit a high degree of similarity in organization and structure, even across sector (Metz 1989), and organizational scholars have argued that the education field is subject to strong pressures that result in schools seeking to be like other schools in order to gain legitimacy and ensure the stability of the organization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). When exposed to external pressures such as increased competition, new institutional theory would suggest that the perceived need to be like other schools would result in organizational mimicry. A third perspective suggests that schools may wait to enact changes in organizational purpose and structure, demonstrating a form of structural inertia in an attempt to insulate the school from risk and maintain current relationships with stakeholders as they gather additional information regarding changes in the field in which they are embedded (Hannan and Freeman 1984).

One way to consider how organizations may be changing is to examine how schools describe their intents, purposes, and priorities: the school mission statement (Hallinan 2005). Individuals in the organization craft school mission statements for both external and internal audiences, including current and prospective families as well as teachers, staff, and students. These statements provide a public face for the school and may reflect both field and market forces when schools experience increased competition for students within a school choice environment.

To consider how schools are responding to changes in the policy landscape, this descriptive and exploratory study uses structural topic modeling to examine a large representative sample of school mission statements in Indiana, a state with an increasing number of parental choice policies. Understanding how schools in the various sectors
represent their organizational missions as well as whether and how these missions may be changing in the presence of school choice policies provides important contextual information for parents as they consider possible schools for their children and for policymakers as they evaluate changes in the educational landscape. As choice policies were implemented not only to increase educational opportunities for students but also to improve schools, understanding whether and how schools are responding to increased competition offers some sense of whether choice policies are having the desired effect on schools as organizations.

This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, it takes advantage of structural topic modeling, one of a number of innovative text analysis methods, to assist in the systematic coding of a large sample of school mission statements. Second, it considers ways in which competition may be influencing the mission, purpose, and organization of schools, and third, it provides a case to examine the extent to which different organizational theories predict behavior in a field with new and increased market pressures.

2.2 Background

2.2.1 School Mission Statements

Creating a school mission statement, a strategic planning tool originating in the corporate sector (Braun et al. 2012; Drucker 1974), has reached near complete adoption as a practice within the educational field in part as a result of school accreditation requirements (AdvanceEd 2018; Stemler, Bebell, and Sonnabend 2011). These statements are developed by school leaders, often with the input of teachers and other
community stakeholders, for both external and internal audiences. School mission statements are thought to guide the actions of school personnel and provide current and prospective families with the stated aims of the organization, similar to corporate and non-profit mission statements in other fields.

Critics of mission statements question how well the content of mission statements represent the practice and performance of organizations and find mission statements to be overly general statements (Khalifa 2011). However, research by Weiss and Piderit (1999) that examines school performance pre- and post-adoption of the practice in Michigan suggests that mission statements are heterogeneous, offering insight into how leaders understand the organizational goals of the school, and are fluid, open to both interpretation and to revision. Based on their sample of mission statements from across the U.S., Stemler et al. (2011) argue that school mission statements are a valuable source of empirical data related to organizational purposes that can be reliably coded and illustrate systematic differences related to local context. Researching mission statements in Pennsylvania, Schafft and Biddle (2013) support the use of mission statements as empirical data but find less evidence that mission statements are unique to local context, instead finding statements to be rhetorically similar with evidence of borrowed ideas and representations of state-wide institutional discourse and debate. Taken together, these studies suggest that while sufficient variation exists among mission statements to provide fruitful study, these school documents may be susceptible to a diffusion of ideas and attitudes within a local area and thus likely subject to changes in state and local policy.
2.2.2 School Sector Differences in Mission

Although previous research has focused primarily on traditional public (Schafft and Biddle 2013; Slate et al. 2008; Stemler et al. 2011; Weiss and Piderit 1999) and charter school mission statements (Lubienski and Lee 2016; Renzulli, Barr and Paino 2015), including mission statements of other sector schools provides opportunities for understanding how the purposes of schooling vary across the wider educational field, particularly within an environment of increased schooling options. Mission statements often represent the organization’s reasons for existence (Braun et al. 2012), and charter, religious, and private schools may use the mission statement to distinguish themselves from the considerably larger number of traditional public schools. Charter, private, and religious schools are also characterized by greater autonomy and local governance and may have the ability to more closely link what goes on in schools to their mission statement (Bryk, Lee and Holland 1993; Levin 2009; Wong and Klopott 2009).

Public school mission statements have been previously coded using inductive strategies, resulting in between 9 to 15 fairly consistent topics (Slate et al., 2008; Stemler et al. 2011; Weiss and Piderit 1999). These topics generally include cognitive/academic development, social development, emotional development, civic development, physical development, vocational preparation, integration into the local and global community, and providing a safe/nurturing environment and a challenging environment (Stemler et al. 2011). These topics reflect the broad and general goals of public schooling, which focus on developing different aspects of the student, the learning environment, and preparing students for life beyond schooling.
Less research has been done on charter school mission statements, but some research finds both generalist as well as specialist missions present in this sector. Although generalist missions resemble those of the public sector, specialist missions detail a specific curriculum, thematic focus, or intended population (Renzulli et al. 2015). Other research suggests that charter schools share many themes with public schools but demonstrate a greater focus on cognitive and academic development with less of a focus on civic development (Lubienski and Lee 2016; Stemler and Bebell 2012).

The Catholic school sector has long held a reputation for high academic standards, student discipline, and religious formation among parents (Bryk et al. 1993; Cheng, Trivitt, and Wolf 2016; Hallinan 2005; Trivitt and Wolf 2011) and has served as an alternative to public schools for religious and academic purposes for families with the means to afford tuition (Bryk et al. 1993; Walch 1996). The largest and oldest system of private schools in the U.S., Catholic schools currently educate 36.2% of private school students nationally (U.S. Department of Education 2017). However, the sector has experienced enrollment losses and school closures in recent decades (MacGregor 2012) as tuition rates have increased and charter schools have entered the educational landscape, creating direct competition as a tuition-free alternative to the traditional public system (Lackman 2012; Ladner 2007; Waddington 2012). Catholic schools have historically focused on two main goals—strong academic preparation and religious formation (Bryk et al. 1993; Hallinan 2005; Sikkink 2012)—although some research suggests that tension exists between these two areas in some school communities, particularly with regard to which is of higher priority (Fuller and Johnson 2013). Limited examination of religious school mission statements suggests that religious schools often
include a religious or spiritual element within the mission statement (Boerema 2006; Stemler and Bebell 2012). Less work has focused on how private and religious sector school mission statements differ in content beyond this general aspect, but one study suggests that private school mission statements reflect the needs of the founding community which may be “faith based, class based, or special interest” (Boerema 2006:199).

2.2.3 School Choice Policies in Indiana

Over the past two decades, Indiana has adopted several educational choice policies that serve an increasing number of students (see Figure 2.1). Within the public sector, Indiana has voluntary inter-district choice, and school districts have the option to allow students from other districts to attend their schools. Within Indianapolis, both inter-district and intra-district choice—the ability to transfer to a public school other than the assigned district school—is mandatory (Education Commission of the States 2017). A public charter school law was passed in 2001 and while the number of charter schools was initially capped on a per annum basis, the law has expanded since 2005 to remove caps and to increase the number of charter authorizers within the state. With these changes, several school choice and charter organizations rate Indiana’s charter law as “strong” and rank the state highly compared to other states with charter laws (Center for Education Reform 2017; National Alliance for Public Charter Schools [NAPCS] 2018; National Association of Charter School Authorizers 2016). The Indiana charter sector has grown from 11 schools in 2002 to 95 schools in 2016-17 and currently serves over 48,000 students (Indiana Department of Education [IDOE] 2018a; NAPCS 2017).
Indiana also provides options for qualifying students to attend private schools using state funds. In 2011, Indiana adopted a voucher program, the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program, based on family income and eligibility requirements with increasing pathways for student eligibility over time. The program, which began in the 2011-12 school year, currently serves both low- and middle-income students and has provided over 35,000 students a voucher to attend one of 318 participating private schools in 2017-18 (IDOE 2018a). Indiana also supports a tax credit scholarship program, which allows individuals and corporations to contribute to state-approved scholarship-granting organizations (SGOs) that provide private school scholarships to low-income students.
students. This program distributed over 9,000 scholarships to students in 2016-17 (IDOE 2018b). Contributors to these SGOs are able to claim a 50% state income tax credit for these contributions (EdChoice 2017).

Figure 2.1 details the increasing number of students taking advantage of the different school choice options in Indiana since 2009 (Catt and Rhinesmith 2017; Glander 2017; IDOE 2018a, 2018b). The number of students using some form of public or private school choice has more than tripled since 2009, from just over 30,000 to over 100,000 in 2017-18, serving roughly 10% of K-12 students in Indiana (IDOE 2018a). These numbers do not include students exercising choice options through inter- and intra-district public school transfer programs beyond magnet schools so underestimate the number of students who do not attend their assigned public school in Indiana to a certain degree.

2.2.4 Impacts of Choice on Schools as Organizations

The different sector schools all exist within local ecologies of schooling and while competition may have existed between private and public schools previously, the increasing choice options—including the availability of tuition vouchers and tax-credit scholarships for use at private schools along with growth in the charter sector—may result in heightened competition for students between schools and sectors. As some research on mission statements suggests that mission statement contents are rhetorically similar and subject to within-state educational discourse and debate, the examination of statements before and after an expansion of state-funded educational choice options provides an important look at how schools and their missions may shift in the presence of these policies. In addition, this provides a case in which to weigh different macro
perspectives of organizational theory that “make conflicting predictions or offer competing explanations for an organizational phenomenon” against each other, which some argue is needed within the current state of organizational theory (McKinley and Mone 2003:365).

Organizational theories suggest that schools may follow one of three paths when faced with increasing competition within the field. Market theory suggests school communities may attempt to differentiate themselves through changes in school mission statement content or organization in order to compete and attract new students, whereas new institutional theory related to organizational similarities (i.e., isomorphism) within the field suggests schools may try to align what they do with other schools in an effort to seek legitimacy and stability. Ideas related to structural inertia, however, suggest that many schools may remain relatively unaffected and continue business as usual. The next sections consider each of these theoretical possibilities in turn.

2.2.4.1 Market Competition

School choice policies in the form of charter schools and state-funded vouchers to attend private schools have been pursued with the idea that these policies will introduce market forces into the educational field through greater competition for students, and in doing so, will foster innovation in schools and increase student achievement across all schools (Betts 2005; Chubb and Moe 1990; Friedman 1962; Hoxby 2001; Levin 2009; Walberg and Bast 2003). Many school choice proponents have argued that in order to survive within a market, schools will have to offer what parents want. The market environment promotes this match between parent interests and school offerings because
under school choice policies, more parents have the ability to express preferences by switching schools. If schools are unsuccessful in attracting and retaining a certain number of students, they will not receive adequate funding for operational costs and thus will be motivated to consider different ways of educating students in order to stay relevant within the market (Betts 2009; Hoxby 2001).

Private schools are thought to have an advantage in that they have greater autonomy to create and adhere to organizational goals. Private school governance and authority structures allow private schools to be more focused and to appeal to market niches (Davies and Quirke 2007). In contrast, public schools are subject to an overwhelming and growing list of goals imposed on them as a result of their existence as a democratic institution. In other words, public schools have to be all things to all people, which can result in a less coherent set of goals that tend to be “weak and watered down” (Chubb and Moe 1990:54).

Evidence of change in a direction of differentiation or innovation within a mission statement would suggest that choice is resulting in active competition for students among schools, at least from a marketing standpoint. We would expect that when additional choice options and competition are introduced in an educational market, schools will innovate in some fashion in order to compete and distinguish themselves from other market players. As mission statements are typically written for both external and internal audiences, market theory changes should be reflected in mission statement topics that directly reflect innovation or an appeal to market niches, such as curricular or instructional specialization (e.g., STEM or fine arts academies or problem-based learning or inquiry).
Charter schools, free from bureaucratic restraints, may continue to focus on innovation or specialization in their mission statements over time as these characteristics set them apart from the traditional public system. Similarly, Catholic and other private religious schools may seek to emphasize their defining characteristic—a religious educational environment—in order to continue to fill a market niche (Davies and Quirke 2007). Previous research suggests that a considerable subset of parents value and seek out a religious education for their children (Cheng et al. 2016; Levin forthcoming; Trivitt and Wolf 2011), and religious schools may choose to capitalize on this brand within an environment of heightened choice. Traditional public schools may seek to appeal to aspects of these market niches, particularly those related to innovation or seek to differentiate in other manners, by adopting a curricular focus or providing unique programmatic offerings.

2.2.4.2 Institutional Isomorphism

Some organizational theory, however, would suggest that competition might have the opposite effect on schools. Education is considered a highly structured organizational field, subject to strong constraining pressures that result in individual schools looking strikingly similar to other schools in the same environment, a phenomenon that has been described as institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). Uncertainty within the educational field leads to “homogeneity in structure, culture, and output” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983:147), and in search of both legitimacy and stability, schools model themselves after other schools that they perceive to be successful. These tendencies toward isomorphism are thought to be greater under specific
circumstances. Situations in which a single source of income funds an organization, the extent to which the organization has transactions and involvement with the state/government, and when fewer visibly different models of the organization exist within a field provide specific pressures that may make organizations more likely to mimic others in their field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Each of these conditions exert pressure on schools under school choice policies.

External pressures in the form of choice policies provide an additional level of uncertainty, as different types of schools are able to more directly compete for operating funds from state governments through voucher and charter programs tied to student enrollment. As school enrollments shift in the choice environment, with funds tied to student numbers, changes in enrollment—and in turn the financial stability of the organization—may place pressures on schools to model what they do based on what successful schools do. These ideas suggest that rather than competition encouraging schools to differentiate, it may have the opposite effect, leading schools across sectors to become more similar over time when faced with uncertainty (Lubienski 2003; Preston et al. 2012).

As the traditional public school sector is the largest and perhaps most stable sector, educating roughly 88% of the student population in Indiana (IDOE 2018a), we may find that the smaller private and charter sectors may mimic public schools, the major player within the field. Previous research suggests that charter school mission statements have moved from more specific to more general over time (Renzulli et al. 2015), which suggests that we may find some evidence of this as charter schools mature and adapt to their environments. Private and Catholic schools, with the newfound ability to access and
receive public funds for students may seek to become more like the public sector, potentially downplaying the religious aspects of their mission in an attempt to appeal to a larger audience. With new competition for state funding based on a per pupil basis and under the potential threat of a decreasing operating budget, public schools may begin to focus their own statements, reducing or refining the content to be more like private and charter schools.

2.2.4.3 Structural Inertia

Another thread of study within the organizational literature suggests that organizations may respond relatively slowly to changes in the field. As consumers value reliability over efficiency, there may be good reasons for schools to continue business as usual, following through with existing routines and holding fast to core features in a form of structural inertia (Hannan and Freeman 1984). Change creates instability and may introduce greater risks for schools that already feel threatened from changes in the environment. The ability to change is thought to be a factor of the size and age of the organization, with large and established organizations thought to be less likely to make radical changes. Small and younger organizations are more likely to attempt change, but are also at greater risk if these attempts should fail. In addition, organizations with high reproducibility (i.e., organizations that are part of systems, such as schools) are thought to be highly resistant to change as making substantive shifts in areas such as mission compromises their identity as part of the system (Hannan and Freeman 1984).

The absence of change in school mission statement topics in this study would suggest that the external face of schools has not changed in response to the pressures of
increased competition introduced by choice policies. This may manifest itself in different ways in each sector. Public schools, as members of larger districts, may be the least likely to change their mission in specific or focused ways without bureaucratic support. Similarly, to the extent that religious schools are part of a system of schools with high uniformity and reproducibility—such as Catholic schools—these schools may be less likely to take on major changes in mission as a result of competition. Catholic schools are also tied to the Catholic Church, whose mission and structure almost never undergo revision. Private and religious schools that are not tied to larger institutions or systems may be the most likely to embrace changes in mission, but these institutions are subject to the greatest measure of risk in this endeavor. If school leaders misread the environment as they make changes, a mismatch between parent desires and school offerings may force schools to close as a result of low levels of student enrollment. Charter schools, as new schools established in response to legislation and for intentional reasons such as innovation, may also be unlikely to change their missions. These schools are currently in the phase of the organizational life cycle when they are building connections and trust with stakeholders and structural changes could threaten these young relationships.

2.3 Data and Methods

To understand how school mission changed during this time of increased options for schooling, I collected mission statements from schools at two time points: prior to the adoption of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program during the years 2009 to 2011 and the most recent school year 2016-17. Mission statements were collected from a representative sample of 575 public and private schools in the state of Indiana in
conjunction with the larger School Effectiveness in Indiana (SEI) study that seeks to better understand organizational and instructional conditions in an environment of school choice (Berends and Waddington 2015). The sample was drawn from all schools in Indiana serving grades K-8 in some configuration, which administer the state standardized test (I-STEP). The sample was stratified on the basis of region, urban locale, school level, and socioeconomic status, and private schools were also stratified by religious affiliation, either Catholic or other (nonsectarian and other religious).

A follow-up survey was sent via email to the principals of these schools during late spring and summer of 2017 to gather information regarding current and previous school mission statements since 2009. The response rate for this survey was 64%, but responses related to archival mission statements at the first time point (i.e., prior to the adoption of the voucher program) were lower as changes in school leadership in many schools meant this data was unavailable to current school leaders.

In an attempt to create a more complete dataset, Internet searches of school websites were used to locate current school mission statements from non-respondent schools. School mission statements are often publicly available and located on the front page of the school website, on an “About the school” page, or within a school handbook posted to the website for parents and students. To locate mission statements at the first time point, the Internet archive (http://archive.org) was used to search school webpages from the years 2009 to 2011. This independent, non-profit website provides a searchable digital library of millions of Internet sites over time and provides screenshots of websites as well as the dates in which they were captured.
The resulting combined dataset of survey responses and web-collected statements yielded 902 mission statements from 547 schools (95.1% of the original sample of 575 schools), with mission statements available at two time points for 357 schools (62.0% of the original sample). Of the schools included at both time points, 58% of schools had revised or rewritten their mission statement over this time period.

I conducted supplemental analyses that suggest the missing data here are primarily a result of the inability to retrieve mission statements at time point 1 and are not driven by the other covariates in the model. The missing data is the result of not being able to locate the mission statement from either the school survey or the Internet archive. There are also a small number of charter schools (fewer than 8) that were established between the two time points and for whom a mission statement at time point 1 does not exist. While it would be ideal to include a matched sample of mission statements at both time points, excluding schools without mission statements at time point 1 would have eliminated information from more than 200 schools and would have resulted in a sample that was no longer representative of schools in the state. As the focus of the analysis is not on change in individual schools but rather changes between and within sector over time, I chose to include as many mission statements and schools as possible from these two time points in order to more fully consider statement trends over this period.

Mission statement texts were merged with school context and composition information from school administrative data publicly available from the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE, https://compass.doe.in.gov), including size of school, racial/ethnic composition of school, socioeconomic composition of school, aggregate academic achievement, and location of school. For the pre-voucher measures, publicly
available IDOE data from academic year 2009-10 were merged with publicly available data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Survey 2009-10 and Common Core of Data 2009-10 to create a more complete dataset. For the 2016-17 school context measures, principal-reported school administrative data from the SEI principal survey were merged with IDOE data from academic year 2016-17 to fill in missing values.

2.3.1 Structural Topic Modeling

The content of school mission statements has been inductively coded in recent research, resulting in nearly a dozen consistent themes (Lubienski and Lee 2016; Stemler et al. 2011; Weiss and Piderit 1999). A large state representative sample of mission statements at two time points along with recent advances in automated coding techniques provides an opportunity to use a different method—topic modeling—to surface hidden or latent themes that may have been overlooked in previous analysis (Bail 2014; Ignatow and Mihalcea 2017; Mutzel 2015).

Topic modeling can be conducted using a growing number of automated coding techniques. What these techniques have in common is that they consider text documents as a “bag of words,” essentially ignoring punctuation, word order, and a list of commonly used words (e.g., and, or, the) in order to create a cluster of topics. In probabilistic topic models, the likelihood that a topic—understood as a co-occurrence of words—will be present in a document is also calculated (Blei 2012; Ignatow and Mihalcea 2017; Mohr and Bogdanov 2013). The topics the model identifies offer “relationality of meaning” within the text capturing the embedded nature of topics within the larger collection of words (DiMaggio, Nag, and Blei 2013:571).
Topic modeling is both a qualitative and quantitative endeavor. While the topic model itself is an unsupervised, automated process based on a statistical model of language, the output of the model is informed and interpreted by the researcher’s knowledge of the area of study. Rather than remove this substantive interpretive element, topic modeling merely adjusts the order, shifting the qualitative analysis to a later point in the analytical process (Mutzel 2015).

Of the available topic models, I chose to use structural topic modeling (STM; Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2012) for this analysis. STM is an unsupervised model that estimates a specified number of topics \((k)\) present within a collection of texts, using data within a set of covariates to help determine the structure of topics. STM, like other topic models, defines document-specific distributions over words from which a word’s topic assignment is based and allows for a document to be associated with more than one topic (Roberts et al. 2012). I chose to use STM for analysis as it enabled me to include school-level covariates, such as school sector, time, school size, and school aggregate academic achievement among other school context information, within the discovery of topics and to then estimate differences in topics using these covariates.

