SUPPORTIVE PROGRAMS IN SYNERGISTIC MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT AND PREVENT STUDENTS FROM DROPPING OUT

by

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate’s dissertation co-advisors, Dr. Patricia Maslin-Ostrowski and Dr. Daniel Reyes-Guerra, Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology, and has been approved by all members of the supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the College of Education and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined how two high schools have successfully increased graduation rates while serving minority-majority and impoverished communities. Data collected for this qualitative, multi-site, case study employed publicly-available archival materials, interviews, focus groups, and observations in leadership meetings to help narrate a story that takes into account the complexities of human relations, specifically those in school settings in an urban school district. Thirty-four participants were selected by the principals at the participating schools and included members of their leadership teams, such as literacy coaches, assistant principals, magnet coordinators, students, parents, security specialists, and guidance counselors.

The conceptual framework of the study was based on three research questions. The first question examined the synergistic relationships between the selected middle and the high schools with the purpose of addressing students’ at risk of dropping out factors in the areas of academic engagement, behavior, and attendance. The second question
investigated the different types of initiatives enacted to provide support and efforts to engage or reengage students. The third question was used as a guide to observe the effects that the principals have on the work of stakeholders and how they serve their students.

This study examined the various ways in which two high schools and their three feeder middle schools combine efforts to reengage students academically and socially. The selected high schools have demonstrated success in graduation rates while serving minority-majority students in areas of poverty, as determined by the high percentage of students qualifying for the Free and Reduced Lunch program. The findings indicate the existence of purposeful collaboration between personnel with an emphasis on programmatic continuum, communication, and other initiatives to strengthen articulation.

Further, this study identified various forms of support programs for students to remain engaged or reengage, such as extracurricular activities, mentoring, and expansion of interest-based classes. Lastly, the findings demonstrate that the principals involved in this study clearly established a mission and vision and their leadership teams enact such with a balance between their own initiatives and adherence to the goals of their respective school leaders.
DEDICATION

To my mother, Maria Tejada: although we spent a brief seven years together on
this earth, you remain my hero in shining armor. Your path and example are what I try to
emulate and the reason I became a teacher.

To love and selflessness incarnate, Carmen, my wife and best friend: you get a
doctorate for being the rock of our family, the life of the party, and having the world’s
most appeasing smile.

To my boys, Mario, Alejandro, Miguel, and Victor: your love and support are my
oxygen. Also, to Gabrielle, Rhayana, and Lucas; you have brought our family a ray of
sunshine.

To my sisters, Carmencita, Victoria, and Antonia: life has been a constant uphill
battle, but being your brother is a distinct honor because I see in you the strength and
dignity of our mother and of the many Latina women who strengthen the fabric of our
society.

To my grandmother, Carmen (“Mamita”), someone who never attended school,
but who was one of the brightest and most courageous women I have ever known.

To my father, Sergio B. Collado, for teaching me that a man’s word is his bond
and a good merengue makes the soul smile.

To Don Miguel y Dona Maria, words cannot express my love and gratitude for
you. You gave me a family when I most desperately needed one the most.

To all of my nieces and nephews for filling our lives with the most profound
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To my extended brothers and sisters, Compadre Joselito, Compadre Nilson, Compadre Anthony, Compadre Jose, as well as Miguel, Vicky, and Maria, for sharing so many great moments.

Lastly, to all of my students in New York and Florida: to this day I hold true that I have learned more from you than you have from me. Together we have laughed, cried, learned, and did our best to make this world a better one, one lesson at a time.
SUPPORTIVE PROGRAMS IN SYNERGISTIC MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT AND PREVENT STUDENTS FROM DROPPING OUT

Tables ........................................................................................................................................ xvi

Figure........................................................................................................................................ xvii

Chapter 1. Introduction................................................................................................................. 1

   Problem Statement...................................................................................................................... 5

   Purpose....................................................................................................................................... 6

   Research Questions.................................................................................................................... 8

   Conceptual Framework ............................................................................................................. 8

   Researcher Positionality .......................................................................................................... 11

   Significance............................................................................................................................... 14

   Chapter Summary .................................................................................................................. 15

Chapter 2. Literature Review ....................................................................................................... 16

   Historical Disparity of Education in the United States ......................................................... 17

      Increase and Concentration of Minorities ................................................................. 20

      Disparity of Completion and Dropouts ........................................................................... 21

   The Role of Federal and State Government in the Era of Accountability ................. 23

   High Stakes Accountability and its Effects on Dropping out of School .................... 28

   NCLB’s Zero Tolerance and its Impact on Students ...................................................... 31

