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EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A FRESHMAN/SUCCESS ACADEMY
PROGRAM THROUGH THE PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS IN AN URBAN
HIGH SCHOOL

By
Michelle A. Pettiford

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2020

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Michelle A. Pettiford under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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In memory of
Ushedra L. Gilliam
Howard Campbell
Alton Thompson
Cora Lofton
Theodore Thompson
Bernetha P. Morgan

Abstract

EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A FRESHMAN/SUCCESS ACADEMY PROGRAM THROUGH THE PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATORS IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL. Pettiford, Michelle, 2020: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of educators regarding the effectiveness of an academic success program for ninth- and 10th-grade students who are at-risk males. The term at risk has often been utilized to describe students who have low academic performance as well as social and emotional concerns observed during the transitioning process from middle to high school. The foundation of this study centered on past and current educational initiatives, achievement gaps, and pedagogical and cultural awareness for at-risk minority students as they entered high school. I used a 2-phase process that included the implementation of a questionnaire and one-on-one interviews to collect the perceptions of educators. This methodology allowed educators to provide their perspectives on the effect of a high school academic success program on the academic, social, and behavioral performance of at-risk male students for the past 2 school years. The three key indicators of “making sure that students were on the right track,” “empower students,” and “creating a positive culture” evolved linking into the themes of academic success, building a student support system, teacher effectiveness, student preparation, and building relationships. As a result, positive implications and significances were established from the prospective of the participating stakeholders of the Freshman/Success Academy.

Keywords: high school males, at-risk students, freshman academy program, teacher perceptions, qualitative, student success program

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The ideology of education in the United States has had a long journey from the 16th to the 21st century. While being a reality for some families, for many, obtaining an education was simply a dream—nevertheless, its basis has always been to prepare students for the future. However, the philosophy of education in the United States experienced a paradigm shift due to legislative reform, which had a significant impact on the development of various programs within schools, teacher preparation, and the equitability of student achievement as well as success (Daggett, 2004).

In 1994, former President Bill Clinton passed the Goals 2000 educational initiative, shadowed 11 years later by former President George W. Bush's educational initiative, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Although these initiatives set specific goals for all academic levels, the overall indication was directed for high schools to reach the benchmark of prospective cohorts meeting 100% of graduating seniors, thus state educational agencies were given numerous ways to meet this requirement. One of those was the developmental freedom of implementing core academic assessments. Additionally, states were provided with the power to establish parameters around schools meeting Adequate Yearly Progress. However, such a stipulation was becoming difficult for high schools to achieve as the National Center for Education Statistics reported from October 2011 to October 2012 that 3.4% of students who were enrolled in public or private high schools left school without completing a high school program. Moreover, Black and Hispanic students began to have higher dropout rates, particularly in Title I schools in the United States than their Caucasian counterparts, thus resulting in underachieving and consequently contributing to the action of not closing the

achievement gap (Stark et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2016).

To counteract these newfound results, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2014 was an attempt to further bridge the gap of achievement between all ethnic groups (Paul, 2011). For Title I high schools, administrative teams were pushed to identify students who were off track with their graduating cohort due to failing critical courses, having a heightened amount of absences, or disciplinary infractions to meet established goals. Schools were then able to place efforts into action that were accepted by the federal requirements set forth through such sanctions as School Improvement Grants (Learning First Alliance, 2003). With a comprehensive approach to learning improvement, School Improvement Grants assisted schools to begin meeting the expectations of improving the function of the school organization through professional development and coaching teachers on the entities of data, instructional strategies, and differentiation as stated under the mandated laws (Mizell, 2010). Employing additional staff as well as implementing programs like credit recovery, which provides opportunities to attain credit for the failed class(es), the outlook of meeting the goal of 100% graduation as well as decreasing the gap of achievement appeared to be attainable within the educational environment (Hanover Research, 2017); yet countless factors connected to student motivation, transitional periods, social disadvantages, socioeconomic status, family circumstances, and inadequate funding in schools are steadfast within education.

Of those factors, all critical and connective to the educational growth of a student, three that continue to surface within various topics of discussion and research are student socioeconomic status, lack of motivation, and the unstable transitional period from

middle to high school (Robinson, 2015). According to Bainbridge and Lasley (2002), one's education and poverty level have continuously been demonstrated to have a connection to the lack of success, as does the social, emotional, and psychological pressures in the life of a student. Taking this and the lack of success with the federal educational legislature of NCLB into consideration, former President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December of 2015. Shifting the educational mindset of the United States from the "one-size-fits every state" of NCLB, ESSA was developed to improve the assistance that schools require to build on the progress in the following areas:

- ensure states set high standards,
- maintain accountability,
- empower state and local decision makers,
- preserve annual assessments and reduce the often-onerous burden of unnecessary and ineffective testing,
- provide more children access to high-quality preschool, and
- establish new resources (Executive Office of the President, 2016).

As the state and local educational agencies began to unpack the provisions in ESSA, the desire for closure as it related to the achievement gap among schools remained prevalent within the academic culture (The Office of Secretary of the Press, 2015). With former President Obama's call for a re-envisioning of the American high school experience in his 2013 State of the Union, the ideology behind a "Next Generation High School" was formulated to highlight the importance of collaboration between education, business, and postsecondary partners based on six specific strategies:

- participation in the rigorous curriculum,
- small learning communities/small schools of choice,
- career academies,
- dual enrollment,
- early college high schools, and
- college and career counseling (USDOE, 2014).

The Next Generation High School initiative invested over \$375 million into student educational development in the academic areas of science, technology, engineering, and math. The initiative benefited through such businesses and corporations as IBM and P-Tech opening a total of 19 new schools between 2016 and 2017. Also, the Nellie Mae Foundation awarded approximately \$21 million in grants to various student centers within the New England area to assist with the achievement of 80% college and career readiness among high school graduates by 2030. Last, the Alliance for Excellent Education committed to launch and build “Better High Schools for All” in order to design free ESSA toolkits for school leaders to implement or support the initiatives of early college high schools/dual enrollment efforts, AP/IB programs, career, and technical education for students to attain deeper learning and personalized learning (Executive Office of the President, 2016).

Although the steps to close the achievement gap have been evident within school districts, it remains that many students, particularly from the minority culture, are plagued with the effects of instability and lack of motivation and teacher understanding to successfully transition from one grade level to the next (Burke & Ladner, 2010; Symonds, 2004). One of the highest instability restrictions is the national child poverty

rate. According to the 2017 data on child poverty, less than one in five children were living in households with incomes below the federal poverty line in the United States. Additional reports on children identified as impoverished or low income in 2017 documented that 25% of Hispanic children and 29% of Black children were drastically higher than 11% of both non-Hispanic White and Asian children (Child Trends Databank, 2019). Another constraint being dropout rates and off-track graduation rates correlate to research conducted by Olson (2006), who indicated that at least 30% of ninth graders fail to finish high school with their incoming cohort.

For this reason, schools must take the initiative to change the pattern of failure by thinking outside the traditional educational box to change the current results. Such attempts should begin with impacting the pedagogical enhancement of educators through ongoing professional developments. One professional development opportunity is for educators to become culturally responsive to all students in their classrooms as it aligns with reacting to behaviors, instruction, and assignments. Samuels (2018) stated in her study of 200 educators from a low-socioeconomic school that culturally responsive educators provide a student-centered approach to learning that refers to and recognizes the importance of their backgrounds and experiences to promote the academic and behavioral success of the student. Samuels went on to argue that providing for educators to be reflective in their practice and participate in professional development opportunities on cultural responsiveness is imperative when learning about specific strategies and tools for fostering an equitable classroom. Second, research suggests that schools develop holistic programs to assist students, particularly minority ninth-grade students, to develop their academic and emotional/social well-being. For example, the development of the

freshman academy and success programs combined with supplemental initiatives like Extended Day, Virtual Online Program, and Saturday School can begin with the application to support such students. A report provided by the National High School Center (2018) under USDOE found that most established freshman academies and success programs were isolated sectors of the school comprised of strategic teams of educators who collaborate with one another in the academic areas of English I, Common Core Math I, Earth and Environmental Science, and World History. The formation of both novice and experienced teachers within these teams prompted the active collaborative opportunities between educators with the common goal of ensuring that first-time ninth graders were equipped with the academic as well as social entities required to ensure a smooth transition into the secondary environment.

Statement of the Problem

The formal educational system, as the world has come to know it, was formulated to instruct students to become intellectually productive citizens. Ideally, this was conducted in a way that students go to class to receive “top-notch” instruction from a passionate, well-informed educator to unmask and discover new skill sets as well as future capabilities. Despite the well-intentioned programs of NCLB, Race to the Top (RTT), and ESSA, questions about the impact of these initiatives, online academic programs such as Edgenuity or Connections Academy, and the controversy on curriculum surfaced, particularly for minority males. Such incongruences were a part of the released 2015 report by the USDOE. *The Nation’s Report Card: Reading 2015*, documented that 69% of the 224 African American males who were not on or close to grade-level proficiency by the third grade would exhibit deficiencies within the literary standards of

comprehension, recall, and vocabulary. Additionally, former Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson provided alarming educational statistics to members of the National Newspaper Publishers Association at their 2013 annual convention about the academic performance of African Americans in the third and fourth grades (Curry, 2015). In his speech, Johnson reported that only 16% of African American third and fourth graders in Sacramento County attained a level of proficiency on their end of the year assessments in 2013. Consequently, Johnson's plea to fight this crisis began such initiatives as the Sacramento Reading Partners and STAND UP to provide students with the opportunity to attend a school of their choice to gain the skills required to become independent and successful readers (Curry, 2015).

Lack of Academic Success for At-Risk Students

According to research conducted by Pharris-Ciurej et al. (2012), on the decline in academic performance upon entering high school, the ethnic groups of African American, Native American, and Hispanic and male students have above-average dropout rates. Elias et al. (2008), stated that these complex and problematic implications must be lessened through the application of social and emotional intelligence related to theory, research, and practice for students to make healthy, caring, ethical, and responsible decisions as it aligns to their academic learning.

Therefore, the need to develop complex interventions that provide a more personalized approach to the transitional procedures for high school students is vital to change the failure pattern and gap in achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Dr. Lourenço Garcia, principal of Revere High School, implemented such an intervention in 2012. The Massachusetts high school reported several academic and behavioral

challenges in 2011 that inundated the success of the 1,709-enrolled student body. After reorganizing resources and curriculums, Dr. Garcia and his staff developed a freshman academy. The newly structured academy, described as being a school-within-school for first-time ninth graders, included teachers who incorporated flexible groups to personalize instruction as well as targeted support (Wilson, 2016). Since the implementation, the freshmen scores at Revere High School increased from Level 3 (the lowest proficiency ranking) to Levels 1 and 2 in 2013 and 2014 (Pearson, 2015).

Anyon (2016) conducted a comprehensive study within the Denver school system to document the success of various schools that implemented the restorative practices. These practices that took place across three educational sites utilized four essential strategies to generate a conflict resolution model, which included intensive professional development to decrease out-of-school suspension rates and increase graduation as well as achievement rates. Over the 3-month study, Anyon conducted interviews and focus groups with staff members who were involved in the development of school-wide expectations and relationships that focused on positive behavioral interventions and support approaches to assist with disseminating behavioral expectations among identified at-risk students. Donnor and Shockley (2010) recommended specific modifications to current instructional approaches utilized to teach and assess learning are significant to the achievement of minority males both socially and academically.

Purpose of the Study

The realm of education has been plagued with the task of ensuring that all students are provided with equal opportunities to be successful. Given that this task is vital for students to achieve the goal of obtaining a high school diploma, educators and

the individuals who lead them are faced with building a bridge for minority students, particularly males, who are academically unmotivated and behaviorally identified as at risk. Research has shown that this lack of success is linked to educator lack of knowledge about cultural relevance; equity within schools; and formalized transitional programs to address the academic, procedural, and social concerns of the minority male student (National Research Council, 2001; Neild, 2009; Samuels, 2018).

As a result of what research has suggested as being the problem among minority males, transitional programs for middle to high school are important. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the effectiveness of a Freshman/Success Academy program through educator perceptions of an urban high school. Identifying the perspectives of educators using an exploratory approach provided administration with the tools to collaborate on the enhancement of not only academically but developmentally responsive programs to become culturally responsive with understanding the experiences and success rates affected by attendance, retention, and referrals.

Conceptual Framework

For this study, the researcher focused on the educational stakeholders who provide direct instruction to high school students in the Freshman/Success Academy program located within a school district in the piedmont of North Carolina. With the Pygmalion or Rosenthal effect and Bandura's (1989, 1997) social-cognitive theory as the conceptual framework throughout Phases 1 and 2 of the study, the researcher utilized a questionnaire and interviews to capture the perceptions of the educational stakeholders to determine the program's effectiveness for its students, particularly the at-risk minority male (Andersen, 2018).

Andersen (2018) suggested that high teacher expectations and perceptions of class ability are essential, as their responses to students can result in expected behavior. The given interpretations of this study coincide with Bandura's (1989, 1997) social-cognitive theory, which determines that one's belief in their ability to perform affects the behaviors required to produce the desired outcome. For students, self-efficacy, the expectations of educators, and transitional programs can be vital to achievement, even in a state of fear or avoidance. Therefore, by providing students with the opportunity to thrive within an effective transitional program that encompasses positive activities with supportive peers and staff members, an at-risk minority male student can meet the rigorous demands of high school while managing the more demanding expectations of life (National High School Center, 2018).

Significance

As the progress of education began stalling between the late 1980s and 1990s, the differences in achievement between ethnicities and cultures within the educational environment were evident. Even in the early 2000s, the gap of academic achievement became prevalent as a result of the lack of differentiation in classroom instruction and teacher preparation, as well as the academic success of minority students (Center for Education Policy Analysis, 2019). In a time in which society became engulfed with technological innovations, reality television, and new communicative methods, the era of public education was met with a general dissatisfaction due to low assessment scores, high disciplinary actions, and the continuous induction of massive educational reform (Mills, 2013). Furthermore, the transitional factors of eighth to ninth grade, ninth to tenth grade, and those who were identified as being at risk became additional factors for the

largest percentage of high school students to demonstrate high retention rates, increasing student absenteeism, and increased dropout rates (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Many teachers, school board members, administrators, and parents alike acknowledge that there is work that needs to be done and changes that need to occur to ensure that *ALL* students have met their educational potential. The question remains, where does the change begin, and who does it begin with? Educational leaders are being asked to develop new ways to improve the quality of education to ensure that today's students meet the requirements set forth by local and federal education agencies (Arcaro, 1995). Since the implementation of various arrangements under the umbrella of educational reforms, educators have indicated their desire clearly and concisely to engage in the prescribed undertakings that schools have developed to enhance student outcomes and increase satisfaction among consumers of public education (DeStefano et al., 1992).

This research helps to answer these questions and fill the gap in the literature on the effectiveness of Freshman/Success Academy programs for minority male students who have been identified as at risk. Many studies that have been conducted focus on aspects of transition, freshman/success academies, and attaining the perceptions of students and their parents. However, few attempts have been made to acquire teacher perceptions to determine the effectiveness of Freshman/Success Academy programs for rising ninth- and tenth-grade students who are the minority, male, and at risk. Furthermore, this study will be significant for further research to inform educational environments on strategies to prepare teachers for cultural responsiveness effectively, build nurturing relationships, and address the academic and behavioral readiness of minority male students who are at risk.

Professional Significance of the Problem

Researchers have indicated that high schools need to incorporate smaller learning communities to promote engaging lessons that will improve student performance (DuFour & Eaker, 2009; Ferriter & Graham, 2010; Oxley & Klump, 2006). This form of professional learning community (PLC) assists with the strategic planning of common expectations to improve student performance. Such a method was introduced 2 years before NCLB, in a speech made by Richard Riley (1999), Secretary of Education in the Clinton administration. During his speech to the National Press Club, Riley stated that due to a student's intense and sometimes emotional transitional period of middle to high school, the school-within-a-school approach allows students to connect as well as develop a positive rapport with their teachers.

Riley (1999), in addition to other researchers and educational leaders like Neild and Weiss (1999) and Reents (2002), agreed that the transitional problems students face could be smoother through programs like a transitional academic program. By strategically developing such programs, school administrators and teachers can stimulate the minds of their students using an instructional system that repels adversity academically and emotionally. However, the problem remains that the gap between minority students and their White counterparts is due to excessive suspensions and absences coexisting with substandard teachers and a misperception of self-image, especially in the urban community (Lewin, 2012; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Toldson, 2011). Therefore, this study sought to explore the perceptions of instructional stakeholders to determine the effectiveness of freshman/success academies for minority male youth who are "off track" academically and who have been identified as at risk.

Definition of Terms

Achievement Gap

Achievement gap refers to the disparity that is currently present within the academic performance between groups of students. That data that define the gap historically are demonstrated in grades, standardized test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college completion rates, among other success measures. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African American and Hispanic students at the lower end of the performance scale and their non-Hispanic White peers and the similar academic disparity between students from low-income families and those who are better off (Ansell, 2018).

Achievement Level

Achievement level setting, also known as standard setting, is the process for establishing one or more threshold scores on an assessment, making it possible to create categories of performance (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate

The adjusted cohort graduation rate is the percentage of public high school freshmen who graduate with a regular diploma within 4 years of starting ninth grade (Institute of Education Statistics, 2019).

At Risk

Students or groups of students who have been identified with a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school. Additionally, students who are identified with this term are known to be in jeopardy of not completing school due to homelessness, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, serious health issues, domestic violence,

transiency, learning disabilities, low test scores, disciplinary problems, grade retentions, or other learning-related factors that could adversely affect the educational performance (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).

Cohort

Students who enter ninth grade for the first time form a cohort at a school. This cohort is “adjusted” by adding any students who subsequently transfer into the cohort and by subtracting any students who subsequently leave due to transfer, dropout, or death (High School Graduation Rate Non-Regulatory Guidance, 2008).

Common Core Standards

Educational assembly in the United States that details what K-12 students should know in English language arts and mathematics at the end of each grade (Roach, 2004).

Communities in Schools

Connecting needed community resources with schools to help young people learn, stay in school, and prepare for life (Communities in Schools, 2014).

Connections Academy

Tuition-free, fully accredited online public schools for students in Grades K–12 (Kamenetz, 2015).

Discipline Referral

Discipline referrals can be an extremely effective tool. They are a way to remove students who are noncompliant with classroom and/or school norms. They are utilized as documentation for parental reference and other means of disciplinary consequences (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Dropout

Students who quit school before earning a diploma, regardless of whether they completed high school requirements later, by way of acquiring a General Education Diploma (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Edgenuity

An online intervention program that uses data to pinpoint where students are struggling and provides them with targeted instruction to help them catch up, keep up, or get ahead within various academic areas (Edgenuity, 2016).

End-of-Course (EOC) Assessment

EOC assessments are exams in English, Algebra I, and biology that allow students in Grades 9-12 to be tested on the knowledge and skills they have gained from taking specific courses. They are different from tests like Smarter Balanced, which are comprehensive and assess overall content-area knowledge. EOCs are administered twice per year during the last 3 weeks of the course semester (National Research Council, 2001).

ESSA

Reauthorization of the 1965 ESEA, which established the American federal governments expanded role in funding public education. ESSA passed both chambers of Congress with strong bipartisan support (Executive Office of the President, 2016).

Extended Day Program

Extended Day programs take place before and/or after school for students who need to work on attaining credit for failed classes (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Formative Assessment

Formative assessments gather feedback that can be used by the instructor and the students to guide improvements in the ongoing teaching and learning context (Linn & Grolund, 2000).

Freshman/Success Academy

A school within a school to help rising ninth-grade students transition to high school. Students encounter a smaller learning community with a wide variety of class choices and more personal contact with teachers and counselors (Clark & Hunley, 2007).

Grade Point Average (GPA)

A number that indicates how well or how high you scored in your courses on average (Potter, 2018).

Graduation Rate

The percentage of seniors who graduate from high school within their incoming cohort (National Research Council, 2001).

Multi-Tier System of Supports

A framework that is utilized within various schools to provide targeted intervention and support to struggling students to assist them in the areas of academics and behavior, social, and emotional needs (Rosen, 2017).

National Assessment of Educational Progress

The National Assessment of Educational Progress is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what students know and can do in various subject areas. It began in 1964 with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation to set up the Exploratory Committee for the Assessment of Progress in Education (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2003).

NCLB

Educational initiative that was signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2000. It was a reauthorization of ESEA, the central federal law in pre-collegiate education. It established various requirements for public schools in America. NCLB was designed to drive gains in the achievement of all students (Daggett, 2004).

PLC

A PLC is an extended learning opportunity to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a particular work environment or field. It is often used in schools as a way to organize teachers into working groups (Robinson, 2015).

Retention

Retention signifies the lack of credits earned in 1 year, which would have qualified students to promote to the next grade. There are several reasons for retaining a student: achievement; attendance; or sometimes, social issues. The retained student must repeat a grade level (Rounds-Bryant, 2008).

Saturday School

Extended learning as well as enrichment opportunities that provides students with opportunities to enroll in academic tutoring, credit recovery, and varied enrichment courses such as art, music, dance, and world languages (Pytel, 2007).

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is the measure of the level of success or proficiency that has been obtained at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it against some standard or benchmark (Linn & Grolund, 2000).

Transition

The movement between two or more objects, individuals, and/or items to become better or attain something new (Mickelson, 1990).

Virtual Online Program

An online virtual school offering students the opportunity to learn at their own pace, full or part time (Krejcir, 2018).

Overview of Methodology

The primary method of exploring educator perspectives was grounded theory, a qualitative research method designed to determine the effectiveness of a Freshman/Success Academy on students, mainly minority male students (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The purpose of selecting this method was to attain complex textual descriptions from educators who instruct at-risk students based on academic, discipline, and attendance referrals. Collected data analysis for this study was conducted in two phases. The researcher systematically transcribed feedback from educators using online open-ended questionnaires and conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews over the course of 6 weeks.

Questionnaire

Participants were provided a 6-item open-ended questionnaire found in Appendix A through a SurveyMonkey platform that allowed for open and clear responses. Using an online tool such as SurveyMonkey allowed educators to complete the open-ended questionnaire at their convenience. Each of the responses were then analyzed to identify the common themes and categories. The categories and themes were then utilized as points of discussion to dig deeper with participants during Phase 2 of the study (Creswell

& Miller, 2000; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Interviews

Upon the gathering and development of themes and categories, the researcher reached out to participants who agreed to participate in Phase 2 of the study, which consisted of two Zoom interview sessions. The online interactive sessions were conducted once a week over 3 weeks using the guided questions from Appendix B. During each session, the researcher facilitated various topics of concern as an extension from the collected and analyzed questionnaire. This method was utilized to allow participants the opportunity to engage in open conversations. The information gained from the interview sessions was used to gather further insight into the overarching question as it aligns with the Freshman/Success Academy.

