

Original Article

# School-Based Collective Efficacy and Its Impact on Student Behavior and Academic Engagement

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**Abstract:** School-based collective efficacy—the shared belief among teachers and staff in their collective capacity to influence student outcomes—has become a central construct in contemporary educational research and practice. Grounded in Bandura’s social-cognitive theory, collective efficacy reflects the extent to which school communities perceive themselves as capable of organizing and executing actions that lead to academic and behavioral success. This study explored the theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, and practical implications of collective efficacy in educational settings. Findings from multiple studies demonstrate that high levels of collective efficacy are associated with improved student behavior, reduced bullying and disciplinary problems, and enhanced academic engagement and achievement. The mechanisms linking collective efficacy to positive outcomes include shared norms, consistent behavioral expectations, collaborative teaching practices, and relational trust among staff. Furthermore, collective efficacy serves as a buffer against contextual challenges such as socioeconomic disadvantage, promoting resilience and sustained improvement in schools. The paper concludes that strengthening collective efficacy through collaborative leadership, professional learning communities, and mastery experiences offers a powerful pathway for fostering student engagement, positive behavior, and overall school effectiveness.

**Keywords:** collective efficacy, school climate, student behavior, academic engagement, teacher collaboration

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The success of any educational institution depends not only on the competence of individual teachers but also on the collective capacity of the school community to promote student learning and positive behavior. In recent years, school-based collective efficacy has been recognized as one of the most significant contributors to school effectiveness and student success [1]. Rooted in Bandura’s (1997) theory of self-efficacy, collective efficacy extends the concept of individual confidence to the group level, emphasizing that it is the shared belief in the staff’s collective power that drives sustained educational improvement. In essence, when teachers collectively believe that they can influence student outcomes despite external challenges, they are more likely to set ambitious goals, persist in the face of adversity, and create supportive environments conducive to both academic and behavioral growth. The concept of collective efficacy has been increasingly adopted in educational research to explain variations in school performance, classroom climate, and student engagement. An author [2] describes school-based collective efficacy as teachers shared perceptions of their faculty’s capability to affect student learning positively. This construct is particularly vital in understanding how schools, as social organizations, can foster conditions that encourage both academic excellence and prosocial

behavior among students. It shifts the focus from individual teacher performance to the collaborative dynamics of the whole school, emphasizing the power of shared beliefs, teamwork, and mutual accountability. Empirical research demonstrates that collective efficacy is a strong predictor of both student achievement and behavioral outcomes. Schools characterized by high collective efficacy tended to exhibit stronger academic cultures, greater resilience to contextual disadvantages, and fewer behavioral problems. Similarly, [3] meta-analysis revealed that collective teacher efficacy is one of the most robust correlates of student achievement, with an effect size greater than most other school-based variables. The connection between collective efficacy, student behavior, and engagement suggests that when educators share a sense of collective responsibility and confidence, students are more likely to experience consistent expectations, emotional support, and motivation to engage actively in their learning. This paper seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of school-based collective efficacy and its impact on student behavior and academic engagement. It begins by outlining the theoretical foundations of the concept, particularly within Bandura's social-cognitive framework. It then reviews empirical research examining how collective efficacy influences both student behavioral outcomes and academic engagement. Finally, the paper discusses strategies that educational leaders and policymakers can adopt to strengthen collective efficacy within schools, with a focus on sustainable school improvement and positive educational climates.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: BANDURA'S SOCIAL-COGNITIVE THEORY AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY**