   Financial and Legal Impacts of Dropping Out .............................................................. 32
Financial Impact ................................................................. 33
Legal Impact ................................................................. 35
Academic Disengagement .................................................. 35
Grade Retention .............................................................. 37
Timely Intervention and Graduation .................................... 39
Behavior and Disciplinary Problems ................................... 41
Exclusion From School and its Effect on Students ................... 41
Disciplinary Gap and Intervention ....................................... 43
Attendance and Truancy ..................................................... 46
Truancy Due to Assuming Adult Responsibilities ...................... 47
Supportive Intervention Through Social Emotional Learning .... 49
Emotional Support ........................................................... 50
Synergistic Practices and Collaborations ............................... 51
Multicultural and Culturally Sensitive Pedagogy ...................... 52
Community and Contextual Consideration in Providing Support .... 53
Data-Informed Interventions ................................................. 56
Wraparound Process ........................................................ 56
Response to Intervention ................................................... 57
Chapter Summary ............................................................ 60
Chapter 3. Methodology ...................................................... 63
Restatement of the Research Questions ................................. 63
Research Design .............................................................. 64
Interview Sample ............................................................ 67
Recruitment of Participants .................................................................69
Observation Sample ...........................................................................69
Document and Artifact Sample .............................................................70
Data Collection ......................................................................................70
Interviews ............................................................................................70
Focus Group .........................................................................................71
Interview Protocols .............................................................................71
Observations .........................................................................................72
Document Analysis ...............................................................................72
Qualitative Data Analysis .....................................................................72
Descriptive Quantitative Data Analysis ...............................................74
Delimitations and Limitations ...............................................................75
Chapter Summary ................................................................................75
Chapter 4. Findings of Case Study A ....................................................76
Chavez High School .............................................................................77
Description and Demographics ............................................................77
Participants ..........................................................................................78
Challenger Middle School .................................................................79
Description and Demographics ............................................................79
Participants ..........................................................................................79
Finding 1. Purposeful Collaboration Between Schools, Community, and
School Personnel ...............................................................................80
Sub-Finding 1.1. Schools collaborate to enhance students’ interest and community support.................................................................................. 83
Sub-Finding 1.2. Programmatic Articulation ........................................ 84
Sub-Finding 1.3. Creating Short and Long-term Visions for Student Success ................................................................................................................. 87

Finding 2. Proactive and Reactive Supportive Processes for Monitoring Student Progress .................................................................................................................................................. 90
Sub-Finding 2.1. Proactive and Reactive Intervention Programs .......... 91
Sub-Finding 2.2. Support Through Social Emotional Learning .......... 94
Sub-Finding 2.3. Student Academic Support ....................................... 97
Sub-Finding 2.4. Engagement and Reengagement Through Extracurricular Activities .......................................................................................... 100

Finding 3. Principal Leadership as a Guide for Stakeholders and Community Engagement ........................................................................................................... 102
Sub-Finding 3.1. Principal Vision and Mission and the Role of Teachers and School Leaders .......................................................................................... 103
Sub-Finding 3.2. Community and Parental Involvement ...................... 104

Finding 4. Students’ Perspectives of CHS and Responsibility for Success...... 107
Sub-Finding 4.1. Student Urgency to Succeed Despite Socioeconomic Limitations .................................................................................. 108
Sub-Finding 4.2. Supportive Role of Educators and Parents ............... 111

Chapter Summary ................................................................................... 112

Chapter 5. Findings of Case Study B .................................................... 114
Participants at Lincoln High School ................................................................. 117

Franklyn Middle School .................................................................................... 118

Participants at Franklyn Middle School .......................................................... 119

Adams Middle School ....................................................................................... 119

Participants at Adams Middle School ............................................................. 120

Finding 1. Program Articulation Based on STEM and the Arts ...................... 121

Sub-Finding 1.1. Programmatic Articulation Based on STEM and
Performing Arts ................................................................................................... 122

Sub-Finding 1.2. Showcasing Talent and Expanding Opportunities ...... 124

Finding 2. Social Emotional Learning as a Base for Academic Learning .... 127

Sub-Finding 2.1. Providing Holistic Support Through Social
Emotional Learning ............................................................................................. 128

Sub-Finding 2.2. Extracurricular Engagement for Positive Student
Relationships .......................................................................................................... 131

Finding 3. Principals’ Commitment to Mission and Vision ......................... 134

Sub-Finding 3.1. Principals’ Passion for Mission and Vision ...................... 135

Sub-Finding 3.2. The Role of Parents as Support for Students .............. 137

Finding 4. Leveraging School Value to the Community: Personally
and Socially ............................................................................................................ 138

Sub-Finding 4.1. Awareness of the School’s Place in the
Community ............................................................................................................ 139

Sub-Finding 4.2. Garnering Community Engagement for Student
Support ............................................................................................................. 141

Chapter Summary .............................................................................................. 143

Chapter 6. Summary and Conclusions ............................................................... 144

Summary of Findings .......................................................................................... 146

Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion of Findings ............................................... 147

Synergistic Collaboration Between Middle and High School ......................... 148

Identification and Provision of Supportive Programs ....................................... 151

Principal Leadership and Other Stakeholders ............................................... 153

Stakeholders and Community Engagement ...................................................... 156

Conclusions ......................................................................................................... 157

Collaboration and Synergy Among School Leaders and Staff of Middle Schools With Leaders and Staff of the High School

They Feed Into ................................................................................................... 157

Continual Supportive Initiatives Provided to Students in the

Areas of Academics, Behavior, and Attendance ............................................. 158

Principals’ Vision-Centered Leadership Matters, Particularly That

Which Empowers Other Stakeholders in the Schools to Pursue or

Enact Initiatives .................................................................................................. 158

Implications and Recommendations ................................................................. 158

Implications ......................................................................................................... 158

Recommendations .............................................................................................. 160

Closing Thoughts ................................................................................................. 163

Collado’s Supportive Programs Model to Prevent Student Dropout...... 164
Teacher Support: Coaching, Feedback, and Guidance......................... 166
Proactive Data Informed Intervention.............................................. 166
Social Emotional Support, Mentoring, and Goal Setting................... 166
Synergy: Middle and High School Collaboration.............................. 166
Principal Leadership: Vision-Centered and Directional ..................... 167

Appendices.......................................................................................... 168

Appendix A. Tropical County’s Traditional Public High School
  Graduation Rates 2011–2013......................................................... 169

Appendix B. Tropical County Traditional Public High School
  Indicators 2014-2015................................................................. 170

Appendix C. FAU IRB Letter of Exemption ........................................ 171

Appendix D. TCPS IRB Approval ..................................................... 172

Appendix E. Recruitment Scripts..................................................... 173

Appendix F. Observation Guide....................................................... 176