2.3.2 Model Decisions and Data Analysis

To prepare the text for analysis, I removed the term “mission” as well as school names, locations, and communities manually. Then I used a series of automated cleaning processes within the STM package in R (Roberts et al. 2012) to remove punctuation, low frequency words, high frequency words, and common English prepositions and pronouns, also known as stop words. The program also stems words, reducing them to their root
forms for analysis (e.g., “change” became “chang” in order to capture the words change, changes, changed, changing).

I then specified the structural topic model to include a set of school context variables that had the potential to impact the mission of a school. School sector and year serve as the main covariates of interest, with sector defined as one of four categories—traditional public, charter, Catholic, and other private—and year defined as the two time points in the analysis—pre-voucher (2009-10) and current (2016-2017). Additional covariates include school size, school level, school location, percent of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch (FRL), percent of students from race/ethnic minority groups, and percent of students passing both reading and math on the ISTEP+ standardized test (see Table 2.1 for descriptive statistics and variable coding).
TABLE 2.1

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR ANALYTIC SAMPLE OF STATEMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Full Sample</th>
<th>Pre-Voucher 2009-10</th>
<th>Pre-Voucher 2016-17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pr/mean (SD)</td>
<td>pr/mean (SD)</td>
<td>pr/mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sector</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>.217</td>
<td>.226</td>
<td>.212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Private</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Public</td>
<td>.633</td>
<td>.674</td>
<td>.605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-300</td>
<td>.325</td>
<td>.291</td>
<td>.348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301-500</td>
<td>.351</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501+</td>
<td>.324</td>
<td>.356</td>
<td>.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td>.478</td>
<td>.440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary/Middle</td>
<td>.279</td>
<td>.272</td>
<td>.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>.172</td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/High</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td>.214</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>.215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburb</td>
<td>.332</td>
<td>.337</td>
<td>.328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>.269</td>
<td>.261</td>
<td>.275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent FRL</strong></td>
<td>.405 (.255)</td>
<td>.350 (.239)</td>
<td>.443 (.259)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent Minority</strong></td>
<td>.246 (.250)</td>
<td>.206 (.219)</td>
<td>.273 (.267)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent Passing ISTEP+</strong></td>
<td>.624 (.189)</td>
<td>.745 (.128)</td>
<td>.540 (.180)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N (Statements)</strong></td>
<td>902</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>534</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The analysis includes 902 mission statements from 547 of the 575 SEI sample schools (95.1%). Statements at two time points are included for 357 schools (62.0%).
Next, I ran the model with different numbers of user-specified $k$ topics in an iterative fashion informed by previous work on mission statements. As hand coding of mission statements determined nearly a dozen consistent topics in recent research (Lubienski and Lee 2016; Stemler et al. 2011; Weiss and Piderit 1999), I ran the model for values of $k$ between 6 and 20. Each model returned the specified number of topics in the form of high probability words and high frequency words. For each value $k$, I noted overlapping topics, looking for topics that seemed repetitive or that should be condensed with other topics. I continued in this manner for each level of $k$ in decreasing order until I noted distinctive topics that were being subsumed into more general topics and therefore lost to analysis. To assist in this process, I created a spreadsheet with a column for the topics for each value $k$ in descending order. Within this column, I listed the topic output, keeping common or similar topics within the same row across values of $k$ to provide a visual of when topics disappeared or appeared. Using this tool, I chose the optimal value $k$ based on topic content, selecting the model $k=17$ as it provided the greatest breadth of intuitive topics with the least overlap of words and ideas (Ignatow and Mihalcea 2017; Mutzel 2015; Steyvers and Griffiths 2007).

I then verified the choice of $k=17$ both qualitatively and quantitatively. First, I examined word clouds of high probability words for each topic (see Figure 2.2 and Table 2.2) and read through 25 mission statements associated with each topic in order to verify the consistency of ideas within topics and to devise a descriptive label for each topic. Next, I examined fit statistics for each model based on semantic coherence and exclusivity values produced by the model. Using these complementary quantitative and
qualitative checks, I determined $k=17$ to be the optimal model with the most intuitive topic output among the models $k=15\ldots20$. 
Figure 2.2: Word cloud images of high probability words in each topic
## TABLE 2.2

**TOPIC MODEL SOLUTION (K=17)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Top words (by FREX score)</th>
<th>Example Mission Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Christ-Centered</td>
<td>christ, biblic, christ-</td>
<td>“… is dedicated to preparing the next generation to serve the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cent, center, equip,</td>
<td>Lord Jesus Christ by providing an education built upon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lord, discipleship</td>
<td>biblical truth and marked by excellence.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Change World</td>
<td>chang, world, make,</td>
<td>“… dedicated to quality education and committed to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cultiv, ever, appreci,</td>
<td>developing lifelong learners who value themselves, contribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>impact</td>
<td>to their community and succeed in a changing world.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Every Child</td>
<td>everi, charact, day,</td>
<td>“… in partnership with all stakeholders, supports every</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>knowledge, child,</td>
<td>student in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>skill, necessari</td>
<td>necessary to reach their full potential.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Aspects of Development</td>
<td>social, emot, physic,</td>
<td>“… to meet the intellectual, creative, emotional, physical, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>intellect, growth,</td>
<td>social needs of all students. Everyone is committed to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>foster, activ</td>
<td>developing students to their fullest potential.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Working Together</td>
<td>staff, work, togeth,</td>
<td>“… faculty, support staff, parents, and community is to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>parent, teacher,</td>
<td>provide a safe and caring environment rich in academic and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>meaning, support</td>
<td>technological curriculum in which all students learn.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Develop Thinkers</td>
<td>think, creative, critic,</td>
<td>“… to develop each student’s ability to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>commun, citizenship,</td>
<td>effectively, read independently, solve problems, and to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>respect, accept</td>
<td>demonstrate responsibility for their own learning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Full Potential</td>
<td>empow, reach, potenti,</td>
<td>“… provide a positive, safe, and nurturing environment where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>full, experi, nurture,</td>
<td>students are empowered to take an active role in their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>educ</td>
<td>education and to reach their potential.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Life Skills</td>
<td>order, life, offer,</td>
<td>“… to provide a safe environment which emphasizes academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>stakehold, assess,</td>
<td>achievements, life skills, and responsible behavior in order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>fulfill, express</td>
<td>to prepare our students to be successful in school and beyond.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Safe Environment</td>
<td>care, inspir, environ,</td>
<td>“… is committed to providing a safe and caring environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>individu, creat,</td>
<td>where all children will want to learn.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Responsible Citizen</td>
<td>becom, citizen, learner,</td>
<td>“… as a family, community, and school partnership, is to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>product, respons,</td>
<td>ensure that each student becomes a self-directed learner and a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>societi, lifelong</td>
<td>contributing responsible citizen through an instructional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>delivery system that engages students in achieving their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>personal best.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Believe Students Can Learn</td>
<td>believ, way, appropri,</td>
<td>“We believe all student deserve a safe, respectful, positive,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>deserv, purpos, improv,</td>
<td>and caring environment to realize their full potential socially,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>process</td>
<td>physically, and academically.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>cathol, tradit, spiritu,</td>
<td>“… is an educational ministry of … and exists to provide all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>church, moral, grade,</td>
<td>students from preschool through eighth grade an exceptional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>valu</td>
<td>education in a supportive atmosphere based on Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>values and tradition.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>divers, success, cultur,</td>
<td>“… to develop socially responsible students who are literate,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>recog, within, enhance,</td>
<td>academically successful, engaged in all aspects of their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>core</td>
<td>education and prepared for success in the 21st century.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2.2 (CONTINUED)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Top words (by FREX score)</th>
<th>Example Mission Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Faith Formation</td>
<td>faith, form, parish, famili, format, holi, spirit</td>
<td>“In a nurturing environment and through the cooperative effort of families, teachers, and parish community, all children at … will develop a sound foundation of Catholic faith along with an excellent base of knowledge that prepares them to be lifelong learners.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Know Christ</td>
<td>christian, god, jesus, love, whole, children, teach</td>
<td>“… to provide, in partnership with parents, a Christian Education which guides children to know Jesus as their Savior through God Word, and to strive for academic excellence in a life of service to Him.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Achievement &amp; Standards</td>
<td>high, nation, perform, college, level, state, readi</td>
<td>“… is committed to the total education of children as measured by their ability to master and exceed district, state, and national standards. A system of differentiation including remediation and acceleration will be used to meet the needs of individual students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Prepare Leaders</td>
<td>ever-chang, prepar, guid, strong, challenge, leadership, healthi</td>
<td>“… shall become a world class model for high performance urban schools preparing all students for academic success and leadership roles in a global society.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I then examined regressions for each topic where the outcome is the expected proportion of the topic within the mission statement. Regressions were run for each of the 17 topics, first by sector to examine differences in topic prevalence between sector, and then separately by year to examine differences between topic prevalence in the entire corpus at the two time points. I ran a separate STM model that included an interaction between sector and year to determine differences within sectors over the two time points for each of the 17 topics to consider within sector changes to mission statements over time.
2.4 Results

2.4.1 Summary of Topics

The 17 topics (see Figure 2.3 for complete list of topics and Table 2.3 for descriptive statistics related to topics) delineated by the structural topic model were similar to topics traditionally coded in mission statements but with some notable differences. First, the structural topic model provided greater topic specificity, breaking apart three threads that are usually grouped into one large category in manual coding. Rather than one broad cognitive development topic, the structural topic model identified three distinct topics—develop thinkers, academic success, and achievement and standards. Similarly, three distinct topics—change world, responsible citizen, and prepare leaders—were identified that are usually coded together under future or civic outcomes. Four distinct topics also emerged related to religious outcomes of schooling—Christ-centered, Catholic, faith formation, and know Christ.
Figure 2.3: Topics and expected topic proportions for the entire corpus of statements.
## TABLE 2.3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS RELATED TO TOPICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Description</th>
<th>Full Sample Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Pre-Voucher 2009-10 Mean (SD)</th>
<th>2016-17 Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic 1: Christ-Centered</td>
<td>0.053 (.136)</td>
<td>0.036 (.110)</td>
<td>0.064 (.151)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 2: Change World</td>
<td>0.041 (.100)</td>
<td>0.033 (.090)</td>
<td>0.047 (.106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 3: Every Child</td>
<td>0.051 (.099)</td>
<td>0.042 (.083)</td>
<td>0.057 (.109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 4: Aspects of Development</td>
<td>0.065 (.084)</td>
<td>0.072 (.090)</td>
<td>0.059 (.079)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 5: Working Together</td>
<td>0.080 (.120)</td>
<td>0.096 (.131)</td>
<td>0.069 (.112)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 6: Develop Thinkers</td>
<td>0.043 (.083)</td>
<td>0.050 (.090)</td>
<td>0.038 (.077)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 7: Full Potential</td>
<td>0.071 (.098)</td>
<td>0.066 (.091)</td>
<td>0.074 (.102)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 8: Life Skills</td>
<td>0.041 (.105)</td>
<td>0.044 (.119)</td>
<td>0.039 (.093)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 9: Safe Environment</td>
<td>0.107 (.105)</td>
<td>0.114 (.110)</td>
<td>0.102 (.100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 10: Responsible Citizen</td>
<td>0.118 (.143)</td>
<td>0.134 (.141)</td>
<td>0.108 (.144)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 11: Believe Students Can Learn</td>
<td>0.033 (.095)</td>
<td>0.038 (.100)</td>
<td>0.030 (.091)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 12: Catholic</td>
<td>0.058 (.122)</td>
<td>0.050 (.118)</td>
<td>0.063 (.125)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 13: Academic Success</td>
<td>0.059 (.091)</td>
<td>0.062 (.101)</td>
<td>0.057 (.083)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 14: Faith Formation</td>
<td>0.058 (.132)</td>
<td>0.049 (.124)</td>
<td>0.064 (.136)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 15: Know Christ</td>
<td>0.057 (.120)</td>
<td>0.057 (.125)</td>
<td>0.057 (.116)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 16: Achievement &amp; Standards</td>
<td>0.047 (.117)</td>
<td>0.035 (.096)</td>
<td>0.055 (.129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 17: Prepare Leaders</td>
<td>0.021 (.055)</td>
<td>0.024 (.057)</td>
<td>0.020 (.054)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N (Statements) 902 368 534
Second, the topic model collapsed some topics previously coded as separate topics. Many mission statements list the specific domains of development—academic, social, emotional, physical—and researchers have coded these as distinct elements in previous studies. The topic model, however, searching for co-occurrences of words as topics, identified a single topic that included all of these disparate domains. Further inspection of the mission statement text confirmed that these domains are nearly always used together and in list format, suggesting that these words can be grouped under one topic, here labeled *aspects of development*, reflecting a holistic effort to educate the whole child.

2.4.2 Comparisons by Sector

Separate linear regressions with school sector as the independent variable and the expected proportion of a topic as the outcome demonstrate both similarities and differences between the sectors. Mission statements do not differ significantly on the expected proportion of the statement that likely contains the topic *aspects of development*. Three of the four sectors—traditional public, charter, and Catholic—had similar proportions of the topics *academic success* and *safe learning environment*. For other private schools the proportions of these topics within mission statements are significantly lower. Traditional public, charter, and other private schools reference a *changing world* at similar proportions, with Catholic schools including this topic in smaller proportions (see Figure 2.4 and Table 2.4 for sector and time regression estimates).
Figure 2.4: Regression plots for topics with few statistically significant differences by sector. Outcome is the expected proportion of the topic in mission statements.
<p>| TABLE 2.4 |
| REGRESSION ESTIMATES FOR SECTOR AND TIME (N=902) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Christ-Centered</th>
<th>2 Change World</th>
<th>3 Every Child</th>
<th>4 Aspects of Development</th>
<th>5 Working Together</th>
<th>6 Develop Thinkers</th>
<th>7 Full Potential</th>
<th>8 Life Skills</th>
<th>9 Safe Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SECTOR</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.06***</td>
<td>-0.03***</td>
<td>-0.04***</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.10***</td>
<td>-0.05***</td>
<td>-0.06***</td>
<td>-0.05***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.00)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter</td>
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<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.06*</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.11***</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
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<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
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<td>Other Private</td>
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<td>-0.10***</td>
<td>-0.06***</td>
<td>-0.05***</td>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept (Public)</td>
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<td>0.07***</td>
<td>0.07***</td>
<td>0.11***</td>
<td>0.07***</td>
<td>0.09***</td>
<td>0.07***</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>0.03*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.03*</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>(0.01)</td>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept (Pre-Voucher)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.04*</td>
<td>0.08***</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
<td>0.07***</td>
<td>0.06***</td>
<td>-0.06***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.02)</td>
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<td>----</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible Citizen</td>
<td>Believe Students Can Learn</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>Faith Formation</td>
<td>Know Christ</td>
<td>Achievement &amp; Standards</td>
<td>Prepare Leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>-0.09***</td>
<td>-0.03*</td>
<td>0.19***</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.20***</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
<td>-0.07***</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>-0.11***</td>
<td>-0.05*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td>0.10***</td>
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<tr>
<td>(0.03)</td>
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<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Private</td>
<td>-0.12***</td>
<td>-0.05***</td>
<td>0.09***</td>
<td>-0.04***</td>
<td>0.09***</td>
<td>0.21***</td>
<td>-0.05***</td>
<td>-0.01*</td>
</tr>
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<td>(0.02)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept (Public)</td>
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<td>0.07***</td>
<td>0.02***</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
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<td>(0.02)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Results from separate regressions of single covariates predicting topic proportions. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001 (two-tailed tests)
Traditional public school mission statements have the highest proportions of the statement referencing the topics of forming *responsible citizens*, community *working together*, and *believing all students can learn*, with significant differences between public schools and the other sectors. Public schools also have the highest proportions of the topics *develop thinkers* and provide *life skills*, but these estimates are not significantly different than for the charter sector (see Figure 2.5 and Table 2.4).
Figure 2.5: Regression plots for topics with the highest point estimates for public schools. Outcome is the expected proportion of the topic in mission statements.
Charter school mission statements are more likely to contain topics related to *achievement and standards* and *preparing leaders* with significant differences between charter schools and the other sectors. Charter schools have the highest proportions of the topics meeting the needs of *every child* and helping students reach their *full potential*, but these estimates are not significantly different than the traditional public sector (see Figure 2.6 and Table 2.4).
Figure 2.6: Regression plots for topics with the highest point estimates for charter schools. Outcome is the expected proportion of the topic in mission statements.
An important difference between the structural topic model and the manual coding of mission statements relates to the coding of religious topics. As opposed to a single religious or spiritual code, the STM model surfaced four distinct topics related to religious schools: Catholic, faith formation, Christ-centered, and know Christ. Catholic school mission statements had the highest topic proportions of the topic Catholic with references to the ministry of the church, tradition, and the words Catholic education. On average, the expected proportion of this topic in Catholic school mission statements is 0.19. Catholic school mission statements are also most likely to reference faith formation, with an expected proportion of 0.20 of Catholic school mission statements dedicated to discussion of mission relating to forming students in the Catholic faith through participation in the parish community, prayer, spirituality, and service. These topics are present but in smaller proportions in the mission statements for other private schools (see Figure 2.7 and Table 2.4).
Figure 2.7: Regression plots for topics with the highest point estimates for Catholic and other private schools. Outcome is the expected proportion of the topic in mission statements.
The other private category in Indiana includes a high proportion of Protestant Christian schools—specifically evangelical, conservative, and ecumenical schools—which is reflected in the topics that surfaced. *Christ-centered* has an expected topic proportion of 0.32 for other private schools, suggesting that as much as one third of the text of other private school mission statements in Indiana are devoted to explicit discussion of education as Christ-centered. Similarly, the topic *know Christ* captures a common element of evangelical Protestantism, developing a personal relationship with Christ (Wagner 1990). This topic has an expected proportion of 0.21 of the text of other private school mission statements. These two topics are also present in Catholic school mission statements but in smaller proportions. These and the other religious school topics were not present in traditional public or charter school mission statements (see Figure 2.7 and Table 2.4).

2.4.3 Differences over Time

When comparing mission statement topics between the two time points, only two statistically significant differences emerged from the separate linear regressions where time serves as the variable of interest and the expected topic proportion the outcome. The topic community *working together* decreased across the entire corpus while the topic *Christ-centered* increased across the entire corpus. These differences, while statistically significant, are small and decrease or increase by an expected proportion of 0.03 (see Table 2.4).
2.4.4 Differences within Sector over Time

I ran models with an interaction between school sector and time separately for each topic to explore whether there were significant changes in expected topic proportions within sector over time. Only two topics resulted in statistically significant effects: faith formation in the Catholic sector and know Christ in the other private sector. Within the Catholic sector, the interaction was positive with the expected topic proportion of faith formation increasing by 6% over the time period. The topic know Christ, however, decreased within the other private sector by 10% (see Figures 2.8 and 2.9 and Table 2.5 for regression estimates).
Figure 2.8: Interaction effect of sector and year for Topic 14: *Faith Formation*. Results in green are for the Catholic sector, orange for other private, red for charter, and blue for public.

Figure 2.9: Interaction effect of sector and year for Topic 15: *Know Christ*. Results in orange are for the other private sector, green for Catholic, red for charter, and blue for public.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>14 Faith Formation</th>
<th>15 Know Christ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>0.13***</td>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charter</td>
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</tr>
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<td>(0.04)</td>
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<tr>
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</table>

NOTE. Results from separate regressions of interactions predicting changes in topic proportions within sector over time. Only statistically significant interaction effects presented. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001 (two-tailed tests)
2.5 Discussion

The structural topic model surfaced 17 distinct topics within a representative sample of elementary and middle school mission statements in Indiana and provides evidence that schools in Indiana serve a broad range of purposes. Compared to mission statement analysis nationally (Stemler et al. 2011) and in the state of Michigan (Weiss and Piderit 1999), the topics found in the Indiana corpus align with other mission statement coding, but the automated coding of the STM model groups some topics together and provides further distinction between topics in some areas compared to manual coding. Mission statements in each sector were found to contain shared topics of academic success, aspects of development, change world, and safe learning environment, but distinct differences by sector emerged.

Traditional public school mission statements included more elements and were less focused than private school mission statements. Public school statements had higher expected proportions for topics that spoke to general goals of schooling, such as forming responsible citizens, working together within the community, and believing that all students can learn, and included topics such as providing life skills, developing thinkers, meeting the needs of every child, and helping students reach their full potential in similar proportions to charter schools. While there were no within sector changes over time for public school statements, the topic that decreased within the entire corpus over time, community working together, is a topic with the highest expected proportions in this sector. This suggests that there may be some effort to focus public school statements by removing an explicit statement related to cooperation with parents and the community. Within the public school sector, however, there is no increase in topics related to
achievement and standards or innovative market niches that would be predicted by market forces. Beyond the reduction in one topic area, there is little evidence that the public sector is becoming more like the other smaller sectors, suggesting that these schools may be subject to structural inertia, resulting from a long-established, bureaucratic system that continues to educate the majority of students even in areas where robust choice policies have introduced competition in the form of charter schools and vouchers (Hannan and Freeman 1984).