Setting for the Study

This study took place in a school district that has a student population of 33,000 and is the eighth largest school district in North Carolina. There are more than 4,000 employees; 2,000 of whom are teachers, with an average of 21 teachers being National Board certified. Currently, the district maintains 23 elementary schools, nine middle schools, nine high schools, two Early Learning Alternative schools, and two early colleges on a \$300 million operating budget. In the 2017-2018 school year, the average for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score was 1,107, a 17-point differentiation from the North Carolina SAT average of 1,090. Additionally, 58.9% of the students scored a 17 or above as compared to the 57.9% of students across the state. The cohort graduation rate for the 2017-2018 school year was 89.2% as compared to the state's cohort average of 88% (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], n.d.).

The school (School CH) to be utilized in this study was established in 1895 and is one of the oldest public high schools within the county as well as the state. The total school enrollment in the last month of actual enrolled student membership for the 2019-2020 school year was 1,131. The enrollment ethnicity breakdown for School CH includes American Indian/Alaskan Native (one); Asian (23), Black or African American (301), Hispanic (302), Multi-ethnic (53), Native American/Pacific Islander (one), and White (450) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Total Enrollment Based on Ethnicity 2019-2020

	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	Total
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0	0	1	1
Asian	7	6	7	3	23
Black or African American	83	73	64	81	301
Hispanic	98	77	75	52	302
Multi (Two or more)	14	15	14	10	53
Native American/Pacific Islander	1	0	0	0	1
White	109	121	102	118	450
Total	312	292	262	265	1131

With 604 students making up the ninth and 10th grades, the Freshman/Success Academy enrolled all first-time ninth graders and 10th graders who were not on track to graduate within their cohort or identified as at risk for the 2019-2020 school year.

Over the 2-year span, the number of referrals and subsequent consequences have increased drastically. As shown in Table 2, the discipline data show the number of referrals from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019 have increased by approximately 78% across grade levels. These data are duplicated for the cases of subsequent consequences for the duplicate consecutive school years.

Table 2

Suspensions and Referrals for the 2019-2020 and 2018-2019 School Years

School Year	Incidents (referrals)	Offenses (suspensions)
2019 – 2020	535	530
2018 – 2019	419	415

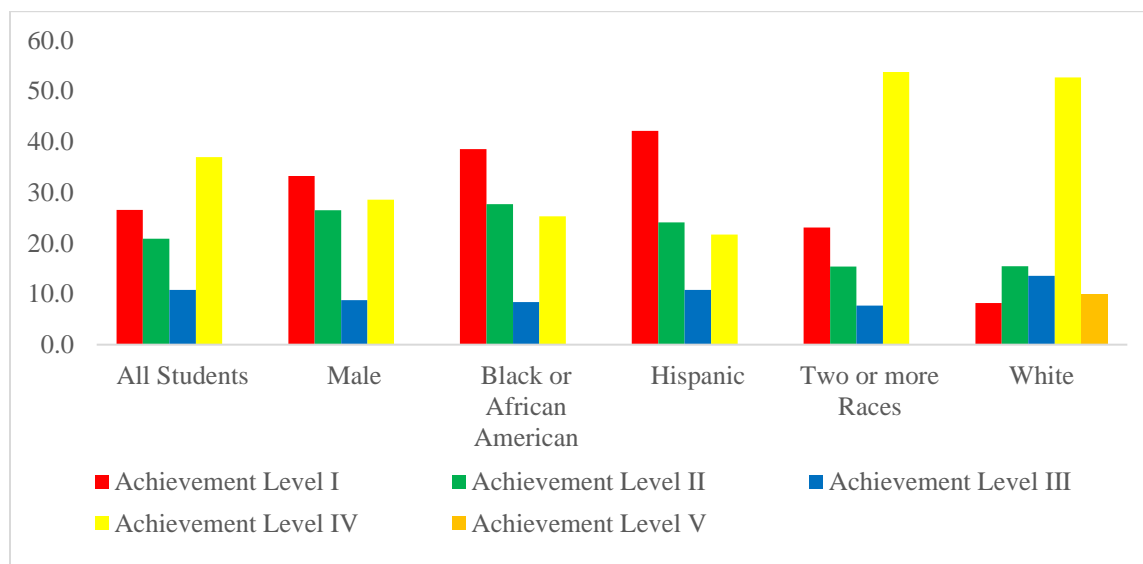
Note. For the purpose of this study, I focused on the students assigned to the ninth and 10th grades.

As a result of the drastic increase over the 2-year span, the administration of School CH and the Freshman/Success Academy program utilized the disciplinary data to systematically and insightfully reflect on ways to improve the discipline format across all grades, particularly for those students in the Freshman/Success Academy program.

Due to the profoundly high number of referrals and consequences for students at School CH, the proficiency rates on the EOC assessments widen as a result of absenteeism from classes. As shown in Figure 1, students in the 10th grade who took the North Carolina English II EOC showed an immense disparity between males, minority students, and their White peers.

Figure 1

Student Proficiency on North Carolina English II Performance 2018-2019

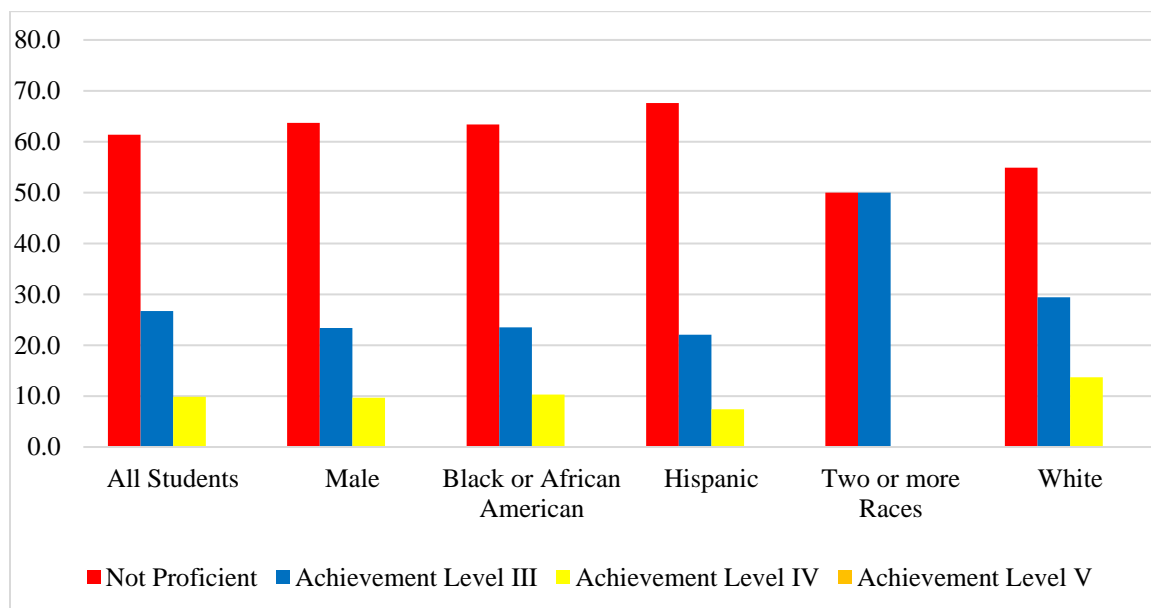


While 26.6% of all students achieved a level of 1, 6.7% more male students achieved the same level at School CH. Taking a deeper dive into the data results for English II, approximately 80.8% of the Black or African American and Hispanic students achieved a level of 1 compared to a combined 31.3% of students who identified as Two or More Races or White. The achievement gap of approximately 49.5% between these two groups of races is consistent for all other achievement levels. For example, all the students in their perspective, racial categories achieved the proficiency achievement level of 3 or above; however, students recognized as being Two or More Races or White exceeded all student percentage rates by a combined total of 106.5%, a difference of 59.5%.

This trend of disproportionately is also transparent in the 2018-2019 data for Math I as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

School CH Student Proficiency on North Carolina Math I Performance 2018-2019



Students who achieved a level of 1 or 2 were not proficient on the North Carolina Math I EOC. As a result, 63.7% of the males scored not proficient compared to 61.4% of all students at School CH. Even within the specific racial breakdown, there was a differential gap of at least 10%. More specifically, Black or African American students (63.4%) and Hispanic students (67.6%) were among the two highest racial groups who were not proficient in comparison to their peers of Two or More Races (50%) and White (54.9%). Even with the proficiency achievement levels of 3 and 4, there was a distinct gap of achievement between Black or African American and Hispanic students and their counterparts.

Research Questions

In order to determine the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy program in an urban high school, the researcher utilized the exploratory investigative approach to obtain the perceptions of the instructional stakeholders who teach at-risk

minority students. Therefore, the overarching question for this study was,

1. How do instructional stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy Program of the minority male student who has been identified as at risk?

To further analyze the perceptions of all stakeholders who participated in this study through the implementation of a questionnaire and interviews, the following research questions were employed to attain specific perceptions from instructional stakeholders.

2. How can the effectiveness of the implementation of the Freshman/Success Academy be described?
3. What are the purposes (goals and objectives) of the Freshman/Success Academy program?
4. What concerns exist about the logistical operations of the program?
5. How effective are the procedures of the Freshman/Success Academy program in addressing the behavioral and academic needs of minority male high school students?
6. What challenges exist as a result of the implemented design of the Freshman/Success Academy program to ensure the academic success of the minority male student?

Conclusion

This qualitative study was organized into five chapters to evaluate the perceptions of educators in the Freshman/Success Academy program regarding the proactive strategies utilized to close the achievement gap of participating at-risk male minority students within high school. Chapter 1 included the background and purpose of this

study, statement of the problem including the research questions, methodology, and overview for the selected means of evaluation. The literature review in Chapter 2 is relevant to the study as it provides an historical foundation of education and its initiatives within the public school system. Further review includes the analysis of literature on the negative issues surrounding the ninth-grade transition; the academic achievement of at-risk students; the cognitive, emotional, and social entities that possibly influence their success; and the perceptions of the teachers who educate them. Such a descriptive analysis assisted with setting the foundation of Chapter 3, which describes the appropriate methodology for the study. A discussion of the data collected through the provided questionnaire and interviews as well as the key findings of the study is presented Chapter 4. The conclusions that are drawn from the data and recommendations for future research on Freshman/Success Academy programs are presented in Chapter 5 of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

Student absenteeism, high suspension rates, and dropout rates are just a few of the many entities that are negatively impacting the success rate of a high school student, particularly the minority male. Statistics have shown that African American male students are more likely to withdraw from school and ultimately drop out of school (Osborne, 2002). Accounting for the largest percentage, first-time ninth graders fail to accumulate the required minimal amount of academic credits within their first semester as a result of the elements. Consequently, those individuals must enroll in a credit recovery program such as Edgenuity in order to stay on track to graduate with their prospective cohort. Such recourse has the potential to birth a high level of frustration and anxiety, thus resulting in the continued gap of achievement among minorities (George, 1999). With those barriers growing at a rapid rate of speed due to culture indifferences and instability of the family, the priority to develop and implement a strategic supportive educational system that promotes success for all students is vital to ensuring that the gap on achievement becomes condensed and to a point of closure (National Research Council, 2001). The challenge, however, stems from the lack of an equitable educational system to effectively understand the various learning styles that encompass the cognitive and socio-emotional development of all students regardless of the additional academic and supplemental programs that are within schools (Hale-Benson, 1982; Rothon et al., 2010). Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to determine the effectiveness of a Freshman/Success Academy program of at-risk students as it relates to attendance, academic achievement, and overall feelings about school from the teacher perceptions.

History of Education

Public education in America has evolved from the once one-room buildings with wooden desks, a blackboard, a class set of academic books, various pieces of artwork, and a stove to the modern day schools complete with multi-classrooms that have laptops, Ipads, Smartboards, engaging lessons, and formative as well as summative assessments. However, the present could not exist without a past, with more than 150 years in which young people were provided with a knowledge that would open the doors to their future and livelihood. Although the thought of formal schooling was not readily available to all, it could be stated that attaining an education was priority to the early American colonists of what is called The United States of America. With the first American high school, the Boston Latin Grammar School, being founded in 1635, the state's view of education, although selective, was one that was positive and engaging. In 1647, with the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony establishing an elementary school for towns that had at least 50 families living as residents, the goal of this governmental force, better known as the Puritans, was pushing the assurance to secure that their children had the educational opportunity to learn to read the Bible and receive basic information about their Calvinist religion (Bracey, 1997). While the rudiments of literacy and arithmetic were taught within the family house, the Puritans are recorded as being the first tax-supported public school within the country. With such schools as the ones developed by the Puritans and the Boston Latin School, the importance of education within the newly founded America became the primary idea of not only the academic essentials of reading, writing, and math but also the opportunity to instill self-pride and values (Bracey, 1997).

During the 17th century, the public schools were only educating male students,

with the highest level of education being that of grammar. This was due to constraints of farming, wars, and the credentials of the teacher, which were almost extinct. Such a discourse was not to say that females were not being educated, but those who were from poorer households typically did not see the educational benefits as compared to those families of wealth who would send their female children to private school (Watson et al., 2013). With the innovational changes that engrossed the Industrial Revolution, the induction of President Jefferson, and the war between the French and British, the progress of education divulged itself by fellow educator Horace Mann. According to Race Forward, a national organization that tracks the progress of public education, Mann was slated as a well-traveled individual who introduced the educational world to the concept of age grading. Beginning in Massachusetts, this method was proven to be successful and thus was executed as the norm for public education across the United States (Biography.com Editors, 2020; Public Broadcasting System, n.d.; USDOE, 2005).

The continuation of what people in America knew as the public educational system had implemented homogenizing classrooms and compulsory attendance laws to ensure that all eligible children were included in the revolution of what was viewed as education. In spite of the seemingly invigorating impressions of what the educational system was moving towards and the sparks of triumphs, the plea by Thomas Jefferson requesting to utilize tax dollars to fund schools fell on the deaf governmental ear and subsequently delivered the beginning of hardships and anguish upon the American public educational system (Bracey, 1997). Keeping with the principles that were established with “public education,” the exuberating efforts to implement equality among all children was at the doorstep of the American government with the 1896 Supreme Court ruling,

Plessy v. Ferguson to uphold the legality of segregation (Watson et al., 2013).

Nonetheless, with great effort and diligence within the Civil Rights movement, in 1954, the Supreme Court overturned its ruling with an historical landmark case in education, *Brown v. Board of Education*. With the ruling, the desegregation of African American and Caucasian students was one of America's monumental milestones for public education. It was under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment that the Supreme Court unanimously held that the de jure segregation of public schools was unconstitutional (Russo et al., 1994). Although a remarkable event, this decision and preceding decisions brought about issues that were not only immediate to the government and families but became an enigma for many educators. Teachers and administrators had to learn how to nurture the development of students from very different backgrounds and confront how the cultural differences of their students would be addressed not only within the school but the classroom (Watson et al., 2013).

Although school integration and other social actions were seemingly positive strides within the educational system, the means of equality for all races and classes continued to lack across the United States. The steps to ensure the forward-thinking of fair means continued with the Progressive Movement. With the goals to promote the ideas of morality, economic reform, efficiency, and social welfare, the Progressive Movement was the onset of apathy towards the social ills and injustices that were observed within government; medicine; finances; churches; and the most significant piece of reform, the public education system (Bracey, 1997). By the end of the 19th century, it was reported that educational leaders were becoming increasingly distressed with the outcomes of the quality of education that students were receiving, specifically

African American male students in high school (DTI Associates, Inc. under the USDOE, n.d.). The educational distress that was presented in an unremitting emotion has thus continued its presence within current society. Robinson (2015) argued that many students are not receiving the kind of education that is required to meet the economic demands of the 21st century. Robinson went on to state that the organization of a student's day does not mimic that of a 40-minute class period. Therefore, the instructional environment should replicate that of a student's home and possible work environment as much as possible to increase levels of engagement as well as interest through hands-on activities, technology, and project-based activities.

Even in 2002 with the implementation of NCLB, which stated that every student will reach a high level of proficiency in core academic skills, the lack of acknowledgement of the cultural diversity and demographics that are within the classroom will continue to be the foundational cause of high rates in the areas of dropout, suspension, and absenteeism (Douglass, 2007). In 2017, Terri S. Wilson, a reviewer from the University of Colorado Boulder, reported in *Review of Better Evidence, Better Choices, Better Schools* significant differences between NCLB and ESSA. Fleischman et al. (2016) stated that ESSA “offers state education agencies significant opportunities to use evidence to support the improvement of schools and ensure better outcomes for all students” (p. 4), where NCLB only specified school improvement strategies to the state LEA. The report concluded that the interpretation of this “new” law found in ESSA is utilizing tier levels. This means that states can still prioritize and preserve NCLB's emphasis on a small band of accepted research methods: randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs. However, states have a more significant opportunity for

advancement due to the promotion of using evidence to support schools in need of improvement and to achieve better student outcomes. The current American high school education system is based on a model and curriculum that assume the majority of the enrolled students have the intentions, aspirations, and foundation to postsecondary education or training; however, with minimal rigorous academic preparation as early as prekindergarten, that is almost absolute for the African American male and other minority male students. Take for instance the reported 81% of students who graduated from the class of 2013; this was reported to be the highest graduation rate for students to be in their appropriate cohort, according to the 2015 Building a Grad Nation (Civic Enterprises and Everyone Graduates Center at the School of Education at John Hopkins University, 2015). This is an almost 20% increase from nearly 4 decades where graduation rates were in the low 70th percentile (Civic Enterprises and Everyone Graduates Center at the School of Education at John Hopkins University, 2015).

Educational Initiatives

The historical timeline of public education for the United States has been marked with a plethora of movements that were implemented with the mindset to improve schools as well as the achievement for students. When Horace Mann began the educational initiative in 1837, he introduced the standardization model into the public school curricula (Watson et al., 2013). This first educational initiative, called the Common School Movement, pressed for public schools to be tax funded just as the Prussian “common school system,” which was one of the most internally diverse schools in the world during the 1800s (Jordan, 2015). As a result, the enrollment of schools began to rise dramatically due to the execution of child labor and truancy laws (Meghir &

Palme, 2005). Since this educational thrust, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education under the umbrella of the USDOE has endorsed a variety of other initiatives that promoted as well as supported the success of students within the United States. Ranging from School Improvement Grants to ESEA to RTT, NCLB, and ESSA, each of these initiatives were strategically developed with the hopes to continue to equip every student across the United States with the tools to succeed and achieve (Daggett, 2004; ("Reauthorization of the elementary and secondary education act," 2015).

Translating to the passing of ESEA on April 9, 1965 under former President Lyndon B. Johnson, ESEA became the most expansive federal bill ever passed because it brought education into the forefront of the national assault on poverty by allocating funds to assist low-income students as a result of Congress passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Braceras et al., 2007; Paul, 2011). With the focus of this bill being tailored to “War on Poverty,” specific funding such as Title I was strategically apportioned to attempt to close the gap between the prevalent issues of race and poverty in the United States (“Reauthorization of the elementary and secondary education act,” 2015). According to USDOE (2014), the services under Title I were to only be utilized for schools serving areas with high-poverty students who were failing or most at risk of failing in order to meet the goals of proficiency. To assist with meeting established proficiency goals of Title I schools, local education agencies throughout the United States were provided with opportunities to attain funding from specific grants. The allocated funds from those grants were solely for the hiring of additional teachers to help reduce class size, tutoring, purchase of instructional equipment, materials and supplies, parental involvement activities, professional development, and prekindergarten programs (Stark et al., 2015).

However, criticism has been verbalized about the appropriateness of how the allocated funds are utilized due to the continued gap of achievement between Title I versus Non-Title I schools continuing to grow farther apart. Such criticism was confirmed in a 2008 study on the impact of school climate on student achievement. Varlack (2008) examined the differences in Title I and non-Title I schools in an affluent Maryland suburb related to school climate and student achievement and provided information to the body of knowledge and expanded the understanding and implications of school climate and its overall impact on achievement. As a result of this quantitative study, Varlack stated that there was a general difference between the two school types in terms of academic performance. Of the 20 schools, 10 being classified as Title I, that were utilized in the study, there was a higher percentage of the sample in Title I schools that scored in the basic range on the state assessment versus students enrolled in the non-Title I who represented at least twice the frequency in the advanced range on the state assessment.

One of the more prominent initiatives, RTT, is reported to be a \$4.35 billion competitive grant program that was developed to assist with increasing student achievement, closing achievement gaps, and preparing students for college and careers within the United States educational system. The program was originally authorized in 2009 under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of President Obama's cabinet and utilized four pivotal pillars:

- Adopting rigorous college- and career-ready standards and assessments.
- Recruiting, evaluating, and retaining highly effective teachers and principals.
- Building data systems that measure student success and inform teaching and learning.

- Turning around low-performing schools.

The intention to utilize these pillars was to prompt states to begin their own implementation of end-of-the-year testing as it is in direct alignment to their Common Core Standards to ensure that students were able to demonstrate mastery leveled performance on various tasks. Since its implementation, it has been reported that as individual states moved towards closing their achievement gaps, the vitality to learn from the process and make midcourse corrections when needed to improve its overall success is priority (Miller & Hanna, 2014).