Appendix G. Document Summary Guide.......................................... 177

Appendix H. Archival Data Guide .................................................... 178

Appendix I. Interview Protocols...................................................... 179

Appendix J. Consent Forms............................................................. 206

References.......................................................................................... 214
TABLES

Table 1. At Risk Behavior Indicators, Interventions, and Outcomes................................. 9

Table 2. Public School Enrollment by Racial/Ethnic Group in the Five Largest Districts 2004........................................................................................................ 21

Table 3. ROC by Racial/Ethnic Group 1972–2012................................................................ 22

Table 4. National Rate of Secondary School Suspensions 1972-1973 and 2009-2010.................................................................................................................. 45

Table 5. MTSS-RTI Process.................................................................................................. 59

Table 6. Participants at Chavez High School ...................................................................... 78

Table 7. Participants at Challenger Middle School............................................................... 79

Table 8. Graduation Rates: Lincoln High School, Tropical County Public Schools, and Florida................................................................................................................. 116


Table 10. Participants at Lincoln High School....................................................................... 118

Table 11. Participants at Franklyn Middle School............................................................... 119

Table 12. Participants at Adams Middle School................................................................... 120

Table 13. Summary of Findings of Case A and Case B......................................................... 148

Table 14. Collado’s Supportive Programs Model to Prevent Student Dropout................. 165
FIGURE

Figure 1. Supportive Services for At Risk Students Toward Graduation or Completion

11
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Dropping out of school for most students is the concluding occurrence of a long process. Research supports the conclusion that students who drop out of school exhibit a trail of at risk of dropping out behaviors and characteristics going back to middle or elementary school (Verdugo, 2012). Verdugo further opined that there are four major influences that can support success or contribute to the deterioration of students’ academic progress: family influence, school influence, community influence, and students themselves. In a prior study, Carlson et al. (1999) also determined that antecedent correlates of school failure include poor academic achievement, history of failure in classes, truancy, and disciplinary problems. The lack of resources and support from these various entities, including students, may impede them from obtaining timely academic support, thereby exacerbating the deterioration of students’ achievement progress. Goldschmidt and Wang (1999) concluded in a longitudinal study that various factors affect dropping out of school: economic factors, single parenting, parent education, parent support, poverty, and employment opportunities. Lee (2002) reached a similar conclusion, stating that changes in family socioeconomic conditions are contributing factors affecting the achievement gap between White, Black, and Hispanic Students. For this purpose of this study, the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” are used interchangeably. This study collected data in a school whose minority-majority population is made up of Latino students.

In spite of changes in the family socioeconomic structure and other negative
influences, the desegregation of schools and reforms to school finance policies are contributing factors to ameliorating the achievement gap between White, Black, and Latino students (Darling-Hammond, 2010). However, according to Darling-Hammond, this positive trend was reversed when the Reagan administration led the elimination of progressive education reforms by suspending or greatly reducing funds for college access programs and K-12 supportive initiatives for urban and poor rural schools. This lack of supportive programs contributed to a sharp increase in the achievement gap, after years of progress. Furthermore, during the Reagan administration, conservatives introduced legislation that focused on outcome rather than input, which set the tone for the high-stakes testing systems of education that ensued (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This study looked into schools that have taken a different approach; they have enhanced the provision of supportive programs and increased student engagement.

The increased achievement opportunity is manifested by a gap in academic engagement and academic progress and low achievement in standardized exams for different groups of students, specifically students in minority-majority schools and students coming from low socio-economic families. These aforementioned factors are major causes for grade retention (Jimerson, 2001; Noguera, 2003b). Grade retention causes students to be in classes with younger peers, which contributes to social pressures and frustrations that increase the possibilities of students to drop out (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999). McCoy and Reynolds also found that students who were previously retained had significantly lower attendance and a higher incidence of disciplinary problems by the time they got to high school. In a later study, Carpenter and Ramirez (2007) concurred with McCoy and Reynolds’s findings and advanced that two major
predictors contribute to the achievement opportunities among White, Black, and Latino students: grade retentions and the number of suspensions. This was addressed as participating schools provided the students various means to recover failed classes, rather than implement retention options.

Other factors that contribute to students dropping out are disciplinary and social problems exhibited by poor adaptation to school environment and norms. Students who are excluded from school by means of suspension can become less bonded to school and to their course work, which results in poor grades due to poor motivation. Often, these less bonded and disenfranchised students are more likely to turn to law-breaking activities (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

Poor adaptation to the school environment may also be manifested through low self-esteem and negative social relationships with peers. Students with a disruptive behavior profile have a greater propensity to leave school without graduating. Research cites three types of disruptive behaviors: aggressiveness, hyperactivity, and oppositional defiant behaviors (Vitaro, Brendgen, & Tremblay, 1999). Data collected demonstrated how schools used mentoring, proactive planning, and reactive intervention to address deviant behavior in a positive manner.

Students’ failure to attend school consistently, as well as persistent truancy or prolonged absenteeism, are also identified as contributing factors to high dropout rates (Carlson et al., 1999). The reasons offered for disengagement and subsequently dropping out in various studies range from students losing interest in school due to social disengagement to students assuming adult responsibilities, such as full time jobs, teenage pregnancies or parenthood, and other responsibilities that obstruct the possibility of
positive school engagement and consistent attendance (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Attendance is also affected when students are purposefully excluded from school for disciplinary reasons. The exclusion from classes due to disciplinary problems affects students’ academic engagement and exacerbates their attendance problem (Arcia, 2006). Arcia delved into the effects of suspension and exclusion of students from classes and concluded that various at risk characteristics such as behaviors, poor attendance, disciplinary issues, academic problems, grade retention, problems linked to socioeconomic limitations, lack of parental involvement, as well as other indicators of low performance. The schools involved in these case studies implemented various resources, including social workers and guidance counselors, to address absenteeism.