Charter school statements discuss preparing leaders and a focus on academic achievement and standards at higher rates than any other sector, suggesting that charter schools are focusing on student outcomes. They share some common topics with the public sector, including providing life skills, developing thinkers, meeting the needs of every child, and helping students reach their full potential. Although these topics do not increase within the sector over time, the common topics expressed in these newly established schools suggest that charter schools, through their mission statement content, may be seeking to align what they do with the larger public sector in an attempt to appeal to those interested in the broad purposes of education, likely for reasons of legitimacy and stability. What is evident from a look at the common topics within the charter sector is a focus on meeting or exceeding standards and a focus on the individual that together suggest an appeal to families who feel their needs may not have been met in traditional public schools and speak to central ideas behind the charter movement (Teasley 2009). Charter schools, the most recently established sector of schools, do not appear to be substantially revising their mission statement content in these early years of forming stakeholder relationships.
Catholic school mission statements include high proportions of two religious focused topics—Catholic and faith formation—which describe the educational environment they are providing and how the schools seek to provide it. Catholic school mission statements also included more general topics found in other sectors, including common topics with the public and charter sectors of academic success, safe learning environment, and a holistic education referencing the multiple aspects of development. Catholic school mission statements continue to appeal to a specific market niche of parents seeking education in a religious environment, preferences that led to the establishment and growth of the sector through the 1960s. Facing decreasing enrollment as well as school closures, rather than try to align their missions with the larger public sector or new competition posed by charter schools, Catholic schools may be doubling-down on the faith elements of their mission, particularly the faith formation aspect, what the sector would describe as the Catholic identity of the school (Bryk et al. 1993; Convey 2012; Fuller and Johnson 2013), which includes the relationship with the parish community, a focus on Catholic prayer and spirituality, and integration of Catholic ritual and tradition in the educational endeavor. This appears to be an attempt to set the Catholic schools apart from the other sectors and emphasize their reason for existence as a ministry of the Catholic Church.

Within the other private sector, which includes an extremely high proportion of independent Christian schools, mission statements include high proportions of two different religious topics—Christ-centered education and helping students know Christ—but offer less of a focus on academic success, echoing previous work done on evangelical Christian schools where academics are considered an important but secondary focus of
these schools (Sikkink 2012; Wagner 1990). The one topic that increases over time within the entire corpus is the *Christ-centered* topic, which suggests that other private schools may be further emphasizing their religious environment in an appeal to an established market niche. The within sector change in private schools—a decrease in the *know Christ* topic—provides some evidence that these schools may be downplaying certain elements of a focus on personal discipleship in an attempt to become more like Catholic school mission statements that reference this aspect of religious education in smaller proportions. While they are not changing their missions per se, they appear to be shifting their language from explicit discussion related to helping students form a relationship with Christ to a more ecumenical focus on offering a *Christ-centered* environment. This slight change is not a full-scale shift in mission but may be a nuanced effort to align themselves with other religious schools in an attempt to compete.

Per market theory, the introduction of school choice into the educational field brings with it competitive pressures, with schools actively competing for students and in turn increasing the quality of the educational product and differentiating from others in the field in order to appeal to students and families. Somewhat surprisingly topics related to innovation, specialization (i.e., STEM or fine arts), or academic quality were not reflected in the topics identified by the structural topic model, suggesting that school mission statements in Indiana do not reflect the reimagining or innovating aspects expected to follow with expanded public funding. From a change perspective, choice does not seem to have resulted in major changes to mission statement topics in the first seven years of choice in Indiana. This suggests that competition within the educational marketplace may not visible from a school mission perspective.
This study, however, does suggest that religious schools are placing increased focus on the religious differences that set them apart from public and charter schools, clarifying rather than downplaying this aspect of the school’s mission for prospective students and families. There is some evidence, however, that other private schools, while not abandoning their religious missions, may be toning down some of their overtly Christian relational language in favor of more general language as reflected in the Christ-centered education topic.

From a new institutional perspective, external pressures resulting from changes in the field related to choice should find school missions becoming more alike in the attempt to gain legitimacy in order to ensure organizational stability (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). Despite these theoretical predictions, I find that, although statements in different sectors share some common topics, there are distinct differences by sector at both time points with little evidence of these smaller sectors becoming more like the larger sector over time.

The forces of structural inertia may be contributing to the lack of change found within these statements. Despite the large growth in students exercising different educational options during this time period, this study considers a relatively short time period. The pressures related to enrollment and funding may not yet be felt among these different sectors. In addition, the size and age of the public and charter sectors and the connection to religious mission for the Catholic and other private sectors may make whole scale changes in mission unlikely even over time. However, some of the subtle shifts found in this study suggest that there may be some fluidity in how schools present themselves organizationally and to prospective families.
There is little to suggest here that one organizational theory best captures the dynamics of change in the field as a whole. Rather, parts of each theory appear to be reflected in the organizational behavior of different sector schools, suggesting that further work may be needed to consider how different avenues of thought might be integrated or reconsidered to form a more “unified paradigm for organizational theory” (McKinley and Mone 2003:367).

2.5.1 Mission, Choice, and Policy

Although choice policies may have changed the demographic composition of some schools, rather than change to compete, most schools appear to be staying true to their missions prior to the creation of vouchers. From one perspective, to the extent that school mission statements capture the organizing principles of schools, this suggests that choice policies may not be influencing how schools operate. With little change in mission over time, school organization in the different sectors does not appear to be becoming more similar, but at least as understood from these public statements, schools may not be innovating either.

From another perspective, rather than revising the mission, schools may be opting to adjust how the mission is enacted through different strategies or approaches that better fit the needs of current and incoming students. While the overarching mission may not have changed, the programs and policies encompassed by the mission may be shifting to better match student and family needs and interests. For private and Catholic schools with some indication that these schools are making their religious missions more explicit or refining or clarifying their missions, schools may be holding fast to their founding organizational purposes while welcoming students from other religious backgrounds.
This greater intentionality around the school’s purposes may serve as a way to anchor the schools in this changed environment.

2.5.2 The Role of Mission in Choosing Schools

Catholic and religious private schools becoming more explicit with regard to their religious goals and purposes within their mission statements provides some evidence that the school mission statement may be an important piece of information for parents to consider when choosing a school. Catholic and religious private schools include religious elements within their school environment and instruction, and parents must decide if these schools are a good fit for their families and match their personal priorities for education. As mission statements appear on the majority of school websites and are an easily accessed public statement of a school’s guiding objectives, evidence here suggests that these statements may serve as an informative first introduction to the school for prospective families.

Rather than downplay the religious character of these private and Catholic schools to seem more similar to the other options in the market, school leaders in Catholic and private religious schools seem to be actively working against mission shift in an attempt to stay true to their mission, keep prospective families informed about their options, and fill a market niche appealing to families interested in schooling in a religious environment.

2.5.3 Whom Do Schools View as Competition?

Competition from Catholic and other private sectors is not a new phenomenon for the public sector as public and private schools have coexisted in the educational
landscape for more than a century. Public and charter schools, as solely government funded entities, may focus on competition between each other rather than religious schools, which offer a distinctly different schooling environment. Similarly, Catholic and other private sectors may focus on competition in the private sector. However, there may be reasons for Catholic schools to consider charter schools as a new competitor as Catholic schools have long enjoyed a reputation as a low-cost alternative to public schools and some research suggests that enrollment in Catholic schools has suffered due to the emergence of charter schools (Lackman 2012; Ladner 2007; Waddington 2012).

Research conducted in New Orleans schools suggests that whom schools viewed as competitors influenced their strategies and behavior (Jabbar 2015). Aurini and Quirke (2011) argue that the market hypothesis stems from a macro perspective of the larger environment and thus market forces may not influence individual actors’ perceptions of their local environment. If other sectors and schools are not perceived as direct competitors, school leaders may not feel pressure to revisit the purpose and organization of the school. To the extent that school leaders have only limited information about the other options for schooling within their local market, they may be insulated from competitive pressures and thus may not feel the need to make adjustments. This potential disconnect between macro-level forces and micro-level responses may have implications for organizations in other fields, particularly those in which market conditions are a new phenomenon.

2.5.4 Future Research

This study is an exploratory and descriptive analysis of mission statements in just one state with increasing choice policies over time. Comparisons are made within sector
and over time, but to further test the organizational behavior hypotheses, future analyses should compare changes in mission statements in a state with school choice policies with changes in mission statements in a state without choice policies. This type of analysis would be able to consider choice policies as a form of treatment and thus assist in ruling out other environmental pressures or conditions that may be influencing schools during this time period.

From a modeling perspective, the STM model is designed to group together common topics within a collection of texts, so the extent to which mission statements are exhibiting a high degree of individualized specialization may not be reflected within these results. Further, this study relies on the school mission statement as an indicator of school organization and operates under the assumption that school mission statements are current and accurate representations of schools’ organizing principles. Although some evidence suggests that mission statement contents can be highly familiar, salient, and resonant for teachers and leaders in school communities across school type and sector (Dallavis 2018) and principals report that mission statements represent what goes on in schools (Stemler et al. 2011), additional ethnographic inquiry is needed to evaluate the extent to which the mission statement content is used and reflected in the organization of schools and their day-to-day operations.

The analysis of mission statements before and seven years following the enactment of a voucher program provides a first step in understanding how school choice policies influence the mission and organization of schools in a state with a set of robust choice programs. It also provides a case in which to compare theoretical predictions of organizational behavior against outcomes in an attempt to better understand which
theories hold and under what conditions. Continued attention to the question of how school choice policies affect schools as organizations and the external pressures that accompany them are needed as these policies are monitored and evaluated in the near and distant future.

2.6 References


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64


CHAPTER 3:
DO SCHOOLS USE MISSION? MISSION STATEMENT FAMILIARITY, SALIENCE, AND RESONANCE IN K-8 SCHOOLS ACROSS SECTOR

3.1 Overview

Schools are complex entities. Each school can be understood as a community, a group of individuals focused on a single, but multi-faceted endeavor: the education of young people. Each school building has its own culture—the shared norms, values, and beliefs of the community—which can send both explicit and implicit messages to students regarding what the community believes is important (Hallinan 2005).

Mission statements are one way in which institutions—from large corporations to small non-profits and from universities to elementary schools—have attempted to shape and define the group culture for those involved in the life and work of the organization (Braun et al. 2012; Morphew and Hartley 2006; Williams 2008). These statements often combine messages of who we are and what we do in ways that seek to capture the shared aspirations of the organization for those involved in the work of the organization as well as those who may come into contact with the organization (Stemler and Bebell 2012). Skeptics, however, question the utility and value of such statements (Braun et al. 2012; Khalifa 2011) as they may be easily relegated to a website, binder, or frame on the wall.
This paper considers whether and how schools use mission statements, examining how statements are familiar, salient, and resonant for teachers and principals in elementary and middle schools. Using multiple sources of data from 17 schools in one community, I find that mission statements were highly familiar in just over half of the schools in the sample, and that mission statements had greater salience in public magnet, Catholic, and independent schools and more opportunities for resonance in Catholic and independent schools. However, an important case from the traditional public sector suggests that the intentional use of mission statements is possible across school type and sector, providing some evidence that mission statements can serve as a “blueprint” for school culture (Hallinan 2005:132).

3.2 Background

3.2.1 Mission Statement as Educational Practice

As creating a mission statement is a practice rooted in the logic of common sense, it seems difficult to argue with the idea that you must first define a goal in order to work toward and achieve it. Perhaps for this reason, crafting a mission statement is a widely adopted practice that has been thought to inform the objectives and priorities of a school community. The effective schools literature finds a shared culture and mission to be a quality of an effective school (Purkey and Smith 1983; Rosenholtz 1985; Teddlie and Reynolds 2000) and the development of a mission statement is considered a best practice and starting point for school improvement and reform efforts (Hill, Foster, and Gendler, 1990; Goldring and Berends 2009; Newman 2007; Wiggins and McTighe 2007). Little empirical evidence exists, however, to support the practice and its intended effects on
achievement or other non-cognitive outcomes. Despite this lack of evidence, a mission statement and a school’s familiarization with the mission have become institutionalized within accreditation requirements and the practice has reached near complete adoption within the K-12 educational field (AdvanceEd 2018; Stemler and Bebell 2012). However, skepticism exists regarding the value and the use of such statements (Braun et al. 2012; Khalifa 2011; Stemler, Bebell, and Sonnabend 2011) as well as whether the practice is a meaningful use of time and attention in an era of increasing accountability measures and demands on schools.

Most of the research related to school mission statements focuses on statement content and creation. The text of school mission statements has been coded into between 9 and 15 somewhat consistent themes, including elements of the environment (e.g., safe and nurturing), different aspects of student development (e.g., cognitive, physical, social, emotional, etc.), and specific outcomes for graduates (Slate et al. 2008; Stemler and Bebell 2012; Weiss and Piderit 1999). Some research suggests that mission statements exhibit influences of both the local community (Stemler and Bebell 2012) as well as state and district policies (Schafft and Biddle 2013). Other research finds shared rhetorical ideas within mission statements, with common phrases and topics found in large samples of statements within individual states (Dallavis 2018; Lubienski and Lee 2016; Schafft and Biddle 2013) and trends in mission statement contents that can be traced over time (Dallavis 2018; Renzulli, Paino, and Barr 2015).
Less is known about the use of mission statements in the school community. With mission statements included as part of accreditation requirements and criteria (AdvanceEd 2018), it is possible that a flurry of activity exists around the mission prior to accreditation visits or at the start of the academic year, but perhaps little to no energy or time invested on a regular basis. Even with the near complete adoption of mission statements within the field, determining how much schools use mission, to what purposes, and to what extent they influence what goes on in schools are largely unanswered questions.

Previous research on the use of school mission statements has relied on interviews and direct questions posed to school leaders. Stemler and colleagues (2011) found that principals understand mission statements “as an important tool for shaping practice and communicating core values” (384) and believe there is “a strong link between mission and practice” (410). This evidence, however, may be subject to social desirability bias with the possibility that principals answered in the affirmative because of a desire to meet researchers’ expectations or to seem in alignment with what has come to be thought of as a best practice.

Even less is known about teachers’ familiarity with school mission statements. To date, no such study on teacher use and understanding of school mission statements has been conducted. In examining related studies of mission statements in corporate and non-profit organizations, one recent study by Kopaneva and Sias (2015) considered employee familiarity with the organization’s mission statement, interviewing employees from a broad range of organizations and industries asking them to describe the mission of the organization. They then compared the interview transcript to the organization’s official
mission statement, calculating measures of congruence between themes present in the interview and in mission statement. They found that on average, employees identified and discussed just over one-third of the themes contained in the official mission statements, representing “a gap in the translation processes between the level of everyday practice and organizational representation” (376), calling into question the purported link between mission statements and the everyday life of organizations.

3.2.2 Mission Statements as Cultural Objects

Hallinan (2005) posited that the mission statement can serve as a “blueprint” for school culture, making explicit some of the implicit values and beliefs that send messages to students about what is important to the community. At least two studies argue that mission statements are valuable sources of data that provide “an accessible and meaningful window for further exploration of the purpose of school” (Stemler and Bebell 2012:10; Weiss and Piderit 1999). Other work, however, considers whether mission statements may be better regarded as “window dressing” with a study in higher education determining that mission statements represented complex signaling, combining messages of institutional distinctiveness and legitimacy but offering less cultural information specific to the school (Morphew and Hartley 2006:459).

While the creation of a school mission statement is thought to be an effective practice, it is also important to consider these statements as written representations of the expressions of the norms, values, and beliefs of a community. As these statements are cultural objects created by members of a school community and “produced, distributed, marketed, received, and interpreted by a variety of people and organizations” (Griswold
2004:79), analyzing how these statements are used may assist in understanding the potential connection between school mission and school culture.

3.2.3 Familiarity, Salience, and Resonance

Understanding how familiar school leaders and teachers are with their school mission statement as well as whether they feel connected to the content of the mission statement are important indicators of whether mission statements are worth the resources and effort that go into creating them. One way to consider how important the content of the mission statement is to the community is to consider whether or not the contents of the statement are known and understood to be meaningful to the members of the community and whether there are instances when the mission statement becomes resonant.

A cultural object may be considered familiar when it can be recalled and recounted with ease. The object, however, is thought to be salient when it stands out or holds prominence among other similar ideas or concepts. Guhin (2016) argues that salience “can be understood as a profound emotional connection to a particular issue that makes the issue worth more of an individual’s or community’s time, energy, and attention” (152). The extent to which the school’s mission statement is salient in the educational environment may contribute to how effective the mission statement is as an organizational tool. Thus, considering how school leaders bring mission statements to the school community’s attention, how connected individuals become to the statement, and how closely individuals identify with the statement can speak to how salient the statement is within the school.
Moving beyond familiarity and salience, I consider whether mission statements have the potential for resonance, examining how school leaders and teachers report interacting with the mission statement. McDonnell, Bail, and Tavory (2017) argue that resonance is not a static attribute of a cultural object but rather something that “emerges in the relations between object, person, and situation” (2), in particular when the object is “employed to solve a problem” (3). Considering how school leaders and teachers report interaction with the statement can provide some indication regarding the potential that mission statements have for resonance in the school community, a quality thought to motivate groups and individuals toward action.

3.2.4 School Sector Differences in Mission

While the educational field in the U.S. exhibits many commonalities related to school structure, instruction, and assessment, a number of differences exist between sectors. The public sector—state-organized, district-managed, and locally funded by taxpayer dollars—makes up the largest market share of schools, educating nearly 90% of students nationally (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2018a) and 92% of students in Indiana (Indiana Department of Education [IDOE] 2018). Organized into local districts, public schools are subject to the decisions and policies of the district office that range from specific program implementation to professional development programming to school financing—all of which are subject to the goals and priorities of the home district. As they serve the lion’s share of students in a tuition-free environment, public schools must meet the needs of a broad range of students from diverse socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, cultural, social, and academic backgrounds.
In an effort to desegregate public schools and attract a diverse set of parents and students, some public districts have reorganized some schools into magnet schools. These schools share several common elements: they offer a curricular or instructional focus, such as STEM or fine arts, facilitate voluntary desegregation, provide families a choice of school within the district, and offer access to students beyond the assigned catchment zone (Goldring forthcoming). The majority of magnet schools rely on some form of selection, with students opting-in through an application or admission process which may include achievement testing. Magnet schools total just over 3,200 schools nationally with roughly 10% of these schools located in Indiana (NCES 2018b).

The private school sector educates 10% of U.S. children in independent or small systems of schools (NCES 2018a). Private schools are funded largely through student tuition, and many are sponsored by religious churches or communities. The largest system of private schools is the Catholic school system, which has served Catholic and immigrant families for over one hundred years (Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993; Walch 2003). While the system has experienced recent closures (MacGregor 2012), these schools continue to serve families of all socioeconomic statuses in an environment that focuses on academics as well as faith formation (Austin and Berends 2018; Bryk et al 1993; Hallinan 2002). As tuition-funded institutions, independent and other private sector schools often seek to fill markets niches in education, and thus may reflect specific elements in their mission statements in order to attract families.

Recent changes in school choice policies in many states and in Indiana now provide eligible students state-funded vouchers to attend participating private schools (see Berends, Primus, and Springer forthcoming; Berends, Waddington, and Schoenig
2019). As more diverse groups of students have the opportunity to attend private schools, understanding how schools across sector represent and enact norms, values, and beliefs is important information for parents and students considering enrolling in these schools and for the school communities who may be experiencing changes in context and demographics with the ability to welcome students from a growing number of backgrounds.

Mission statements may be used in some school types and sectors more than others. The term mission has religious connotations related to the historical evangelization efforts of Christian missionaries and the idea of a personal mission or vocation one seeks to live out as part of one’s faith or beliefs. This may lead to a greater use and connection in Catholic schools. Independent schools may also exhibit tighter connections to mission based on the desire to be distinctive and set themselves apart from the other educational options in the field. Similarly, public magnet schools have been created with distinct objectives that seek differentiation from the larger public sector. Mission statements may not have as strong of a presence in traditional public schools, however. The need to serve students from diverse backgrounds and meet a wide-range of student needs may result in general statements that provide less focus for teachers and school leaders and result in less interaction with the mission statement.

3.3 Research Questions

Much of the previous research on mission statements in K-12 education considers the content of mission statements, exploring the common trends, topics, and themes within these public statements. In this exploratory study, I examine whether and how
mission statements are used in the school environment by considering the following questions and looking for variation in schools across type and sector:

1. Are school leaders and teachers familiar with the mission statement? Do their understandings of the school mission match the contents of their school mission statements?

2. Are mission statements salient in the school community? Do school leaders and teachers form connections with mission statement contents?

3. Are there opportunities for mission statement to have resonance in the school community? Is mission used to solve problems?

3.4 Data and Methods

3.4.1 Sample

This study includes 17 schools in one Indiana community (see Table 3.1). Invitations to participate in the study were sent to principals in traditional public, public magnet, public charter, Catholic, and independent private schools that served grades K-8 in some configuration. Comparisons by school sector serve two main functions in this analysis. First, considering how mission statements are used in diverse environments can offer insight into the practice by providing examples from a greater range of school and site-specific implementation. Second, Indiana has the largest state-funded choice scholarship program in the U.S., allowing students who meet eligibility criteria to use vouchers to attend private schools (EdChoice 2018). Understanding how public and private schools differ, from an organizational as well as an instructional standpoint, can assist both policymakers and parents in understanding the school “products” currently available in the educational marketplace. This research may also suggest ways in which practices might be shared across sector for the benefit of all schools (Hill et al. 1990).
TABLE 3.1
SAMPLE OF SCHOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Size &lt; 300</th>
<th>Size 300-500</th>
<th>Size &gt; 500</th>
<th>School SES</th>
<th>Percent Minority</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: School data accessed from the Indiana Department of Education for the 2017-18 school year from the IDOE Compass website (https://compass.doe.in.gov). To determine the aggregate school socioeconomic status, I used the percent of students receiving free and reduced price lunch in the school. Schools with 0-33% of students on FRL are indicated as “H”, 34-67% as “M” and 68-100% as “L.” Percent minority and achievement are indicated in thirds as well. Achievement in the school is based on the percent of students who passed both the reading and math sections of the ISTEP+ in 2016-17.