Consistent with the principles that have guided the current and past presidential administrative initiatives, such educational endeavors that have been in direct alignment to the reauthorization of ESEA ultimately proposed competition and other incentives between states, school districts, and schools in order to develop and implement comprehensive reform and improvement plans that both raised student achievement and closed achievement gaps. As with the desired implications of RTT, the reauthorization of ESEA focused on raising the national educational standards, encouraging innovation within educational realms, and rewarding success, while allowing individual states and their local districts to become more flexible with the resources that were selected to invest for the greatest educational impact (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

Thomas and Brady (2005) argued that the accountability requirements under ESEA and NCLB, although a step in the right direction, were developed from a theoretical perspective and continue to lack a realistic understanding of the complex issues of instructing students who are economically as well as academically

disadvantaged. Researchers have stated that there needs to be a reliable and robust accountability system established to improve the quality of public education in general and opportunities for disadvantaged students (Allington, 1991; Daggett, 2004). Even with the current reauthorization of NCLB with ESSA, critics state USDOE provides too much “freedom” to the states by establishing their student subgroup. Although states are required to attain federal approval for a minimum sample size greater than 30 and the performance of small subgroups are captured, a state must also take the limitations of small-group measurement into account when discussing growth measures within their accountability systems and school report cards (Bell & Young, 2016). Third, the reliance on state departments of education to administer federal funds (promoted to avoid criticisms of federal control) resulted in an expansion of state bureaucracies and larger involvement of state governments in educational decision-making. Requiring each state to utilize evidence-based approaches towards the improvement of documented student outcomes, states were provided the opportunity to acquire a piece of the allocated \$165 million for various grants that were developed under the Investing in Innovation fund (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

As stated in the explicit and strategic steps to hold educational systems responsible for failing to adequately serve socioeconomically disadvantaged children, NCLB raised the bar of accountability even higher. However, researchers such as Bracey (1997) stated that some districts should not have been held accountable under those policies with underfunded initiatives and unrealistic objectives without providing substantiating support for educational research. This was one of the main concerns former President Barack Obama used as the foundation to develop opportunities for states

to develop their own strong systems for school improvement based on sufficient evidence, rather than imposing cookie-cutter federal solutions that were evident in NCLB (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Just as provided in Table 3 depicting the 4-year cohort graduation data for North Carolina, the percentage of students who have graduated from high school in 4 years or less has remained stagnant according to the NCDPI (2019) Accountability Office. However, the percentage of graduates who are males, African American, Hispanic, American Indian, and/or Economically Disadvantaged has remained at a 6% or more gap as compared to their White peers, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate by Subgroup

2019 4-year cohort graduation rate results by subgroup (2015-2016 entering ninth graders)		2018 4-year cohort graduation rate results by subgroup (2014-2015 entering ninth graders)		2017 4-year cohort graduation rate results by subgroup (2013-2014 entering ninth graders)	
Students	Percent	Students	Percent	Students	Percent
All students	86.5	All students	86.3	All students	86.5
Male	83.5	Male	83.2	Male	83.5
White	89.6	White	89.6	White	89.3
Black	83.7	Black	83.2	Black	83.9
Asian	94.5	Asian	93.4	Asian	93.8
American Ind.	81.2	American Ind.	84.4	American Ind.	84.3
Hispanic	81.1	Hispanic	83.2	Hispanic	80.5
Two or More Races	83.9	Two or More Races	84.1	Two or More Races	84.3
Economically Disadvantaged	81.8	Economically Disadvantaged	80.3	Economically Disadvantaged	81.8

Thus, the question remains throughout the mindset of educators, parents, and

educational leadership, have the extra support and initiatives been enough to close the gap of achievement? Some governmental officials both current and past have the opinion that it is not. During an interview by the Public Broadcasting System, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (2012) stated that the greatest risk to national security was our failing public education system. Rice went on to say in the personal interview that this failure of public instruction “could undermine the United States’ ability to compete in a global economy.” The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009) published a report that called for the public education system to reinvent education in order to prepare American students to compete with international students both academically and with the skills necessary to fill a competitive job. The USDOE Perkins II and the United States Congress of the National School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994 promised change in the American high school by inviting all states and school districts to apply for funds that would assist with the school and work-based learning system (Congress of the U.S.; Washington; DC. Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources et al., 1994; Sammon, 2008). Such attained funds respectfully assisted with addressing the school-to-career needs of students by providing a curriculum that included career awareness in addition to various opportunities to interact with the business community thus enlightening the movement for college and career readiness. With the goal of the National School to Work Opportunities Act to ultimately raise the state standards and assist with the succession for students, schools responded by creating innovative career academies like Explorers Club. Consequently, funding was cut and the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Act of 1998 began to observe the affects through an increase in dropout rates and absenteeism within numerous North Carolina high schools.

Nonetheless, USDOE's Smaller Learning Communities grants which began in 2000 in conjunction with major foundations such as the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation opened the door to states with large comprehensive high schools like Chicago to assist with the funding efforts of school improvement to become smaller and more personalized within the instructional and educational delivery to students identified as at risk or disadvantage (Sammon, 2008).

Teacher Effectiveness

According to such resources as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Measures of Effective Teaching Project (MET) that are funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, effective teacher is an individual who demonstrates certain characteristics within the classroom in a consistent manner (Martin & Loomis, 2013). However, this definition and the movement of research that investigates the correlation between teaching, achievement gap, and building relationships within the classroom move the educational influences from the concept of a highly qualified teacher to a highly effective teacher. This means the educator must not only know the content but have the ability to recognize the various learning styles, deficits, and a logical means to implement improvements in the way teaching and learning can take place in schools across the United States (Barry, 2010). As early as the 1980s, research focused on teaching effectiveness as disseminated in parts of the United States to analyze how schools support effective teaching. Even the late Kathleen Cotton of Northwest Regional Education Laboratory valued the defining of effective teaching and ways schools can support it in a constructive, equitable manner.

Based on information and the schema depicted by Hildebrand et al. (1971), an effective teacher can be described and defended as one who demonstrates those various distinct characteristics under five general categories of organization and clarity, analytic/synthetic approach, dynamism and enthusiasm, instructor-group interaction, and instructor-individual student interaction. Within each of these categories, the specifics are as depicted in Table 4.

Table 4

General Categories of an Effective Teacher

Categories	Characteristic I	Characteristic II	Characteristic III	Characteristic IV
Organization and clarity	Explains clearly	Is well prepared	Makes difficult topics easy to understand	Uses examples, details, analogies and other modes of explanation to make material understandable
Analytic synthetic approach	Gives the student a sense of past, present and future directions as well as the origins of ideas and concepts	Discusses viewpoints other than his/her own		
Dynamism and enthusiasm	Is an energetic, dynamic person	Conveys a love of the field	Has an aura of self-confidence	
Instructor-group interaction	Can stimulate, direct, and pace interaction with the class	Encourages independent thought and accepts criticism	Knows whether or not the class is following the material and is sensitive motivation	
Instructor-individual student interaction	Is perceived as fair, especially in his/her methods of evaluation	Is seen by his/her students as approachable and a valuable source of advice even on matters not directly related to the course		

In 2009-2010, MET utilized a combined measurement comprised of teacher

classroom observation results, student perception survey responses, and student achievement gains adjusted for student characteristics such as prior performance and demographics to determine teacher effectiveness within their classrooms. During the following year of 2010-2011, the group continued the study by randomly assigning students to two or more teachers who were a part of the MET project to determine if the students who were randomly assigned to teachers who were previously identified as more effective actually performed better at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. Based on student assessment results and summative evaluations, the selected composite measure of effective teaching was accurately predicted, thus confirming within the 2009-2010 research that teachers previously identified as more effective caused students to learn more within their academic classes (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2007).

When posed with the question, “what do new teachers need to know and be able to do,” it was the report *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World* that was prepared by The National Academy of Education (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2017) determined that a new teacher needs to be equipped with a common core of knowledge and skills which is applicable within the classroom no matter what a student’s demographic is. The report went on to state that if a beginning teacher does not have such knowledge with all of the advances within the research of education, the “world” of education will never be “complete” or finished (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2015). Instead, it will always be a work in progress, as it is in all other professions.

Pedagogical Preparation

In recent publications provided by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2015), there are some policy makers who have recently advocated

that a passing score on a test of subject matter knowledge and a background check are all that is required to be considered an effective teacher. Moreover, the same individuals who hold governmental positions have supported various approaches that would permit those same teachers with no preparation in pedagogy or child/adolescent development to be classified as highly qualified, if they pass a test of subject matter knowledge, i.e. Praxis I. Such an ideology has defecated the premise that has been established within USDOE as to an effective teacher ultimately knows about learning, they have and desire to enhance their deep understanding of the pedagogy that is centered on their subjects, and they are willing to actively participate in some form of vertical planning to know about other subjects.

Cohen and Goldhaber (2016) stated in his research on teacher effectiveness that “licensure test performance is clearly not a silver bullet” (p. 25). An emphasis on the systematic system for assessing teachers to determine their preparedness to enter the classroom as sole practitioners was required to prepare them adequately (Cohen & Goldhaber, 2016). Thus, two components that are critically important in teacher preparation, teacher knowledge of the subject to be taught and knowledge and skill of teaching that subject, are what should be at the forefront of all educational programs. Such is in the documented case of *Williams v. California*, which charged that many students were deprived of their right to an adequate education as a direct result of underqualified teachers; in the late 1990s, nearly 50% of entering teachers in California did not have a teaching credential and were hired in districts serving the neediest students (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2015).

Collaborative Inquiry

When one begins their educational venture into the invigorating world of education, one can become incredulous with various emotions. Particularly within the magnitude in which the scope of education has come to in terms of evaluations, walkthroughs, rigor, formative as well as summative assessments, and of course lesson plans. Often hired near the beginning of the school year without knowing anything about the culture of the school, novice teachers are succumbed to a vast array of immediate needs. The first is to fashion a functional environment within of a 900-square foot room or smaller filled only with desks, chairs, and possibly two computers and printers with enough ink to last half of the year (Weinbaum et al., 2004).

Instructionally, it is the desire of that novice teacher to develop and cultivate a community of learning among students. Such communities resemble working peer groups with the purpose of learning and collaborating. However, if those specified groups are unable to produce and therefore demonstrate mastery of an assumed learned standard, such results will become reflective of that novice teacher. As teachers struggle from time to time, the action of collaborative inquiry or PLCs becomes the major contributor and driving force to develop the big picture of lessons to ultimately uncover essential questions, engaging activities, and functional formative assessments (Oxley & Klump, 2006). As defined by Weinbaum et al. (2004), collaborative inquiry is a systematic process where teachers gather together to explore issues about teaching and learning that they have identified as important for the success of their students. When the actual process and practical application of collaborative inquiry is implemented, five major entities need to occur: (a) develop collaborative inquiry groups consisting of like-minded

professionals; (b) review student performance data related to both state and benchmark assessments; (c) provide collaborative inquiry teams time, support, leadership, and ongoing opportunity for discourse regarding instructional directions; (d) review benchmark assessment data throughout the school year to determine the effectiveness of instructional decisions; and (e) modify instructional direction if needed (David, 2009).

In research that was analyzed by the American Educational Research Association Panel, nationally recognized educators evaluated the empirical evidence that was relevant to the practices and policies of preservice teacher education in the U.S. The findings of such a study specified that for higher educational programs to produce successful novice and consequently experienced teachers, the action of having intentional collaborative arrangements between university programs and local school districts must be consistently implemented throughout the required coursework. In addition, the panel found that within seven of eight studies reviewed, there was a positive correlation between licensure and student achievement, especially in mathematics education. Thus, the panel concluded that through planned, guided, and sustained interactions with pupils within early field and student teaching, the available evidence favors licensure in the field gained by university-based teacher preparation as an indicator of effective teaching, which includes collaborative inquiry and naturally leads to student achievement (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005).

David (2009) wrote that when teachers are actively working together to identify common challenges, analyze relevant data, and test instructional approaches, the action of collaborative work will ultimately increase student learning. Kasl and Yorks (2010) provided similar remarks, stating in order to have significant impact on student

achievement, inquiries that are collaborative in a systematic style where individuals use their past experiences and expertise to collectively solve problems should be a priority with instructional practices. Therefore, when students, particularly minority males, are assigned to an “excellent” teacher for 1 school year, the opportunity for them to gain up to a full year’s worth of academic growth is higher as compared to a student assigned to an “ineffective” teacher (Weisberg et al., 2009).

In this way, schools have a greater impact on the academic achievement for students, particularly the male student who has been identified as at risk. However, all educational leaders must be prepared for such a task in order to implement a plan of action within the educational system that calls for ongoing and consistent means of collaboration. Beginning with recognizing the values of the minority male student’s abilities in conjunction with their culture, the task of drawing upon the strengths will become easier as the collaborative inquiry process occurs. Moreover, according to Rivkin et al. (2005), when high-risk students are given highly effective teachers who are engaged participants of this inquiry, there is a high probability that those students will outperform students taught by teachers who are categorized as being ineffective when aligned to collaboration. Additionally, by utilizing the collaborative inquiry as a daily ritual of the teaching process, the role of the teacher will always be optimized to be significant in the organization status of success (Asamen & Berry, 1989; Baratz & Baratz, 1969).

Teacher Perceptions of Minority Students

Minority students have historically encountered difficulties in relation to academic achievement. Educators and lawmakers have recognized these disparities and have attempted to alleviate the challenges by enacting programs and legislation that

address the disparities since ESEA of 1965 (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Nisbett, 2011).

“Blacks often are perceived as being academically and intellectually inferior by the larger society” (Carter, 2008, p. 12) is a thought that is present in many minds today; even with the highlights of success that have been presented across schools within the United States, it has been one comment made among many as it aligns to educators, males, and students of minorities (Clay, 2011). Yet, once educators become intrinsically aware of the unique factors that are involved in the education of this population, the motivational and engaging learning process once and for all can be replaced with some of the current stereotypical beliefs and value systems of this race. Holland and Mazzoli (2001) stated, “Teachers also see reflections of what lies beneath the surface of these students: abuse, fear, optimism, pain, alienation, distrust, confidence, failure, and a wide range of characteristics that each person has been fortunate to experience or forced to endure” (p. 296). Majors and Billson (1992) concluded that an African American male’s behavior is often misinterpreted due to their desire to remain “cool” to counter the stresses of oppression. However, numerous studies indicate that such misinterpretations can and have caused many educators to conclude that African American males are innately rude and have an aversion towards schooling (Majors & Billson, 1992). Furthermore, when individuals within the educational system, both in and out of the classroom, conscientiously make an attempt to discover and answer the reasons as to why there has been an influx of male minority students who have dropped out, become frustrated, and continue to be in the lower half of the nationwide achievement gap, the success that can be rightfully earned can begin. One such attempt has been made through the study conducted to provide answers as to why there has been an increasingly high rate of

African American students being inducted into the special education programs at schools across the United States (Graham, 2008). Research has indicated that the likelihood of minority students receiving instruction from a teacher who is from a similar racial and economic background is low (Natesan et al., 2011), and these students continuously underperform in comparison to their nonminority peers. Graham (2008) utilized data from USDOE to provide detailed information as it relates to the age and disability of students who are referred for educational services within the schools.

Graham (2008) went on to suggest the reasoning of overrepresentation is due to various learning style differences of students within the culture of minorities. Graham made use of the study to determine the correlation that exists between the perceptions of educators on the cultural characteristics of the minority male, in addition to the special education referral rate. Providing reliable and valid data to provoke quality questioning about the referral process that currently takes place within the school, Graham found that there was no statistical causal relationship between the attitudes of the educator and the referral rate of minorities, particularly male students. However, there was a significant correlation between the perceptions of educators who fell in the “novice” category and providing effective instruction to students of diverse cultures. Therefore, it is safe to state that the expectations of teachers are particularly important in the development of the male student who is characterized as a minority. Positive racial attitudes by the teacher can not only boost achievement but motivation as well (Graham, 2008).

With low or even mixed expectations from a teacher, the level of motivation can decrease, contributing to low self-image or self-esteem. Cannon (2013) examined the education and perceptions of minority males in an urban high school to combat the

negative perception that can trigger a sense of cultural bias, defeat, and painful experiences. Cannon also analyzed the cultural competency of teachers and administrators within the selected school, which was an urban public high school in Savannah, GA. Utilizing, the methods of one-on-one interviews, round-table discussion groups, and a Likert survey, Cannon drew on the perspective of the critical race theory to seek answers to the following questions:

- What are the lived experiences of the participants while in urban public high schools?
- How do the participants' experiences relate to the tenets of critical race theory?
- How do the participants compare their lived public school experiences to their desired or anticipated experiences?
- To what extent did high school teachers and administrators understand and respond to the students' culture?
- What impact, if any, did the cultural competency of educators have on students' academic achievement?

At the conclusion of this study, Cannon (2013) suggested that the implementation of a "cultural bias" training is imperative so teachers and administrators increase their awareness of possible cultural bias that might be present within their instructional practices. Cannon went on to state that teacher certification programs could also be required to incorporate service-learning assignments that are able to apply specific skill sets to attain practical experience within communities that are of the minority culture. The perceptions and expectations teachers have regarding minority students from

economically challenging backgrounds could possibly have negative impacts on academic achievement. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore teacher perceptions and the impacts on the academic achievement of minority students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, with the status of stereotypical opinions of the minority population, the discourse that is currently being implemented must be retracted in order to attain a true and reliable sense to change the current perceptions of those who educate the minority male.

Student Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development

From the time we open our eyes, research has been documented to state that we as individuals are in the process of developing into the person we will become for the rest of our lives. Starting with Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development, the delivery of such phrases as "trust vs. mistrust," "industry vs. inferiority," and "identity vs. role confusion" are being pushed to the test with the external as well as internal extremities of life and social issues (Stevens, 1983). According to the University of South Carolina's handbook for first-year students, the description of student development is as follows:

Student development is the way that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result.... There are three types of development:

Change: is an altered state, which might be positive or negative...

Growth: is an expansion which may be positive or negative....

Development: is growth. (Mullendore & Hatch, 2000, p. 2)

This statement is conducive in the research conducted by Chavis (2011), who identified the educational aspirations of African American males who were raised in mother-only

households. In this study, the initial question of “Is a mother-only household a preconceived environment for failure for the Black male” (Chavis, 2011, p. 3), was the foundational piece in the selection process of four African American males from a rural public school in Virginia, along with their mothers. At the conclusion of the study, Chavis documented that more research needs to be conducted due to various outliers that developed within the study; however, one recommendation that was revealed was the imperative that a systematic structure becomes available to address the concerns of disproportionality in terms of the achievement gap and discussion of emotional dysfunction towards the absent or lack of participation from the father.

Aratani (2011) stated there are three main theoretical perspectives that are utilized to determine and understand racial gaps in achievement results. The first perspective claimed that “racial differences in intelligence scores are genetic” (Aratani et al., 2011, p. 4) for children. The second perspective stated, “racial differences in family background largely contribute to the gaps” (Aratani et al., 2011, p. 4) of achievement. Last, the report stated that the “home environment, including parenting practices, a mother’s perceived self-efficacy, mental health, and emotional support” (Aratani et al., 2011, p. 4) are all contributing factors to this long-lasting gap. Aratani et al. concluded interrelations between the second and third perspectives; however, there has not been an adequate amount of research on the first perspective to support such. The report went on to state that young African American males are more likely to be exposed to a range of risk factors within school as a result of the second and third perspectives. Thus, the theoretical perspectives support the gaps among races beginning as early as 9 months up to preschool, which the report stated show that African American boys score significantly

lower within socio-emotional development. The score of significantly lower is also concluded within the areas of cognitive development, reading scores, mathematic scores, and language assessment scores. Chavis (2011) and Aratani et al. both revealed that the social construction of one's identity occurs in different contexts within the overall developmental process.

The "father" of the developmental theory, Lev Vygotsky, who was a Russian educator and psychologist, heavily emphasized the social organization of institutions as being a vital brick to school "enculturation" of students into the practices of society (Moll, 1990). Throughout his research, Vygotsky's theory was seemingly rooted in the constructivist philosophy and contended that for students to cognitively develop, they must actively participate in obtaining knowledge through their experiences, both present and prior, within the current context (Moll, 1990). With his focus on the child's social environment and the influence that it played within the learning process, most of the Vygotsky's research occurred during opportunities in which a child was interacting with adults in the social environment. In his summation, Vygotsky documented that the observed interactions assist with the development of language which in turn promotes appropriate thinking and educational growth for a child (Daniels et al., 2007). Additionally, these interactions offer feedback to the adult who is encouraging the learning process and any consequent support. Through such interactions, the internalization process is what has been learned and will therefore carry over into other aspects of their life, i.e., social and cognitive are instrumental to the academic process for the overall success of an individual (Daniels et al., 2007; Moll, 1990).

It is with this foundational thought process that the aspects of collaborative

learning are vital for student educational development because it allows and promotes the ability to learn from one another (Mason & Singh, 2010). Without the perspective that Vygotsky (1978) shared about the concept of collaborative learning which entails, the high expectations of sitting attentively during a 90-minute lesson for example, are counterproductive due to the maturity level when such is expected to occur has a high probability of not occurring. Additionally, Vygotsky believed that schools should focus on providing students with social opportunities in order to develop the abilities of demonstrating mastery within specified content standards.

Social Theory

Social learning is both an outcome of and an essential input to effective cooperation within a group (Berkes, 2009). It arises from a process through which individuals become aware of how others understand reality and reflect upon the alternative ideas and experiences they encounter (Keen & Mahanty, 2006; Schussler, 2003). The Social Learning Theory emphasizes the social context as a central factor in the development of higher mental functions for all individuals during the process of growing and experiencing life. The “father” of the social theory, Albert Bandura, stated that an individual learned behavior takes place from observational learning or modeling of their environment (Bandura & McDonald, 1963). In research conducted in 1963, Bandura and McDonald combined the aspects of social learning and personality developments to outline five significant articles:

1. Learning is not purely behavioral; rather, it is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context.
2. Learning can occur by observing a behavior and by observing the

consequences of the behavior.

3. Learning involves observation, extraction of information from those observations, and making decisions about the performance of the behavior.
4. Reinforcement plays a role in learning but is not entirely responsible for learning.
5. The learner is not a passive recipient of information. Cognition, environment, and behavior all mutually influence each other.

Unlike E.F. Skinner, who believed that the best way to understand behavior was to look at the causes of an action and its consequences, Bandura (1997) believed that humans are active processors of information; and when in a situation that includes consequences, such thought is placed for the relationship between the two. This is illustrated within the Bobo Doll Experiment that was conducted by Bandura et al. (1961). In this study, the level of aggressiveness was measure in 36 boys and girls from the Stanford University Nursery School aged between 3 to 6 years old on four 5-point rating scales. Based on the scale, the children were then matched in groups as to their similarities in terms of the level of aggression in their everyday behavior. It was determined at the end of the study that the children who observed the aggressive model made far more imitative aggressive responses than those who were in the nonaggressive or control groups. Additionally, boys imitated more physically aggressive acts than girls, and there was very little difference in the verbal aggression between boys and girls.