The aforementioned at risk of dropping out indicators potentially serve as the rationale leading students to the decision to drop out of school. Students who are disengaged from school and from the learning process are more likely to perform poorly academically and socially and, as a result, drop out (Finn & Rock, 1997). Dropping out of school considerably increases the possibility for students to become part of a population of Americans who are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed, and be involved in the penal system (Neild & Balfanz, 2006; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Therefore, dropping out of school is a societal issue that impacts the student, the family, the community, and the country as a whole (Levin, Belfield, Muening, & Rouse, 2007).

This gradual disengagement can potentially be remedied by the implementation of supportive programs (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). Continued research is needed to identify and implement supportive programs and initiatives when students exhibit behaviors that put them at risk of dropping out. Students who find academic and social
support and have a connectedness with their school environment are less likely to engage in deviant behavior and have greater success in school (Niehaus, Rudasill, & Rakes, 2012).

**Problem Statement**

The student dropout rate has proven to be a persistent problem that presents considerable challenges for public education (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), the national dropout rate for persons between the ages of 16-24 years of age is as follows: 5.9% for all ethnic groups combined, 4.6% for White students, 6.5% for Black students, and 9.2% for Hispanic students. Public education has struggled to adequately deal with students who dropout (Porche, Fortuna, Lin, & Alegria, 2011). The effects of dropping out have negative repercussions for the student and society (Levin et al., 2007). Furthermore, it strengthens the possibilities of perpetuating a cycle of poverty (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009).

Darling-Hammond (2010) stressed the urgency for the United States to overhaul parts of the American system of education that contribute to the pernicious and persistent inequity in graduation rates and preparation for the changing job market, particularly for minorities and students from low socioeconomic status (low-SES) backgrounds. Darling-Hammond suggested that further studies are needed to learn from states and nations that have developed strong and equitable systems of education.

Further research is needed in the area of supportive programs intended to remedy the at risk of dropping-out factors that contribute to high school students dropping out in majority-minority schools located in poverty-stricken communities. Noguera (2003b)
articulated the need for more efforts in the endeavors of reengaging at risk of dropping-out students and posited that recent education reforms have overemphasized testing and have treated teachers like technicians. Further, these reforms have underemphasized learning, which negatively impacts impoverished communities because the assessments do not take into consideration the social and economic factors that affect student achievement. Noguera (2012) also stated that the lack of education is a contributing factor to minorities’ over representation in low paying jobs.

Practitioners could benefit from more resources and information regarding how to successfully address academic reengagement, disciplinary problems, and improving attendance. In order to be effective in promoting student learning, leaders, support staff, and teachers may benefit from direction on how to effectively deal with behavior and disengagement, and how to implement supportive programs serving disadvantaged populations.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative, multi-site, case study was to understand and describe how two pairs of schools from the same school feeder patterns, composed of a high school and its feeder middle school(s), have collaborated and instituted supportive programs for students that they have identified as at risk of dropping out of school. This study investigated the programs developed, the synergy of these programs, as well as the role of the principal, the assistant principals, and other stakeholders in their efforts to provide support. Synergy was defined by Bititci et al. (2007), who advanced that it has four conditions: identified common ground; well-structured, individualized, operational processes; compatibility and communication; and clearly defined short-term and long-
term goals. For the purpose of this study, synergy was defined as the consistency and continuity in the implementation of programs and in the provision of support across middle and high school. This research sought to identify best practices for educators and school leaders working with similar populations of students (see Appendix A for the study district’s high school graduation rates). For this research, supportive programs were defined as programs implemented at the schools that provide direct intervention to reengage students who have deviated from possible graduation.

This study collected data on the four perspectives of synergy: first, how schools can identify common ground, student goals, and expectations; second, how individual schools have internal and well-structured processes to support at risk of dropping out students; third, how schools ensure compatibility and communication between and within middle and high schools; and fourth, how schools have a clear understanding of the short and long-term goals of student achievement and reengagement (Bititci et al., 2007).

Data were collected from schools whose student population is composed of majority-minority students located in predominantly low SES communities as determined by percentage of students qualifying for the Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) program. Although schools with high poverty rates and high minority populations have a higher propensity for various at risk factors that negatively affect the dropout rate, the schools selected have demonstrated success in the graduation rate while serving majority-minority and high-poverty student populations.

Based on the aforementioned definition of synergistic practices, this study also focused on the remedies proposed by the schools, such as, but not limited to, encouraging attendance and participation in extracurricular programs, academic enrichment
opportunities, and proactive behavior measures. Furthermore, this research also focused on synergistic and collaborative measures between middle and high schools in the areas of curricular articulation, behavior or discipline, and academic progress. This synergy also involved direct academic intervention and the continuum of various programs such as exceptional student education (ESE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by three research questions:

1. What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, each pair composed of a high school and its feeder middle school(s), have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

2. What supportive programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the schools to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

3. What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders including teachers, counselors, support personnel, parents, and students, involved in the process of identifying students at risk of dropping out and implementing supportive programs?

**Conceptual Framework**

Table 1 exhibits at risk of dropping out behavior indicators, interventions, and outcomes based on research by Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) and
Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, and Hall (2003). These inform the conceptual framework regarding at risk behaviors and dropout and interventions toward reengagement.