The concept of collective efficacy was first articulated by [4] as part of his broader social-cognitive theory, which emphasizes the reciprocal interaction between personal factors, behaviors, and environmental influences. According to Bandura, efficacy beliefs—both individual and collective—serve as key determinants of how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act. While individual self-efficacy pertains to one's belief in personal capability to perform specific tasks, collective efficacy refers to the shared belief of a group in its conjoint ability to organize and execute actions required to achieve desired outcomes. In the educational context, collective efficacy embodies the confidence that the teaching staff, as a unified body, can make a meaningful difference in students' learning and behavioral development. An author [5] argued that collective efficacy operates through mechanisms similar to individual self-efficacy, including goal setting, persistence, resilience, and strategic effort, but manifests at a group level. In schools, this means that when teachers collectively believe in their capacity to influence student outcomes, they are more likely to engage in collaborative problem-solving, share best practices, and maintain consistent expectations for students, thereby fostering a coherent and supportive learning environment. The theoretical foundation of collective efficacy rests on four main sources of efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states [6]. Applied to schools, mastery experiences occur when teachers collectively achieve success in improving student outcomes, reinforcing their shared belief in their capabilities. Vicarious experiences arise from observing other schools or teacher teams succeed under similar conditions, providing models of success. Social persuasion refers to verbal encouragement and recognition from leaders or peers that affirm the staff's collective competence. Lastly, affective states—such as trust, morale, and emotional climate—can either strengthen or weaken collective efficacy depending on whether the school culture is positive and supportive or fragmented and stressful. Collective efficacy also intersects with related constructs such as school climate, teacher collaboration, and trust. For instance, schools with high levels of relational trust among staff tend to report stronger collective efficacy [7]. Similarly, professional learning communities and shared decision-making structures provide social and organizational contexts where collective efficacy can thrive. Thus, collective efficacy is not only a cognitive belief but also a social phenomenon embedded in the everyday interactions, norms, and practices of the school community.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of collective efficacy has evolved over the past three decades from a theoretical construct to one of the most empirically supported predictors of educational success. Initially rooted in community psychology and criminology—where neighborhood collective efficacy was used to explain variations in crime and social disorder [8,9]—the construct was adapted to the educational context by [10]. In schools, collective efficacy refers to the shared belief among educators that, as a collective, they have the capability to positively affect students' learning and behavior. Unlike individual teacher efficacy, which focuses on personal competence, collective efficacy underscores a school's social system and its shared sense of purpose, collaboration, and confidence in achieving common goals. According to [11], collective efficacy functions as a key organizational property of schools that directly influences teacher behavior and indirectly affects student outcomes. When teachers perceive that their colleagues are competent, collaborative, and committed, they are more likely to invest effort in challenging instructional tasks and maintain consistent behavioral expectations. Conversely, schools with low collective efficacy often exhibit fragmented cultures where teachers feel isolated, powerless, or skeptical about their collective influence on students. This difference has been shown to predict not only academic outcomes but also patterns of student behavior, including cooperation, engagement, and discipline. Several large-scale studies have demonstrated the strong predictive power of collective efficacy in relation to school outcomes. For example, Hoy, Sweetland, and [12] reported that collective efficacy was significantly associated with student achievement even after controlling for socioeconomic factors and school size. Similarly, [13] found that collective efficacy mediated the relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage and academic achievement, suggesting that strong shared beliefs could buffer against external contextual challenges. An author [14] further observed that collective efficacy was closely linked to transformational leadership and teachers' commitment to school improvement, highlighting the role of leadership in fostering such shared beliefs. Beyond academic achievement, collective efficacy also plays a critical role in shaping school climate and student behavior. A positive school climate—characterized by mutual respect, safety, and collaboration—creates the psychological and social conditions under which collective efficacy flourishes. In turn, high collective efficacy reinforces prosocial norms and shared behavioral expectations that promote order and engagement among students [15]. Thus, the relationship between collective efficacy and behavior can be conceptualized as reciprocal and dynamic: a strong sense of collective capacity enhances behavioral consistency and student cooperation, while positive behavioral outcomes further reinforce teachers' shared confidence in their collective influence. Meta-analytic evidence further underscores the centrality of collective efficacy in education. An author [16], in a meta-analysis of 26 studies, reported an overall effect size of 1.57 for collective teacher efficacy on student achievement—making it one of the most potent factors in [17] synthesis of educational influences. Although most research emphasizes academic achievement, the mechanisms that drive this relationship—collaboration, consistency, trust, and engagement—are equally relevant to student behavior. Therefore, collective efficacy should be understood as both a cognitive and social construct that shapes the entire ecosystem of teaching, learning, and behavior management in schools.