At the approximate age of 11, the developmental stage of adolescences begins, with an immersion of important changes in the structure as well as function of the brain; and no other developmental stage is characterized as having more dramatic changes

(Albert & Steinberg, 2011). Equipped with the cognitive development of intellectual interests and deeper moral thinking, both males and females begin to embark on a road which will only be traveled once. In addition to one's development in the area of cognition, the hit to the social-emotional development can also be drastic. Recognizing that these sometimes overwhelming and frustrating emotions of struggling with one's sense of identity, having an increased conflict with parents, displaying a sense of moodiness, and having the desire for independence can cause any student to panic at the thought of entering a new learning environment such as high school. With recent advances in technology and research, the ability to view the adolescent brain is now present within the medical world. Such technology and research indicate that the brain, not hormones, is responsible for the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of teens. Within this range of brain "reconstruction" that exists within an adolescent, the cliché of "use it or lose it" is critical within the educational setting. Therefore, utilizing a strategic and developmental approach to reach and maintain the attention of the adolescent mind in a comprehensive program is not only vital but crucial in order to reduce the current negative aspects of first-time ninth graders.

In another study conducted by sociologists, Shaw and McKay (1942) attempted to explain and predict violence and other criminal activities within various communities that were observed to be categorized as having a low socioeconomic status, resulting in the social disorganization theory. Shaw and McKay developed the foundation for this theory when they noticed high crime rates persisting in some Chicago neighborhoods despite high population turnover (Sampson, 1997). According to the theory, the number of single-parent households and households that were considered within the levels of

poverty undermine a community's ability to socially control and pass on the norms, expectations, and values that lead to acceptable successful outcomes. Duncan (1994), who continued the Shaw and McKay study, found that African American males became more likely to stay in school as the racial integration of the community increased. Thus, supporting the findings from the Bobo Doll experiment, Duncan provided a substantial standing to assist with understanding how the social disorganization theory could be linked to individual academic outcomes and social ties from the community to the family (Roche et al., 2007). A vast majority the educational system's current failure of males who are characterized as at-risk is related and understood as the inability to develop their intrinsic motivation. As statistics within end-of-the-year assessments, dropout rates and other disciplinary actions demonstrate, there are too many minority children, specifically African American males who are currently performing poorly in school because they have low expectations, feel hopeless, lack interest, or give up in the face of potential failure, not because they lack basic intellectual capacities but because they lack the ability to actively learn within the realms of the social learning theory (Asamen & Berry, 1989).

Emotional Theory

The Emotional Intelligence Theory refers to individual differences in the identification, understanding, expression, regulation, and use of one's own emotions and those of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It has also been found to be an important predictor of an individual's adaptation to their environment forming emotional connections (Greenberg et al., 2001). When looking at emotional intelligence, one must refer to the four major aspects that make up the theory: the appraisal and expression of emotion, the use of emotion to enhance cognitive processes and decision-making,

knowledge about emotions, and management of emotions (George, 2000). The term emotional intelligence was first used in 1985 by Payne. Since that time, there have been numerous studies in which researchers have investigated the role of emotional intelligence in different contexts and disciplines as well as its connections to the various environmental situations and/or circumstances.

The 2-factor theory or the Singer-Schachter theory of emotional experience was devised by Schachter and Singer (1962), both of whom integrated this particular theory into the role of both physiological and cognitive factors in determining the role of emotional factors that cause its arousal within an individual. To test the theory, Schachter and Singer hypothesized that in the absence of an “appropriate explanation” (p. 383), participants could be manipulated into experiencing an emotion by agitating various aspects of the available “cognitive circumstance” (p. 382). With the implementation of Vitamin supplements, the 184 participants, all male college students, would receive injections of the vitamin compound Suproxin. Although, such was not true, the study created both experimental and control conditions respectively to ensure validity and reliability. The participants then received their assigned dosage based on one of three conditions: informed, ignorant, and misinformed. In the informed condition, participants were made aware of the injection’s potential side effects (e.g., increased heart rate, shakiness, etc.), thus giving an appropriate explanation of arousal. In the ignorant condition, participants were not given any information regarding potential side effects and thus no explanation for arousal. Last, in order to control the effects of introspective anxiety in the face of side effects, the misinformed condition participants were made aware of fabricated side effects. Based on the reactions as the given supplement was

provided, the results of the experiment confirmed Schachter and Singer's original hypothesis. In both the euphoric and angry conditions, participants in the ignorant and misinformed conditions consistently showed significantly higher scores on both activity indices and self-report scales than those in the informed and placebo conditions.

Based on the above definition and study, the description of emotional theory as it relates to the development of individuals becomes a unique as well as pivotal role in education and learning, especially when teachers are attempting to develop lessons that are aligned to various concepts as well as posing questions or assignments that are analytical in thought for students who enter the classroom with "emotional baggage and turmoil" (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003, p. 336). Moreover, the actions of the emotional theory coincide directly to the lack of academic achievement that has been documented for males due to the relevant frustrations of personal environment as well as other emotional factors that could possibly (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003) impact their ability to learn, be confident, be hopeful, display imagination, solve problems, handle stress, and control emotions (Fer, 2004). Students who are better able to channel their emotions constructively will reap greater benefits, enjoy school life, earn better grades, be involved deeply in the assigned tasks, and face contingencies with determined face and dogged resilience (Betz & Luzzo, 1996).

Cognitive Development Theory

Cognitive theory has generated a new understanding concerning learning, thinking, knowledge, teaching, and assessment. Many studies have suggested that these new understandings imply the need for paradigmatic shifts in educational methods, perspectives, and institutions (Gronlund, 2000). Jean Piaget, who has been connected to

the cognitive theory, attempted through various studies to determine reasons as to why children gave incorrect answers to questions that required logical thinking on a concept. Piaget (1963) believed that such incorrect answers were the door to reveal important differences between the thinking of adults and children. Due to such a discovery, Piaget (1963) determined that there were three basic components to an individual's cognitive ability to think in a logical manner.

The first component to an individual's cognitive ability is one's schema or the building blocks of knowledge. As discussed within the social learning theory, schema deals with the intelligence of behavior. It is a way in which an individual organizes information and then utilizes such to interpret the things they see, hear, smell, and touch (Singer & Revenson, 1997). The second component Piaget (1963) developed under the cognitive theory is adaptation. According to educators, this component is most pivotal because the actions of assimilation, equilibrium, and accommodation prove that a student possesses the ability to adapt or enable themselves to transition from one stage to another which ultimately leads to major shifts in cognitive ability as well as the learning process (Piaget, 1973, p. 36). The final component of Piaget's (1973) cognitive theory consists of the four stages of development for an individual, which consist of sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. With the first stage of this process being sensorimotor, which begins at birth, a child experiences the world and gains knowledge through their senses and motor movements. When a child reaches the age of 11, they have reached the formal operational stage. It is at this stage, which usually ends at the age of 16, when a child should be entering their junior year of high school and moving from representing the world through mental images and symbols and performing

mental operations to dealing with situations, changes, and actions within the present. Although, Piaget's (1973) final stage does coincide with the beginning of adolescence as well as begins the stage for abstract thought and deductive reasoning, a child's ability to be flexible, rational, and systematic is prevalent (Singer & Revenson, 1997). However, if an individual has undergone trauma, the process of knowing, perception, and the products (for example, knowledge) will be disconnected and challenging to perform a simple task like describing, explaining, and understanding their cognitive ability (Piaget, 1973).

Problem-focused arguments concerning such an inability or inconsistency are reflective upon the urgency for schools to develop and implement various means that will not only meet the needs to serve all students with different learning needs but will adequately prepare them for the "what's next." Currently, schools have not sufficiently attended to what helps all students learn, with many cognitive capacities or prerequisites for their later emergence being stalled due to their roots in the early years of life being in a disarray that is filled with negative connotations (Browning & Greenwald 1990; Champagne, 1986; Garner, 1986; Sellwood 1989).

Student Discipline

Data on corporal punishment, suspensions, and expulsions of students in large urban school districts within the United States indicate that between 1973 and 2006, there was an increase from 3.7% to 6.9%. This is consistent with studies like the one conducted by Welsh and Little (2018), who determined that there are highlighted racial discipline disparities for Latino/as, African Americans, and American Indians as compared to their Caucasian counterparts. In a study of the overrepresentation of minority students with discipline consequences, Skiba and Peterson (2000) found that suspensions have been

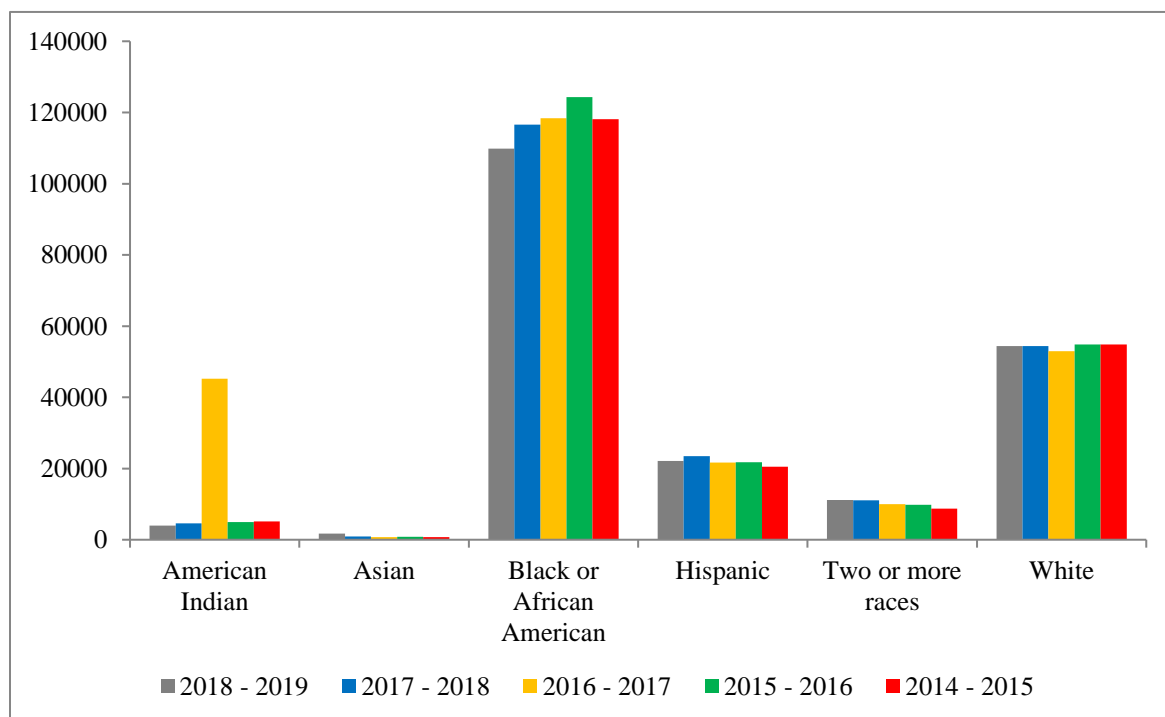
shown to be a moderate to strong predictor of dropping out of school, especially for ethnic minority students. In the same districts, dropout rates for these children were 7% to 12% higher than their Caucasian peers within the same grade levels. Findings went on to state that the majority of these students were suspended because they simply refused to say “yes or no ma’am or sir,” apologize, take off their hats, alter their walk, talk softer, smile, or change their body language (Kunjufu, 1986). Hertzog et al. (1996) discovered a difference in the approach to discipline by teachers and administrators between middle schools and high schools. High schools tended to have a stricter code of conduct and tended to abide by it closely, whereas middle schools were not as stringent. This creates a transition problem as students must adjust behaviors to meet high school expectations, which can be difficult for students at this age. Moreover, factors such as a student’s socioeconomic status and gender, school characteristics, and teacher attitudes also have been linked to differences in discipline referrals and outcomes (Gay, 2006). When in situations such as the one described above, it has been discovered that males who are characterized as the minority are constantly confronted with what is known as two “selves”: the “one-self,” what community and peers expect of them; and the “other-self,” what the school expects of them (Bell, 2009, 2010). Therefore, when they are able to bring those two egos together, the outcome is a continuous battle with the negative ego takes precedence over the others (Bell, 2009, 2010). As simplistic as it might appear, the internal traits an African American male battles through the social, cognitive, and emotional trajectories are ongoing, thus carrying over into the factors of low attendance, suspensions, and dropouts.

With the most frequently reported crimes in high school being possession of a

controlled substance in violation of the law, possession of a weapon excluding firearms and powerful explosives, and possession of an alcoholic beverage, NCDPI (2019) confirmed that the male ethnicities of Black or African American, Hispanic, and American Indian have the highest documented consequences of short- and long-term suspensions. This is evident in Figure 3, which provides data on short-term suspensions among various races for students in North Carolina high schools. It is vital to state what NCDPI recognizes as a short-term suspension: A short-term suspension equates to a 10-day or less suspension (NCDPI, n.d.).

Figure 3

2014-2019 North Carolina Short-Term Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity

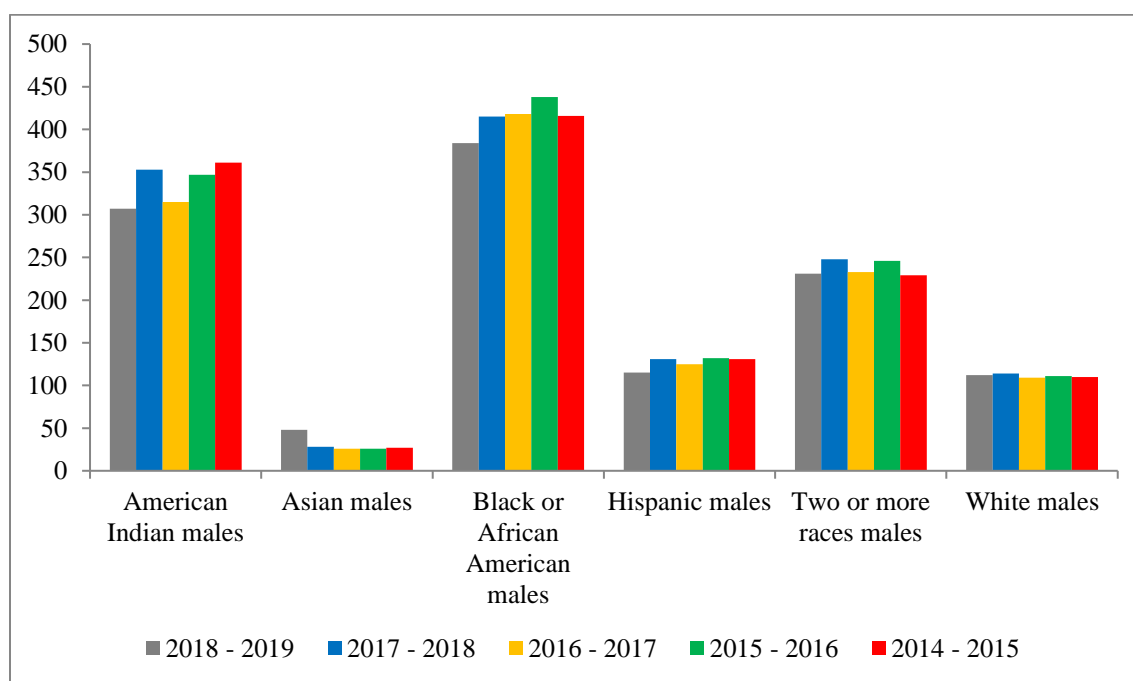


As for the high school grades, 67,952 short-term suspensions were reported statewide for a rate of 150 suspensions per 1,000 students. From 2014 to 2019, Black or African American students accrued a total of 587,340 short-term suspensions, the highest

number in North Carolina high schools. Although there was a slight spike of 124,358 suspensions during the 2015-2016 school year and a decrease of 109,882 in 2018-2019, severe gaps remained evident as compared to their White, Hispanic, and Two or More Races counterparts. Moreover, minority male students, as shown in Figure 4, represented an overall high rate of short-term suspensions between the 2014-2019 school years compared to White and Asian male students (NCDPI, 2019).

Figure 4

2014-2019 North Carolina Short-Term Suspensions for Males Per 1,000 Students

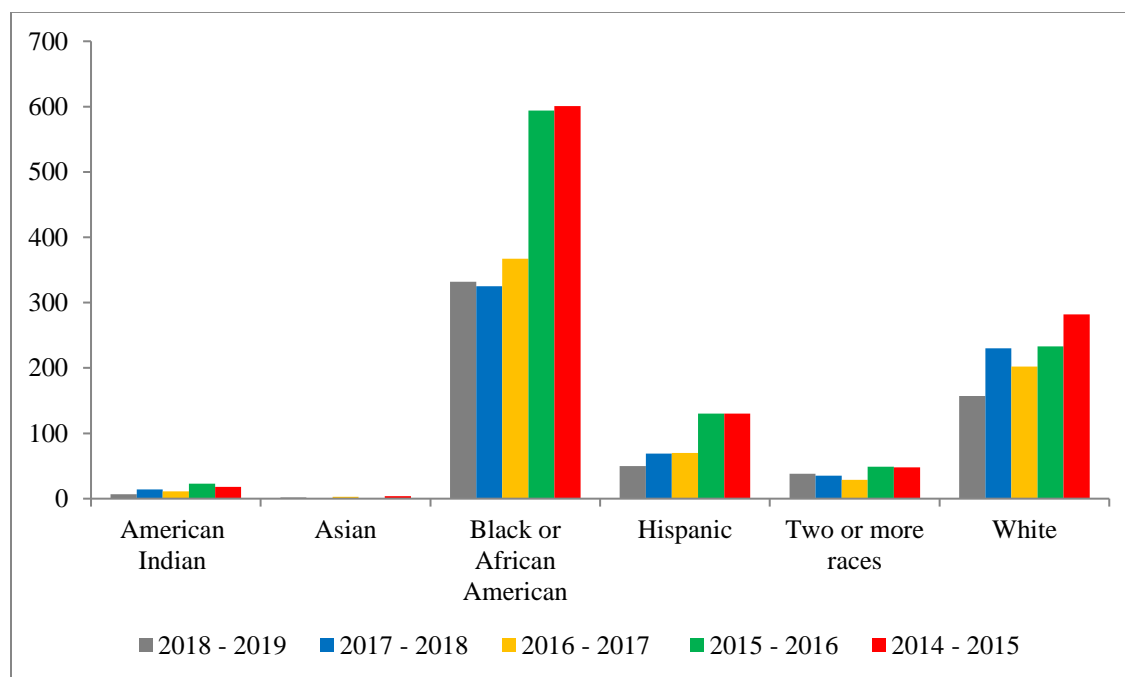


From 2014 to 2019, short-term suspensions were unvarying compared to the overall racial data within North Carolina high schools. Short-term suspensions for Black or African American male students were four times more than White males and doubled that of males who identify as Two or More Races. Approximately 114 to 132 per 1,000 of White and Hispanic male students received a consequence of short-term suspensions for 5 years beginning in 2014 (NCDPI, 2019).

The consequence of long-term suspensions is more punitive and higher, as shown in Figure 5. As defined by the Report to the NC General Assembly for 2018-2019 by NCDPI (2019), long-term suspensions are consequences in which a student receives 11 or more days out of school. It is vital to note that school districts have the freedom to allow suspended students to attend an alternative learning program or school to serve their infraction. In 2018-2019, 587 long-term suspensions were reported in North Carolina which was a 12.77% decrease from the 673 long-term suspensions reported in 2017-2018 and a 15.5% decrease from the 2016-2017 academic year.

Figure 5

2014-2019 North Carolina Long-Term Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity



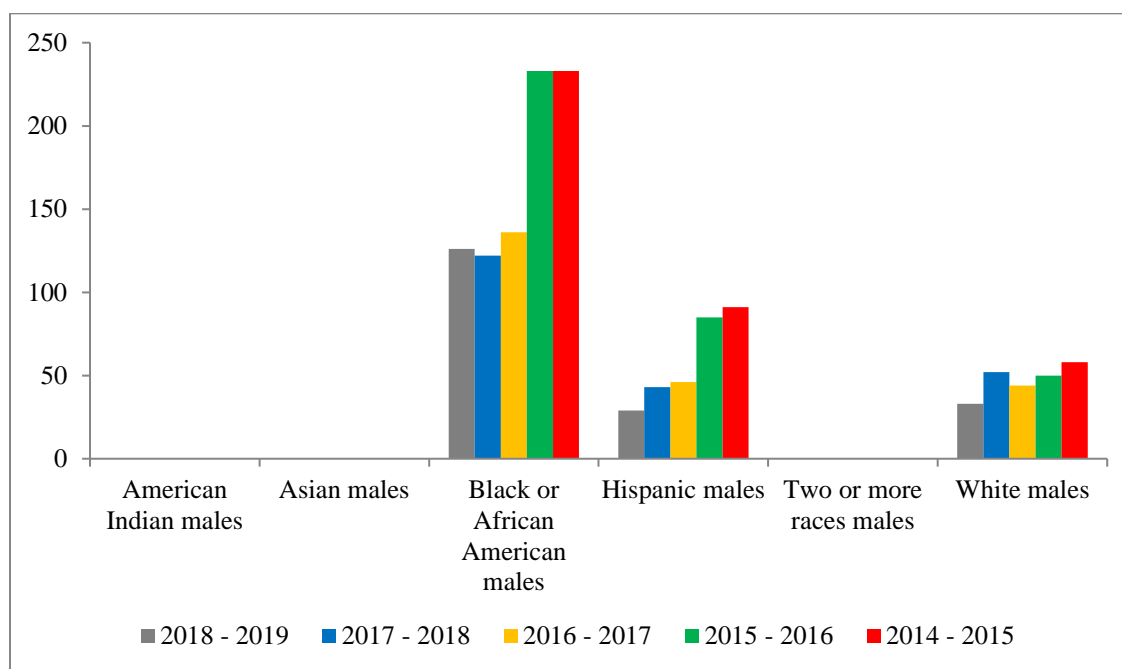
Black or African American students in North Carolina received the highest number of long-term suspensions. Specifically, in the years of 2014-2016, a total of 1,195 Black or African American students were sent home for at least 11 or more days as a result of some type of negative infraction(s). Although White students were the second

highest group who received long-term suspensions, Black or African American students received approximately 100 more suspensions across the 5 years. Compared to Hispanic students, the number of suspensions for 2018-2019 doubled for Black or African Americans, with a 282 more consequences.

In Figure 6, three of the six groups of male students did not receive any type of long-term suspension. However, Black or African Americans males still had the largest amount of long-term suspensions.