Table 1

**At Risk Behavior Indicators, Interventions, and Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At Risk Students</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Interventions</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor attendance</td>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>Outreach to families</td>
<td>Dropout or reengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEL opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconsistent attendance</td>
<td>Academic support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Present, but not engaged</td>
<td>Alternative grading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No make-up work</td>
<td>Extracurricular activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult responsibilities</td>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make-up provisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentoring programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community outreach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic failure</td>
<td>Frequent low grades</td>
<td>Enrichment programs</td>
<td>Dropout or reengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low parental involvement</td>
<td>Guidance support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor study habits</td>
<td>Allow make-up work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade retention</td>
<td>Elective classes: Art, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior problems</td>
<td>Frequent external suspension</td>
<td>Course recovery</td>
<td>Dropout or reengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal suspension</td>
<td>Effective parental involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exclusion from classes</td>
<td>Rewards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defiance of authority</td>
<td>Non-exclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-participation in extracurricular programs</td>
<td>Alternative to suspension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disciplinary referrals</td>
<td>Incentives for positive behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 illustrates how students who present at risk factors and receive supportive programs and services have the potential of experiencing a more positive outcome with regard to behavior, attendance, and academic engagement leading to the possible outcome of graduation or completion. The circles on the upper part of the graphic represent academic failure, discipline problems, and poor attendance. The semi-circle arrows represent a variety of supportive programs and initiatives at the school level, and the circles at the bottom of the graphic represent a more synergistic relationship between the three factors towards possible graduation or completion.

Graduation and completion are terms used to describe success in finishing a high school level program that entitles the student to go on to college or other post-secondary education, as well as join the military or qualify for jobs that require a high school diploma or equivalent credential. Specifically, graduation refers to obtaining a diploma by completing a program of studies in a traditional high school. Completion refers to attaining a high school diploma through a general equivalency program or other means, such as the various adult education programs.
In this section, I address my positionality in this research, as well as my rationale for conducting this study. I was mindful of potential biases stemming from two areas. The first is professional due to my current position as Principal in the district where the research was conducted, Tropical County Public Schools (TCPS, a pseudonym). The
school where I work also serves a minority-majority student population, 90% of whom qualify for the FRL program. Over the past five years, my school has seen a sharp increase in students qualifying for FRL due the closure of an adjacent middle school and redistricting of my school’s boundaries. The newly reassigned students, predominantly Black and Hispanic, are from very poor communities. Students qualifying for FRL increased from 56% in 2013 to 90% in 2017 (Tropical County Public Schools [TCPS], 2017).

As the newly reassigned students began to enter as sixth graders in 2013, the socioeconomic dynamics of the school began to change, and a sense of urgency was immediately created to implement various programs to address the social and emotional needs of the new students and their families. The academic, behavioral, and attendance challenges the new students presented proved to be a great burden for many teachers, causing several to seek transfers and other professional opportunities. At the conclusion of the fourth year, close to 90% of the teachers had transferred and financial incentives were put in place for teachers willing to accept employment at JMS and other schools of similarly high levels of poverty.

The second reason stems from my own personal history coming to the United Students at 13 years of age, not knowing English, and constantly feeling disengaged from school. This feeling of disengagement, paired with financial struggles, was exacerbated by watching my same-age cousins drop out of school in Brooklyn, New York, get jobs, and immediately become somewhat financially stable. I stayed in school while also having to assume adult financial and other responsibilities, which eliminated my ability to participate in my school’s extracurricular activities in sports and music.
In conducting this study, I tried to understand the students’ engagement from the perspective of an immigrant who came to the United States at the 13 years of age. Although I was, by all academic measures, a good student, due to my limitations with the English language, I struggled to survive in the New York City public school system. Leaving school for work seemed at that time to be a more practical approach to my financial and academic struggles. In many instances, it was truly tempting, but I found educators, administrators, family members, and school organizations at Franklin K. Lane High School and Queens College of the City University of New York (CUNY) to keep my interest and focus in graduating. My college application was initially rejected due to poor academic proficiency, but I was later accepted in the SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) program that allowed underperforming students to enter the CUNY system. This program allowed me to take remedial classes that granted me credit hours, but not college credits. This caused me to continually take on student loans and work various jobs to survive.

Working during high school can have a positive impact according a 1984 study by D’Amico. D’Amico concluded that students who worked during high school had lower rates of unemployment. However, when high school students assume adult responsibilities, such full-time employment to help fulfill the financial obligations of supporting themselves or their families, the trend reverses and students’ potential for dropout increases. That was precisely what occurred with my cousins, and they dropped out of school.

For these reasons I strove to remain mindful of Creswell’s (2013) recommendation to “position” myself in the writing through the “reflexivity” process,
becoming conscious of my biases, values, and experiences, both personal and professional (p. 216). In order to address the possibility of my own professional and personal biases in the analysis of the data, I followed Wolcott’s (2001) concept of analysis, which calls for a limited, more precise, and more clearly defined role for the data. I also adopted Creswell’s (2013) perspective, allowing the data to tell its own story, and finding patterns where the researcher establishes “correspondence” (p. 199) between two or more categories into findings.

The selection of this research topic and the three research questions was a very deliberate attempt to investigate schools that are addressing similar populations of students under similar socioeconomic conditions. The techniques helped to address research bias given my positionality within the context of this study. The elimination of bias was a focus throughout the analysis.

**Significance**

This research provides insight on how supportive programs can reduce the risk factors of student dropout by assisting students with reengagement in their academic life. Furthermore, due to the focus on middle to high school transition, this research informs early identification of students at risk of dropping out for secondary educators and administrators. This early identification may lead to the implementation of programs specifically tailored to address the risk factors that are linked to academic disengagement, as well as behavioral and attendance problems. Thus, collecting data regarding early identification aids in the analysis of the types of interventions available at different grade levels.