### 4. IMPACT OF SCHOOL-BASED COLLECTIVE EFFICACY ON STUDENT BEHAVIOR

A growing body of empirical evidence demonstrates that collective efficacy is a significant predictor of student behavior, particularly in relation to reducing problematic or antisocial behaviors such as bullying, aggression, and misconduct. An author [18] conducted a multilevel analysis of Greek primary and secondary schools and found that higher levels of collective efficacy were associated with significantly lower rates of bullying perpetration and victimization. Schools characterized by strong teacher collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility reported fewer behavioral issues, even after

controlling for individual and contextual factors such as class size and socioeconomic status. This finding aligns with [19] community-level research, suggesting that collective efficacy acts as a form of informal social control that regulates behavior through shared norms and collective vigilance. Similarly, [20] observed that in schools where teachers collectively believed they could influence student behavior, students reported lower incidences of bullying and greater perceptions of safety. These findings emphasize that collective efficacy operates not only through formal disciplinary policies but also through the social ecology of the school—teachers' collective willingness to intervene, model appropriate behavior, and uphold consistent expectations across classrooms. When students perceive a united and competent teaching body, they internalize behavioral norms more readily and are less likely to engage in disruptive or antisocial acts.

## 5. PROMOTING PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Collective efficacy not only mitigates negative behaviors but also promotes prosocial attitudes, empathy, and cooperation among students. Research indicates that schools with high collective efficacy tend to foster environments where students experience greater emotional support, fairness, and community belonging [13]. These conditions encourage students to respect others, take responsibility for their actions, and participate constructively in classroom activities. For example, in a study of Finnish secondary schools, [21] found that collective efficacy was positively associated with students' perceptions of teacher fairness and support, which in turn predicted reductions in peer victimization and improvements in peer relations. This link between teacher collaboration and student behavior can be explained through social learning mechanisms. When teachers model cooperation, empathy, and collective problem-solving, students are more likely to emulate these behaviors. Furthermore, collective efficacy enhances teachers' ability to maintain consistent behavioral standards across classrooms. Consistency in discipline and support is essential for reducing confusion and conflict among students, as mixed signals from teachers can undermine authority and create opportunities for misbehavior.

## 6. BUFFERING AGAINST CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES

One of the most striking aspects of collective efficacy is its ability to buffer against contextual and environmental challenges that often undermine school functioning. Schools located in socioeconomically disadvantaged or high-risk communities frequently face external pressures that contribute to behavioral issues such as absenteeism, violence, or disengagement. However, research has shown that high collective efficacy can mitigate the negative effects of these stressors. An author [22] demonstrated that collective efficacy moderated the relationship between poverty and student outcomes—schools with strong collective efficacy beliefs achieved higher student performance and better behavior even in challenging contexts. The buffering effect can be attributed to the fact that collective efficacy enhances collective problem-solving, persistence, and adaptability. Teachers in high-efficacy schools are less likely to attribute student misbehavior to uncontrollable external factors such as family background or community conditions. Instead, they adopt a growth mindset orientation, believing that concerted effort and collective strategies can produce improvement. This shift in attribution patterns results in more proactive and preventative approaches to managing student behavior, such as social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, peer mentoring, and restorative practices.