Figure 6

2014-2019 North Carolina Long-Term Suspensions for Males Per 1,000 Students



Particularly during the years of 2014 and 2016, schools reported that Black or African American male students had 233 referrals that resulted in long-term suspensions, whereas, Hispanic and White students remained under the average of 100 long-term suspension consequences from 2014-2019.

Freshman/Success Academies

The transitional period of sixth to seventh and eighth to ninth grades are two of the most integral but stressful transitions in a student's academic life. However, middle to high school transitions, specifically eighth to ninth and ninth to tenth grade, are the most complicated due to the physical, emotional, and intellectual changes for an adolescent (National High School Center, 2018). During this period, the self-efficacy of an adolescent can impede their level of academic achievement if the label at risk has already been attached as a result of a lack of accomplishment or high behavioral incidents. According to Margolis and McCabe (2006) as well as Neild (2009), the self-efficacy of a student's assimilation into unfamiliar environments and relationships is significant to a student's connection to the school, which can cause the student to have a high probability of becoming "stuck" and not graduating within 4 years. Thus, the development of educational support programs like freshman or success academies is essential for students who are making the academic transition, especially those who are behaviorally and academically at risk.

When a school decides to establish a Freshman/Success Academy, teachers are placed on teams with common planning. The leadership is also separate from the central part of the school, which includes counselors and other essential staff. Physically, the program is typically self-contained either in a separate building or wing of the school. This structure allows teachers autonomy to collaborate within PLCs to effectively discuss individual student needs, share best practices, and implement researched interventions using a common planning platform (Bernstein et al., 2008).

Freshman/Success Academies and Student Achievement

In 1840, the educational world as individuals knew it changed to an organized system. With such educational reformers like Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, the ideology of a common-school system was birthed. These reformers strategically fought to make sure that social and academic opportunities for all children were conducted among an increasingly diverse population (Biography.com Editors, 2020; Public Broadcasting System, n.d.). However, the educational realm continues to “fail” our students, especially those within the transitioning periods from middle to high school.

According to the 2008 National Mathematics Advisory Panel’s report, it was recommended that for a student to succeed in algebra, they needed to acquire a “thorough understanding” (p. 18) of fractions, decimals, and signed numbers while in middle school. The same recommendations to have a thorough understanding were also made by the National Reading Panel during the same year as it related to the techniques of reading comprehension, vocabulary words, and the ability to effectively engage in guided reading. It was also stated within the report that students who were first-time ninth graders were not adequately equipped with the necessary skills required to be and/or become an engaged reader (Cantrell et. al., 2013).

Although, Common Core was developed with the intention of providing each student with the opportunity to demonstrate mastery with their own learning capabilities, it is very evident within the curricula that there is a significant difference between the eighth and ninth grade. Beresford (2013) compared the responses of both the male and female participants to show that males had a more difficult time during the transitional period from eighth to ninth grade due to attempting to acquire friends, pass classes, and

fulfill the desire to become part of the school's sports teams and/or clubs. Without a doubt, within any parent's or educator's mind, the transitional period for those who are entering high school is clearly difficult whether it be socially and/or academically. However, difficulties such as these have contributed to high dropout rates, decreasing graduation rates, and overall low achievement for students, specifically males, at the end of their freshman year of high school (Cook et al., 2008).

In a comparison study, McCoach and Siegle (2003) investigated the attitudes of 244 ninth through 12th graders towards the aspects of school, teachers, motivation, and academic self-perceptions. At the end of the study, McCoach and Siegle stated that there were significant differences among both high- and low-achieving students on all four factors. However, the academic self-perception and motivation were stronger predictors of academic achievement than attitude due to the high achiever's middle school experiences. Thus, a student who enters the halls of middle school walks into a structured atmosphere knowing exactly what is expected of them by the 10th day in terms of assessments, homework, and behavioral actions. Yet, when the middle school doors close and the world of high school opens, the expectancy of structure is dropped into the unknowing hands of the timid ninth grader attempting to find their way on the first day. With such major differences within the academic and behavioral expectations that are set forth from administration and teachers, the eighth grade student's world of such simple tasks as walking in a straight line to the cafeteria is now transitioned to a world of changing classes for every block, going to the cafeteria without the guidance of your teacher, and knowing your GPA as well as its connections to the credits and a timely graduation. Such experiences were discussed within the qualitative study conducted by

Bridgeman et al. (2008). Within this study, focus groups, interviews, and assessment data were utilized to answer the study questions, “How do Black male students experience the transition to ninth grade” and “How do Black male students make sense of their transition experience?” Bridgeman et al. also included the personal experiences of 16 African American male students who were in the ninth grade to maintain the level of validity. Based on the attained answers and conclusions that were drawn, the study showed that most of the male participants had difficult experiences within their ninth-grade year which ultimately affected their overall GPA. The study also produced four themes as to why such affects occurred: (a) change in teacher-student relationship, (b) school rules and suspension, (c) pedagogy (content, lack of challenge, cultural alienation), and (d) social capital (relationship with peers and others).

Male student high school success is ultimately based and rooted on the formative experiences that precede the 4-year venture within the high school classroom (Alexander et. al, 2001; Pytel, 2007). While the focus generally has been on low high school graduation rates due to dropouts, the intervention on the middle school level is imperative in order to turn the current mindset of male students who are in middle school around and reduce potential high school dropout numbers. Dropping out is generally the result of a long process of negative elementary and middle school experiences. Thus, research states that potential dropouts can be spotted as early as sixth grade (Balfanz et al., 2007). Such is a prime example stated within an annual report on the Implementation of the Education and Economic Development Act of 2017. Within the document, members define and describe an at-risk student as one who is at risk of dropping out of school and thus might require temporary or ongoing intervention in order to achieve in school and to graduate

with meaningful options for their postsecondary future (Personal Pathways: Education and Economic Development Coordinating Council to the Governor of South Carolina, the General Assembly, and the State Board of Education, 2018). The document went on to state and provide strategies that have been proven to enhance the awareness of a need to implement effective programs such as a Freshman/Success Academy, developing partnerships with the Career and Technology school to combat some of the risks that have been presented within the middle school. A 2012 study that attempted to determine the effectiveness of a Freshman Academy that was located in Mobile County, Mississippi reviewed random attendance records, course mastery, and discipline referrals and found that students, parents, and teachers all expressed positive perceptions about the academic and social interest areas of freshman students but negative perceptions about the structural interest area (Clinton, 2012). Academically, the preoperational efforts of Freshman Academy initiatives can also assist with such ill findings as in the study conducted under the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). The administrators of this study sent detailed questionnaires to random corresponding teachers, school principals, and parents who were connected to identify at-risk students. The researchers also asked students of the coordinating parents to complete a separate survey to determine reliable results. Based on the results from the qualitative study, 51% of the students dropped out because they simply did not like school. The other 41% indicated they were failing, and 34% of the students indicated they could not get along with teachers. The report also stated that one-third reported they could not keep up with the schoolwork and one-quarter did not feel like they belonged in school. Therefore, the level of disengagement led them to an unwillingness to put forth

academic effort and regrettably leaving the educational system prior to the end of their sophomore year (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993).

With such a discourse as the one described above in addition to the ongoing educational initiatives, high schools around the United States are choosing to develop and implement various types of programs such as Freshman/Success Academies in order to increase the pressing issues that currently are facing high schools. All freshmen and students who are characterized as being at-risk have the opportunity to attain specialized attention and orientation to high school and postsecondary opportunities in addition to being instructed with a team of teachers who are seen throughout the day. The typical academic academies' mindset utilizes an isolated program for first-time ninth graders from the rest of the student population by using a school-within-a-school model. Integrating educational content with building interpersonal inquiry, support, and guidance from teachers and parents is on the rise (Clark & Hunley, 2007).

Ultimately, the freshman academy concept is put into place as an additional strategic plan to a school reform effort that can contribute to a high school's quest to create smaller learning communities that can assist in the improvement of student achievement. It is a place where personalization can be established, and strategies are implemented to prepare students for both the high school experience and for postsecondary experiences. An attempt to attain specific information on how to personalize the implemented strategies for success was demonstrated in a study by Dudley (2012). Dudley used the critical education and self-efficacy theory to determine how schools can implement more meaningful academic and social programming to promote success for students who are freshmen in a high school. With the interpretive

phenomenological analysis approach as her foundation, four ninth-grade students were interviewed three times each throughout the second half of their freshman year to understand how students make meaning of the freshmen academy experience. The result being that the anticipation of high school, adjusting to various expectations, navigating landscapes, overcoming academic difficulties, participating actively, planning for the future, and reflecting on the year were all perceptions of a sense of overwhelming emotions at times (Dudley, 2012).

Responding to national education, Congress authorized the Smaller Learning Communities program to support the development of career academies, learning community models, and schools within schools (Kuo, 2010). Additionally, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2007) concluded that large comprehensive high schools needed to create smaller learning environments where teachers can build relationships with students and collaborate to discuss strategies to acquire knowledge about student needs and interests. With the action of collaborative efforts in mind, “high schools must look into changing the current educational landscapes to increase the success of a ninth grader by implementing programs and providing more resources” (Daggett, 2004, p. 2). Once such a program is implemented in a strategic and comprehensive manner, the compression of closure towards the achievement gap for minority males in the ninth grade will be adequately and effectively successful for not only students in the ninth grade but for succession within their entire 4 years and beyond (Oxley & Klump, 2006).

Freshman/Success Academy and Student Behaviors

One of the many goals behind the development of freshman academies is to help students feel a connection with their new school surroundings and peers (Clark &

Hunley, 2007). However, research has found that this transition can sometimes be challenging for at-risk students, resulting in adverse outcomes such as discipline referrals, suspensions, and other behavioral reprimands (Shimp, 2017). Barnwell (2013) reported that in 2013, there were 4,996 discipline referrals written on 911 students and 532 suspensions of 284 students from his Kentucky high school.

Hertzog et al. (1996) conducted a study comparing the perceptions of students who transitioned from middle to high school using the Harter Adolescent Self-Perception inventory. It was determined at the conclusion of the study that there was a significant drop in student perceptions in the areas of physical appearance, job competence, romantic appeal, behavioral conduct, and self-worth. Another study found that disruption within lessons, calling out, and making remarks on somebody or something without teacher permission were just a few of the classroom problem behaviors displayed among junior secondary school students in Hong Kong (Sun & Shek, 2012). With the impact of transition varying for students who enter high school, the foundation of freshman academies is significant for providing alternate approaches to decreasing stress, depression, anxiety, and inefficient problem-solving strategies, which often plague students (Pajares & Schunk, 2002).

Conclusion

In conclusion, student success during their freshman year is pivotal to future learning experiences within a high school. Therefore, the purpose of this review was to examine how those experiences can be affected due to the current educational status as it relates to four entities: historical, academic, developmental, and instructional. Specific research has shown that historical public education began as an institution in which a

selected few were given the opportunity to enhance their knowledge; however, such an institution gradually transitioned into an organization that imported the acts of integration as well as rigor into various academic programs (Russo et al., 1994; Watson et al., 2013). The need to examine this history is significant to provide a connected foundation to the academic literature that was also reviewed to explore how the development of such educational initiatives as the Common School Movement became a pillar to programs like the Success Academy, Freshman Academy, or Credit Recovery (Cisneros-McGilvrey, 2012). Moreover, the review of literature on the development and implementation of a Freshman/Success Academy provided the framework to understand why minorities, especially males, have possible limited amounts of academic success within the high school classroom (Rounds-Bryant, 2008).

The literature on the social, emotional, and cognitive developmental theories discovered by Bandura, Vygotsky, Erikson, Skinner, and Piaget provided an understanding of the transitional period of eighth to ninth grade (Beresford, 2013). Additionally, the review of literature on the pedagogical, collaborative inquiry, and perspective of a teacher assisted me in deepening the holistic evaluation of the academic achievement within high schools. Reviewing studies conducted by Graham (2008) and Hamlet (2012) demonstrated that it is equally essential for the previously mentioned aspects to be considered when examining student success within the academic community on the high school level.

Although several literature reviews examine the effects of current educational initiatives supporting successful transitional periods, the success of Freshman/Success Academies is the most isolated when combating the developmental elements of

transitional male students. The evaluative technique that was proposed in this study extended to the logistical applications of a Freshman/Success Academy and its stakeholders to conduct qualitative research on the perspectives of administrators and teachers as it relates to the success of the male student who has been characterized as at risk. Furthermore, the participatory research method went through a questionnaire and a series of interviews to collect valid as well as reliable information about the program and the expectations that have been inducted since implementation. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth methodology of the evaluative process I utilized over 6 weeks with randomly selected stakeholders from the program.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Perceptions of educational stakeholders were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of a Freshman/Success Academy program on at-risk minority male students who are first time ninth and tenth graders off track from their graduating cohort. Moreover, I used the same perceptions to determine the program's effectiveness concerning the behavioral, social, and emotional well-being of the same students as it aligns with their academics. The literature on school transitions denotes that the transition to high school can be problematic for students due to the developmental as well as achievement gaps found within education (Camera, 2015). The result of this is that the transitional programs such as Freshman or Success Academies may be the one factor that either keeps students engaged in their schooling or completely disengages them, leading to success or failure. In addition to the importance of a fluent program for effective transition are the perceptions that have the possibilities of being established with educating a student with below average assessment scores (Artino, 2012). To that end, the questions that guided this study were explicitly focused on the variables of student achievement, attendance, and behaviors, which all note the impact and connection to the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy at the identified high school. This chapter describes the design and research methods I implemented throughout the study, including the setting, participants, data collection procedures, analysis, limitations, and delimitations.

Research Design

Creswell (2003) defined qualitative research as,

Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning

individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and I making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation. (p. 4)

Leung (2015) provided his perspective on qualitative research by stating, "qualitative research aims to seek answers for questions of how, where, when who and why with a perspective to build a theory or refute an existing theory" (p. 324). The process of qualitative research has also been described as a model that unfolds what takes place within a natural setting, thus providing the researcher with the opportunity to develop various levels of involvement from its participants in a broader and less restrictive environment (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2013). Such was the basis within this study, which led the researcher to look for the complexity of participant perspectives of the selected setting and the Freshman/Success Academy (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

By attaining the perspectives of individuals who have direct contact with all the minority male students who participate in the Freshman/Success Academy program, the study was designed to examine how these students make meaning of their transitional years as well as the year(s) in which they have not been successful academically and/or behaviorally. Over a total of 6 weeks, the following overarching question was presented and investigated.

1. How do instructional stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy program on the minority male student who has been identified as at risk academically and/or behaviorally?

The goal was to answer the overarching question in two phases of an exploratory design using the empowerment evaluation as the foundation. The two phases of the study included an initial questionnaire followed by interviews with self-elected participants.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of educators and administrators on the impact that a Freshman/Success Academy program has on minority males who are first-time ninth graders/sophomores as well as those who are off track and subsequently enrolled in the Freshman/Success Academy, by further analyzing the following questions:

2. How have the implementation and expectations of the Freshman/Success Academy program been effective?
3. What are the purposes (goals and objectives) of the Freshman/Success Academy program?
4. What concerns exist about the logistical operations of the program?
5. How effective are the procedures of the Freshman/Success Academy program in addressing the behavioral and academic needs of minority male high school students?
6. What challenges exist as a result of the implemented design of the Freshman/Success Academy program to ensure the academic success of the minority male student?

Role of Researcher

I am not affiliated with any of the students, educators, or administrators of the Freshman/Success Academy or the school site of this study. Therefore, my role was transparent during both phases of the study in order to report findings in an ethical manner. As stated by Herr and Anderson (2015), “Insider researchers often collaborate with other insiders as a way to do research that not only might have a greater impact on the setting, but also has the potential to be more democratic” (p.45). Thus, I held the roles of both a facilitator and collaborator.

Throughout the study, I acquired the assistance of a nonpartisan colleague to assist with disseminating the information obtained from the collection of questionnaires as well as the interviews. The purpose of the nonpartisan colleague was to assist with coding and eliminating any and all possible biases (Chenail, 2011).

Selection of Participants

To adhere to the ethical considerations during this study, the stakeholders were provided with a document to give permission to participate within both phases of the study. It was noted during Phase 1 that if the consent documentation was not returned prior to Phase 2, participants would not be included in the study. Both the school and its district were notified of the specifications of this study as it related to attaining permission, the collection of data, and subsequent management during the process.

Sample Instructional Participants

The sample instructional participants were drawn from 20 professional members of School CH as shown in Table 4. Representative samples of five of the 20 educators were asked to review the piloting questions for both the questionnaire as well as the

interview groups; however, the participants did not take part in either phase of the study.

Instructional Stakeholders for Phase 1

To provide a holistic as well as in-depth look into the Freshman/Success Academy program, two administrators and five educators who are directly affiliated with School CH as well as the academy were asked to participate to gain their perspectives as it related to the overall effectiveness, behavioral, and academic procedure of the program. The seven instructional stakeholders were provided with a link to complete the questionnaire through SurveyMonkey. To be included in Phase 2 of the study, the instructional stakeholders provided permission to be contacted for an interview. At the conclusion of Phase 1, two of the seven instructional stakeholders communicated interest in participating in Phase 2; however, only one stakeholder returned the consent form by the provided deadline.

Instructional Stakeholders for Phase 2

For Phase 2 of the study, one stakeholder participated in the two separate interview sessions that took place. This participant completed and returned the consent form in a timely manner, although another instructional stakeholder expressed interest to participate.

Table 5

Total Instructional Stakeholder Participation

Pilot	Phase 1	Phase study
20 sample instructional participants not affiliated with Phase 1 or Phase 2	Seven instructional stakeholders	One instructional stakeholder

Research Setting

The selected site for this study was established in 1895 in the eighth largest school

district in North Carolina. The total school enrollment to date was 1,138 of which 295 are ninth graders, 302 are 10th graders, 286 are 11th graders, and 282 are 12th graders. The demographics for the school were African American 27%, Hispanic 22.6%, Asian 2.1%, Caucasian 39.6%, American Indian .1%, and Two or More Races 4.5%. Of the total enrollment, both males and females who were first-time ninth graders and sophomores who were identified as at risk and below grade level were enrolled in the Freshman/Success Academy. The targeted program for this study utilized the ideology behind a “school within a school” since the opening of the 2018 school year (Deweese, 1999). Such a site is currently the only one in the piedmont region of North Carolina that encompasses both first-time ninth graders and students who have been identified as being off track from graduating within the allocated 4 years of high school.

At the time of the study, the breakdown as it related to the percentages of the demographics in the program as well as males and females was not available. However, males who were identified as at risk, who accounted for at least 75% of the ninth graders and 25% of the 10th graders, were the focus of this study. The seven instructional stakeholders have all been a part of School CH for approximately 5 years. Additionally, the seven instructional stakeholders have been a part of the Freshman/Success Academy program for the past 2 years. Two of the seven instructional stakeholders have been in the field of education for at least 10 years. Five of the seven instructional stakeholders have been in the field of education for at least 3 years. The participation approval of the research study was granted by the district superintendent, school principal, and research approval committee of School CH’s district.

Qualitative Inquiry

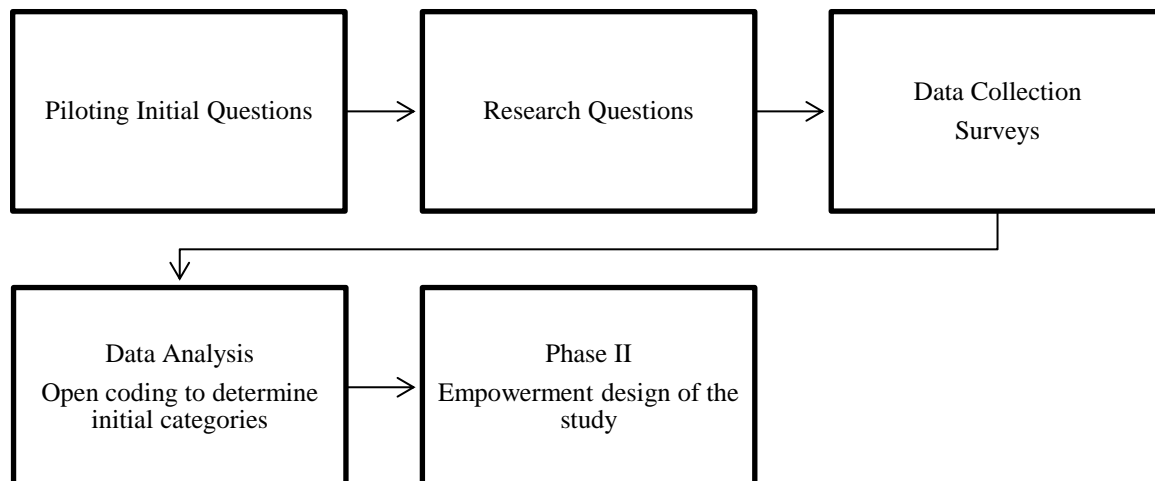
The method used for this study was qualitative in nature and was concerned with interpreting human behaviors from the viewpoint of those who have experienced them (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Utilizing such a naturalistic approach to understanding phenomena in a manner that did not attempt to manipulate the perspectives and findings of the study was deemed to be the most appropriate (Patton, 2001). Moreover, utilizing a participatory-oriented approach intertwined with an exploratory approach to involve as many instructional stakeholders as possible leads to a greater opportunity to utilize the results to build the culture of the school and decrease the high numbers of attendance, referrals, and suspensions as well as the data-based decision-making for a particular program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). For this research, the purpose was to determine the effectiveness of a Freshman/Success Academy program on at-risk minority male students as perceived by their instructional stakeholders.

Phase 1

The focus of this phase was to establish an understanding of how to best proceed to gain insights and familiarity of the instructional stakeholders using an exploratory design over a 3-week period. In order to attain a true sense of the study, an exploratory design was implemented in order to assist with determining the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy on at-risk minority male students from the perceptions of their teachers. The focus of an exploratory design was to establish an understanding of how to best proceed with a study attempting to gain insight and familiarity of research that has few to no earlier types of studies. This design structure, as shown in Figure 7, was vital to the study due to the lack of research on attaining perceptions of the

instructional stakeholders who work within the Freshman/Success Academy program to determine its effectiveness on minority male students who are characterized as at risk. For the exploratory phase of the study, a link to the questionnaire was provided to seven instructional stakeholders to understand as well as interpret the phenomena that provided in-depth and perceptual information. As instructional stakeholders completed the questionnaire, they were provided with the purpose of the study; a voluntary participation consent form; and dates, times, and specifics as to how the focus groups would be conducted in Phase 2 of the study. The researcher was notified through SurveyMonkey when the initial instructional participants completed the questionnaire. Data were automatically analyzed through the software to identify common patterns in responses. Of the seven instructional stakeholders who were provided with the questionnaire, two stated they would like to participate in Phase 2 of the study; however, only one returned the voluntary participation consent form by the provided deadline. The information and feedback collected were analyzed using open coding to determine initial categories for Phase 2 of the process as well as yield the following insights:

- Development of a grounded picture of the specific situation,
- Generation of new ideas and assumptions,
- Direction for future research and techniques to be developed,
- Development of tentative theories, and
- Determination on whether a similar study is vital for the future (Cuthill, 2002).