The findings have the potential of encouraging districts to re-evaluate current
practices, retention policies, and the role of timely interventions with supportive programs, such as wraparound services, to increase the reengagement of students. This study may also provide guidance to principals regarding their role in supporting students at risk of dropping out and encouraging synergy and collaboration between middle and high schools.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the dropout topic as a concluding event in a long trail of failures marked by academic disengagement, attendance and truancy problems, and behavior and disciplinary difficulties. The chapter also presented the research questions that guided the study’s design, as well as a description of the conceptual framework that framed the collection and analysis of data. The data gathered were subsequently analyzed and conclusions were reached on how two high schools and their feeder middle schools have demonstrated success with at risk students in majority-minority schools. These successful practices are reported in later chapters of this study. This study also examined the role of the principal and other stakeholders and the synergistic relationship, or lack thereof, between middle and high schools. The schools selected for the study possess the particular characteristics of serving majority-minority populations, having high percentages of students qualifying for the FRL program, and demonstrating success in graduating at risk students. In the following chapter, the literature review begins with a look at the historical background of education in the United States followed by an analysis of the literature relevant to student academic engagement, behavior, and attendance.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the pervasive and persistent nature of the student dropout problem in the United States, academics, practitioners, research and philanthropic foundations, different government agencies at various levels, as well as school districts, have produced a vast amount of research. This literature review concentrates on research that has contributed to a better understanding of student dropout, specifically dealing with at risk of dropping out characteristics related to academic failure, behavioral issues, and attendance or truancy problems.

This chapter begins with an overview of the research associated with the disparity of educational attainment throughout the history of the United States as it pertains to different groups: Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and others. This is followed by a review of the involvement and influence of federal and state governments in local education and the effects federal and state intervention on public education at the local district level. This review is complemented by a breakdown of the financial impact dropping out has on students and on society as a whole, particularly as it relates to SES. The financial impact is followed by a review of the research on the reasons, remedies, and practices in the areas of academic disengagement, behavioral problems, and attendance problems and their effect on student achievement for potential dropouts. It also includes a review of synergistic processes, a discussion on multicultural education, as well as a brief discussion of data-informed interventions. The final section is a summary and synthesis of this chapter.
Historical Disparity of Education in the United States

At the outset of the United States becoming a sovereign nation, education of the masses excluded key segments of the population, including Blacks and students from other races, as well as marginalized groups, such as women (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). During the colonial period, laws governing education were established with the intent of developing students’ morality based on values interpreted from the Christian Bible (Old and New Testaments) (Laud, 1997). According to Laud, the American Revolution marked a shift from the main purpose of education being the development of religious morals. In early 1800s after the American Revolution, education’s main objective became the attainment of knowledge through the establishment of common schools. This goal was particularly important to Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin.

Thomas Jefferson’s vision of his nascent country was to have an educated population in order for its citizens to be able to exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities. This new philosophical view of education was enacted with varying success and emphasis in the different states. In 1642, Massachusetts led the nation enacting into law the “condemnation of parents and masters who did not take steps to ensure their children could read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of this country” (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993 p. 25). Much later, in 1837, Horace Mann, the first Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education campaigned for new legislation that expanded the opportunity for education to include marginalized citizens. Mann was a proponent that education was a national necessity and had to be expanded (Bogotch, 2011).
However, the dereliction of responsibilities regarding education of Blacks and other groups remained a consistent and pervasive problem for the United States throughout the better part of the last two centuries. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1993), in 1850, only 1.8% of Blacks and other races in the United States were enrolled in public schools, compared to 59% of the White population for persons between the ages of five and 19 years. By 1900, the enrollment of Black students increased to 31.1%; by 1950, 74.8% of Black children were enrolled. It wasn’t until 1980 when the enrollment of Black children at 88.1% was nearly comparable to the enrollment of White children at 89%.

As the United States has evolved as a nation, the definition of literacy and the purpose of educating its citizens have also evolved. For instance, at the birth of the nation, the definition of literacy was limited in scope to the basic ability to read and write. Today, literacy is interpreted as the ability to gainfully function in a modern society (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). Thus, the educational marginalization of minority students has negatively impacted their ability to fully and gainfully function in modern society.

This marginalization in education has had a direct influence on society as a whole with regard to citizens’ ability to live, work, and reach their highest potential. According to a study sponsored by the National Governors Association (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009), student who drop out are less likely to be employed, more likely to receive various forms of public assistance, and more likely to be incarcerated. It is estimated that each high school student who drops out costs the public sector $209,100 over a lifetime in various types of public assistance (Princiotta & Reyna).
Randolph, Fraser, and Orthner (2006) concluded that, although many factors contribute to dropping out of high school, four factors are particularly influential: gender and race/ethnicity, early school experience (academic failure), school involvement (behavior), and participation in extracurricular activities. Another study by Lee (2002) stressed the complexities of the achievement opportunity divide asserting that family conditions, such as educational attainment, income, poverty, and being from single-parent household have a deleterious effect on student achievement. Lee also found that youth culture, behavior, and poor choices play a major role, as well as poor institutional and school conditions such as teaching, course taking, and other factors.