*The independent schools do not administer the state standardized test or provide information to the state regarding their school demographics or achievement. Their school level and enrollment numbers were found on their school websites.

Careful attention was paid to ensuring variation in the sample according to school-level demographics, academic achievement, and socioeconomic status in order to ensure variation in school context and characteristics within each sector (see Table 3.1 for description of sample). Despite concerted efforts to include charter schools in this analysis, very few charter schools operate in the community under study, and I was not able to collect enough data on these schools to include in the analysis. The community does have a strong presence of Catholic and independent schools, which are
overrepresented in the sample. School leaders and teachers from each school participated in different elements of the data collection.

3.4.2 Data Collection

Once a school leader agreed to participate in the study, I sent a short electronic survey requesting the text of the current mission statement and information about the writing and review process of such statements. I sent the survey 1-2 weeks in advance of the interview to avoid immediately priming school leaders prior to the interview, and I used information gathered in the survey to prepare for the interview and focus group at each school. School leaders were able to delegate the survey to a colleague within the school who was more knowledgeable of the school context, and survey information was collected from all 17 schools.

I conducted interviews with each of the 17 school leaders in their school offices between August and December 2017. These interviews were semi-structured and followed a similar pattern. The first part of the interview focused on the school leader’s understanding of the school’s mission. Halfway through the interview, I brought out the school’s mission statement and the remainder of the interview focused specifically on the current statement. On average, the school leader interviews lasted 49 minutes, with interviews ranging from 34 to 81 minutes (see Appendix A for protocol). The focus on understanding of mission separate from the mission statement was intentional in order to better understand the role of the statement and to provide the school leader a chance to evaluate how well the mission statement captured his or her sense of mission within the school. At the conclusion of the interview, I requested permission from the school leader to conduct a focus group with a small group of teachers from the school. In addition, I
received a campus tour on roughly half of these visits when the school leader’s schedules permitted.

Small focus groups were held at 16 of the 17 schools during this same time period. All teachers and instructional aides within each school building were invited to participate in their school’s focus group and participants included those who volunteered in response to the invitation. Focus groups included between 2 and 6 participants and took place immediately after school, usually in one teacher’s classroom or the teachers’ lounge. On average, focus groups involved 4 teachers, lasted an average of 44 minutes, ranging from 28 to 59 minutes, and involved the use of productive methods (McDonnell 2014) as well as a group interview.

Productive methods involve a small group of individuals on a collective task. Rather than filtering participant responses through the researcher’s representation and understanding of concepts and questions in set survey questions or traditional interview protocols, productive methods have participants work together on an activity in order to assist the researcher in determining how the group understands the concept or phenomenon at hand. In this manner, “by asking people to produce an object, and then observing the process of decision-making, deliberation, and discussion, cultural processes become legible” (McDonnell 2014:248). Analysis of the group deliberations and the object produced provide participant constructed insight into the uses and meanings of the mission statement.

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1 Due to tension surrounding school mission and culture in one school, one principal did not permit me to hold a focus group.
To better understand the relationship between shared ideas of mission, what goes on in schools, and the school mission statement, I had the focus groups participate in a productive activity at the beginning of the focus group. I passed out note cards and pens to each participant and asked the group to spend the first few minutes independently recording their individual understanding of the school’s mission on the card using words, phrases, or pictures. Next, I asked the group to share the thoughts they generated on their individual cards aloud with the group, and then as a group, I asked them to generate a list of common ideas and a list of more individual ideas on a separate card, with one member recording the group’s ideas. I observed and audio-recorded the individual and group activity. After the activity, I asked the group questions similar to those asked of the school leader using a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix B). Halfway through the interview, I brought out the school’s official mission statement printed on a separate note card for each person. I asked the teachers, as a group, to evaluate how well the mission statement captured the sense of mission they generated at the beginning of the focus group, probing participants to identify where the sense of mission and the mission statement were aligned and where there were substantive differences.

In conducting this activity, I had three primary goals: (1) to capture those initial top-of-mind ideas and word associations related to mission at their school without influence by the other members of the group, (2) to activate individual thoughts on the understanding or sense of the school’s mission to better prepare them for a conversation with their colleagues, and (3) to observe how the group made sense of the varying ideas they brought to the table around the idea of mission and how those ideas fit or did not fit with the actual mission statement.
The use of productive methods here attempts to witness first-hand how teachers understand the mission of the school, which may or may not include reference to the mission statement. In schools where the mission statement has more of an emphasis within the school environment, teachers would be more likely to include specific elements of the mission statement in their responses. In schools where the mission is rarely referenced or less of an organizational focus, teachers would still be able to contribute general, personal, or group-related ideas of mission they understood to be present within their school community. I used discussion questions and the resulting conversation among the group to further draw from the teachers how these ideas of mission were present or enacted within the school. As in the principal interview, halfway through the discussion, the mission statement text was introduced into the conversation.

The data from the productive exercise here complements the use of more standard and direct questions related to mission in schools that could be subject to social desirability bias. In addition, the multiple sources of data from each school assisted in triangulating information, providing a richer sense of each school environment and opportunities to consider instances where participant responses provided conflicting information.

3.4.3 Data Analysis

All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis and imported into Atlas.ti along with the school mission statements and scanned images of the notecard artifacts. I first established how familiar school leaders and teachers were with the content of their school mission statement by conducting individual school analyses. To do so, I coded each school’s mission statement into meaningful segments
(see Figure 3.1 for an example). In two cases, the mission statement was followed by a longer set of belief statements. For consistency with the rest of the sample, the belief statements for these two schools were not included in the analysis. The average number of coded segments in a mission statement was 8 and ranged between 4 and 15. Next, I coded the principal interview and focus group interview for the school using the specific themes from the school’s statement up to the point in the interview or focus group where I introduced the actual text of the school mission statement into discussion. Near or exact wording from the statement as well as examples of the concept in action were coded. Artifacts from the productive activity were also coded in this manner. This process was repeated for each school.

Figure 3.1: Example of mission statement in the present study
coded into topic segments

EXAMPLE MISSION STATEMENT

[School name] develops life-long learners\textsuperscript{1} who live their faith\textsuperscript{2} through stewardship\textsuperscript{3} and are committed to Catholic values\textsuperscript{4} and academic excellence\textsuperscript{5}

CODED SEGMENTS

develops life-long learners\textsuperscript{1}
live their faith\textsuperscript{2}
stewardship\textsuperscript{3}
Catholic values\textsuperscript{4}
academic excellence\textsuperscript{5}
I then created a principal-statement familiarity measure for each school by dividing the number of mission statement topics referenced in the first half of the principal interview by the total number of topics in the mission statement. This resulted in a proportion ranging from 0 to 1. For example, if a school’s mission statement had been coded into 5 segments and the school leader mentioned 4 of those themes in the first half of the interview, the resulting principal-statement familiarity score was equal to 0.8. I created a similar measure for the focus group interviews at each school in the same manner. I then plotted the principal-statement measure against the focus group-statement measure to provide a visual representation and assist in illustrating and analyzing the variation within the sample. Although these created scores are rough and imperfect measures, they provide a basic understanding of how well principals and teachers know, recall, and can discuss the elements of the school’s mission statement, and when considered together and in comparison with other schools in the sample assists in uncovering variation.

I examined cases across the distribution to consider reasons for both high and low familiarity of mission statements within the school, using abductive reasoning (Tavory and Timmermans 2014) to infer from the survey, interview, and focus group data the most plausible conditions under which mission statements are more or less familiar, salient, and resonant within a school environment. The multiple sources of data from each school offered a more complete understanding of mission in each building, allowing me to triangulate the responses received from school leaders and teachers and to develop a deeper sense of how closely the school community was connected to the mission statement in each school and under what conditions.
In the next section, I first present the familiarity measures at the school and role levels noting differences by sector. Next, using interview and focus group responses, I present conditions under which mission statements appear to have familiarity, salience, and opportunities for resonance among school leaders and teachers.

3.5 Results

3.5.1 Statement Familiarity by Role and Sector

To consider variation in how well practitioner understandings of mission in schools matched their mission statement, principal- and focus group-statement familiarity measures were plotted against each other for the 16 schools with both principal and focus group data (see Figure 3.2). These measures were not evenly distributed across the sample but rather clustered in the top right corner of the graph. As the figure illustrates, 14 of 16 schools had at least one familiarity measure greater than 0.7. For nine of these schools, both the principal and focus group measures were 0.7 or higher. School leaders in 11 schools had familiarity measures of at least 0.7 while 12 schools had focus group familiarity measures in this range.
Figure 3.2: Calculated familiarity measures by role and school

Figure 3.2 also illustrates differences by sector. Six of the nine schools with both principal and focus group measures above 0.7 were Catholic schools. Independent schools reflected high measures of focus group familiarity while there was greater variation in familiarity among the traditional public and public magnet schools at both role levels, with two of the traditional public schools in the sample demonstrating the lowest familiarity scores.

Next, I examined the interview data from principals and the focus groups in an attempt to understand the conditions under which understandings of mission and the
mission statements were closely matched. The following conditions and their presence or absence in these cases is presented in Table 3.2 and discussed in the sections that follow.
TABLE 3.2

FAMILIARITY, SALIENCE, AND RESONANCE

COMPAVED BY SCHOOL AND SECTOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Familiarity</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
3.5.2 Familiarity

How familiar individuals are with mission statement text provides a baseline for considering whether school leaders use the mission statement in the school community. From the combined data, the age and focus of the mission statement and the practice of frequently reciting the mission statement as a school community emerged as two possible reasons for high statement familiarity. In contrast, teachers in schools with low familiarity scores were quick to point out the absence of the statement from the day-to-day operations of the school.

3.5.2.1 Age and Focus of Statement

Having a more recently written or revised mission statement might be expected to result in greater recognition and recall of the mission statement text within the school community. Of the 12 schools with high focus group familiarity measures, five schools had written new statements within the last three years. One teacher who had recently participated in the writing process commented, “I think … that [the process] caused us to really think about what [the mission] meant. So not only do we have ownership but we really understood it” (Teacher 2, Catholic School 1). Another teacher from a school with a new mission statement reflected on past processes: “I totally agree with everybody here that, yes, there’s been a mission statement that we’ve never been made clear of that someone else has done for us, and said, yes, this is what we’re doing… So I think that’s changed starting this year” (Teacher 2, Public School 3). However, the remaining seven schools reported that the school mission statement content had remained stable over time. These statements were highly familiar for teachers, suggesting that mission statement
familiarity may not necessarily be linked to recent creation of the statement by discussion and deliberation. Statements that have been around longer may be more firmly integrated into the school community and culture.

The length of the statement may also be an important factor related to teacher and principal familiarity. More tightly focused statements with fewer topics may be easier for a community to embrace and enact within the community and in the related activity in this study, recall. In this sample, on average, Catholic school mission statements were comprised of 6 topics, compared to magnet schools with an average of 8, and traditional public and independent schools with an average of 10 topics. For the schools with the highest congruence measures, only the independent school statements had more than 7 topics.

One teacher spoke to the length of mission statements saying, “I think a mission statement should be very succinct, and it should be targeting something specific, and not 20 different things. You know, it should be very clear and concise” (Teacher 2, Public 3). Her coworker agreed that the mission statement “can’t be all over the place … [or] you’re not gonna get anything right” (Teacher 4, Public 3).

Length seemed to be understood as an important characteristic of mission statements for the schools where they had recently revised statements, for similar reasons. One principal discussed his desire for the school “to be able to recite it, because it’s not long. It’s very clear. It’s very simple. And that was the whole point of it. We didn’t want it to be a paragraph. We really made it a medium-length sentence that really conveyed everything that we wanted it to convey” (Principal, Catholic School 1). Similarly, teachers in two other Catholic schools both brought up the need for the statement to be
“simple” (Teacher 4, Catholic School 2) or “basic” (Teacher 3, Catholic School 5) for the same reason: to facilitate student knowledge and understanding of the mission.

3.5.2.2 Daily or Weekly Recitation

The practice of reciting the statement as a whole class or school appeared to be another factor related to familiarity with mission statement content. In two Catholic schools the mission is recited daily within the school and the statement is recited weekly in one independent school. As a result, the teachers reported that teachers and students know the statement by heart. In reflecting on the level of ease or difficulty of generating the school’s mission on the notecard, teachers in 3 of the 17 schools discussed immediately referencing the mission statement content running through their heads. One teacher said, “I thought about our mission statement, and my kids say it every day, so I kinda was saying it in my head” (Teacher 2, Catholic School 5). While these practices may assist in helping teachers know or recall the mission statement and keep it at the forefront of practice, it may not fully connect the community to the statement. Teachers in one Catholic school referenced the surface nature of such memorization practices:

When we had accreditation visits from the accrediting bodies, we had to memorize the mission because we could’ve been asked on the spot, “What is your mission? Why are you here?” So a few days before the visit we were all like, “Da, da, da, what is that?” You know, quizzing each other like, “This is ridiculous. This is not the purpose of this, right?” (Teacher 1, Catholic School 6)

Recitation and memorization likely provide a baseline measure of familiarity. When discussing a school’s previous policy of memorization, one magnet school teacher remarked, “When you see something over and over and you talk about it over and over, it
becomes more a part of [what you do], but I don’t know it now. So maybe I never really knew it in my heart. ‘Cause wouldn’t I still know it?” (Teacher 3, Magnet School 3).

3.5.2.3 Lack of Use

Teachers and principals in schools where the mission statement was not used were up front about the absence of the statement in the life of the school. In the four schools with low focus group familiarity measures, principals and teachers alike reported low involvement with the statement. One teacher commented, “I was trying to think of the mission statement and I’m like, I don’t think we do have one or did I miss it somewhere, is it in a bulletin I didn’t read, like what’s our statement?” (Teacher 3, Public School 1).

Another teacher in the school concurred:

As far as the school’s mission it is hard to speak to what the current mission is because I don’t think we’ve seen one for quite a while…. I know somewhere, if we probably dug we probably do have the mission somewhere, you know, specific for the school. But I have to agree, I mean probably the mission, in general, just is the big umbrella of everything we are working on. (Teacher 1, Public School 1)

Teachers in one magnet school discussed how use of the mission statement had decreased in the past few years:

Teacher 4: Yeah, because I don’t—I mean, we have a mission statement and everything, but I don’t know that most people know it and I don’t know that most people follow it. And I don’t know that we have a vision for us—

Teacher 3: We used to have it memorized. I mean, I haven’t seen it for, like, three or four years, but it used to be that we had it memorized and we saw it—every meeting we went to, it was put up on the board. (Magnet School 3)

One school with a new mission statement reflected on previous years where mission was not a focus within the school:
Teacher 3: Well, the reality of [the school] is—you three know; I know because we’ve been there for 13 years. We haven’t had a mission statement. We haven’t had a focus, a vision…
Teacher 3: Well, there’s been one, but we haven’t been—
Teacher 4: Oh, don’t go there.
Teacher 1: Yeah, I know.
Teacher 3: Yeah, exactly.
Teacher 1: No, seriously…
Teacher 4: Oh, I know.
Teacher 3: There’s been one for when they have to turn a document in somewhere.
Teacher 4: And that was the conversation I was having with [another teacher] was about, yeah, this stuff has to exist, but it’s not a driving…
Teacher 1: It’s almost like secret.
Teacher 4: It’s not a driving force. And it’s why like we feel like we’re all over the place because there’s not, there’s not one rounding statement. (Public School 3)

Two public school principals discussed the increase in district-wide programs and mandates that resulted in less time available for activity related to mission. For this reason, one recently installed principal had opted not to create a new mission statement but to instead use a mission-related document provided by the district in place of a school specific mission statement.

In my experience, it just ends up being on a piece of paper and just not referred to, but the main ideas of the mission statements are still—you know, raising student achievement, working diligently for each child. And so when I came last year there wasn’t one but then … I saw this [district document]. I was like, you know what, I’m not gonna sit and spend three, four, five weeks meeting and crafting and arguing about, oh, that word should go here, that should go there. I said I just want to be aligned with the district and these are to the point and so that’s kind of why I haven’t pushed that. (Principal, Public School 4)

While the principal had opted not to create a statement, the decision to substitute a district document, suggests that the principal understood a common mission as an important organizational tool. However, it is also important to note that teachers in this school had the lowest familiarity score in the sample.
More than one teacher in schools with little interaction with the mission statement, asked to keep the notecard with the school’s mission statement printed on it as a reminder or reference, suggesting that it would help them become more familiar with the statement and assist their daily practice. Teachers in one Catholic school commented:

*Teacher 2:* We need these cards. Every teacher should get one of these cards.
*Teacher 1:* Yeah, I think that would be nice. Just put it right on my desk.

(Catholic School 7)

3.5.3 Salience

If familiarity provides a baseline understanding of the mission statement, considering whether the contents of mission statements are salient provides a deeper sense of whether mission statements are a focus within the school and whether individuals have established some form of connection to the statement. In order for mission statement contents to be salient to individuals in the school, they must be both familiar with the statement and have the opportunity to establish connections between the topics and their personal experiences in the school. To consider whether the mission statement was salient, I looked for evidence that leaders and teachers either demonstrated a personal connection to mission or created opportunities for involvement with the mission that could lead to such connections. School leaders and teachers discussed instances where (1) the language of the mission statement is used often and with multiple audiences, (2) school leaders and teachers continually discussed the contents and meaning of the mission statement with the community’s stakeholders, and (3) when they felt a strong connection existed between their personal mission and the school’s mission. Each of these conditions relevant to the salience of mission statements is discussed in turn.
3.5.3.1 Use of Statement Language

Four schools referenced using the terminology of the mission statement in varying interactions within the school community. For some schools this was an intentional move toward keeping practice tied to mission and the statement relevant within the community, as one principal elaborated:

We are very intentional and purposeful about communicating how we are supporting [mission]. That includes having the mission statement widely available, whether it’s posted around at school, it’s on our website. It is on our weekly electronic newsletter. It is in all our admissions. It is everywhere. We are saturated by the mission statement. Also, for example, even our social media presence and strategies centers on mission. We are very intentional with our social media presence, and we make sure each week that each main aspect of our mission is featured in some way on social media. (Leader 1, Independent School 1)

By using mission statement language frequently and consistently, school leaders and teachers report being able to reinforce messages related to mission. As one teacher in a public school described:

One of the reasons that we’re seeing a difference in the students overall is that we are using common language. So no matter what classroom they’re in, whichever adults they’re working with, you know, and they’re hearing it from the administrators, they’re hearing it from the teachers, they’re hearing it, you know, in the office, whatever. Positive mindset and the core values. When you keep hearing those same things again and again, it’s sinks in. (Teacher 6, Public School 3)

In this same school, the principal reinforced the importance of using common language consistently in interaction with the entire school community:

When I do the announcements in the morning they’ll go, here she goes. And I’ll say the same thing. But they’re hearing it constantly. I want them to be able to see the core values, hear the core values, I want them to be able to recognize when it’s being modeled for them…. They’re probably tired of hearing all of the verbiage too, but I’m drowning it into everyone. (Principal, Public School 3)
A teacher in a Catholic school spoke to using key phrases with special meanings for the community, phrases taken from the writings of the founder of the religious community that sponsors the school:

We are good about the verbiage that we use internally and also externally but I think there are these key phrases, “educating hearts and minds,” “making God known, loved, and served.” We, I think, are pretty consistent with one another but also in expressing the message to the kids, to the families internally. (Teacher 5, Catholic School 1)

Other schools use words and phrases that represent the distinctiveness of their mission, with teachers in one school using the language in conversation with each other: “We often ask ourselves, ‘What is your cosmic task?’ Or, ‘What is my cosmic task?’” (Teacher 5, Independent School 2). In this manner, the school brings the language of the statement into relational interactions within the school and increases opportunities for the statement to become salient.

3.5.3.2 Continued Discussion of Statement

Beyond simply using the language of the mission statement, teachers and/or principals in seven schools referenced the ongoing discussion of the school mission with different members of the school community. Teachers in one independent school shared that they discuss and “dig into” (Teacher 5, Independent School 2) different elements of the mission weekly at faculty meetings and that these conversations spill over into the “conference room, staff room, and the kitchen” (Teacher 4, Independent School 2). The principal in this school also spoke of the faculty’s ongoing dialogue around mission: “We’ll go back to our mission statement and we’ll actually reread the mission statement
to say, ‘In what ways is this not meeting our mission?’” (Principal, Independent School 2).

The objective of these ongoing discussions appears to ensure a “match” (Teacher 1, Independent School 2) between what goes on in the school and the mission statement. Similarly, teachers in a Catholic school discussed ongoing conversation related to the mission and what goes on in the school: “What is the purpose of a Holy Cross education?2 So often, our staff meetings include this kind of thought process. I think it’s a lot of how we think as a staff” (Teacher 2, Catholic School 1). Keeping the mission statement a topic of conversation and discussion gives it priority and focus among the faculty and as one principal stated, she wants to continually revisit it “to keep it living. It’s like everything else. If you stop talking about it, it gets pushed to the back and I don’t want that to happen” (Principal, Public School 3).