## 7. MECHANISMS LINKING COLLECTIVE EFFICACY AND STUDENT BEHAVIOR

The influence of collective efficacy on student behavior operates through multiple mechanisms. The first is norm enforcement, whereby strong collective beliefs lead teachers to uphold shared expectations and consistently reinforce appropriate behaviors. The second mechanism is collective

monitoring, which refers to the staff's shared vigilance in identifying and addressing behavioral issues early. Third, collective efficacy enhances emotional climate—teachers who trust and support one another create a sense of safety and predictability that reduces anxiety and misconduct among students. Finally, it fosters collective responsibility, meaning that teachers view behavioral management as a shared task rather than an individual burden. When these mechanisms function together, the school becomes a cohesive system of behavioral regulation and support. The literature consistently demonstrates that school-based collective efficacy plays a central role in shaping student behavior. It influences the degree to which teachers enforce norms, intervene in conflicts, and sustain positive climates. Schools with strong collective efficacy beliefs experience lower rates of bullying, aggression, and disruptive conduct, alongside higher levels of cooperation, empathy, and discipline. Importantly, collective efficacy not only directly impacts student behavior but also strengthens the school's resilience against contextual challenges such as poverty, instability, and large class sizes.

## **8. IMPACT OF COLLECTIVE EFFICACY ON ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT**

Recent research extends the role of collective efficacy beyond student achievement to its critical influence on academic engagement—students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in learning. Schools with strong collective efficacy foster climates of support, shared accountability, and optimism, which enhance student motivation, attention, and persistence. Engagement serves as a key mediating factor linking teachers' shared beliefs with improved academic outcomes, as demonstrated by studies showing that high-efficacy classrooms buffer against disengagement and behavioral disruptions. Collective efficacy also strengthens motivation and persistence, as shared beliefs drive teachers to set ambitious goals, employ adaptive strategies, and sustain effort despite challenges. This collaborative mindset promotes reflective practice and continuous improvement, which, in turn, inspires students to engage more deeply and develop a sense of belonging and purpose. Empirical evidence confirms that collective teacher efficacy is among the most powerful predictors of academic achievement, surpassing traditional factors such as socioeconomic status. It also enhances social and emotional engagement, fostering stronger teacher–student relationships, trust, and equitable classroom dynamics that encourage participation and resilience. Several factors shape the strength of school-based collective efficacy. Transformational leadership is foundational, as it cultivates shared vision, collaboration, and professional growth. Collaborative cultures and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) reinforce mutual accountability and problem-solving, transforming individual efforts into collective success. Relational trust among staff underpins open communication, risk-taking, and shared commitment, while mastery experiences—documented improvements in student outcomes—serve as the most potent reinforcement of efficacy beliefs. A positive school climate, characterized by inclusivity, safety, and shared purpose, further sustains these beliefs, even in resource-constrained or high-poverty contexts. The implications for educational leadership are substantial. Leaders should promote distributed leadership structures that empower teachers, embed collaboration in daily routines, and recognize collective achievements. Building trust and fostering transparent communication are essential to maintaining cohesion and morale. Targeted professional development and continuous assessment of efficacy beliefs ensure sustained improvement. Ultimately, collective efficacy operates as a dynamic, malleable driver of school success—linking effective leadership, teacher collaboration, and student engagement into a unified framework for educational transformation.

## **15. CONCLUSION**

School-based collective efficacy represents one of the most powerful yet underutilized levers for improving student behavior and academic engagement. Grounded in Bandura's social-cognitive theory, it encapsulates the shared belief among teachers and staff that they can, through collective effort,

positively influence student outcomes. Empirical evidence demonstrates that high levels of collective efficacy are associated with reduced behavioral problems, stronger prosocial norms, enhanced academic engagement, and higher student achievement. These effects persist even in challenging socioeconomic contexts, underscoring collective efficacy's role as a source of resilience and adaptive capacity for schools. The mechanisms through which collective efficacy operates—shared norms, trust, collaboration, and consistent expectations—illustrate the social nature of schooling. It is not merely individual teacher excellence but the collective conviction of the faculty that sustains improvement. For educational leaders, the task is therefore to nurture environments where collective efficacy can thrive: through shared leadership, professional collaboration, mastery experiences, and a culture of trust. When schools cultivate such conditions, they become not only centers of learning but also communities of collective empowerment where teachers and students alike believe in their ability to achieve meaningful success.

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