Figure 7*Phase I: Exploratory Design*

The average time of completion of the questionnaire was calculated at 16 minutes.

During this time span, SurveyMonkey captured the initial perspectives of each instructional stakeholder. At the conclusion of Phase 1, two of the instructional stakeholders consented to be in Phase 2; however, only one returned the participant consent form to move into Phase 2 of the study.

Phase 2

According to Fetterman and Wandersman (2012), “Empowerment evaluation is the use of evolutionary concepts, techniques, and findings to foster improvement and self-determination” (p. 10); thus when guided by 10 principles, researchers and evaluators have the capabilities to align decisions with a larger purpose or goals associated with capacity building and self-determination within an environment:

- Improvement: help people improve program performance,
- Community ownership: value and facilitate community control,

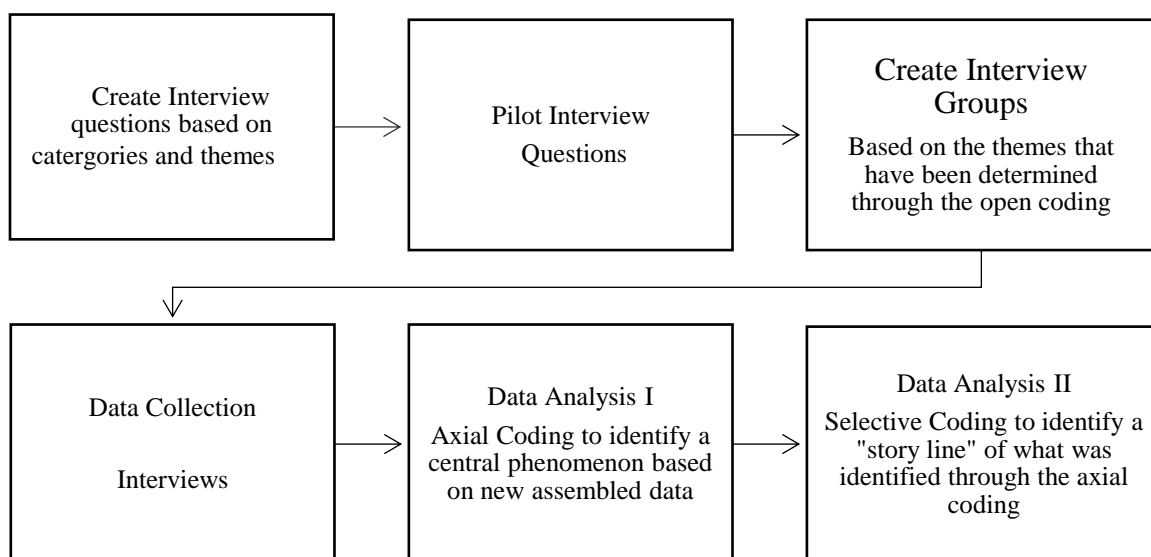
- Inclusion: invite involvement, participation, and diversity,
- Democratic participation: open participation and fair decision-making,
- Social justice: address social inequities in society,
- Community knowledge: respect and value community knowledge,
- Evidence based strategies: respect and use both community and scholarly knowledge,
- Capacity building: Enhance the stakeholder's ability to evaluate and improve planning and implementation,
- Organizational learning: To apply data to evaluation and implement practices and inform decision-making, and
- Accountability: emphasize outcomes and accountability (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2007).

For the purpose of this phase of the study, the principles of improvement, inclusion, evidence-based strategies, capacity building, organizational learning, and accountability were emphasized to gather perceptions of the stakeholders who participate in the academy. During this phase, identified themes to contextualize the feedback provided during the two separate interviews were conducted with the one participant from Phase 1 (see Figure 8). The original plan of discourse was to interview seven participants who were engaged in Phase 1; however, only one participant complied with the requirements of returning the consent form. The information collected during the two separate interview sessions assisted in determining the effectiveness of the program as it aligned to current research documented in the areas of academics: low attendance and increasing noncompliant behaviors of minority and/or at-risk minority male students (Hall et al.,

1982; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1979). Furthermore, the responses collected during the interviews were an attempt to implement a process that that would transform the program in a way that would build the capacity for intellectual judgements as well as actions among a community of learners (Lentz et al., 2005).

Figure 8

Phase 2: Exploratory Design



Piloting Questions

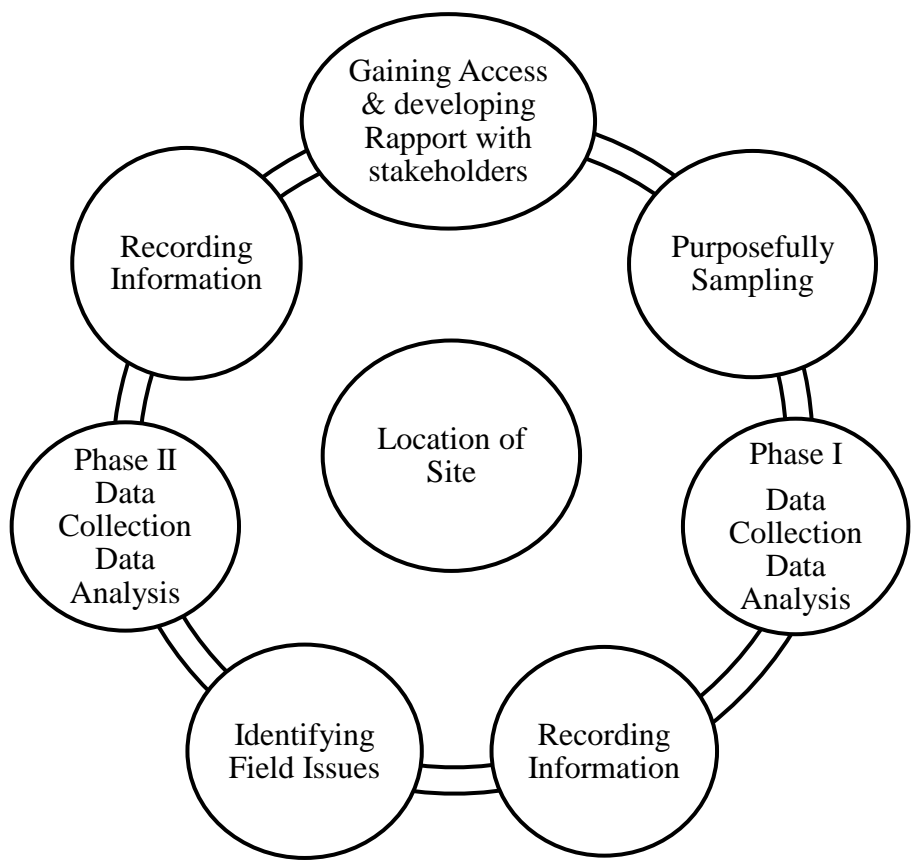
To avoid sampling errors and validate all analyses of potential perceptive differences notated among the different groups, a random purposeful sampling plan was utilized to identify any flaws found within the questions asked in the questionnaire and interview (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The piloting phase took place 1 week prior to the implementation of both Phases 1 and 2. The purpose of this vital step was to ensure the understanding of what each question is asking through the feedback that is provided in a manner that is trustworthy and credible of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

Data Collection Procedures

In the qualitative process of this study, collecting data in a non-numeric manner provided the opportunity to explore how decisions were made within the organization as well as provided detailed insight on other utilized programs (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For this study, the data collection procedures included a questionnaire and interview of instructional stakeholders to attain indicative perspectives that were holistic, rich, and nuanced over a total of 6 weeks to obtain perceptions of six research questions, as depicted in Table 6. Although there were numerous approaches to the data collection process as demonstrated in Figure 9, the unstructured, open-ended procedures of a Google Form and Zoom platform were utilized to attain the perceptions of instructional stakeholders in a non-evaluative manner (Creswell, 1998). Reviewing and addressing the feedback that was attained during the piloting of questions, the researcher began the data collection procedures with a review of the current state of the Freshman/Success Academy regarding its purpose and mission.

Figure 9

Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Five Approaches (Creswell, 2007)



Questionnaire

Over a 3-week period, seven instructional stakeholders were provided with a link to a questionnaire using SurveyMonkey as the distributed platform. During this phase of the study, seven participants were provided with a link to the questionnaire, the purpose of the study, and a letter of permission (Appendix C).

Upon receiving the responses from the questionnaire, two of the seven instructional stakeholders who returned the form were provided with specific dates of the interview sessions as well as a restatement to the purpose of the study. Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) stated that many stakeholders are unfamiliar with the evaluative process and

therefore may have difficulties expressing what they would like to state about the questioned item and/or program. Thus, it was vital for the researcher to gain insight using appropriate measures to attain valid, clear, and concise information that would assist with the conduction of the interviews in a meaningful and purposeful manner (Patton, 2001).

Interviews

Based on the return of the one consent form from the instructional stakeholder, an alternative method of interviewing was utilized to gain clear insight on the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy at the selected site (Posavac & Carey, 2017). The researcher contacted the one instructional stakeholder to confirm the time and dates of the one-on-one semi-structured interviews which focused on the identified themes/ categories that took place through the online conference software Zoom. The decision to conduct Phase 2 of the study in this manner was a requirement made by the district accountability superintendent. During the preconference with the instructional stakeholder, the researcher provided information on how the interviews would be recorded and to attain consent to the interview and audio recording (Appendix D). In addition to the restriction placed on how Phase 2 would be conducted, the researcher was informed of the restrictions as to how long the interview sessions would need to be. Therefore, the initial time of 1 hour over 3 weeks was shortened to 40-minute conversations over a 2-week time span. Upon agreeing to the redesigned specifics of the study, the instructional stakeholder agreed, and the study continued.

Of the various advantages there are to conducting interviews in qualitative studies, one that is precedent is the ability to attain a closer level of communication between the interviewer and participant through informal conversations that are based on

predetermined questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2006). Using subtle cues to control the direction of one-on-one conversations, the method of semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to pursue the exploration of spontaneous issues that were raised during Phase 1 of the study (Ryan et al., 2009). The strength of executing an interview format while gathering qualitative data furnished participants with the opportunity to interact in a manner that produces data in a comfortable and carefree way (Morgan, 2001).

For the implementation of this study, two semi-structured interviews were conducted over a 2-week time period once a week using the Zoom format. Due to the deepness of the nonjudgmental conversations, the two Zoom interviews varied from 30 minutes to 60 minutes due to the deepness of the conversations that took place (Chenail, 2011; Smithson, 2000). As the progression of Phase 2 continued, the interview sessions used the themes that surfaced from the data analyzation in Phase 1 (Creswell, 2003).

As a result of the patterned themes that were determined at the end of Phase 1, the researcher facilitated the conversation with the one instructional stakeholder by asking probing questions in order to encourage the expansion on the issues that were transcribed during the questionnaire (Albrecht et al., 1993; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Each of the sessions was audio recorded to ensure validity of all actions and statements that were made. At the end of each session, the researcher with the support of the nonpartisan colleague could conduct debriefing sessions with the opportunity to review any and all statements that were made as depicted in Table 6.

Table 6*Data Collection and Research Questions*

RQ1: How do instructional stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy program on the minority male student who has been identified as at risk?		
Type of data needed	Population	Data collection method
Perception data	Educational stakeholders in addition to the nonpartisan colleague and researcher.	Questionnaire Interviews
RQ2: How have the implementation and expectations of the Freshman/Success Academy program been effective?		
Type of data needed	Population	Data collection method
Perception data	Educational stakeholders in addition to the nonpartisan colleague and researcher.	Questionnaire Interviews
RQ3: What are the purposes (goals and objectives) of the Freshman/Success Academy program?		
Type of data needed	Population	Data collection method
Perception data	Educational stakeholders in addition to the nonpartisan colleague and researcher.	Questionnaire Interviews
RQ4: What concerns exist about the logistical operations of the program?		
Type of data needed	Population	Data collection method
Perception data	Educational stakeholders in addition to the nonpartisan colleague and researcher.	Questionnaire Interviews
RQ5: How effective are the procedures of the Freshman/Success Academy program in addressing the behavioral and academic needs of minority male high school students?		
Type of data needed	Population	Data collection method
Perception data	Educational stakeholders in addition to the nonpartisan colleague and researcher.	Questionnaire Interviews
RQ6: What challenges exist as a result of the implemented design of the Freshman/Success Academy program to ensure the academic success of the minority male student?		
Type of data needed	Population	Data collection method
Perception data	Educational stakeholders in addition to the nonpartisan colleague and researcher.	Questionnaire Interviews

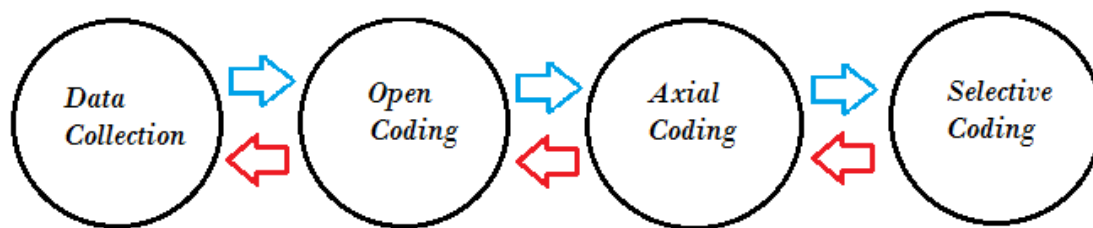
The theoretical framework of the grounded theory was utilized to analyze the collected data for this study. During both phases of the study, the researcher employed the review of codes and categories to ensure the overall themes were grounded within the data. After the review process, each transcript was independently examined with the

attempt to attain cluster-like information into patterns or themes to develop a preliminary list of codes that led to a specified number of identifiable codes for the entire data set as Creswell (1998, 2003) suggested. This process included but was not limited to listening and reading through the transcripts of the seven returned questionnaires and the two interview sessions at least twice. From the final list of codes, a color was assigned to each code and then chunked accordingly within the focus group interview transcripts. These chunks of data were then grouped together by code and further analyzed according to any emerging theme(s) or patterns that were present within the overall study (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

As depicted in Figure 10, it was the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the analysis of the data was triangulated in a viable and reliable manner. Thus, the researcher utilized an extensive auditing process that was conducted in two phases: (a) open-coding procedures, which were used in the data analysis to identify common themes, identifying, naming, categorizing, and describing phenomena (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990); and (b) axial coding, which is the process of relating codes (categories and properties) to each other, via a combination of inductive and deductive thinking (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Glaser, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Figure 10

Concurrent Data Analysis and Data Collection Through a Feedback Loop



The implementation of the grounded theory methodology is an approach where the study's analysis allows the researcher to attain educational stakeholder perspectives. This method was utilized as the data analysis to determine the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy program on at-risk minority male students as it pertains to the perceptions of its educational stakeholders. In the grounded theory method, open coding is the first stage in the implementation of a research study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). With Glaser (1978, 1992) suggesting the analysis of data be conducted throughout a study, the researcher also utilized axial coding as a part of Phase 1 to determine relating codes and themes. The researcher then allocated links to frame the inductive concepts, which led to selective coding, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990), when determining “conceptually similar actions and interactions” (p. 12) and the core variables for the study (Stalp & Grant, 2001).

Methods for Verification

To serve the principles stated within the empowerment evaluation, the researcher verified each of the participant's recorded statements by transcribing as well as ascertaining through debriefing sessions on an individual basis with the instructional stakeholder. To ensure the validity of this process, the nonpartisan colleague tracked the

documents as well as the coding process when appropriate. An overall constructed descriptive and reflective notation of each session's meaning and account was provided to the nonpartisan colleague for validity purposes Creswell (1998).

Limitations

The limitations of this study were those identified characteristics of design and methodology that would impact the interpretation of the findings from the perceptions of the educational stakeholders who instruct students in the Freshman/Success Academy program (Price & Murnan, 2004). Specific limitations that were present include the delivery of the questionnaire, participation rate, research evaluator bias, and the bias of the instructional stakeholders. No generalizations can be made with regard to the wider educational community.

Delimitations

Delimitations of a study address how a study will be narrowed in the scope or how it will be bounded (Leedy & Ormord , 2010; Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Based on this definition, this research was constricted to the perceptions of the instructional stakeholders of the school in which the Freshman/Success Academy program model was utilized for this study. Additionally, the researcher did not attain the perspectives of the male minority students on the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy.

Conclusion

This chapter provided details of the methodology that took place within the qualitative study on the effects of a Freshman/Success Academy as it aligns with the perceptions of its teachers and administrators. These perceptions were anchored using documentation that was related to the school's student achievement of the minority male,

discipline, and attendance. Analyzed data that were acquired through the strategically arranged questionnaire and interviews were validated by the nonpartisan colleague throughout both phases of the study. Chapter 4 presents the data in a manner that demonstrates the evaluative effects of the Freshman/Success Academy to negate the next steps for the academy, in addition to future studies.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a Freshman/Success Academy program by examining the perceptions of key educational stakeholders who educate first-time ninth grade and sophomore minority males who are off track from their graduating cohort and who have been identified as at risk. The category of at risk has been determined by academic and/or behavioral records of the males prior to entering the study site of an urban high school in the piedmont region of North Carolina. Instructional stakeholders were the focus to gain various perceptions due to prior research, which deems the center primarily or in combination with the student, parent, and community.

Overview

This study used the qualitative inquiry research methodology with a conceptualized foundation using the grounded theory that has been defined by Creswell (2003), Creswell and Poth (2018), Leung (2015), and Maxwell (2013) to answer the one overarching question with five subsequent research questions on which this study was based.

1. How do instructional stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy program on the minority male student who has been identified as at risk academically and/or behaviorally?
2. How have the implementation and expectations of the Freshman/Success Academy program been effective?
3. What are the purposes (goals and objectives) of the Freshman/Success Academy program?

4. What concerns exist about the logistical operations of the program?
5. How effective are the procedures of the Freshman/Success Academy program in addressing the behavioral and academic needs of minority male high school students?
6. What challenges exist as a result of the implemented design of the Freshman/Success Academy program to ensure the academic success of the minority male student?

In order to provide a valid and reliable study, the researcher developed a qualitative inquiry research that encompassed an empowerment evaluation. The research was conducted during the first semester of the 2019-2020 school year with instructional stakeholders who were identified as the teacher(s) of record for students who were assigned to be in the Freshman/Success Academy for at least 1 of the 2-year existences and two administrators. The population of this study consisted of seven instructional stakeholders who were provided with the questionnaire, with two consenting and one who returned the voluntary participation consent form.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze the overarching question of “How do instructional stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy program on the minority male student who has been identified as at risk academically and/or behaviorally” in an urban high school in the piedmont area of North Carolina. Tables 7-11 show the responses of the seven participants who participated in Phase 1 of the study.

Phase 1

Table 7

Survey Question 2

What is your overall general perception of the Freshman/Success Program as it aligns with implementation and expectations?	
Participant identification	Participant responses
Participant 1	Some of the parts of the program were extremely successful. The most successful part was the use of our Success Coaches. These coaches were able to build relationships with students and help us tackle behavior issues as they popped up. The use of the program “transmath.”
Participant 2	It’s a great initiative. Honest attempt to target underserved children. In addition, offer supplemental training and resources to kids with critical skill deficits that can negatively impact their high school success.
Participant 3	Program that puts student needs first
Participant 4	It has changed from what its original purpose was and now just seems the only change is the amount of time in class
Participant 5	The program is installed to have a positive impact on our 9th and 10th grade students in transitioning into the high school environment and curriculum
Participant 6	The program has functioned much differently between the two years that it has been in implementation. Last year, it was much more focused on behavioral and academic intervention by implementing new strategies in the classroom while this year it is more focused on classroom setting changes.
Participant 7	The program gives all students the ability and resources to be successful in high school. It provides intentional support and differentiation to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Survey Question 2 was, “What is your overall general perception of the Freshman/Success Program as it aligns with implementation and expectations?” The perceptions of the instructional stakeholders as they aligned with the overall Freshman/Success Academy program were stated to be positive. Three of the seven responses stated that the initial year, the 2018-2019 school year, was more focused on the academic and behavioral aspect of the student. Responses also concluded that the implementation of Success Coaches was instrumental to the current success of the program due to the intricate instructional and behavioral strategies that were modeled for

the instructors.

Table 8

Survey Question 3

What do you perceive as the goals and/or objectives of the Spider Success Program?	
Participant identification	Participant responses
Participant 1	Our goals were to help students learn how to become contributing members of their local communities by learn to collaborate and problem solve.
Participant 2	Close the skill gap enough in that school year that will position students to be promoted to the next grade level. In addition, raise their awareness of the expectations, demands, and pace of high school. Ultimately so they can compete with their peers. Lastly, so that they can create options for themselves after graduation.
Participant 3	To provide the right amount of support for all students to have the opportunity to be successful in core classes
Participant 4	The goal was supposed to target high risk students and help them to develop the skills they need in school and life, as well as help them to catch up on the reading and math skills they missed throughout their school years.
Participant 5	The objective of the program is to help students be more prepared for the 11th and 12 grades as well as for college or career path. This not only focuses on academic but also behaviors/attitudes that can lead to successful outcomes. Goal setting and SMART goals are a large foundation of the program.
Participant 6	The mission and vision as laid out at the creation of the program were: The mission of the program is for scholars to feel empowered by exploring and building academic and personal skills to pursue their passions. Vision: Students who create a positive culture that impacts their lives, school, and communities. This is still what I hold to.
Participant 7	To empower students to have the skills and resources necessary to be successful inside and outside of the high school setting.