Some schools involved students in discussions of school mission, particularly middle school students, who had greater developmental capacity for engaging with the mission. One school had their fifth graders write about the school’s mission:

We had our kids reflect in journals on what it meant, and the majority of the kids were able to talk like we should always wanna learn, we should be Christian. They seem to understand, like, there was meaning behind it, not just these were words that we say every day. (Teacher 6, Catholic School 5)

2 “Holy Cross education” here refers to the specific brand of Catholic education provided by the sponsoring religious order of the parish and school, here the Congregation of Holy Cross. Many Catholic religious orders have nurtured specific traditions, often referred to as charisms, which have been infused into the life and culture of the schools they sponsor. For example, a primary focus in Jesuit schools is the formation of young men as “Men for Others.” Similarly, Ursuline religious sisters stress a commitment to service in their education of young women, which is reflected in their motto of _Serviam_, Latin for “I will serve.”
In this manner, they had students use reflection to make connections to the mission independently, which were then discussed with the larger class of students. One independent school goes a step further and has students construct classroom guidelines annually using the mission statement:

What they do is they actually look at the nine belief statements to say, “Okay. We believe in a socioeconomic and racial ethnic diverse population in our school. What can we be doing inside of the school day to make sure that we have created that environment and we’re also fostering that environment?” So, very blatantly they’re actually looking at the mission statement and they’re creating guidelines based on the mission statement. (Principal, Independent School 2)

Several schools involved families in discussions surrounding mission. For private schools, this often was part of admissions conversations with new and prospective families. One principal described these conversations, “As we orient new families, there’s a great deal of effort and intentionality as well in educating them in the mission and as they begin to experience it themselves, [they are] able to realize, ‘Oh that is what that is’” (Principal, Independent School 1). Beyond simple recognition of the mission, particularly for Catholic schools, leaders wanted to ensure fit between the school’s mission and families’ expectations. One principal stated:

As we get families that aren’t Catholic or as we get families that are new or rediscovering Catholicism, I think it’s important that we are very clear with, “This is why we exist.” Again, we don’t exist as an alternative to a public school. We exist as a Catholic school to further the mission of the Church. (Principal, Catholic School 5)

A public school with a new mission statement organized a whole school assembly for students and parents in the opening days of the school year to present and discuss the school’s new mission:

We had a parent night where I shared the vision, the mission. I was very forthcoming with who I am and what I believed was possible for their children,
that it wasn’t a race thing, it wasn’t an ethnic thing. It was “I believe in your kids” thing. That we may not have all the resources that some of the other schools have, but that’s not gonna hold us back. It’s no secret the reputation of the building. The reputation is that it’s a bad school and there are bad kids. And part of that’s true. But that we’re trying to change it by changing the mindset and the parents applauded. (Principal, Public School 3)

Bringing teachers, students, and families into discussions of mission seems to be one way to more deeply engage stakeholders with mission and forge stronger connections between the school and the statement and in turn increase the salience of the statement within the community.

3.5.3.3 Personal Connection to Statement

The extent to which individuals connect on a personal level to the school mission appears to increase the salience of a school mission statement. Many teachers across sector discussed personal connections to the mission of their school, some of which were based on personal beliefs and convictions that individuals see reflected in the statement. These personal connections vary by school type and sector.

3.5.3.3.1 Public Magnet Schools

Teachers and principals in three of the four magnet schools discussed teacher connection to mission resulting from signed commitment statements in the years following the reorganization of the schools into magnets. One teacher commented: “In the olden days you had to sign a form to be here, so, you had to agree to that mission. We don’t do that anymore, but it hasn’t been that long ago that we did…. You had to like buy into the academy and all of that” (Teacher 1, Magnet 2). While signing a commitment to mission was no longer a current practice, the relatively low teacher turnover in these
102

schools had resulted in a stable group of teachers who had applied to teach in the schools because of the mission.

We had a core group of teachers that were here since the beginning, and this was their first job. Many of them were hired in fresh out of college. They developed curriculum units. I mean, they started from scratch, and they spent a lot of time. So they had, already, that sense of the initial mission, which I think is still somewhat what we have today…. I’d say, about half of our faculty is original, and the other half is new. So I think those that are new have kind of got a sense of our mission from their colleagues, and I think that we have a very dedicated group that really wants to see our kids, our program succeed, our kids succeed, and to be able to push them beyond the expectations. So I would say that sense of mission, all of them have bought into that. (Principal, Magnet School 2)

Because the personal connection to mission was so strong, one principal described mission-related tension stemming from changes in the school context and demographics:

The teachers have really struggled and they’re almost angry to a point because they are upset, like “You promised me this vision and I committed to it and I came here for it, and now here I am in 2017 and this isn’t what I was promised.” (Principal, Magnet 4)

This example suggests that once strong connections are formed to mission statements, deviance from a salient mission may result in conflict within the community.

3.5.3.3.2 Catholic Schools

The mission of the Catholic Church features strongly in Catholic school mission statements, with the parish or inter-parish school serving as an extension of the Church’s educational mission. Catholic school teachers and principals in each of the Catholic schools discussed strong ties to the mission of the school for this reason. Many felt a personal connection to the Church, which translated into a commitment to the mission of the school. One teacher commented:

If it’s a Catholic school where you know that you want to follow Christ and you want to live the way you’re called to be … there’s this underlying mission that we
all know… and we know we’re teaching academics and we know that we have this call from God. (Teacher 2, Catholic School 6)

Catholic school teachers talked about their role in their larger parish community, seeing their students at Sunday Mass and understanding the need to live the mission of the school outside of the school building. Many teachers found the mission of the school to be integrated across different aspects of their lives. One teacher commented, “The same things that I teach here, I bring home to my teenage boys and address to them, so this isn’t anything that’s different” (Teacher 3, Catholic School 5). Perhaps because of the integration between home, school, and parish, teachers and leaders spoke of a match between personal and professional mission:

One of the things that makes this job feel like a good fit is my own personal mission is consistent with that which already was here. So I don’t feel like I have to change too much my own sort of passion about things. It fits well here. (Principal, Catholic School 6)

One teacher commented: “I think it’s easy, too, because if your personal mission aligns with your school mission, then it’s just easy” (Teacher 3, Catholic School 3).

3.5.3.3.3 Independent Schools

Teachers and leaders in independent schools also drew connections between mission in their personal and professional lives. The two independent schools in this sample had distinctive and detailed mission statements that teachers and principals reported connecting to their personal ideals and sense of mission. One teacher commented: “The mission statement is something that seems personal – people take it personally, from the children to the adults, and it pervades our work” (Teacher 5, Independent 2). A teacher in a different independent school spoke similarly: “I think
we’re all called to this place or drawn here because of [the mission], and so we identify strongly with it” (Teacher 4, Independent School 1).

Teachers and leaders in independent schools also seemed to be conscious of a fit between mission at home and at school, and reported integrating the school’s mission into their personal lives: “I feel like it becomes more of an individual mission rather than just at work; I find myself doing this at home and it just becomes a part of you, like that’s the mission you wanna follow” (Teacher 1, Independent School 2). One school leader described his introduction to the mission of the school:

I also felt that this was going to help me become a better person that being exposed to a mission on a daily basis that has this sort of strength and this sort of commitment to it, I felt was ultimately going to help me become a better person. I think that that’s like a fairly good litmus test of a mission statement. (Principal, Independent School 2)

The ability to form connections to the mission on a personal level gave the mission greater meaning and salience for individuals within these schools.

3.5.4 Resonance

Beyond familiarity and salience, principals and teachers in seven schools reported deeper engagement with the statement, detailing instances when they used the statement actively and purposefully in situations related to decision-making and/or the intentional building of school culture. Principals and teachers here indicate that mission can serve important problem-solving functions in providing an impartial standard to reference in tough conversations and decisions and can provide a centerpiece to build a culture around. These examples do not fully capture the emotional aspect of resonance as described by McDonnell et al. (2017), but they do suggest experiences with the potential to witness such feeling.
3.5.4.1 Making Important Decisions

Independent and Catholic schools referenced using mission as a tool in making decisions and policies within the school on a regular basis. One Catholic school principal described the statement as “something concrete and tangible that we can refer to, to keep us on our mission. It sort of tethers us to that mission” (Principal, Catholic School 5). An independent school leader described it as a “guiding force” toward a goal:

I think being an independent school we’re very much driven by our mission. It’s sort of our guiding force. We try to refer back to it when we’re making all decisions, and think about the experience we’re trying to provide for children. So, it is really central to even the daily tasks that we do. We try to always go back to refer to the mission and are we moving towards that. (Leader 1, Independent School 1)

The mission statement seemed particularly valuable for school leaders and teachers in private and Catholic schools when faced with change, from scheduling and curriculum to pick-up and car-line policies to whether to allow students to use handheld devices in the classroom environment:

And anytime that we’re looking to do anything at all, change anything at all inside of the school, we do go back to the mission statement and use that to be our third point of reference to say, “Is it matching all of the points of this mission?” So nothing is done without consulting the mission. (Leader, Independent School 2)

The principal and teachers within one independent school made multiple references to the mission statement as this “third point of reference” as described here by the school leader:

So the mission statement has always served as this third point of reference to say, “What’s the most important thing we’re doing right here?” And so it allows egos to sort of wash away and we’re all just sort of servants here for the children and we are servants of the mission. (Principal, Independent School 2)
The three points referenced here are the speaker, the listener, and the mission statement. The statement exists “outside of [the] conversation… that diffuses any sort of heated conversation” (Principal, Independent School 2). In that manner the mission statement becomes both a reference point of stated goals and ideals but also an interpersonal tool to assist in tough conversations or unpopular decisions. From a problem-solving standpoint, then the mission statement can be used to resolve or avoid minor conflict among stakeholders in for example, parent-teacher conferences:

So, the mission again served as this third point of reference… when you’re talking about a child’s grades, let’s say, in a conference with their parents, if I’m talking about [a student]’s grades and I’m looking directly at [the student], [the student] feels worthless because she’s like, “She’s talking to me about my grades.” Or it could be the opposite. “This person feels like I’m really important, right? This is really good for me,” versus these are the grades we’re talking about and then it’s not about [the student] and it’s more about the work that [the student] did. (Principal, Independent School 2)

One Catholic school principal also understood the mission as playing a similar role in using mission to make and justify tough decisions:

So, an act as simple as greeting a child when they come in the room really supports our mission. And so, I think making connections like that when I’m asking for something of the staff or requiring something of the staff, they may not like it. But it’s not about me. It’s about the mission. And that makes it easier for me to make some tough calls sometimes. (Principal, Catholic School 5)

However, if the mission is not central to the school, these decisions could easily be devoid of meaning and less effective at solving problems within the school. One teacher described needing “a solid, authentic, usable mission”:

Yes, you need a mission, but you also need a good mission… I think you need to take time to focus on what your school is all about and really centralize that mission so then it becomes, really, the root of your school. So yeah, without a mission statement that’s steeped in how you want [the school] to be and how you want students—or everybody to use it then, yeah, I don’t really see how that could work. (Teacher 1, Independent School 2)
3.5.4.2 Building School Culture

In two schools, new principals reported intentionally using a newly approved mission statement as part of an effort to build school culture. In one Catholic school, a new principal and pastor sought to revitalize the school environment and more closely tie it to the parish’s religious tradition, strengthening the Catholic identity of the school in the process, and “developing a school culture that echoes our mission” (Principal, Catholic School 1). The teachers were aware of the efforts toward this with one teacher describing the school’s efforts as “building a culture—that’s what we’re trying to do now is build a culture” (Teacher 2, Catholic School 1). In this case, the mission statement appears to be providing the focus for intentional efforts related to how the school operates and the norms and values it is seeking to instill in students.

In a public school, a new principal was using new mission and vision statements to change the culture of the school from negative to positive, efforts which one teacher described as “sparking hope” for the community (Teacher 4, Public School 3). Faced with a failing accountability grade from the state, low achievement scores, and negativity from external and internal sources, the new principal was using the new mission statement to assist in retaking control of the school’s culture as well as students’ perceptions of themselves and their school environment. As the principal described:

So we’re trying to get the students to build some confidence and build some school pride. I started the very first day of school with an assembly and I asked how many of you have heard something negative about your school or about the students that go here? And the entire gym had hands up. How many of you want that to change? Well here’s my plan. How many of you want to be on my team? (Principal, Public School 3)
In the principal’s view, the whole-school efforts around mission and vision are “a new start, a fresh start” to build on for all stakeholders—teachers, students, and parents. Although it is not necessarily a quick fix, the mission and vision anchor the changes and address the need for a renewed sense of urgency and purpose in the school.

It’s a three-year plan and … we know that it’s not gonna happen overnight. Our building didn’t get where it is overnight and we won’t get out of it overnight. The previous leadership was here for ten years and so we’ve got some stuff to do. (Principal, Public School 3)

A new focus on mission through the introduction of a mission statement was one tool used to solve the problem of a negative reputation for the school as well as a basis for changing negative mindsets of the students and teachers in the community. As one teacher described, “People have to feel hopeful in order to see a new future, in order to have that vision. And that’s what keeps people going. And so I think that has been the big difference” (Teacher 6, Public School 3).

3.6 Discussion

In this study I use the concepts of familiarity, salience, and resonance to provide leverage in considering whether and how school leaders and teachers use mission statements and how relevant these statements are within the school community. Although skepticism seems to surround the relative importance of the mission statement in the school environment, evidence from this study suggests that in more than half of the schools, teachers and principals were highly familiar with the statement text and that teachers in roughly three-quarters of the schools in the study could recall and discuss the majority of the statement contents in a small group setting. While age and focus of the statement likely contributed to familiarity in some cases, several cases had older
statements and some of the schools with the highest familiarity—independent schools—had mission statements with the greatest number of topics. Daily or weekly recitation of statements contributed to statement familiarity in three schools, and teachers and principals in schools with the lowest familiarity scores reported the absence of the mission statement in the school environment, with teachers reporting not using or seeing the mission statement in recent years.

Beyond familiarity, mission statements were salient to some degree in 12 of 17 schools. The personal ties to statement content that demonstrate salience stem from individuals’ pre-existing ideals and beliefs as well as connections forged by direct interaction with statement language and content. Schools that brought the language of the mission statement into daily interactions in the school enabled teachers and students to use the phrasing of the mission statement which kept the statement “living” in the community. Discussing the meaning of the mission statement with teachers, students, and parents also provided opportunities for deeper engagement with mission statement text. These personal connections to mission differed across school type and sector suggesting that mission salience is not necessarily tied to personal convictions or ideals.

Teachers and leaders described multiple instances when the mission statement had resonance for the school community. Mission statements were used as solutions to problems in seven schools. In these schools, mission was actively used as a tool, and teachers and leaders were able to discuss the ways in which the mission statement was engaged to mitigate conflict and assist in making tough decisions. One school’s description of the mission statement as a “third point of reference” illustrated how mission can be used as an impersonal and neutral perspective to diffuse tense situations
and potential conflicts. Mission statements also provided a basis for building school culture, and the case of the public school using mission as a foundation for school reform echoes previous work that suggests that change in schools includes a commitment to a focused set of objectives within a school community (Goldring and Berends 2009; Hill et al. 1990).

Overall, mission statements seemed to be most integral to schools where all three conditions were present: the statement contents were familiar, held specific meaning for the community, and were used and referenced purposefully within the school environment. In these schools, the mission statement was an essential aspect of ongoing practice rather than a one-time or annual activity. From a school type and sector perspective, data from this study suggest that individuals in Catholic and independent schools demonstrate the highest familiarity with the mission statement, and that these schools are more likely to provide conditions for the mission statement to gain salience and to be used in ways that offer opportunities for resonance. However, evidence here suggests school sector alone is not an indicator of whether or not a school can successfully implement mission-related practice. Individual teachers and leaders in public magnet schools in the sample demonstrated high personal connections to mission and one traditional public school was intentionally using mission as a basis for school reform efforts, attempting to revitalize the school culture with a new mission statement. This finding echoes previously work by Hill and colleagues (1990), which stresses the potential for mission-related activity in schools across type and sector.

Compared to private schools, traditional public schools differed most substantively in the ability for the school to use or reference the mission statement while
weighing important decisions and demands in the school environment. Public schools, as part of large bureaucratic school systems, are faced with greater directives related to curriculum, programming, and policy and likely present fewer opportunities to consider mission in substantive decisions related to day-to-day operations. However, there may be opportunities for school leaders and teachers in these schools to bring the mission statement into school-level decisions. These decisions may not be foundational related to policy but may offer ways to shape the details of community life and culture in the school. More research is needed to understand the extent to which public schools are able to make local decisions based on mission and at what scale.

It is important to note that data for this study come from schools in just one community and while special attention was paid to recruiting schools within close proximity and representing multiple sectors, findings may not be generalizable to other communities in this or other state contexts. Future work would benefit from the study of schools in a community with a greater number of charter schools as these schools are an important addition to conversations on mission as newly established schools, often with specific educational objectives (Renzulli et al. 2015). While this study is not entirely free from social desirability bias in participant responses, to improve upon previous studies, data were collected from multiple sources and productive methods were used in addition to traditional interviews in an attempt to triangulate information and to gather more complete data on school contexts. To fully understand the role of mission statements in specific school contexts would require additional participant observation or ethnographic research in the form of longitudinal case studies of individual schools. Also, observing teachers and leaders as they use mission to make decisions would provide additional
evidence related to the potential mission statements have as solutions to school-level issues and a deeper measure of their resonance. Finally, considering ideas of mission are but one way of attempting to understand school culture. More work is needed to consider how and under what conditions ideas of mission and the use of mission statements influence group culture within school communities as well as the possible direct and indirect outcomes related to the use of mission statements.

This study makes several contributions to the literature on school mission and culture. First, this study moves beyond analysis of the content of school mission statements to examine the use of mission statements within the school environment. To do so, I use an innovative method—engaging focus groups in a productive activity—in addition to individual and focus group interviews to understand whether and how mission statements are used and referenced across a diverse sample of school types and sectors in one community. Productive methods allow observation of how groups of individuals make sense of concepts and phenomenon in their environment and complement more traditional forms of data collection. Use of these methods in small communities, such as schools, can provide important data and insight into the construction of small group culture. Further use and application of these methods may also assist in greater understanding of what is meant by school culture, an often used but rarely defined term, and assist in understanding how schools vary across this potentially important dimension.

3.7 References


CHAPTER 4:
IS MISSION STATEMENT CONTENT RELATED TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?
INVESTIGATING ACADEMIC-FOCUSED TOPICS AS MEDIATORS ON
ACHIEVEMENT OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS USING STATE-FUNDED
VOUCHERS IN INDIANA

4.1 Overview

Recent school choice policies enable eligible students to attend a participating
private school using a state-funded scholarship or voucher. These policies have been
enacted in 26 programs in 15 states and the District of Columbia since 1990 and offer
many students and families an alternative to their assigned public school (EdChoice
2018). Using these scholarship vouchers, parents are able to choose a school among
public and private options that they believe will best meet their children’s academic
needs. With state funds being used to sponsor student attendance in these private,
independent, and sometimes religious schools, research is needed to understand the
impacts of these policies on student achievement and to understand the role school sector
plays in this process.

Schools across sectors likely differ in school culture, what some have defined as
the norms, values, and beliefs shared by members of a school community (Hallinan 2005;
Hoy 1990; Van Houtte 2005). The organizational decisions, policies, and actions of
school leaders and teachers are thought to send both explicit and implicit messages to
students regarding what the school community believes to be important. One such vehicle
for these messages is the school mission statement, which can provide a “blueprint” for
the culture of the school (Hallinan 2005:132). Mission statements can serve as direct
messaging tools to communicate to teachers, students, and parents what the adults within
the school community believe is important—what norms, values, and beliefs are
shared—and provide a basis for what goes on in the everyday life of the school.

To the extent that mission statements communicate strong messages about the
community’s belief in the importance of academics to teachers, students, and parents,
they may assist in defining what it means to be a member of the school community and in
turn motivate and encourage action that highlights and emphasizes a focus on academics
within the school community. Evidence showing links between mission statement content
and school-level academic outcomes suggests there may be some connection between
what messages the mission statement includes and how students perform academically
(Weiss and Piderit 1999; Slate et al. 2008), but to date this research remains inconclusive.

In this study, I consider the following research question: Does the inclusion of
academic-focused topics in school mission statements mediate or moderate student
achievement outcomes for students using a voucher? I use school administrative data and
longitudinal student achievement records from the state of Indiana to replicate estimates
of academic outcomes for students using a voucher in a representative sample of schools.
Then, using topic measures within school mission statements, I examine whether
academic-focused messages in mission statements are related to individual student
achievement in math and English language arts (ELA) for low-income students switching schools using a state-funded voucher.

4.2 Background

4.2.1 Voucher Policies and Student Achievement

School choice policies have been instituted in an effort to better meet parent and student needs. These policies have introduced increased options for schooling through the establishment of magnet and charter schools, tax credit scholarships, and vouchers or state-funded scholarships which can be used to pay for tuition in a private school (Austin and Berends 2018). The intent behind these policies is to increase educational opportunities for low-income students by providing more than one option for where a child attends school and to increase student achievement across the board. When schools are faced with increasing competition for students, they will feel greater urgency to innovate and improve in order to continue to attract students and remain viable within the educational field (Hoxby 2001, 2002). Of the many types of choice, school vouchers have been the most contentious in that they provide families with public funding supporting student attendance at private and sometimes religious schools.