Educational reform is a key factor to a nation’s progress. Darling-Hammond (2010) established that nations around the world that experience success in education are expanding curriculum and access, dismantling rigid tracking systems, and investing time and other resources to staff development to meet the needs of their students. In conclusion, poverty, academic failure, and other socioeconomic issues, including the disparate treatment of racial and ethnic groups in the United States, have been linked to higher concentrations of student drop outs belonging to those groups (Randolph et al., 2006). Such youth represent a considerable loss of opportunity for the individual and an enormous economic drag on the society as a whole. McCollister, French, and Fang, 2010 analyzed the financial impact of crime on society, and the Alliance for Excellent Education (2013) used their data to conclude that a 5% increase in graduation among the male population, would represent and $18.5 billion in savings to the United States, including $58 million in savings to the State of Florida alone.
**Increase and concentration of minorities.** The percentage of minority students in U.S. public schools has shown a consistent increase, particularly throughout the 20th century. The minority student population is comprised mostly of Black and Hispanic students (Glass, 2008). The population of White students in 1972 was 77.8% and the total minority population was 22.2%. Almost 30 years later, in 2000, the White population comprised 61.3% of public school students, while the minority population increased to 38.7% of public school students (Glass, 2008). It is estimated that by 2020 the Black and Hispanic student population will reach 39%, while the White student population will be 53%.

Data measuring the distribution of public school enrollment in the United States’ largest school districts as of 2004 (see Table 2) depicts a high concentration of minority students in school districts in major urban areas. Table 2 also highlights a high concentration of families living in poverty, thus qualifying for the FRL program. Tropical County is not one of the largest U.S. school districts, but it was added to Table 2 for the purposes of this study.
Table 2

*Public School Enrollment by Racial/Ethnic Group in the Five Largest Districts 2004*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>SES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles (Unified), CA</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dade County, FL</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tropical County, FL</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total U.S.</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Source: KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, and Provasnik (2007).

The high concentration of families with multiple low-SES factors, which has been proven to negatively impact educational attainment, depicts a situation that must be addressed. Society benefits from the provision of education opportunities as way of decreasing crime and increasing the possibilities of these students becoming positively engaged socially and economically in their communities. Next, the disparity among students who complete high school and those who drop out is discussed.

**Disparity of completion and dropouts.** The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reported the rate of completion (ROC) for White, Black, and Hispanic students between the ages of 18 and 24 years not currently enrolled in school. ROC is defined as students who completed high school via traditional school or the general equivalency diploma (GED). The report showed no measurable statistical difference between male and female students’ ROC. The report did show that the disparity of the ROC between White, Black, and Hispanic students has decreased. Although White
students ROC remained the highest among these groups, in 1972 the difference in ROC between White and Black students was 13.9% and in 2012 the difference in ROC between White and Black students was 4.6%. The ROC disparity between White and Hispanic students in 1972 was 30% and decreased to 11.8% by 2012 (see Table 3).

However, these numbers do not paint the entire picture for high school completion and dropout. While there are states with an overall ROC of 89%, such as Iowa, there are other districts and states with a ROC of 56% (Washington, DC) and 63% (Nevada) (Stark, Noel, & McFarland, 2015).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>87.7%</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
<td>91.8%</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total U.S.</td>
<td>82.2%</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
<td>87.2%</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Source: Stark et al. (2015).*

High school dropout rates are often concentrated in high poverty, high minority schools. Schools with more than a 40% dropout rate have been derogatorily labeled as “dropout factories” (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). The three states with the largest numbers of dropout factories are Texas with 206 schools representing 16.2% of the state’s dropouts, Florida with 186 schools representing 38.8% of the state’s dropouts, and California with 147 dropout factories representing 13.4% of the state’s dropouts (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). These schools have a high percentage of students who
qualify for the FRL program as well as high percentages of minority students, two factors that have been determined to be correlated with poor performance and drop out risk (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

As a nation, the United States has seen a considerable improvement in ROC on the whole with a 12.4% increase from 82.2% in 1972 to 94.6% in 2012 (see Table 3). The White student population during this same time period improved from 86% to 94.6%. Black students showed a considerable improvement from 72.1% to 90%, which marks a 17.9% improvement. Hispanic students showed the greatest improvement from 56% to 82.8%, a gain of 26.8%. However, Hispanic students showed the lowest ROC of all of the ethnic groups with 82.8%. Although the progress for ROC among the different ethnic groups is encouraging, the difference of 12 percentage points between White and Latino students and four percentage points between White and Black students is cause to continue the work and increase the implementation of programs and initiatives to benefit disenfranchised students.

The Role of Federal and State Government in the Era of Accountability

The U.S. Department of Education was created shortly after the Civil War for the purpose of collecting statistics and disseminating information amongst the states (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). Since its creation, the U.S. Department of Education was also limited in scope with regard to dictating policies to the states. Essentially, the American system of education at the federal level follows the philosophy of decentralized government that should be limited in scope and influence, as defined by the 10th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which states that powers not delegated to the federal government or prohibited by the Constitution are reserved to the states.
(Ikenberry, 1974; U.S. Const. amend. X). But, as time has gone by, the federal
government has sought to play an increasingly active role under the 14th Amendment’s
provision of “general welfare” (Center on Education Policy, 1999, p. 3; U.S. Const.
amend. XIV).

One of the most conspicuous instances requiring the federal government’s direct
involvement in educational matters in modern times was when the Supreme Court ruled
that segregation of schools was unconstitutional in the landmark case Brown v. Board of
the status quo in many states. Many states reacted by ignoring the outcome, keeping in
place discriminatory policies and practices that underserved Black students (Smith,
2005), thereby testing the resolve of the federal authorities. Smith suggested that these
vestiges of discriminatory practices created monumental legal and psychological battles
in a number of states, obligating the states, and/or the federal government in some cases,
to intervene and forcibly apply the law in the spirit of creating education systems that
serve the needs of all students with greater equality.

The historical inequities or achievement gap has been dubbed a loss of
opportunity by Ladson-Billings (2006) referring to the disparity of educational
achievement as an education debt. The comparison stems from the analogy that when
government spends more than its anticipated revenue, it is operating under a deficit.
Ladson-Billings posited that as far as students of colors are concerned, the United States
has been operating under an education deficit or debt for hundreds of years in large
measure due to historical, economical, socio-political, and education decisions and
policies.
The federal government has also played a major role in an array of major educational changes, such as the following:

- In 1900, the U.S. Congress established the imposition of federal and state taxes to support education.