Survey Question 3 was, “What do you perceive as the goals and/or objectives of the Spider Success Program?” In response to Question 3, the participants agreed that the overall purpose for the students who were assigned to the Freshman/Success Academic program was ultimately to close the skill gap. Such was also supported by the descriptive wording of “empowerment” and “positive culture” for students to achieve within the program. However, only one of the responses included a discussion about focusing on the overall behaviors/attitudes of the students.

Table 9*Survey Question 4*

What concerns do you have about the logistics of the Spider Success Program?	
Participant identification	Participant responses
Participant 1	Students were placed in the Math I Freshman/Success Academy program based off of test scores from taking the transmath base line assessment in 8th grade. All of the students in my classes (except for those that transferred in at a later date in the school year) tested below “regular common core instruction”.
Participant 2	The grouping of kids, sends a message. It’s evident there is a divide between "have and have nots." Majority of your kids in the more accelerated level classes are white. While the remaining black/Hispanic/non-white identified individuals are in the "regular" courses. Not all the teachers are equipped with skills to deal with that specific demographic. Which it makes it very challenging to get the work done. Also, the students notice it and that message doesn't set well within. Especially b/c majority of our students show up with a low self-esteem but cover it up with masks. I believe if we implement more non-traditional practices/training/resources that are designed to address the "whole student" it creates an opportunity to unlock potential, increase confidence, and self-worth.
Participant 3	I want students to have the right amount of support, but not so much where they become dependent.
Participant 4	Inclusion for EC and ESL classes are crowded and defeat the purpose.
Participant 5	Only area of concern would be time/class management. Our SSS students take 45-minute classes that are yearlong compared to the other population of students who have 90-minute semester long classes.
Participant 6	The amount of students involved. I feel that we are trying to reach many students through the same means that some students' needs aren't met.
Participant 7	My concern is "are we being intentional about the number of students in each class"...there will be classes where there are higher numbers of students and are extremely diverse. My concern in the scheduling we are doing and if it best meets the needs of the teacher and student.

Survey Question 4 was, “What concerns do you have about the logistics of the Spider Success Program?” As I reviewed and analyzed the responses to this question, it was found that the instructional stakeholders were concerned with how to be intentional with student placement into the program. Six of the seven responses depicted an in-depth explanation as to how to “serve the needs” of all students regardless of their academic and/or behavioral need. Findings also determined that two of the four responses

perceived that the management of class time was of concern, which aligned to the overall theme for the logistical operations of this question of effectively supporting students.

Table 10

Survey Question 5

How well do you think the procedures of the Spider Success Program are preparing students for high school behaviorally as well as academically?	
Participant identification	Participant Responses
Participant 1	Students were prepared by being given multiple resources to utilize during the school day. This includes success coaches that they could go to when they needed an outlet.
Participant 2	It's a work in progress. We are certainly not in the same place last year. There is more clarity of the goals/objectives. More centralized focus has been placed on managing efficiency and capacity so that the service providers are best positioned to operate at optimal level.
Participant 3	I think that we help build structure for the kids, but struggle to offer choice, which can help students maintain and generalize content/behaviors.
Participant 4	Due to common expectations with all teacher in the program, behavior has decreased
Participant 5	My hopes are that we see a dramatic improvement in behaviors which I believe will then result in high academic achievements.
Participant 6	I think the support system it built last year was the most effective part of preparing students behaviorally and academically as it allowed for us to directly address both areas of need. However, I think the SSS has at times focused on behaviors to the detriment of academics as well as academics to the detriment of behaviors at times.
Participant 7	We have focused on making sure our students are on the right track behaviorally and academically. We implement supports for each area to ensure students comply with expectations. I believe at the 9th grade level this year we have gotten even more specific and intentional about this preparedness.

Survey Question 5 was, “How well do you think the procedures of the Spider Success Program are preparing students for high school behaviorally as well as academically?” Since this program has only been in existence at the study site for 2 years, all the instructional stakeholders' perceptions confirmed that the program is a “work in progress.” Two participants indicated that in the first year of the program, many of the students had a high rate of behavioral issues. However, this number has decreased, and

the focus has now shifted more to increasing the achievement rate.

Table 11

Survey Question 6

What challenges do you feel exist the implemented design of the Spider Success program to ensure the academic and behavioral success of a student?	
Participant identification	Participant identification
Participant 1	Students being placed in the math portion based off the transmath baseline assessment was a challenge.
Participant 2	Need more soldiers in the battle. Currently there is a phenomenal team in place, but there is strength in numbers.
Participant 3	Placement of students in classes
Participant 4	Class size and having students who do not need to be in the program.
Participant 5	Parental involvement and support
Participant 6	I'm not entirely sure what you mean by this question. However, I think one of the biggest challenges we faced was when you have a group of students that are so far behind academically, how you decide how much time you should take away from academic instruction to address their behavioral needs. Some of the students needed a separate time away from academics to work on things like goal setting and decision making, etc.
Participant 7	Mostly time. It becomes overwhelming to teach all of the students who need this program. It also increases teacher burnout because we deal with such a challenging group and sometimes it reflects on our ability to ensure success.

Survey Question 6 was, “What challenges do you feel exist the implemented design of the Spider Success program to ensure the academic and behavioral success of a student? Although, one of the seven responses perceived “parental involvement” to be a challenge as it aligned to the academic and behavioral success of the student, five of the responses perceived that the biggest challenge aligned to the structure of how to group students, decrease teacher burnout, and place students in the most appropriate academic setting for learning.

After Phase 1, responses were analyzed through an open-coding system to determine the common themes and categories shown in Table 12. Identifying these

entities was then aligned to the six research questions and utilized to build the semi-structured interview sessions for Phase 2 (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Table 12

Phase 1 Coding and Themes

Research question	Opening coding	Properties	Examples of participant words
2	Development of student abilities	Building relationships	“great initiative” “Extremely successful” “positive impact on our 9th and 10th grade students in transitioning into the high school environment and curriculum”
3	Social skill development	Student preparation	“become contributing members of their local communities”
4	Intentionality of student placement	Teacher effectiveness	“Students were placed in the Math 1 SSS class based off of test scores”
5	Implementation of appropriate supports	Building a student support system	“Students were prepared by being given multiple resources”
6	Providing student structure instructionally and within the /classroom	Academic success	“group of students that are so far behind academically” “overwhelming to teach all of the students who need this program”

Phase 2

Two separate interview sessions occurred with the one instructional stakeholder who returned their consent form by the deadline during Phase 2. Before the interview sessions began, the study's purpose and the opportunity to remove himself from the study were presented. With permission to continue, the following questions supported the identified themes from Phase 1.

Interview Session 1

Interview Question 1 was, “What was the reasoning and need to begin the Freshman/Success Academic Program?” Regarding the reasoning and need to begin the Freshman/Success Academy program, the instructional stakeholder stated that “the

program started from a conversation during a summer planning session attempting to answer the question, ‘What do kids need coming into high school?’” The participant went into an in-depth monologue about how the group of instructional leaders wanted to create an opportunity for freshman to walk through the doors of the school with the appropriate tools and support in order to be successful. Thus, it was vital for the summer committee to create various activities that addressed both the academic and behavioral areas in a way that would allow for the ongoing gathering of data that would support the program and its expectant success.

The participant went on to clarify that it was also vital to attain buy-in from not only the district but the community and school in order to obtain constructive feedback in an evaluative manner for growth. Therefore, the mindset of the committee was one that wanted to ensure that each of the incoming students and the rising sophomores were equipped with the skills that were needed to be successful within high school, particularly by the end of the first quarter. With this being a priority, the group of administrators and instructional leaders researched previous math and English assessment scores of students, which were documented to be on the fourth- and/or fifth-grade level, as the foundation to plan activities, select appropriate curriculums, and make schedules.

Interview Question 2 was, “From your perception, what were some of the barriers that surfaced once the Freshman/Success Academy program began?” I determined that the provided answer became the basis for other questions in order to determine the perceptual core for the participant and his colleagues of the Freshman/Success Academy. Answering almost immediately, the participant stated, “The barriers that we have seen really did not become apparent until our second year, but I am sure all high schools who

have this same issue when it comes to transition.” The participant continued to share that of all the barriers that have surfaced since the existence of the program, the biggest was the growth mindset of the teachers who were not in the academy program but taught the students who were.

Interview Question 3 was, “What qualifications does a minority male student need to have in order to be a part of the Freshman/Success Academy program?” The participant shared,

Students are selected based upon academic performance, behavioral records, and any data provided in their records that offers a full snapshot of the student. If we identify significant skill gaps, extensive record of behavior that directly impacts performance and any records that communicates the need for this student to have supplemental support in place.

The participant went on to share that such “qualifications” were essential when reviewing and discussing the incoming freshmen as well as those students who were sophomores who had already been identified as at risk.

Interview Question 4 was, “Based on the known logistics of the Freshman/Success Academy program, what is the current academic success rate for the minority male students?” Unfortunately, when asked this question, the participant noted that although measurements were increasingly being integrated to document the academic success rate, it has not been a consistent implemented model. However, the participant did share, “There has been observed improvements with student attendance which aligns to students receiving their necessary credits towards being promoted.”

In addition, the participant perceived that the participation of the selected students

has brought on a sense of maturity to the group, especially current sophomores for the 2019-2020 school year.

Interview Session 2

Interview Question 1 was, “Identify some additional academic and/or behavioral programs that have been developed for the minority male students who are in the Freshman/Success Academy program.” Ultimately, it is the responsibility of educators to implement various means to assist the student with the ability to learn. Therefore, the myriad influences which have surfaced through the implementation of the Freshman/Success Academy program learning have tapped into every facet of a student’s life: physically, emotionally, culturally, and socially. It is with that mindset that the participant shared that some additional academic and/or behavioral programs that have been developed range from course-specific tutoring to after-school tutoring with peers who have been recognized from the National Honor Society. The participant went on to add,

From a character development perspective, we have created gender-specific lunch groups, which create a space for vulnerability and transparency. Students can utilize that space in order to talk about what they are experiencing in school and/or at home without any judgement. It also presents the student with the opportunity to talk through how to navigate various challenges, raise awareness to their self-efficacy, and build relationships, goal/vision setting, and conflict resolution.

Interview Question 2 was, “What steps have been implemented to alleviate concerns and/or challenges that have been communicated to the administrators of the Freshman/Success Academy program?” As a leader within any type of organization, one

must enlist the buy-in of others by intentionally opening opportunities to share concerns as well as the means of resolving such in a purposeful way. This holds true when negative emotions and frustration are at the forefront of an initiative such as the one that is within this study. During Phase 2, the participant shared his perspective on the statement that “all things were not peaches and cream.” When asked to explain this statement, the participant utilized descriptive words such as fear of failure, anxiety, and self-doubt to not only discuss the students but the teachers as well when it came to concerns and challenges of the program. However, the participant was very adamant about expressing his feelings toward the leadership:

We’ve certainly benefited from having leadership to be our spokespersons.

Rolling out the objective/outcomes for the program, it has helped create the bridge between staff and us. Having leadership advocate and share the details with staff, while asking for their involvement has been critical.

With solitude and emphasis, the participant went on to state that although there were obvious concerns expressed from students and educators, many concerns came from educators who were not affiliated with the program but with the school. As a result, administration and participants met to develop the role, Success Coaches. When asked to clarify about such a role, the participant shared the intentionality of the position to assist with building positive relationships with the staff as well as decreasing the ideology that the Freshmen/Success Academy Program was a “babysitting service.” He went on to share,

Providing a great deal of context around what we do and being clear of our role has strengthen our ability for our voice to be heard and given teachers

the confidence to lean on us. There remains to be some resistance, but it comes with greater trust and understanding of our roles. One of the biggest challenges is for coaches to not be pulled in multiple directions, where it creates the mission to drift. Establishing a fine line where you clearly communicate what does/does not help protect the value of our work and capacity.

Interview Question 3 was, “What are your perceptions of the effects of the character-building activities that have been implemented for minority male students who participate in the Freshman/Success Academy program?” The participant emphasized as he answered this question the importance of the transitional period between middle and high school. He went on to explain that this transition can easily be detoured by negative peer friendships due to a new environment. Thus, based on the perception of the participant, it is vital to implement a curriculum that builds the character of a student to enhance their self-efficacy, ultimately effecting their academic success. With a shared vision and viewpoint regarding the essence of the implementation that “character building” can and should bring to the program as well as school, the participant in Phase 2 was transparent in confessing that the administrative team and educators had yet to “scratch the surface” of such an implementation. When asked if he could elaborate as to why such had not been, the participant shared, “Time is our biggest factor in being able to offer character-building activities that offer depth and cultivate transformation. When we afforded that time, 100% of the time it is offered value for our students.” However, the participant did express that he has personally observed a shift among the males, and communication has become more positive over the course of the school year. The

participant completed this answer with the following statement:

Simply put we need more time, because this time can be used to teach/coach/mentor their inner being so that they can show up in the classroom with a clear understanding of self, their goals, and what it means to be ready to perform.

Interview Question 4 was, “What connections does the MTSS [Multi-Tier System of Supports] program have with the behavior success of the minority male students who participate in the Freshman/ Success Academy Program?” The participant emphasized that during the initial development of the program, each participant visited a district-wide MTSS showcase. During this opportunity, participants were able to speak with other schools about how the MTSS program was being implemented within their settings as well as what were the short- and long-term benefits for the implementation. With that information, the participant expressed that this piece of the puzzle has not been utilized in a meaningful manner; however, such connections have provided the opportunity to network with other professionals doing similar work as shown in Table 13.

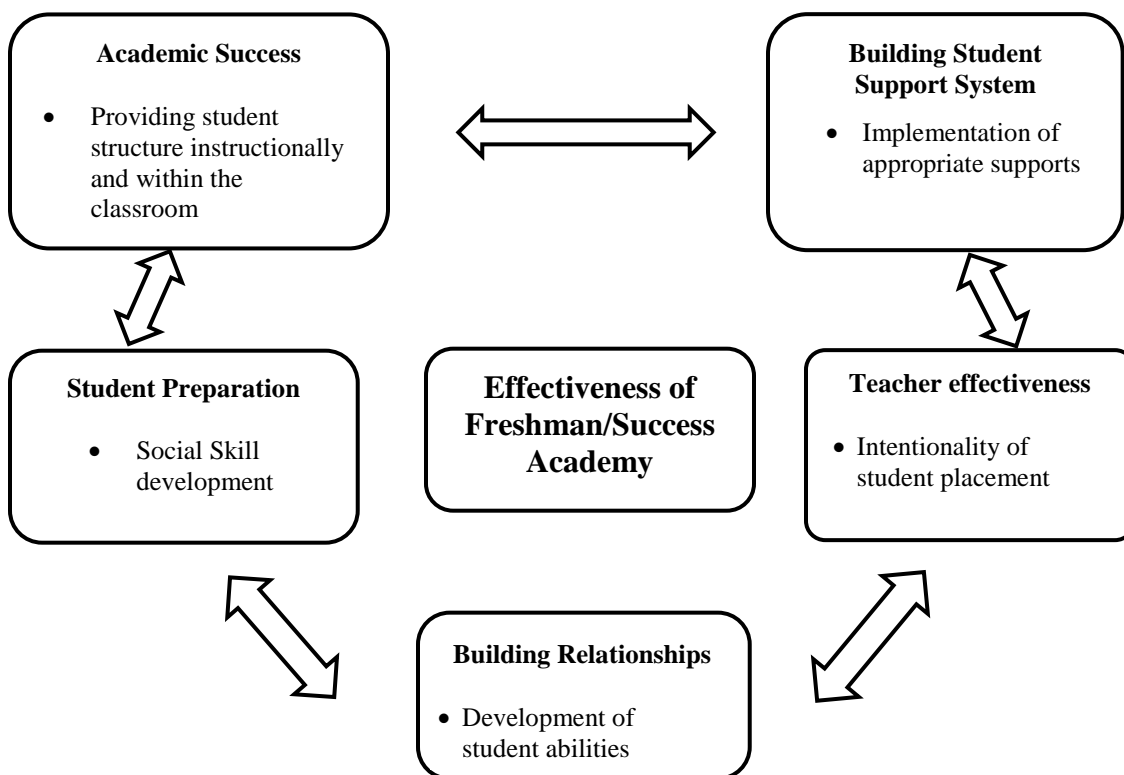
Table 13*Research Questions and Interview Session Alignment*

How do instructional stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy program of the minority male student who has been identified as at risk academically and/or behaviorally?	
RQ2. How have the implementation and expectations of the Freshman/Success Academy program been effective?	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Interview Session 1</u></p> <p>1. What was the reasoning and need to begin the Freshman/Success Academy program?</p>
RQ3. What are the purposes (goals and objectives) of the Freshman/Success Academy program?	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Interview Session 2</u></p> <p>1. Identify some additional academic and/or behavioral programs that have been developed for the minority male students who are in the Freshman/Success Academy program?</p> <p>3. What are your perceptions of the effects of the character-building activities that have been implemented for the minority male students who participate in the Freshman/Success Academy program?</p>
RQ4. What concerns exist about the logistical operations of the program?	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Interview Session 1</u></p> <p>1. Based on the known logistics of the Freshman/Success Academy program, what is the current academic success rate for the minority male students?</p>
RQ5. How effective are the procedures of the Freshman/Success Academy program in addressing the behavioral and academic needs of minority male high school students?	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Interview Session 1</u></p> <p>3. What qualifications does a minority male student need to have in order to be a part of the Freshman/Success Academy program?</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Interview Session 2</u></p> <p>2. What steps have been implemented to alleviate concerns and/or challenges that have been communicated to the administrators of the Freshman/Success Academy program?</p> <p>3. What connections does the MTSS program have with the behavior success of the minority male students who participate in the Freshman/Success Academy program?</p>
RQ6. What challenges exist as a result of the implemented design of the Freshman/Success Academy program to ensure the academic success of the minority male student?	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Interview Session 1</u></p> <p>2. From your perception, what were some of the barriers that surfaced once the Freshman/Success Academy program began?</p>

Summary of Results

Over a course of 6 weeks, a qualitative 2-phase study was conducted to attain

the perspectives of instructional stakeholders. Such perspectives assisted in determining the effectiveness of a Freshman/Success Academy program that educated students who were identified as being at risk, sophomores, and entering high school as first-time ninth graders within North Carolina. For this study, the perspectives that were attained were directed towards the minority male students who fell into at least one of the above entities. At the conclusion of Phase 1 of the study, a repetition of three key indicators surfaced from the collected perspectives: “making sure that students were on the right track,” “empower students,” and “creating a positive culture.” The pronounced indicators provided the foundation for the researcher to determine that there were five categories and themes that supported answering the research questions as depicted in Figure 11.

Figure 11*Categories and Aligned Themes*

Each of the themes prompted a more in-depth level of questioning for the one instructional stakeholder who participated. During Phase 2 of the study, the participant reported that overall, the teachers had begun to build a culture of safety and trust among all their students, particularly those enrolled in the Freshman/Success Academy program. This was as a result of identified lead teachers serving as Success Coaches equipped with the responsibility of collaborating, exploring, and assisting with the discovery of activities to encourage colleagues to work with the whole student and not the at-risk student.

Conclusion

The essence of this research was to make sense of and recognize patterns among words in order to build a meaningful picture without compromising its richness and dimensionality. For this study, the action of sharing perspectives in a clear and distinct process provides participants with the opportunity to learn and share ideas with the desire to help students become successful aside from preformation that can sometimes be misleading (Morgan, 2001; Williamston, 2010). The data that were collected, analyzed, and triangulated provided the researcher with the tools to examine for regularity and for an understanding of where that regularity is not apparent within the researched setting (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In addition, after coding and analyzing the data, one nonpartisan educational professional reviewed the data for credibility. This provided vital entities to keep in mind the need and/or opportunity to apply new codes and relationships that might form within the established examined categories.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

A productive educational system grounded in an understanding of the science of learning is essential to the success of students. As a student enters high school or the tenth grade, the ideology can become an overwhelming entity of staying on track and being responsible especially when one has been identified and labeled as at risk due to behaviors and/or academics. As Clark and Hunley (2007) stated, freshmen encounter many similar difficulties with the transitioning process; however, with such programs as a transitional one, the likelihood of being successful is high. As researchers have investigated the development of students as they progress within school, studies have determined that the academic promotions of students are a result of meaningful and deep learning (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). However, when a student is plagued by the lack of acquiring the social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets necessary to be successful in school and in life beyond, attaining the credits necessary to graduate become less of a priority (National Research Council, 2001). Based on these and other like research, the purpose of this study was to attain the perspectives of instructional stakeholders who worked closely with such students as freshmen and sophomores to determine the effectiveness of such academic and behavioral programs as a Freshman/Success Academy program. As a result, this study answered one overarching question with five subsequent research questions on which this study was based.

1. How do instructional stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy program of the student who has been identified as at risk academically and/or behaviorally?

2. How have the implementation and expectations of the Freshman/Success Academy program been effective?
3. What are the purposes (goals and objectives) of the Freshman/Success Academy program?
4. What concerns exist about the logistical operations of the program?
5. How effective are the procedures of the Freshman/Success Academy program in addressing the behavioral and academic needs of minority male high school students?
6. What challenges exist as a result of the implemented design of the Freshman/Success Academy program to ensure the academic success of the minority male student?

Therefore, this chapter explores the key findings, discusses how the findings relate to the theoretical framework, reviews the limitations of the study, and provides implications for practice and future studies on the perceptions of instructional stakeholders on the effectiveness of a Freshman/Success Academy program.

Discussion of the Findings

Significant alignments were found between the investigated findings and the review of literature presented in Chapter 2. With the aid of semi-structured questions presented to instructional stakeholders during Phases 1 and 2 of the study, analyzed results were utilized to reveal five “big ideas.” Collectively, these ideas aligned to answer the overarching question of “How do instructional stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academy program of the minority male student who has been identified as at-risk?” Each participant disclosed during both phases that the need of

academic success, building student supports, having effective teachers, building relationships, and preparing the student were all vital in order for such transitional programs as a Freshman/Success Academy to work effectively and ultimately be an educational success.

Academic Success

Historically, the realm of education has been plagued with governmental sanctions, financial reforms, and fundamental ridicule (Biography.com Editors, 2020; Public Broadcasting System, n.d.). With a calculated \$600 billion spent on education, the legislative agenda for NCLB and ESEA have attempted to equip schools with the appropriate devices to ensure the academic success of all students (Hanushek & Lindseth, 2009). This was one reason the identified school for this study developed the Freshman/Success Academy program. Throughout the study, participants emphasized the importance of having a program that would assist with reducing the current achievement gap between minority and non-minority students at their school. As one participant stated, the purpose of the program was “to target underserved children” to attain the mastery of content which is required for student as well as academic success (Letgers & Kerr, 2001).