Evaluations of voucher policies over time, however, have shown mixed effects on student achievement (Austin and Berends 2018; Epple, Romano, and Urquiola 2015; Shakeel, Anderson, and Wolf 2016; Zimmer and Bettinger 2015). Experimental and quasi-experimental research on voucher programs focused within cities has not provided a definitive evaluation of these programs. In some cases, modest positive effects on test scores have been found for some students in certain years of participation, or no effects at
all. Among statewide voucher programs, recent evaluation of programs in Louisiana, Ohio, and Indiana have shown negative effects on achievement for students using vouchers to attend private schools. Experimental studies in Louisiana have found negative effects on student achievement. These effects have ranged from large and significant for students who participated in the first year of the program (Abdulkadiroglu, Pathak, and Walters 2018), but with less negative effects for those participating in year two, where only negative effects were found for math achievement (Mills and Wolf 2017). Analyses from a matched sample analysis in Ohio demonstrate similar negative effects on achievement for students using vouchers (Figlio and Karbownik 2016), and most recently, analyses from Indiana show no effect on student achievement in reading and negative effects on math over time (Waddington and Berends 2018).

These analyses provide an aggregate measure of achievement for students using vouchers within a state. It is likely, however, that vouchers provide opportunities for increased achievement for some students in some schools, and that student experiences in these different sector schools vary considerably from school to school. Considering how different elements of school organization are related to achievement for students using vouchers provides opportunities to examine under what conditions choice policies may be more or less effective in fostering student achievement (Austin and Berends 2018; Berends 2015; Schneider 2003).

4.2.2 School Culture, Mission Statements, and Achievement

School culture presents one characteristic where schools likely differ. School culture, although a somewhat nebulous and hard to define concept, has been characterized in several studies as the norms, values, and beliefs shared among adults
within the school community and can be communicated directly to students through personal interactions as well as indirectly through school policies and procedures (Hallinan 2005; Hoy 1990; Van Houtte 2005). Although similar in some ways to what has been termed school climate, some researchers have argued that school culture should be considered a distinct and separate concept (Hoy 1990; Van Houtte 2005). School climate has been more easily measured and validated through scaled survey measures that capture student and teacher perceptions of elements of the school environment, while culture is better understood as the norms, values, and beliefs underlying these elements.

The school mission statement, which represents the norms, values, and beliefs of the school community in a short statement written for both internal and external audiences, has been considered one way in which schools can communicate school culture to the school community (Hallinan 2005). Investigation into the extent to which these messages are evident in the school community and how they may be related to school and student outcomes has been inconclusive to date, likely because of the investment of time needed to witness mission in action through ethnographic study and the multiple direct and more indirect ways in which these messages are filtered through interactions, policies, and classroom instruction. However, messages related to academics within mission statements are likely to be the most closely tied to student achievement outcomes. If the mission statement stresses the importance of academics, teachers, students, and parents receiving this message may place additional focus or value on school work, the activity of learning, and the pursuit of academic success.

While a focus on academics may be thought of as a given within schools, especially in the current climate of high-stakes testing and increased accountability for
schools, the purposes of schooling extend beyond the activity of academic learning. Historically, early schools and curriculum were more focused on moral and character education than academics (Jeynes 2003; Tanner and Tanner 1990), and since compulsory public schooling was instituted, many have argued that schooling has served political purposes in creating an educated citizenry as well as economic purposes, ensuring established social class positions and teaching students to become good workers (Bowles and Gintis 1976, 2002; Tyack 1976). Schools have also been considered as agents of socialization, with a special focus on teaching students how to be a good member of society and work well with others (Dreeben 2002). Some contend that these contradictory goals have undermined the importance of and focus on what is learned in schools in favor of the credential received (Labaree 1997). These perspectives suggest that academic learning has been and continues to be just one purpose among many within schools.

Many of these purposes of schooling have been coded in previous analyses of school mission statements. Although critics of mission statements question how well the content of mission statements represent the practice and performance of organizations and find mission statement topics and contents to be overly general (Khalifa 2011), other research suggests that mission statements are heterogeneous, offering insight into how leaders understand the organizational goals of the school, and are fluid, open to both interpretation and to revision (Weiss and Piderit 1999). Based on their sample of mission statements from across the U.S., Stemler, Bebell, and Sonnabend (2011) argue that school mission statements are a valuable source of empirical data related to organizational purposes that can be reliably coded and illustrate systematic differences related to local context. Multiple studies have used inductive methods to analyze
statement content and have produced similar coding schemes ranging from 9 to 15 topics within a corpus of mission statements (Boerema 2006; Schafft and Biddle 2013; Slate et al. 2008; Stemler et al. 2011; Weiss and Piderit 1999; see Table 4.1 for detailed comparisons of inductive coding in previous research).
# TABLE 4.1

## PREVIOUS INDUCTIVE CODING OF MISSION STATEMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studies</th>
<th>Boerema 2006</th>
<th>Schafft and Biddle 2013</th>
<th>Slate et al. 2008</th>
<th>Stemler et al. 2011</th>
<th>Weiss and Piderit 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample Description</strong></td>
<td>81 private school mission statements from BC, Canada (94% of population)</td>
<td>480 public school district mission statements in Pennsylvania (96% of population)</td>
<td>100 randomly selected public schools in Texas, 50/50 high/low performing</td>
<td>421 public high schools randomly selected from a purposive sample of 10 states</td>
<td>Full sample of 304 public schools from 2 counties in Michigan</td>
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<td><strong>Academic</strong></td>
<td>-Academic</td>
<td>-Academic outcomes</td>
<td>-Academic success</td>
<td>-Cognitive development</td>
<td>-Encourage academic learning</td>
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<td>-Aesthetic</td>
<td>-Academic rigor</td>
<td>-Challenge</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Assert that all children can learn</td>
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<td>-Social development</td>
<td>-Social development</td>
<td>-Social development</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Develop social skills</td>
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<td>-Caring environment</td>
<td>-Safe environment</td>
<td>-Safe and nurturing environment</td>
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<td>-Safe environment</td>
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<td>-Empower</td>
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<td>-School community ties</td>
<td>-Partnership</td>
<td>-Integrate into local community</td>
<td>-Encourage community involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Valuing diversity</td>
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TABLE 4.1 (CONTINUED)

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<td>Life-long learning Productive Responsible</td>
<td>-Vocational preparation</td>
<td>-Prepare for future work outcomes -Prepare for future life outcomes</td>
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</table>

Coded topics relating to academics have ranged from academic success (Slate et al. 2008), academic learning, all children can learn (Weiss and Piderit 1999), cognitive development (Stemler et al. 2011), academic outcomes, and academic rigor (Schafft and Biddle 2013). Rather than a uniform inclusion of these topics across schools, many of these studies have found variation in how academic-focused topics are included in school mission statements across schools and school types. Slate et al. (2008) in a study of public school mission statements in Texas found academic success to be the most referenced theme, but it appeared in just 54% of the mission statements in the state sample. Stemler et al. (2011) found that cognitive development was one of the three most frequently included topics, but it appeared in only 53% of mission statements in the national sample. Weiss and Piderit (1999) found slightly higher numbers of inclusion for academic learning as it appeared in 87% of mission statements in a sample from Michigan. Evidence from these studies suggests that there is considerable variation in whether schools include messages about academics within the school mission statement.
With this variation, several studies have sought to link mission statement contents to some form of student or school-level achievement. Stemler et al. (2011), in a nationally representative sample of mission statements, compared whether mission statement contents differed between schools based on adequate yearly progress status (AYP) as a measure of the school’s academic success. They found that schools that met and did not meet AYP included the topic cognitive development at the same rate (55%), suggesting no difference in statement contents on this topic related to school-level achievement. However, Slate et al. (2008) examined a random sample of 50 high performing and 50 low performing schools’ mission statements in Texas, looking for differences in the inclusion of mission statement topics between the two groups of schools. They found that high performing schools were twice as likely to include the topic academic success in their mission statements compared to low performing schools.

Making use of the state-mandated adoption of mission statements in Michigan, Weiss and Piderit (1999) examined whether adoption of a mission statement containing the codes academic learning or all students can learn influenced school-level achievement in math and reading two years following the adoption of the statement. They found that when mission statements included academic learning as part of a highly focused mission statement with an activist tone (i.e., using active language and focused on school community action, characterized by the phrase “we will…”), school-level achievement increased in both math and reading. When they examined the topic all children can learn, however, a different relationship emerged. This topic was negatively related to math and reading school-level achievement in schools with an activist mission statement.
4.2.3 School Sector Differences in Mission Statements and Achievement

Students using a state-funded voucher move from a public school into a private or faith-based school. Thus, considering how private school mission statements differ from public school statements is important to consider. Very few studies, however, have focused on the content of private school mission statements. One study by Boerema (2006) examined private school statements in British Columbia, Canada, and concluded that private schools have separate and distinct goals as compared to their public school counterparts as these schools were established to “address the needs of a community, whether that be faith-based, class based, or special interest” (199). Faith-based school mission statements compared to secular private school statements were found to have less of an emphasis on academic or intellectual development. However, faith-based school mission statements across denomination discussed providing academics within a faith based-context, with Catholic school statements emphasizing “academic excellence” and evangelical and Calvinist school statements using the terms “Christian” or “Biblically-based” education to describe their academic offerings (196-197). Survey data from faith-based school graduates support this description of academics in faith-based schools, with combined measures suggesting a “stronger academic climate in Catholic schools and a greater focus on relationships and religious and spiritual formation in evangelical Protestant schools” (Sikkink 2012:37).

Private and Catholic schools have been described as communal organizations, schools that consist of “cooperative relations among adults who share a common purpose and where daily life for both adults and students is organized in ways which foster commitment among its members” (Bryk and Driscoll 1988: 2; Bryk, Lee and Holland
1993). Both private and Catholic schools were found to score highly on this measure, and on the whole, communal organization was found to have positive effects on teacher and student engagement and motivation and positive effects on student achievement (Bryk and Driscoll 1988). To the extent that these communal organizations focus on academic learning, shared values related to academics may lead to increased academic success for students, and some evidence suggests that what goes on in private and Catholic school communities may be more closely tied to ideas of mission and the school mission statement (Dallavis 2018b).

Private and Catholic schools have been thought to offer students an academic advantage over public schools. Initial studies based on high school data in the 1980s found higher achievement levels and gains for students attending Catholic schools (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1982; Bryk et al. 1993). Recent studies using more sophisticated methods on nationally representative data at different levels of schooling provide a less clear comparison, with positive high school effects in math (Carbonaro and Covay 2010), but more mixed effects at the elementary and middle school levels, with studies showing similar or negative effects for elementary math (Carbonaro 2006; Elder and Jepsen 2014; Hallinan and Kubitschek 2012; Reardon, Cheadle, and Robinson 2009) and a slight advantage in achievement gains in eighth grade reading (Hallinan and Kubitschek 2012).

Some research indicates that Catholic schools benefit disadvantaged students (Bryk et al. 1993; Greeley 1982; Grogger and Neal 2000; Hallinan and Kubitschek 2010; Lee and Bryk 1989; Neal 1997; Sander 1996), leading some scholars to theorize that Catholic schools better operationalize “the common school ideal,” providing more equal
access to academic opportunities for all students compared to public schools (Hallinan and Kubitschek 2012). Some research has concluded that the Catholic school effect is the strongest among those students who are demographically least likely to attend Catholic schools (Morgan 2009), a population which is perhaps the most similar to low-income students using vouchers to attend private and Catholic schools.

4.3 Hypotheses

Taking into consideration research on school mission statements that suggests academic topics are associated with achievement and research on school sector that suggests positive learning outcomes for disadvantaged students, I hypothesize that academic-focused topics in private school mission statements will be positively related to student achievement in math and English language arts (ELA) for low-income students switching into private schools using a voucher compared to their matched peers who remained in public schools.

4.4 Data

Data for this study come from elementary and middle school students and schools in the state of Indiana. The Indiana Choice Scholarship Program is the largest state-funded voucher program in the U.S. and allows students who meet eligibility criteria to use vouchers to attend private schools (EdChoice 2018). In its seventh year, more than 35,000 students used a voucher to attend one of 318 participating private schools (Indiana Department of Education [IDOE] 2018). In addition to having the largest voucher program in operation, Indiana provides an important case in which to compare student
achievement as many private schools take the state administered achievement test, the ISTEP+, and did so prior to the beginning of the voucher program. Thus, private schools and students had a history and familiarity with the test and state reporting prior to the creation of the voucher program and the increased accountability measures it brought to private schools. In addition, as students in both public and private schools take the same achievement test, direct comparisons can be made between students in different sectors and with their own scores over time. School administrative data and student test score records in math and reading across seven years (2009-10 through 2016-17) have been provided by the state through a data sharing partnership with the IDOE.

Additional data were collected from a representative sample of elementary and middle schools (n=575) across school sector in Indiana in conjunction with the School Effectiveness in Indiana (SEI) study. The SEI study seeks to better understand the organizational and instructional conditions in an environment of school choice (Berends and Waddington 2015), and the sample was drawn from all schools in Indiana that administer the state standardized test (ISTEP+) and serve grades K-8 in some configuration. The sample was stratified on the basis of region, urban locale, school level, and socioeconomic status, and private schools were also stratified by religious affiliation, either Catholic or other (non-sectarian and other religious).

A follow-up survey was sent via email to the principals of these schools during late spring and summer of 2017 to gather information regarding current and previous school mission statements since 2009. The response rate for this survey was 64%, and in an attempt to create a more complete dataset, Internet searches of current and archived school websites were used to locate as many school mission statements as possible.
School mission statements are often publicly available and located on the front page of the school website, on an “About the school” page, or within a school handbook posted to the website for parents and students. The resulting combined dataset of survey responses and web-collected statements yielded 902 mission statements from 547 schools, of which 534 mission statements were collected from the second time point, 2016-17 (92.9% of the original sample). Mission statement data were then merged with school-level administrative data from the Indiana Department of Education with data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data for public schools and the Private School Survey (PSS) for private schools to create a more complete dataset.

4.5 Measures

4.5.1 Outcome Measures

In these analyses, student achievement is the outcome of interest. I use students’ annual ISTEP+ tests scores in mathematics and English language arts (ELA), tests which students take each year in grades 3 through 8. These scaled scores are standardized according to the mean and standard deviation of students across the state by subject, grade, and year of testing, allowing for comparisons in SD units relative to the state average.

4.5.2 Student Demographics

Student demographic and background characteristics from the IDOE data include indicators for student gender, race/ethnicity, free and reduced price lunch (FRPL) status,
English language learner (ELL) status, special education status, grade level, and grade retention in the previous year. The data also include whether a student receives a voucher in each year during the time period observed, from which an annual indicator of whether the student received a voucher was created as well as a measure for the number of total years a student received a voucher.

4.5.3 School Demographics

The school a student attended was observed for each year. School administrative data from the IDOE was linked to the CCD and PSS data from NCES as in the mission statement analysis, and these data were used to create indicators for school sector (e.g., traditional public, charter, Catholic, and other private) as well as school locale (e.g., urban, suburban, rural) and school level (e.g., K-8, K-5, 6-8, etc.).

4.5.4 Mission Statement Measures

Measures of academic content within mission statements were determined through a multi-step process using a structural topic model (STM), an automated and unsupervised coding technique that uses a statistical model of language to group words within documents into topics (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2012). STM differs from many topic models in that it allows for the inclusion of covariates into the model to assist in the creation of topics, resulting in tighter and more intuitive topics based on information about the documents analyzed. These models are probabilistic in nature and allow for the calculation of the likelihood that a topic will be included in a document (Blei 2012; Ignatow and Mihalcea 2017; Mohr and Bogdanov 2013).
Using STM to code document text is both a quantitative and qualitative process as the researcher plays an important role in specifying the number of topics the model solves for, determining the most appropriate model based on understandings of the text and an analysis of model fit. Researchers first determine a range of potential topics $k$ based on prior coding of similar documents in the literature and then examines the topic model solutions seeking the number of topics that provides the most breadth with the least amount of content overlap. The optimal model is then confirmed according to measures of fit related to semantic coherence of topic and exclusivity of words contained within each topic.

In this process, I first prepared the text for analysis, removing school names and the term “mission” from all statements and performed a series of automated cleaning processes that removed punctuation, low and high frequency words, and common words, known as stop words (e.g., a, and, the). Then I included a set of school context variables that had the potential to impact the mission of a school, including school sector, size, level, location, percent students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch, percent students from race/ethnic minority groups, and percent students passing both reading and math on the ISTEP+ achievement tests.

I analyzed iterations of the STM solutions for $k=6...20$ topics. Each solution returned the specified number of topics in the form of high probability words and high frequency words. For each value $k$, I noted overlapping topics, looking for topics that seemed repetitive or that should be condensed with other topics. I continued in this manner for each level of $k$ in decreasing order until I noted distinctive topics that were being subsumed into more general topics and therefore lost to analysis. To assist in this
process, I created a spreadsheet with a column for the topics for each value $k$ in descending order. Within each column, I listed the topic output, keeping common or similar topics within the same row across values of $k$ to provide a visual of when topics disappeared or appeared. Using this tool, I chose the optimal value $k$ based on topic content, selecting the solution $k = 17$ as it provided the greatest breadth of intuitive topics with the least overlap of words and ideas (Ignatow and Mihalcea 2017; Mutzel 2015; Steyvers and Griffiths 2007).

I then verified the choice of $k = 17$ by examining word clouds of high probability words for each topic and read through 25 mission statements associated with each topic in order to verify the consistency of ideas within topics and to devise a descriptive label for each topic. Next, I examined fit statistics for each model based on semantic coherence and exclusivity values produced by the model. Using these complementary quantitative and qualitative checks, I determined $k = 17$ to be the optimal model. The complete list of topics for the STM solution $k = 17$ and the proportion of each topic within the larger corpus are included in Figure 4.1 (for a complete discussion of the topic model analysis and solution see Dallavis 2018a).
Of the full 17 topics, four topics reference academic learning in some respect: *academic success, achievement and standards, believe children can learn*, and *every child* (see Figures 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 for word clouds for each topic and Table 4.2 for high frequency words and example statements). The STM model calculates the proportion of each topic referenced within each individual mission statement and assigns a proportion between 0 and 1 for each topic to each statement. Using the proportions for mission statements at the second time point, 2016-17, I standardized each of the four academic-focused topics within the SEI sample of schools to have a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1 to allow for comparison in SD units. I then coded these variables
into three quantiles, creating a Low, Middle, and High categorical variable for each of the four topics to be used in the analyses.

Figure 4.2: Word cloud graphic of high probability words generated by structural topic model for “Academic Success” topic.
Figure 4.3: Word cloud graphic of high probability words generated by structural topic model for “Achievement and Standards” topic.
Figure 4.4: Word cloud graphic of high probability words generated by structural topic model for “Believe Students Can Learn” topic.
Figure 4.5: Word cloud graphic of high probability words generated by structural topic model for “Every Child” topic.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Top words (by FREX score)</th>
<th>Example Mission Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>divers, success, cultur, recog, within, enhance, core</td>
<td>“The mission of THIS SCHOOL is to develop socially responsible students who are literate, academically successful, engaged in all aspects of their education and prepared for success in the 21st century.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement &amp; Standards</td>
<td>high, nation, perform, college, level, state, readi</td>
<td>“THIS SCHOOL is committed to the total education of children as measured by their ability to master and exceed district, state, and national standards. A system of differentiation including remediation and acceleration will be used to meet the needs of individual students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe All Students Can Learn</td>
<td>believ, way, appropri, deserv, purpos, improv, process</td>
<td>“We believe all students deserve a safe, respectful, positive, and caring environment to realize their full potential socially, physically, and academically.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Child</td>
<td>everi, charact, day, knowledg, child, skill, necessari</td>
<td>“THIS SCHOOL in partnership with all stakeholders, supports every student in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to reach their full potential.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6 Analytical Sample and Estimation Strategy

The analysis presented here relies on the nonexperimental methods used by Waddington and Berends (2018) to estimate the effects of using a voucher to attend a private school in Indiana and uses these methods (1) to replicate findings for the representative sample of Indiana schools contained in the SEI study and (2) to estimate
differences in outcomes for voucher students taking into account academic-focused topics in school mission statements in private schools. The rationale for and a description of this strategy are described below (see Waddington and Berends 2018 for additional details).

As vouchers distributed through the ICSP are not randomly assigned to students and participating private schools in Indiana are not required to hold lotteries to determine enrollment except in the case of oversubscribed schools, estimates related to voucher use in Indiana are subject to selection bias. There are many reasons why students who use a voucher may be different from students who choose to remain in a public school. In order to receive a voucher, parents must apply for the voucher and choose a private school to attend. Some parents may be more likely to actively seek this opportunity for their children and thus, students using a voucher likely differ on the basis of family and student background characteristics, parental preferences, motivation, other available schooling options, as well as unobserved differences in student and family background. For these reasons, directly comparing students who use a voucher to attend a private school and students who remain in public schools would yield biased estimates that do not adequately take these factors into account.