Participants also stated that with the academic success of the students, they also perceived the increase of student self-efficacy. Although this was not part of the research for this study, participants for both Phases 1 and 2 perceived that without the positive mindset and outlook, the 2-3% increase on EOG assessments would not have taken place. Artino (2012) described the nature and structure of self-efficacy on human functioning. In his discussion on the self-efficacy component of Bandura’s social-cognitive theory,

Artino stated that Bandura's definition of self-efficacy is the "idea that individuals make use of their efficacy judgments in reference to some goal" (p. 3). Thus, if such an individual, i.e. student, has low self-efficacy, an attempt to accomplish such a goal and/or task may be avoided. Such findings are one of the foundational blocks that were shared by 50% of the participants in this study when asked about the goal and reasoning for the Freshman/Success Academy. However, self-efficacy was the caveat to the overarching question for this study and to other challenges that the instructional stakeholders perceived to be the connecting factors to the lack of the academic success of their enrolled students. Just as Blackwell (2008) identified in his research on the influences on ninth-grade students, participants in both Phase 1 and 2 perceived that in addition to a low self-efficacy the indicators of achievement, retention, attendance, dropout status, and conduct present greater challenges during the transitional period of middle to high school (Kerr, 2002). Therefore, if these challenges are not confronted with such transitional programs as a Freshman/Success Academy, particularly for the minority male, this trajectory will continue into their sophomore year resulting in an unsuccessful structural experience for students instructionally as well as within the classroom culture (Aratani et al., 2011).

Building Student Support System

Student support systems like Success Coaches or Peer Mentors, which are initiatives the participant stated were added during the second year of the Freshman/Success Academy program, are just some examples that are intricate to the success of transitional programs. With the goal and priority for student success being the spear for the implementation for the Freshman/Success Academy program, the perception of the

participant in Phase 2 emphasized this decision because students felt as though they “weren’t being heard” or being treated fairly as far as discipline was concerned.

During the pivotal building of a transitional bridge for students coming from middle to high school then on to their sophomore year, school leaders must take into consideration five guiding questions:

- What are the outside realities for students?
- What does the word “affirmation” mean and look like to a transformative leader?
- What steps can leadership teams take to explore the “landscape” of affirmation of the school environment?
- How do leaders use affirmation to mitigate the negative influence of the “outside realities?”
- What do leaders recognize and understand about their staff/faculty, students, and community (Jackson & McDermott, 2012).

Jackson and McDermott (2012) discussed the above questions as pivots to begin building an efficient as well as effective student support system within the educational environment. These were some of the similar questions that were presented by participants during the study as the Freshman/Success Academy was being developed. During Phase 1, participants shared that in addition to ensuring that students were successful academically and behaviorally, the need to implement the appropriate supports to prepare them for their postgraduate endeavors were vital (Letgers & Kerr, 2001).

Just as discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, the social, emotional, and cognitive development of a student is critical in the preparation of such endeavors. This is crucial

during the developmental years of a child. Even when reviewing Erick Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development, the phases of "trust vs. mistrust," "industry vs. inferiority," and "identity vs. role confusion" are issues that are prevalent especially during the transitional periods of middle to high school and for students who have already been identified as at risk (Asamen & Berry, 1989). The very perspective of a challenging period for a student was evident towards the end of the first year and beginning of the second for the Freshman/Success Academy program. The ridicule that some of the students were being faced with caused the program and school leaders began the process of implementing appropriate supports so that they, particularly the males, were prepared with multiple resources. Morgan and Krueger (1993) stated that students who are involved in the transition period often develop a more negative view of themselves due to a new environment; therefore, they rely on the need for peer friendships.

Teacher Effectiveness

The correlation between teacher quality and student performance results from the purposeful matching of students and teachers in a very specific manner. This statement was conducive when reading participant responses, which states that teachers would become frustrated when students were not engaged within the lesson or being combative in some manner (Hanover Research, 2017; Rivkin et al., 2005). As a result, teachers perceived that students were not benefiting academically or behaviorally during class. Instructional stakeholders went on to explain that teachers who had a smaller number of students in their class appeared to have more student engagement versus their colleagues with the same demographic of students who had the highest number of discipline referrals. This statement aligns with research conducted by Goldhaber (2006), who

explained that an effective teacher not only scores well on their specific certification exams but can understand the content, responsiveness, and ability of their students to gain active engagement within the classroom. Such is in alignment with the concerns that were expressed throughout the study, as participants provided their perceptions of challenges as well as barriers. It was found that perceptions that included

- purposely placing students appropriately based on current academic needs,
- providing teacher support to prevent “burn out,” and
- providing professional development to enhance current knowledge about instructional strategies

are in alignment to the suggestions made in the article that provides the characteristics of effective teachers (Stanford University, 2015). Last, in a report presented by Wacker and Olson (2019) to the Future Ed. Organization provided evidence in order to strengthen the motivation to learn; it is imperative that the mindsets of teachers are shifted to a growth sector for success. Therefore, teacher effectiveness is one that promotes positive language, mindset, understanding, and engagement to enhance the chance for student success, specifically that of minority males.

Building Relationships

National statistical research shows that the adjusted cohort graduation rate for 2016-2017 had an overall 85% graduation rate (Institute of Education Statistics, 2019). However, in 2017, the average dropout rate for the United States was 4.7%. This rate included students between the ages of 15 and 24 in grades 10-12 who reportedly left their high school either at the beginning of one school year or the next without earning a diploma or alternate credential (U.S. high school dropout rate [2020]: Statistics & trends,

2019). More specifically, the breakdown of those students who were in the minority included 6% African Americans and 8.6% Hispanics, with 5.4% being males. Statistical data such as these stem from a vast array of challenges students face every day (David, 2009).

During Phase 2 of the study, similar statements were made by the participant during the scheduled interviews in which he shared that the collected data as well as previous end-of-the-year assessment data were integral during the collaborative inquiry process for the development as well as evaluating the progress of the Freshman/Success Academy. Additionally, the participant shared his perception of the effects of not implementing a system in which the action of building the culture and relationships was not priority for the academic program. For example, the participant explained that at one point during the first year of implementation, teachers were sending the enrolled students immediately to the building in which the program was housed. As a result, educators as well as students began to view the Freshman/Success Academy as in-school suspension or pullout instead of a transitional program to assist with academic success. With that in mind, the participant went on to explain that leadership decided to collaborate with the instructional stakeholders in the Freshman/Success Academy to develop a program that assisted with the intrinsic motivation of their students. There was a formation of a PLC to discuss researched instructional strategies which centered on building the capacity and relationships between the enrolled students and their teachers. By employing this initiative, leadership hoped to reduce the stigma of the Freshman/Success Academy as being a “punitive holding cell” for students. This action needed to emerge for student success in the Freshman/Success Academy program, especially for students identified as

at risk (Wacker & Olson, 2019).

According to the provided perceptions, the “big idea” of the theme “building relationships” was twofold for both the educator and student. For the instructional educator, the need was to implement strategies to assist with building classroom culture and develop a coherent PLC to explore the critical importance of educator mindsets, beliefs, and practices, to create positive relationships for students to invest in their learning (Ferriter & Graham, 2010). For the student who faced the challenges of being labeled as at risk, fostering programs like character development began to assist with the social and emotional state of belonging, thus providing an empathetic discipline, which prompted the development of a culture of support among teachers and peers (Cannon, 2013; Mason & Singh, 2010).

Student Preparation

Walking through the doors of high school can present a sense of excitement and independence. However, this can quickly be overpowered with anxiety and frustration which can possibly complicate the norms of high school, especially for a student who has been plagued with academic and behavioral negativity (Berkes, 2009). To understand these sentiments, research on the secondary school level has provided results stating that these and many other emotions can become clouded for the at-risk and minority student which can lead to negative relationships, poor decision-making and social skill development if some form of preparatory programs are not introduced (Asamen & Berry, 1989). Additional research has also provided a high correlation between the implementation of high school transitional programs that result in being unsuccessful leading to high dropout rates, low number of on-time graduation rates, and overall low

academic achievement within the classrooms (National High School Center, 2018). Thus, it is imperative for high schools to develop and implement programs that allow rising ninth graders as well as tenth graders who have demonstrated an academic and behavioral struggle to complete some type of student preparation program.

Letgers and Kerr (2001) recommended in their research on transitional programs for ninth graders that student orientation programs such as summer school are needed to assist with ensuring appropriate preparation for student success. This correlates to the analyzed results found within this study. Participants in Phase 1 of the study disclosed to the researcher that the purpose of developing and implementing the Freshman/Success Academy program was to prepare the student for their future through adequate skill development to deal with social issues, conflict resolutions, and academic and behavioral challenges. During Phase 2 of the study, the researcher allowed the participant the opportunity to provide a deeper perceptive view on what that meant in terms of strategies, programs, and/or curriculums. In his response, he stated that during the planning stages, there was a high number of incoming ninth graders who fell in at least one of the categories of being below grade level and/or having a high rate of disciplinary referrals. The high number of incidents carried over to the current 10th graders in the program as well. With that upfront information, the level of disengagement, lack of motivation, and low self-efficacy were already a challenge for both students and their teachers (Balfanz et al., 2007). Therefore, it was critical to develop a well-designed transition plan to prepare incoming and current students to build a strong sense of belonging associated with positive motivation to succeed (Hanover Research, 2017).

Limitations

The constricted number of participants who were selected to participate in this study placed limits the scope and transferability of the results of this study. Also, gathering data with limited access to specific participating student demographics and academic and behavioral history limits the results of this inquiry to this educational environment, so the findings cannot be widely generalized. However, studies like this one provide further understanding as to the reasons why transitional programs for first-time ninth graders as well as students who are identified as at risk aid with closing the achievement gap as well as provide assistance with developing character.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendation 1: Focus the System on Developmental Supports for Students

Transitioning into High School and Who Are Identified as At Risk

Students who suffer from emotional, behavioral, and/or academic struggles often have considerable issues dealing with consequences of any kind particularly from the educational environment (Duncan, 1994). This perspective was not only shared but collected as data during both phases of the study. Especially in Phase 2 of the study, the perspective that some educators lacked the cultural disposition to understand the feelings and experiences of students, particularly the minority male, was observed during the first year of implementation (Douglass, 2007). Such an observation led to the discussion of how to change the mindset of the educator into one that was in the growth paradigm. One recommendation is to train staff on restorative practices and understanding cultural differences of minority students in the Freshman/Success Academy. This strategy is provided as an exclusionary discipline practice within the Freshman/Success Academy

program to the school discipline. The steps that are utilized in the restorative approach as well as the Multi-Tier System of Supports for staff include individual accountability check-ins, coaching sessions, and reminders for online assistance (Anyon, 2016; Rosen, 2017). When included within the educational environment, the disciplinary protocol is implemented as a guide to a restorative conversation:

- What happened?
- What's going on?
- How do you feel about it?
- Who is affected?
- Who is responsible for what?
- How will the harm be repaired?

By incorporating such practices, students are learning the skills necessary to manage conflicts and tensions while building healthy and sound relationships (Lynch et al., 2013).

Recommendation 2: Instructional Stakeholders at the Middle and High School Work Together to Provide for Supports for Student Successful Transition

Transitioning from middle to high school is sometimes difficult, as research has proven (Jackson & McDermott, 2012). Even with the inner emotions of looking forward to such a step, students still have mixed feelings about this inevitable move accompanied by the possibility of such reservations as being behind with learning capabilities, negative personal impacts, and lack of personal support. This problematic perspective was stated from each participant in both phases of this study. Based on such responses and analysis of data, the researcher recommends that this problematic transition can be combated by

implementing some of the following initiatives:

- Summer orientation: Schools develop a transitional curriculum for incoming ninth graders and/or sophomores who are having difficulties with the academic and/or behavioral issues with high school. Such skills may include study skills, organization skills, conflict resolution, and academic preparation;
- Student leadership/mentoring: Provide a group of upper classmen who can serve as mentors for students who have been labeled as at risk or who are transitioning into high school; increase student participation within community programs such as Communities In Schools to introduce post-secondary and career opportunities (Communities in Schools, 2014).
- Tutoring: Provide students with the opportunity to receive academic assistance to reduce both short- and long-term consequences. The most opportune time for this specific intervention to be implemented would be during the summer; however, any time throughout the year would be conducive through such programs as Extended Day and online blended learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Stover, 2009; Watson, 2008).

Recommendation 3: Ensure Educator Professional Learning for Developmentally Supportive Education

Throughout this study, educators shared the need to engage in professional development that would provide opportunities to gain insight as to how to support the needs of the 21st century student adequately. The skills and technologies that are rapidly expanding and being manufactured for this type of student are competing against vast situations like being homeless and taking care of family members. Thus, the

recommendation of ongoing professional development can be broken into four areas:

- Supportive environment: Coaching around how to implement structures that will promote continuity in relationships, consistency in practices, and predictability in routines that reduce anxiety and support engaged learning (Ferriter & Graham, 2010).
- Instructional strategies: Learning how to provide students with opportunities for collaborative learning that encourages questioning, explaining, and elaborating their thoughts in a clear and constructive manner (Anyon, 2016).
- Social and emotional learning opportunities: Becoming trained on how to effectively implement restorative approaches to classroom management and discipline, so students learn to effectively communicate and resolve conflict (Anyon, 2016).
- Cultural responsiveness: Learning and coaching opportunities for educators to develop instructional techniques to match the diverse learning styles of their students as well as prepare them to be responsive to the six culturally responsive characteristics: (a) socio-cultural consciousness; (b) attitude; (c) commitment and skills; (d) constructivist views; (e) knowledge of student's life; and (f) culturally responsive teaching (Krasnof, 2016).

However, even with the above areas as topics for ongoing professional development, the desire to want to enhance their knowledge is required in order to aid in addressing the changing dynamics of educational processes (Jordan & Cooper, 2003).

Implications for Future Research

Unfortunately, ethnic minority male students are at the height of being identified

as at risk within the educational setting, particularly that of high schools. This is evident within the presentation given at the 2019 ASCD Educational Leadership Conference by Mr. Roy Dobbs, author, educator, and founder of the Young Men of Purpose Mentoring Program. During his presentation, Dobbs (2019) stated that during his conducted research on male students who were at risk, only 52% of the 23 males from the first eighth-grade class at the Pike Prep Academy graduated in 2018 (Dobbs, 2019). This confirms the need to conduct more in-depth qualitative studies on reasons why such statistics continue to be alarming as well as disjointed from other research which states that minority groups are showing gains to closing the achievement gap (Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, n.d.).

To develop programs that will educate minority male students on how to react to negative or stressful situations positively, instructional stakeholders must begin the discussion to aid in decreasing the punitive discipline consequences within schools. Continuing to lead with punitive continuums to students will continue and often lead to the contribution of higher dropout rates and diminished educational, social, and civic opportunities. To develop programs that will educate minority male students on how to react to negative or stressful situations positively, a group of educators must begin the discussion to aid in decreasing the punitive discipline consequences within schools (Brown-Kang et al., 2013; Jerald, 2007; Kaufman et al., 2000). Moreover, there is no conclusive evidence to prove that an increase in student suspensions has led to a decrease in classroom disruption (Jensen, 2009). Therefore, this and other specific research that should be further investigated as it relates to the conducted study are suggested to include

- Understanding the correlation between how school and community

engagement can contribute to the educational outcomes for students.

- Understanding the behavioral effects of School to Prison Pipeline on the minority male student.
- Understanding the behavioral effects of a Freshman/Success Academy program on the minority male student.
- Obtaining the perspectives of minority male students who participated in a Freshman/Success Academy program during their ninth-grade year.

Conclusion

Schools have traditionally done a reasonably good job of developing the logistics of transitioning to high school with the provided information, interventions, strategies, and supplies. Also, various studies have shown that by implementing such programs, the opportunity for a positive culture as well as teacher and student relationships increases student motivation (Johnson, 2013). Although there continues to be a significant gap in achievement between Caucasian students and those of the minority, the implemented interventions represent an informed and structured attempt to improve the overall success of *all* students (Rojas-Lebouef et al., 2011). However, such cannot be conducted effectively without the additional support from a community as well as parents who can provide consistent support and educators who are culturally aware of the racial/ethnic backgrounds of their students (Jordan & Cooper, 2003).

Consequently, the purpose of this study attempted to provide the foundation for determining the effectiveness of a transitional high school program by attaining the perspectives of instructional stakeholders in a manner that demonstrated small but significant steps for the selected setting. Thus, positive implications and significances

have been established for educating identified students who are transitioning into high school and are at risk. Within those provided implications and significances, the themes of academic success, building student support systems, educator effectiveness, and building relationships exhibited the foundational importance of such initiatives as implementing a program such as a Freshman/Success Academy program. Additionally, the relationship between the themes and recommendations promote the actions required to elevate the energy and focus that will build a social, emotional, and cognitive capacity for success for both educators and students (Jensen, 2013).

In conclusion, although this is an ongoing effort, each subsequent study investigating the perspectives of those who educate students in a Freshman/Success Academy program will provide meaningful, innovative strategies that will continue to support and improve the outcomes in order to close the achievement gap.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions for High School Instructional Stakeholders

High School Instructional Stakeholder Survey Questions

Survey Questions

Instructional Stakeholders from the selected high school will be asked questions to identify their overall perceptions of the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success related to goals, logistics, behavior and academic success for students.

1. I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document.
2. What is your overall general perception of the Spider Success Program as it aligns with implementation and expectations?
3. What do you perceive as the goals and/or objectives of the Spider Success Program?
4. What concerns do you have about the logistics of the Spider Success Program?
5. How well do you think the procedures of the Spider Success Program are preparing students for high school behaviorally as well as academically?
6. What challenges do you feel exist the implemented design of the Spider Success program to ensure the academic and behavioral success of a student?

Appendix B

Interview Questions for High School Instructional Stakeholders

High School Instructional Stakeholder Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Instructional Stakeholders from the selected high school will be asked questions to identify their overall perceptions of the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success related to goals, logistics, behavior and academic success for students.

Session I

1. What was the reasoning and need to begin the Freshman/Success Academic Program?
2. From your perception, what were some of the barriers that surfaced once the Freshman/Success Academic Program began?
3. What qualifications does a student need to have in order to be a part of the Freshman/Success Academic Program?
4. Based on the known logistics of the Freshman/Success Academic Program, what is the current academic success rate for students?

Session II

1. Identify some additional academic and/or behavioral programs that have been developed for those students who are in the Freshman/Success Program?
2. What steps have been implemented to alleviate concerns and/or challenges that have been communicated to the administrators of the Freshman/Success Academic Program?
3. What are your perceptions of the effects of the character-building activities that have been implemented for students who participate in the Freshman/Success Academic Program?

4. What connections does the MTSS program have with the behavior success of those students who participate in the Freshman/Success Academic Program?

Appendix C

Letter of Permission to Target High School Instructional Stakeholders

August 5, 2019

Dear Instructional Stakeholder:

My name is Michelle Pettiford. I am a doctoral candidate at Gardner Webb University. I am conducting a study on obtaining your perceptions on the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academic program at your high school as it relates to the success of its minority male students. The study will take place over six consecutive weeks with two phases. In phase one, you will be asked six open-ended questions online with consent to participate in phase two of the study. In phase two of the study, you will participate in an online interview, which will take a deeper dive to gain your perceptions on the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success program at your high school.

If you would like to participate in phase one of the study, please acknowledge this introductory letter by selecting yes. At the conclusion of this questionnaire, you will find the *Interview Consent Form* that will need to be read and signed prior to beginning phase two of the study. This form will need to be signed and emailed to mpettiford@gardner-webb.edu by November 10, 2019.

If you have any questions, please contact me directly at mpettiford@gardner-webb.edu.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate.

Michelle A. Pettiford
Doctorial Candidate
Gardner –Webb University

Appendix D

Interview and Audio Recording Consent Form

Gardner Webb University IRB
Informed Consent Form

Title of Study

The Perceptions of Educators on the Effectiveness of a Freshman/Success Academic Program in an Urban High School.

Researcher

Michelle A. Pettiford, Student/School of Education

My name is Michelle Pettiford. I am a doctoral candidate at Gardner Webb University. I am conducting a research project on obtaining your perceptions on the effectiveness of the Freshman/Success Academic program at your high school as it relates to the minority male students.

Participant's Name: _____

What is the study about?

As the researcher, I will conduct a program evaluation by attaining perceptions of educators who are work with students, specifically minority male students in the Freshman/Success Academy program.

Why are you asking me?

You are an educator that has direct contact with students who have been identified as at-risk, first time ninth and tenth graders, and who are minority male students. I would like to have you complete a six-question questionnaire and participate in interview sessions to obtain your perception of the Freshman/Success Academy program are vital to the success of the program. I am interested in hearing what you have to say about the academy and its alignment with the procedures and academics.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

During Phase 1 of the study, you will answer a six-question questionnaire through a SurveyMonkey link. Based on your decision to partake in Phase 2 of the study, you will participate in two interview sessions that will provide you with the opportunity to elaborate on your perspective of the effectiveness of the Freshmen/Success Academic program. Nothing that will be discussed will affect any formal or informal evaluations or continuation of your related services within the academy.

Is there any audio/video recording?

I will use the platform of SurveyMonkey and Zoom to collect all your perceptions during this study. During the Zoom sessions, conversations will be audio and video recorded to help recall the information that was collected during the interviews and questionnaire.

What are the dangers to me?

There are no dangers to you or the organization.

If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated throughout this study, please contact me at XXXXXX

Are there any benefits to society because of me taking part in this research?

By using what you tell me, it will help with the structure and culture of the Freshman/Success Academy program to ensure that the procedural process is effective within the areas of academics and behavior.

Will I be paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you, or payments made for being in this study

How will you keep my information confidential?

You will be provided with an alias during this study. All recordings will be conducted using an alias. What you say will be kept private. The data will be kept on a secure online platform.

What if I want to leave the study?

You can leave the study at any time. You are not receiving anything for your participation in this study. If you chose not to continue to participate in this study, I will destroy any information you will provide.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If there is new information or changes in the study to be made, I will inform you in an appropriate amount of time.

Voluntary consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you have read and fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing to consent to take part in this study. All your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in this study as described to you by Michelle Pettiford.

If you have questions about the study, contact the following individuals.

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Signature: _____ Date: _____