In order to better estimate the effects of using a voucher, Waddington and Berends (2018) created a matched sample of students who used a voucher to attend a private school with similar peers in their public school of origin who remained in the public school. They then applied multiple strategies based on recent studies using nonexperimental approaches to replicate experimental estimates of school choice evaluations (Anderson and Wolf 2017; Bifulco 2012; Fortson et al. 2014) and evaluations of charter schools (Angrist, Pathak, and Walters 2013; Dobbie and Fryer 2013, 2017).
Both the sample construction and their preferred model for estimation of effects are described in detail in the sections that follow.

4.6.1 Student Sample Construction

Prior to constructing the sample, several restrictions were imposed. To be included in the sample, each student had to have at least three years of achievement scores, including the two years before receiving a voucher (i.e., pre-baseline and baseline scores). The voucher student sample and the public school comparison sample are described separately below.

4.6.1.1 Voucher Student Sample

To qualify for a voucher in Indiana, students must meet several eligibility requirements. In the initial implementation of the policy, students had to have been enrolled in a public school—a traditional public, magnet, or charter—in the school year before receiving a voucher. While this restriction was removed from the ICSP for the 2013-14 school year, the voucher student sample is restricted to students moving directly from a public school for two reasons. In other voucher programs, most students move from a public school to a private school using a voucher and evaluations of these other programs compare voucher and public school students. Considering only voucher students who move from a public school to a private school also allows for baseline comparisons of achievement in public schools prior to the move.

An additional eligibility requirement is based on family income, with thresholds that directly correspond to reduced priced lunch (RPL) eligibility, inclusive of free lunch (FRPL) eligibility (IDOE 2018). Students receive either a half or full voucher based on
family income, with students in families at or below the income threshold for RPL eligible for a full voucher. The voucher sample is restricted to students who received a full voucher or who were eligible for FRPL in the two years prior to receiving the voucher in order to estimate voucher effects for students in low-income families.

4.6.1.2 Public School Comparison Student Sample

An exact matching process was used to create a sample of public school students matched on a set of baseline characteristics: attendance at the same school, race/ethnicity, sex, grade, and year. This match allows for baseline comparisons of student achievement between voucher and public school students prior to voucher students’ move to a private school. While the exact matching process is more precise than propensity score matching, it is still unable to provide a match on unobservable characteristics. The exact match here adjusts only for observable differences and estimates are still subject to bias related to differences in unobservable characteristics. In an effort to account for unobservable differences in family income, the sample of matched public school students was further restricted to include only students who would qualify for a full voucher under the FRPL eligibility requirements of the ICSP. The resulting sample includes only low-income voucher students matched with low-income public school peers with the same sex, race, and baseline school, grade, and year. Similarly, the sample only includes low-income public school students matched with a low-income voucher student on the same set of characteristics. Each student has achievement data for at least a three-year period, with scores at minimum for the pre-baseline year, baseline year, and at least one year post-voucher.
For the purposes of this study, the analytical sample was further restricted to include only students who move into an SEI private school using a voucher and their matched public school peers from the public school they attended in the year prior to using a voucher. Voucher students in the analytic sample attended 165 of the 188 private schools in the SEI sample (87.8%).

4.6.1.3 Student Descriptive Characteristics for SEI Sample

The analytical sample for this study includes 6,292 low-income public school students who are in the same school, grade, and year at baseline as 1,192 students of the same sex and race/ethnicity receiving a voucher and attending a private school in the following year. Descriptive differences between voucher students and public school students in the sample are included in Table 4.3. The sample of students is similar to the unrestricted sample used by Waddington and Berends (2018).
## TABLE 4.3

DESCRIPTIVE COMPARISON OF MATCHED ANALYTICAL SAMPLE OF LOW-INCOME VOUCHER AND PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS IN INDIANA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voucher</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>1,192</td>
<td>6,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Baseline measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voucher</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.532</td>
<td>0.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.220</td>
<td>0.245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>0.206</td>
<td>0.185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other race/ethnicity</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language learner</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td>0.168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retained</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended charter</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>0.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended magnet</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended suburban school</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>0.308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended town/rural school</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>0.261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean math score</td>
<td>-0.273</td>
<td>-0.287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean ELA score</td>
<td>-0.226</td>
<td>-0.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean math gain</td>
<td>-0.042</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean ELA gain</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### First-Year post-baseline measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voucher</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended Catholic school</td>
<td>0.570</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended other private school</td>
<td>0.430</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean math score</td>
<td>-0.426</td>
<td>-0.279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean ELA score</td>
<td>-0.212</td>
<td>-0.283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean math gain</td>
<td>-0.154</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean ELA gain</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: Table displays voucher and public school (traditional public, charter, or magnet) students with at least three years of test scores in either math or ELA (pre-baseline, baseline, first year post-baseline) and matched within the same race-sex-year-grade-public school matching cell at baseline. Number of public schools reported at baseline and voucher private schools in first year post-baseline. ISTEP+ Math and ELA scores measured in standard deviation units, relative to the Indiana statewide mean and standard deviation within each grade and year.
Slightly less than half of students in the voucher sample are racial/ethnic minorities, with a slightly higher proportion of black students (0.220) and Latino/a students (0.206) compared to their public school counterparts (0.245 and 0.185 respectively). Voucher students with an ELL classification have a proportion of 0.139, while voucher students who are classified as special education represent 0.089 of voucher students at baseline. These two groups are underrepresented in the voucher students compared to their matched public school peers. Per school characteristics, at least half of voucher and low-income public schools students are attending urban public schools.

In the SEI restricted sample, low income voucher students are slightly higher achieving in math and ELA compared to their public school peers at baseline, with less than a tenth of an SD in difference between both subjects. On the whole, however, both voucher and public school students are lower achieving in both math and ELA compared to the state average by nearly one-fourth of an SD in both subjects. While voucher students are slightly higher achieving than their matched peers who remain in public schools, they are below the state average in both subjects prior to the use of a voucher.

4.6.2 Estimation Strategy

First, I replicate the estimates of Waddington and Berends (2018) with the sample restricted to include students using a voucher to attend a private school in the SEI sample compared to their matched public school peers in their public school of origin. To do so, I use Waddington and Berends’ preferred model: an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model with several covariates, estimated for each year a student received a voucher. Thus, I estimated voucher program effects using a total of three individual models for outcomes in math achievement and then three models for ELA achievement in
separate models by subject. The model for the first-year estimates is included in equation (1) below.

\[ Y_{icgt} = \alpha + \beta Voucher_{icgt} + \pi Y_{icgt-1} + \omega Y_{icgt-2} + \delta X_{icgt-1} + \theta_g + \tau_c + u_{icgt} \]  

(1)

In this equation, the achievement level \(Y\) for each student \((i)\) in matching cell \((c)\), grade \((g)\), and post-baseline year \((t)\) is a function of receiving a voucher and attending a private school \((Voucher_{icgt})\) as well as additional covariates.

This model controls for a vector of student baseline academic characteristics \((X_{icgt-1})\) including classification as an ELL or special education student at baseline. Grade fixed effects \((\theta_g)\) account for systematic differences in exams across grade levels. Matching cell fixed effects \((\tau_c)\) account for unobserved differences between the race-sex-year-grade-school matching cells at baseline. These fixed effects also account for systematic differences in exams across years. The term \((u_{icgt})\) represents school cluster-robust standard errors to account for serial among students within the same baseline public school cohort (same grade and year). Two measures of prior student achievement in the same subject as the outcome are included, one at baseline \((Y_{icgt-1})\) and one at pre-baseline \((Y_{icgt-2})\). As these lagged achievement scores are endogenous in the post-baseline years, they remain in the estimates for the second and third years post-baseline.

As prior achievement differences between voucher and non-voucher students are accounted for within the model, estimates of the voucher program can be interpreted as the value-added achievement gains or losses from baseline. The main estimate \((\beta)\) is described as the difference in the achievement gain or loss from baseline in a given post-
baseline year between low-income voucher and public school students who share the same race/ethnicity and sex and are from the same baseline public school cohort. If all covariates that explain differences between the two groups have been accounted for, the resulting estimate will be minimally biased.

Next, I estimated the effect for voucher students attending private schools with different levels of focus on each academic-related mission statement topic. To calculate these estimates, I introduced an interaction between the categorical mission statement topic variables—coded as low, medium, and high focus for each topic—with the voucher indicator in the model described in equation 1. The main voucher effect in these models represents the voucher impact for the reference group, voucher students in a school with a low focus on the academic topic under analysis compared to their matched public school peers. The voucher estimate for students in schools with a medium focus on the academic topic in the mission statement is calculated through the linear combination of the main effect and the estimate of the interaction. The voucher estimate for students in schools with a high focus is calculated in the same manner.

4.7 Results

4.7.1 Replication of Main Effects of Receiving a Voucher and Attending a Private School

To start, I examine the estimated yearly achievement outcomes for low-income students using a voucher to switch from a public to a private school, comparing the estimates for students in the SEI sample to the estimates produced in the analysis by Waddington and Berends (2018). Table 4.4 presents the two estimates at each time point, pre-baseline through the third year with a voucher, for both math and ELA, comparing
the original estimates by Waddington and Berends (W&B) to estimates for the SEI sample.
TABLE 4.4
REPLICATED EFFECTS OF INDIANA VOUCHER PROGRAM ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT (W&B)
USING THE SEI SAMPLE OF SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Math Achievement</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>ELA Achievement</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-Baseline</td>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>1st Year w/ voucher</td>
<td>2nd Year w/ voucher</td>
<td>3rd Year w/ voucher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All voucher</td>
<td>0.088***</td>
<td>0.090**</td>
<td>0.106***</td>
<td>0.077**</td>
<td>-0.146***</td>
<td>-0.172***</td>
<td>-0.172***</td>
<td>-0.168***</td>
<td>-0.183***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.011)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline covariates</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base. and pre-base.</td>
<td>N N N N N N N N</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ach.</td>
<td>Grade fixed effects</td>
<td>Y Y N N Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y N N Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y N N Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y N N Y Y Y Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Y Y N N Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y N N Y Y Y Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matching cell</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td>Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fixed effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N all students</td>
<td>37,601 7,464</td>
<td>37,601 7,458</td>
<td>37,601 7,407</td>
<td>21,354 5,036</td>
<td>9,156 2,676</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37,264 7,428</td>
<td>37,264 7,437</td>
<td>21,459 5,014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall r²</td>
<td>0.010 0.022</td>
<td>0.039 0.047</td>
<td>0.494 0.460</td>
<td>0.566 0.459</td>
<td>0.540 0.544</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.010 0.022</td>
<td>0.039 0.047</td>
<td>0.494 0.460</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: *p ≤ 0.050; **p ≤ 0.010; ***p ≤ 0.001. ISTEP+ Math and ELA achievement measured in standard deviation units, relative to the Indiana state mean and standard deviation within each grade and year. Robust standard errors clustered by baseline cohort (year-grade-school) are in parentheses.
In math, estimates for students in the SEI sample follow the same trend as found by Waddington and Berends (2018), with voucher students scoring slightly higher than their matched public school peers prior to the voucher students’ move to a private school, with estimates within 0.03 SD units of the full population. Estimates for the first three years of using a voucher reflect an achievement loss in math for students moving to a private school. These estimates follow the same trends as in the full population, with estimates within 0.03 SD of the full sample relative to the state mean. In the SEI sample, voucher students scored an average of -0.172 SD (p<.001) below their matched public school peers in math in the first year of receiving a voucher. This average loss increased to -0.196 SD (p<.001) in the second year of receiving a voucher and then decreased slightly in the third year to -0.183 (p<.001).

In ELA, estimates also follow a similar trend to those reported by Waddington and Berends (2018). Students using a voucher are within 0.02 SD of the full sample relative to the state mean with the exception of the second year with the voucher, where voucher students do not experience the second year decline in scores. Prior to the move to a private school, voucher students in the SEI sample scored slightly higher than their matched public school peers, with estimates within 0.02 SD units of the full population. Estimates for the first three years of using a voucher reflect no differences in ELA scores between students using a voucher to attend a private school and their matched public school counterparts, with estimates within 0.02 SD units with the exception of second year with the voucher where the difference in the estimate is 0.06 SD units and the achievement loss found in the full population becomes positive and is no longer statistically significant.
Overall, these differences in estimates are quite small and yield similar results to the estimation of the larger sample conducted by Waddington and Berends (2018), who confirmed the use of their preferred model with a series of sensitivity and robustness checks. These results lend support for the use of the SEI sample in the analyses that follow.

4.7.2 Differences in Topics by School Sector

The proportion of mission statement content using academic-focused topics varies somewhat by school sector (see Table 4.5). Examining the mean proportions of academic success within mission statements, Catholic and charter school means do not reflect differences with the traditional public sector, but the other private sector has a substantially lower mean proportion of this topic. The difference in means between other private schools and traditional public schools is statistically significant as is this difference between other private schools and Catholic schools. The achievement and standards topic is used in the highest proportions in public charter schools compared to public schools and used at considerably lower proportions in Catholic and other private schools, for which the mean differences are statistically significant compared to public schools. There is not a statistically significant difference, however, between Catholic and other private schools on this topic. The only statistically significant mean difference in the use of the topic believe children can learn is between other private schools and traditional public schools, with other private schools using this topic in smaller proportions on average. Catholic and other private schools also use the topic meet every child’s needs in smaller proportions compared to traditional public schools, but in similar proportions to each other.
TABLE 4.5

SCHOOL DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION (N=534, 92.5% OF SEI SCHOOLS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional Public (n=323)</th>
<th>Public Charter (n=23)</th>
<th>Catholic (n=113)</th>
<th>Other Private (n=75)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Proportion of Mission Statement Reflecting Topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.017* †</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement and Standards</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.181*</td>
<td>0.003*</td>
<td>0.014*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe All Children Can Learn</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.005*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Child</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>0.015*</td>
<td>0.022*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean School-Level Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Pass I-STEP+ Math &amp; ELA</td>
<td>0.524</td>
<td>0.364*</td>
<td>0.629*</td>
<td>0.531†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Free/Reduced Price Lunch</td>
<td>0.491</td>
<td>0.679*</td>
<td>0.320*</td>
<td>0.349*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Percent Minority</td>
<td>0.268</td>
<td>0.615*</td>
<td>0.253</td>
<td>0.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>269*</td>
<td>242*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE. Table displays mean proportions and standard deviations of topics and school-level characteristics by sector. Significance tests conducted using one-way ANOVA with Bonferroni adjustment. Means marked by * indicate that the difference in means for the group are statistically significant compared to the mean for traditional public schools. Means for “Other Private” category marked by † indicate that the difference in the group mean is statistically significant the mean for the “Catholic” category.

4.7.3 Interaction Effects by Topic

4.7.3.1 Academic Success

Attending a private school with a high focus on academic success in its mission statement mediates the achievement loss in the third year of voucher use (see Table 4.6). The estimate is no longer statistically significant which means that voucher students score similarly in math to their matched public school peers by the third year of receiving a
voucher. In ELA (Table 4.7), the differences are more striking. Voucher students in schools with a high focus on academic success in its mission statement score higher than their public school counterparts in ELA across the first two years of using a voucher, scoring 0.117 and 0.199 SD higher on the ELA achievement test (p<.05 and p<.01 respectively).
### TABLE 4.6
MATH ACHIEVEMENT DIFFERENCES FOR VOUCHER STUDENTS
CALCULATED IN COMPARISON TO MATCHED PUBLIC SCHOOL PEERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st Year w/ voucher</th>
<th>2nd Year w/ voucher</th>
<th>3rd Year w/ voucher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No Interactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All voucher</td>
<td>-0.172*** (0.021)</td>
<td>-0.196*** (0.027)</td>
<td>-0.183*** (0.037)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=1,155]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Low Focus</td>
<td>-0.195*** (0.029)</td>
<td>-0.195*** (0.038)</td>
<td>-0.162** (0.059)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=645]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Medium Focus</td>
<td>-0.220*** (0.037)</td>
<td>-0.358*** (0.054)</td>
<td>-0.293*** (0.081)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=393]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in High Focus</td>
<td>-0.189** (0.059)</td>
<td>-0.301*** (0.077)</td>
<td>-0.123 (0.110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=117]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement and Standards</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Low Focus</td>
<td>-0.186*** (0.023)</td>
<td>-0.246*** (0.032)</td>
<td>-0.202*** (0.046)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=1,037]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Medium Focus</td>
<td>-0.546*** (0.106)</td>
<td>-0.242* (0.108)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=43]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in High Focus</td>
<td>-0.216* (0.090)</td>
<td>-0.498*** (0.159)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=42]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Believe Children Can Learn</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Low Focus</td>
<td>-0.193*** (0.026)</td>
<td>-0.236*** (0.035)</td>
<td>-0.128* (0.050)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=721]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Medium Focus</td>
<td>-0.276*** (0.054)</td>
<td>-0.272*** (0.071)</td>
<td>-0.291* (0.124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=208]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in High Focus</td>
<td>-0.162** (0.057)</td>
<td>-0.294*** (0.087)</td>
<td>-0.447*** (0.124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=193]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Every Child</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Low Focus</td>
<td>-0.203*** (0.024)</td>
<td>-0.236*** (0.033)</td>
<td>-0.177*** (0.047)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=921]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Medium Focus</td>
<td>-0.225*** (0.054)</td>
<td>-0.354*** (0.070)</td>
<td>-0.385* (0.116)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=167]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in High Focus</td>
<td>-0.044 (0.124)</td>
<td>-0.245 (0.154)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=34]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES:** *p ≤ 0.050; **p ≤ 0.010; ***p ≤ 0.001. ISTEP+ Math achievement measured in standard deviation units, relative to the Indiana state mean and standard deviation in each grade and year. Effects are estimated by including interactions in the main model. Number of voucher students within each category in brackets. Robust standard errors clustered by baseline cohort (year-grade-school) are in parentheses. Missing cells in third year indicate ≤ 15 students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction Type</th>
<th>1st Year w/ Voucher</th>
<th>2nd Year w/ Voucher</th>
<th>3rd Year w/ Voucher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No Interactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All voucher</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=1,155]</td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction: Academic Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Low Focus</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=645]</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.070)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Medium Focus</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>-0.053</td>
<td>-0.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=393]</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
<td>(0.087)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in High Focus</td>
<td>0.117*</td>
<td>0.199**</td>
<td>0.191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=117]</td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
<td>(0.070)</td>
<td>(0.103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction: Achievement and Standards</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Low Focus</td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=1,037]</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.053)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Medium Focus</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=43]</td>
<td>(0.093)</td>
<td>(0.204)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in High Focus</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>-0.257*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=42]</td>
<td>(0.081)</td>
<td>(0.128)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction: Believe Children Can Learn</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Low Focus</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=721]</td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Medium Focus</td>
<td>-0.066</td>
<td>-0.050</td>
<td>-0.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=208]</td>
<td>(0.049)</td>
<td>(0.062)</td>
<td>(0.127)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in High Focus</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
<td>-0.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=193]</td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
<td>(0.073)</td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction: Every Child</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Low Focus</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=921]</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.057)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in Medium Focus</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=167]</td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td>(0.082)</td>
<td>(0.114)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voucher Students in High Focus</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[n=34]</td>
<td>(0.088)</td>
<td>(0.148)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES:** *p≤0.050; **p≤0.010; ***p≤0.001. ISTEP+ ELA achievement measured in standard deviation units, relative to the Indiana state mean and standard deviation in each grade and year. Effects are estimated by including interactions in the main model. Number of voucher students within each category in brackets. Robust standard errors clustered by baseline cohort (year-grade-school) are in parentheses. Missing cells in third year indicate ≤15 students.
4.7.3.2 Achievement and Standards

Across all levels of use of the topic *achievement and standards* in the school’s mission, voucher students score below their public school counterparts in math. The interaction of voucher use and attending a school that places an emphasis on *achievement and standards* appears to exacerbate the achievement loss in math, particularly in the second year of using a voucher. Similarly, a high focus on *achievement and standards* results in large and significant negative effects on ELA in the second year of using a voucher. This effect is large and negative compared to the overall similarity between voucher students and their public school peers in ELA.

4.7.3.3 Believe Children Can Learn

Including the topic *believe children can learn* does not change the overall patterns of using a voucher on math or ELA scores (Tables 4.6 and 4.7, respectively). In math, this topic appears to increase the achievement loss related to using a voucher, particularly in the third year of using a voucher. In ELA, however, voucher students remain similar to their matched public school peers with no statistically significant differences in scores.

4.7.3.4 Every Child

Using a voucher to attend a school with a strong focus on meeting the needs of *every child* moderates the achievement loss related to using a voucher on math achievement (Table 4.6). Across the first two years of using a voucher, the estimate for receiving a voucher and attending a school with a high focus on meeting the needs of *every child* becomes statistically insignificant, suggesting that both voucher and non-
voucher students score similarly on the standardized math test. In ELA, students attending schools with an emphasis on every child score similarly to their matched public school counterparts (Table 4.7).

4.8 Discussion

Analyzing students in the SEI schools, I find similar estimates of achievement losses and gains for voucher students as reported by Waddington and Berends (2018) in a larger sample of students. Voucher students score similarly to their matched public school peers in ELA with no statistically significant differences in achievement over the first three years of using a voucher. In math, however, voucher students experience an achievement loss compared to their matched public school peers, although the size of this estimate stabilizes in the second year and becomes smaller in the third year.

In examining how voucher student performance differs in relation to school culture, using mission statement contents as an indicator of emphasis on student achievement does not yield a positive relationship with achievement for each academic-focused topic per my hypothesis. Instead, I find positive relationships between two of the four topics: academic success and every child. Attending a private school with a high focus on the topic academic success within the mission statement results in positive and statistically significant achievement gains in ELA for voucher students in the first and second years of using a voucher and moderates the achievement loss associated with using a voucher in math in year three of using a voucher. Attending a private school with a high focus on the topic every child in the mission statement also moderates the
achievement loss in math in the first and second years of using a voucher but does not have a similar relationship with student ELA scores.

The other two academic-focused topics—achievement and standards and believe children can learn—did not moderate the loss of achievement in math for voucher students and did not result in voucher student achievement gains in ELA. In the second year of using a voucher, however, voucher students experienced large and significant losses in ELA compared to their public school counterparts.

Evidence from this study suggests that how academic-focused topics are worded within mission statements may be important for what is communicated to the school community. The two topics with positive or moderating relationships—academic success and every child—are topics that are student-centered and action-oriented, with teachers and school leaders committing to “fostering student success” or “meeting the needs of every child” within school mission statements. The two topics that did not demonstrate a positive relationship with academic outcomes—achievement and standards and believe students can learn—have different orientations. Achievement and standards, in the current era of high stakes testing, emphasis on state standards, and increased accountability for schools, appears to be school-focused rather than student- or person-focused, with an emphasis on school academic offerings as opposed to student learning. The topic believe children can learn is more of a general statement of educational philosophy related to teaching that individual teachers may or may not share with the school. This statement is both general and somewhat vague. Weiss and Piderit (1999) also found a negative relationship between this topic and aggregate school achievement and noted that this topic held less of a call to action than other academic-focused topics.
This study also suggests that private school cultures based on person-centered and actionable academic topics may be more conducive to meeting the academic needs of low-income voucher students, providing individualized learning-related support as students transition to a different school context, and a revised set of expectations among a classroom of new peers. Understanding how private schools integrate low-income voucher students into their school community may be where the rubber meets the road for school mission. Faced with the challenge of integrating students from different backgrounds and meeting their academic needs may result in private schools reviewing the norms, values, and beliefs of the community and clarifying their mission in the face of change (Dallavis 2018b). More research is needed to understand how school communities integrate voucher students and families into the community and how changes associated with these policies is impacting the mission of schools.

This analysis and similar evaluations of voucher programs reporting achievement losses in math stress the need to explore further how private school contexts may influence student achievement. The relationship between person-centered topics and positive academic outcomes seems to suggest that understanding where students are, how they are doing, and what they need to succeed might mitigate these effects, but additional study is needed to understand how teachers in these schools are both formally and informally assessing students on math skills and whether and how these strategies may be linked to school mission and culture.

This study has several limitations. The voucher estimates reported in this study only apply to low-income students who represent only a portion of voucher recipients in Indiana. Over time, Indiana has expanded the voucher policy to include students already
attending a private school, a group of students for whom this analysis strategy cannot take into account. In addition, many middle-income families also qualify for a state-funded voucher, but determining a comparison group using federal FRPL guidelines does not provide adequate information for creating a matched set of public school students based on family income. Further, roughly half of all voucher participants have entered private schools in grades K-4, but the ISTEP+ is not offered in grades K-2 and due to the need for both pre-baseline and baseline measures of achievement for this analysis, the effect of using a voucher can only be estimated in this manner for students in grades 5-8.

The relationships between mission statement content and student achievement are exploratory and correlational rather than causal as this analysis is not able to take into consideration a school’s actual involvement with the school mission statement. A school’s involvement with the mission statement is likely to vary from school to school although some evidence suggests that what goes on in Catholic and private schools may be more closely tied to mission (Dallavis 2018b). Further, this study only considers the relationship between mission statement content and a small subset of students—low-income students using a voucher to attend a private school—although it could be argued that these students are perhaps the most vulnerable in the transition to a new school context and for whom mission may have the greatest impact. More research is needed to understand the larger relationship between mission and student achievement more broadly.

While not definitive, this study provides evidence that academic content in school mission statements may be tied to student achievement outcomes. It also suggests that how schools communicate their norms, values, and beliefs related to academic learning to
the community through the mission statement may influence student success. More research is needed to consider the mechanisms through which mission statement content is directly linked to student achievement.

4.9 References


CHAPTER 5:
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I examined the content and use of school mission statements as well as potential links between mission statement content and student achievement through three separate studies, each in the pursuit of evidence to consider the larger question: Does a school’s mission matter? In these studies, I made use of school administrative data and longitudinal student achievement data provided through a data sharing partnership with the Indiana Department of Education, and I collected data on mission statements in conjunction with the School Effectiveness in Indiana Study (Berends and Waddington 2015), a state-representative sample of schools across sector. I also spent time in schools in one Indiana community, collecting interview and focus group data from school leaders and teachers on their understanding and the use of mission statements in their school communities.

In Chapter 2, I used a structural topic model (STM; Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2012) to analyze mission statement content from before the enactment of a state-funded voucher program, the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program (ICSP), and again seven years later to consider between and within sector changes in mission statement content in the presence of school choice policies over time. The STM surfaced 17 distinct topics within Indiana mission statements with notable similarities and differences by school sector.
Mission statements in each sector were found to contain shared topics of academic success, aspects of development, change world, and safe learning environment.

Traditional public school mission statements included more elements and were less focused than private school mission statements and reflected general goals of schooling such as forming responsible citizens, working together within the community, and believing that all students can learn, and included topics such as providing life skills, developing thinkers, meeting the needs of every child, and helping students reach their full potential in similar proportions to charter schools. Charter school statements discussed preparing leaders and a focus on academic achievement and standards at higher rates than any other sector, suggesting that charter schools are focusing on accountability-related outcomes. They share some common topics with the public sector, including providing life skills, developing thinkers, meeting the needs of every child, and helping students reach their full potential.

Catholic school mission statements included high proportions of two religious focused topics—Catholic education and faith formation—which describe the educational environment they are providing and how the schools seek to provide it, along with the other more general topics found in other sectors, including common topics with the public and charter sectors of academic success, safe learning environment, and a holistic education referencing the multiple aspects of development. Within the other private sector, which includes a high proportion of independent Christian schools, mission statements include high proportions of two different religious topics—Christ-centered education and helping students know Christ—but offer less of a focus on academic success.
Only two topics were referenced at different proportions when the two time points were compared. The topic community *working together* decreased across the entire corpus while the topic *Christ-centered* increased across the entire corpus. These differences while statistically significant are small and decrease or increase by an expected proportion of 0.03. Only two topics resulted in statistically significant differences within sector over time: *faith formation* in the Catholic sector and *know Christ* in the other private sector. Within the Catholic sector, the interaction was positive with the expected topic proportion of faith formation within mission statements increasing by 6% over the time period. The topic *know Christ*, however, decreased within the other private sector by 10%

In Chapter 3, I conducted an interview and focus group study in 17 schools across school type and sector in one Indiana community, employing productive methods (McDonnell 2014) to consider whether and how mission statements are familiar, salient, and potentially resonant within schools. I found that in more than half the schools, teachers and school leaders were highly familiar with the statement text and that teachers in roughly three-quarters of the schools could recall and discuss the majority of statement contents in a small group setting. I found that mission statements were salient to some degree in roughly two-thirds of schools, having forged personal connections to the mission statement as a function or result of time spent in schools, energy around mission, and regular engagement with mission statement contents. A smaller subset of schools used mission statement text to solve problems within the school community, using mission statement contents as arbiters in disagreements, rationale and support for decisions, and as cornerstones for efforts made to build intentional school culture.
Mission statements were most integral in school communities where all three conditions were present. While Catholic and private schools demonstrated the highest familiarity of mission statements, greater conditions of salience, and more opportunities for resonance than traditional public or magnet schools, school sector alone was not an indicator related to the successful implementation of mission-related activity. Public magnet schools demonstrated high salience of mission statement content, and one traditional public school was intentionally using mission as a basis for school reform efforts.

In Chapter 4, I examined the relationship between mission statement content and student achievement. In my analyses, I used topic proportion measures calculated in the STM model presented in Chapter 2, separately examining four different academic-related topics in analyses that compared student achievement in both math and English language arts (ELA) for low-income students using a voucher to attend private and Catholic schools compared to a matched sample of students who remained in public schools. In this nonexperimental evaluation of voucher use and school context, I employed a method used by Waddington and Berends (2018). I found that having a high proportion of the topic academic success in the school’s mission statement mediated the achievement loss associated with using a voucher on math by the third year of voucher use, and in ELA, students using a voucher experienced an achievement gain in the first and second year of voucher use, scoring 0.117 and 0.199 SD higher on the ELA portion of the ISTEP+ in the first two years of using a voucher (p<.05 and p<.01 respectively) in comparison to their matched public school counterparts. The inclusion of high proportions of the statement referencing the topic every child moderated the achievement loss associated with receiving a voucher in math, with estimates becoming statistically insignificant. Voucher
students in these schools scored similarly in ELA. The topics *achievement and standards* and *believe students can learn* heightened the achievement loss associated with voucher use in private schools. These findings suggest that how academic learning is communicated in the mission statement is related to student academic performance.

Each of these studies apply innovative methods to a variety of data, making use of school administrative data and longitudinal student achievement records, state-representative survey data, mission statement texts collected at multiple time points, as well as data collected in the form of principal interviews and productive activities and interviews with small groups of teachers. The use of structural topic modeling, a method of topic modeling, is ideally suited for studying school-related documents as it allows for the inclusion of school-level covariates. The productive activities used with teacher focus groups enable greater understanding of how a small group understands and makes sense of culture which complements traditional interview questions. The use of nonexperimental methods to estimate student achievement outcomes using a matched sample of voucher students compared to their public school peers provides ways in which to account for student selection in a manner that attempts to closely replicate experimental evaluations of choice programs.

The work presented here, however, does not witness mission in action in schools and thus cannot fully assist in fleshing out the mechanisms through which a mission statement influences a school community. To do so would require extensive fieldwork within one or a small number of school communities using ethnographic methods, a project that I would like to pursue in the future, specifically in a school environment.
undergoing some form of change be it related to school or state policy or other changes in demographics or context within the community.

A school’s mission and the mission statement, as well as school culture, can easily be taken for granted within a school community, and findings from my qualitative work point to the importance of intentionality in the use of mission and mission statements. In order for a mission statement to be a “third point of reference,” a school community must be aware of and familiar with the contents of the statement as well as reflective in their use and application of it. As Hallinan (2005) described, schools can communicate the shared norms, values, and beliefs of the adults in the community directly through personal interaction and indirectly through the school practices, traditions, and policies. Examining what goes in the life of schools through the lens of mission provides an important perspective for school leaders and teachers to reflect on the messages they are intentionally or unintentionally sending to students.

More research is needed on the norms, values, and beliefs that are most conducive to positive student outcomes as well as how schools define their norms, values, and beliefs. These are hard questions with easy surface-level responses, but digging into what adults within a community believe and what they want to convey to students is likely a time-consuming endeavor that may surface conflict and tension within the community. The act of defining these shared values and beliefs, the continual and intentional use of these ideas, and a personal commitment to them, however, may have the potential to inspire collective action toward stronger communities and a variety of positive student outcomes.
Schools are likely faced with the temptation to use current “buzz words” in school mission statements to signal legitimacy within the educational field. The content analysis presented here suggests that a set of highly used words and topics are both common and prevalent within a representative corpus of mission statements in Indiana. While these common rhetorical phrases may seem like important or necessary components of a mission statement to those in the field, more research is needed to unpack what these phrases actually mean to those writing the statements as well as to the community receiving these messages. What does it mean to be a “life-long learner?” How do schools create “responsible citizens?” What is meant by “academic success?” How do you know a “safe and nurturing environment” when you encounter it?

Some of these messages may not translate to what actually goes on in schools and some may be more important than others for outcomes that school leaders, teachers, parents, and policymakers care about, among them student academic achievement. While not definitive, my research suggests that how mission statement content is worded may be important for achieving intended outcomes and point to the potential benefits of focusing on academics within mission statements in ways that are person-oriented and actionable as opposed to including more general, philosophical, or school-oriented messages.

From a school sector perspective, while there are many common topics referenced in mission statements across sectors, distinct differences emerged as some sectors used some topics more than others, reflecting potential differences in school culture that warrant additional study, particularly as there is some evidence that what goes on in Catholic and private schools may be more closely tied to mission statement content.
Research presented here suggests that activity based on school mission can be successfully implemented across school type and sector and that mission is not a tool that should be relegated to the private sector.

From the data presented here, school choice policies do not seem to be seriously impacting schools’ stated missions. However, religious schools seem to be refocusing or clarifying religious aspects of their mission, with Catholic schools focusing more on faith formation and other private Christian schools refining how they present religious elements and orientations within their schools. These efforts at refining their stated missions is likely the result of a desire for greater transparency in communicating with potential families and students who may not be of the faith tradition of the school to ensure that parents are aware of the environment that religious schools offer. These studies also underscore the importance of considering differences in school environments and experiences for voucher students in addition to calculating aggregate effects.

Taken together, evidence from the three studies suggests that mission statements communicate shared ideas of a school community, can be used to resolve conflict and inform important decisions, and can serve as a basis for school reform and a foundation for an intentional school culture, with the potential to influence student outcomes. Do school mission statements matter? While the answer is not an unqualified and absolute “yes” in all school environments, as with any organizational tool, evidence here suggests that the value in school mission statements exists in how the mission statement is phrased and put to use and to what purposes.
5.1 References

Berends, Mark and R. Joseph Waddington. 2015. School Choice in Indiana: An Examination of Impacts and the Conditions Under Which School Choice is Effective. Chicago, IL: The Spencer Foundation.


This study seeks to better understand the concept of mission and the use of mission in schools. The interview will take approximately one hour. Questions focus on the use of mission in the everyday operation of the school, the school’s sense of mission, and the school’s mission statement. This interview is voluntary, of course. Please let me know if there are any questions you prefer not to answer, or if you want to stop at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will be kept anonymous; I will not disclose your identity or information that would identify you to anyone outside the project without your permission. Any quotations used in published work will be for illustrative purposes only and will not be attributed in any way that identifies any individual in the study.

AUDIO-RECORDING: I would like to record the conversation just to help me take notes. At the end of the study I will destroy all information that identifies you by name, including the audio files.

Please take a minute to read over the interview consent form and if you agree to participate, please sign the top copy. The second copy is yours to keep. Do you have any questions before we begin?

This first part of the interview will focus on your general sense of the mission of the school rather than the mission statement.

Discussion of Mission in the Life of the School
- Please describe your sense of the mission of the school using your own words.
- I am interested in learning more about your school. Can you walk me through today’s school day?
- How is the mission of the school evident in the work you did today? Probe for examples.
- Where do you think the school’s sense of mission comes from? Do you think it has changed over time?
- Does the mission direct/guide the school or does the school context inform the mission? Which one do you think is most applicable to your school and why?
Community Understanding and Use of Mission

- Does your sense of mission influence your leadership? If so, can you walk me through a time when it did?
- How much time, energy, or resources do you spend on developing a sense of mission?
- How do you think teachers in the school understand a sense of mission? Do they share a common sense of mission or do you think ideas vary from individual to individual?
- How would you rate your staff’s sense of mission on a continuum from cooperation to conflict, with 1 being lots of conflict and 10 being full cooperation?
- How does sense of mission influence how your teachers teach? Can you provide examples?
- How do you think board members understand the sense of mission?
- How do you think parents understand the sense of mission?
- How aware do you think your students are of the school’s sense of mission?
- For whom do you think this sense of mission is most influential? Least influential? Why?
- How is your sense of mission distinct from other schools?

The rest of the interview brings in the mission statement, and I will try to be clear on if I’m talking about the statement or a sense of mission. Please let me know at any point if you need clarification.

Explicit Discussion of Mission Statement

- Would you say this is the current mission statement (share print-out) for your school?
- To what extent do you think that the mission statement captures the sense of mission we’ve been discussing?
- What do you think are there reasons for similarities or differences between a school’s guiding sense of mission and the official mission statement?
- How is your mission statement distinct from other schools?
- Do you think having a mission statement is necessary in operating an effective school? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- Can you describe specific instances or situations that have directly referenced the mission statement?
- Where does the mission statement “live”? In other words, where is it physically present? Probe re: rationale
- How often would you estimate that the school mission statement is discussed? Probe re: staff, students, parents, stakeholders, district
- Do you discuss a sense of mission with these groups outside of reference to the mission statement?
• Is a mission statement necessary to develop a sense of mission? Probe for why/why not.

**Review and Revision of Mission Statements**
• Please tell me the story of the last iteration of writing, reviewing, or revising the mission statement, if you were a part of it. What led to it? What was the process like?
• If you were to revise the mission statement, what changes would you seek to make and who would you involve in the revision process?
• How is the mission decided? Who has to approve the mission before it is finalized?
• To what degree would there be changes in the school if the mission statement were revised?
• Would changes seek to better capture what is going on or seek to change the path of the school?

**Mission Statements and Audience**
• Who do you think is the primary audience for your school’s mission statement? Are there any other/secondary audiences? *Probe* for reasons why.
• Do you think the expansion of school choice in Indiana has impacted the school mission or mission statement? Can you provide examples?

**Experience with Mission in Other Roles**
• How many years have you been principal at this school?
• How many years have you been in education and at what levels and roles (elementary, middle, high)?
• Have you held positions outside of education?
• How has a sense of mission operated similarly or differently in these other experiences?

**ASK ABOUT CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUP with small group of teachers**
Hello and welcome to this group discussion! This discussion is part of my dissertation research. My role is to help walk you through a short activity, to get a conversation going, and to make sure we cover a number of topics.

Thanks to each of you for taking time at the end of the day to discuss your ideas. The goal of this session is to get a sense of how teachers understand and use the concept of mission. The focus group meeting will last about 50-60 minutes. I will be taking some notes but will also be audio recording so that I don’t miss anything important.

Before we get started just a few items.

- I might move you along in conversation because we have limited time together.
- There’s no right or wrong answer to the questions I will ask. I want to hear what each of you think and it’s okay to have different opinions.
- This is a completely voluntary activity. If you feel uncomfortable at any point or want to stop, you may do so at any time.
- Lastly, I would ask that we keep the conversation private and within this room.

Do you have any questions?

I have two consent forms for each of you. One is yours to keep and the other is for my records. This goes over the basic objectives, risks, and benefits. I will give you a moment to read this over and sign if you haven’t had the chance already. As you’re reading through, please let me know if you have any questions.

--- Pause

Okay! Let’s get started! To give you a quick overview, first, I will ask you to generate some ideas individually, then you’ll bring these ideas to the small group to discuss, then I will guide you through some broader questions for discussion.
Part 1. Individual Activity
Teachers will be given 8x10 notecard and pen and asked to respond to the following prompt:

Please take about 5 minutes to think about your school’s mission. Using the pen and paper provided, write in your own words how you understand your school’s sense of mission. You can use words, phrases, and images, whatever you feel best captures the school’s mission. If you decide to use images, please be ready to explain your image to the group.

Part 2. Group Activity
Teachers come together as a group to individually share their individual ideas and together highlight the common themes/ideas/concepts as well as areas where individual perceptions differ.

Next, bring these thoughts you generated to the group. Share briefly among you and together reach a consensus. Which ideas of mission do you hold in common across the group and which ideas are more individual? Please note on the group sheet which ideas are held in common and which are more individual.

Part 3. Focus Group Conversation
The group then participates in a follow-up group interview moderated by the facilitator.

Group Activity Related Questions
- Take a second to reflect on the individual activity where you generated your sense of the school’s mission. Was this easy? Challenging? In what ways?
- How well do you think the common list represents the mission of the school?
- Are there things you would add to this list? What would they be and why?
- Are these ideas of mission you generated widely accepted across the larger staff? If other individuals had volunteered to participate would they have come up with the same list?
- What were the areas that did not meet consensus?

Mission in the Life of the School and Classroom
- How would the school mission be evident to a visitor of the school?
- Tell me about a time you experienced when a sense of mission was evident in the practice of the school?
- Did the mission of the school factor into your decision to be a teacher in this school?
- Does the mission influence your instruction? Can you think of specific times when mission has influenced your instruction?
- Does the mission influence your relationships in the school? In what ways? Can you offer an example of specific moments when mission influenced these relationships?
- How aware do you think your students are of the school’s mission?
Evaluating Mission

- Now, I would like you to think about your shared ideas of mission along with your school’s mission statement (pass out statement and pause while participants read statement over). How well does the statement capture the shared ideas of mission you generated? What does the statement represent well? Where does it differ?
- Where do you think the school’s mission comes from? Do you think it has changed over time?
- Do you think having a mission statement is necessary in operating a school? In what ways? Why?
- To what degree would there be changes in the school if mission statement were revised?
- Who do you think the primary audience is for your school’s mission statement? Are there other secondary audiences?
- Do you think the expansion of school choice in Indiana has impacted the school mission or mission statement? What about increased state accountability measures?

We’ve come to the end of our questions/time. Thank you for your honest opinions – your contributions are tremendously helpful to this research! Please feel welcome to take some snacks home with you and make sure you take your gift card. Thank you!