- In 1965, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed, providing aid to school districts and states to improve education for children from low-income families. Later amendments included educational opportunities for limited language proficiency and Native American students.

- In 1972, the U.S. Congress adopted the enactment and enforcement of the Title IX Education Amendment, prohibiting the discrimination against students based on gender.

- In 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Act was signed, which provided financial assistance to states to cover the cost of providing equitable education for students with disabilities (Center on Education Policy, 1999).

The federal government also became increasingly involved in local educational practices with the expressed pursuit of performance accountability and more rigorous standards. Many federal funds and programs were conditioned by strict measures of implementation at the state and local levels (Ravitch, 2010). One of the most profound and pervasive impacts of federal policies came with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, signed into law in 2002 by the George W. Bush administration. The main tenets of NCLB were to make standardized exams scores the primary measure of school quality in the name of accountability. The NCLB movement replaced the Clinton administration’s Goal 2000 initiative, which was focused on curricular improvement through a standards-
based education in order to increase academic rigor (Ravitch, 2010).

NCLB contained six basic elements that affected state and local educational practices:

1. States identified academic standards for core classes;
2. States created assessment systems and monitored students toward meeting standards;
3. States provided schools and districts with report cards and disaggregated data by students’ ethnicity and subgroups in different categories;
4. States created a system of labels to inform communities about how their local schools were performing;
5. States created an Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) plan for 100% proficiency by academic year 2014-2015, which established tracking by the creation of subgroups along the lines of ethnicity and SES; and
6. States came up with rewards and sanctions for schools, educators, and students in relation to states’ goals in their respective AYP plans (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2006).

States that did not comply with the law were threatened to lose billions of dollars in Title I funding (Nichols et al., 2006). The provision meant that states with a high concentration of minority students were forced to make considerable efforts to comply with the demands of NCLB, particularly pertaining to the measurement of proficiency of minority subgroups and, in the process, had to also make sacrifices in other areas of education (Glass, 2008). Glass advanced that many states implemented these measures of accountability differently in order to address the educational exigencies of the state.
government and adherence to the NCLB due to the politics of race and ethnicity. Glass (2008) shared powerful data: “…the severity of education accountability measures varies in relation to the percentage of Hispanics or Non-White population growth in the state” (p. 208). In addition, Nichols et al. (2006) conducted research of 25 states that adopted high-stakes testing programs and applied an accountability pressure rating (APR) to measure the level of pressure on education policies. They found a direct correlation between states with high percentages of minority students and a high APR. In his testimony before the U.S. Senate, Robert Balfanz (Fixing No Child Left Behind, 2015) stressed that a key component to continued improvement for graduation is a strong synergistic approach between the federal and state governments and local communities, taking into account the high concentration of at risk students in many schools. The aim should be to directly address the main effects of student disengagement: impact of homelessness (or poor living conditions), food insecurity, exposure to violence, and poor academic support.

After the implementation of NCLB, the nation’s education system grappled with evaluating its effects in the political arena and in the world of education. Ravitch (2010) postulated that NCLB’s goal of 100% proficiency would only work if states simplify their meaning of proficiency. As a result, student learning gains plateaued, decreased, or increased very little, according to an analysis by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Fuller, Wight, Gesicki, & Kang, 2007).

The urgency of accountability has produced an array interventions that has also produced data in various formats and enabled the drawing of conclusions as to whether or not schools are being effective. The challenge now is to determine whether schools are
measuring what really matters. McTighe (2018) posed three essential questions in this regard: What really matters in contemporary education; how should we assess what really matters; and how might assessment enhance learning that matters, not just measure it?

The approach taken by the federal and state governments in the implementation of NCLB, particularly in the pursuit of greater accountability through high stakes assessments, has had negative effects in schools serving high-poverty, high minority students. Driven by the demands of these policies, many states enacted grade retention policies, limited curricular opportunities, demonstrated inability to address issues related to social economic situations, stigmatized schools and communities, and did not adequately address the quality of the educators serving those communities (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fixing No Child Left Behind, 2015; Glass, 2008; Hong & Youngs, 2008; Noguera, 2012; Ravitch, 2010).

**High Stakes Accountability and its Effects on Dropping out of School**

The role and influence of the federal government has increased as different administrations have looked to establish public positions on education reform. In 1983, under the Reagan administration, the *A Nation at Risk* report was published, galvanizing the attention of the nation with its claims that other nations were surpassing the United States in educational attainment (Ravitch, 2010). The report called for college admission reform across the board, affecting K-12 as well as post-secondary education. Ravitch asserted that the opportunities to improve American education presented by *A Nation at Risk* were transformed into a race toward increased testing, privatization of schools, and increased control by the states, as well as undue influence by the federal government with the NCLB act: “Whereas the authors of *A Nation at Risk* concerned themselves with the
quest and breadth of the curriculum… No Child Left Behind concerned itself with basic skills… It promoted a cramped, mechanistic, profoundly anti-intellectual definition of education” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 29). Ravitch referred to the transition from the tenets of *A Nation at Risk* to the mandates of NCLB as a lost opportunity.

Nichols et al.’s (2006) research is consistent with both Ravitch’s (2010) and Hong and Youngs’ (2008) conclusions that high stakes accountability has had a negative effect on the curriculum. Holding schools accountable also stigmatized majority-minority populations with low performing schools without taking into account socioeconomic conditions, the poor quality of many of the teachers, and the poorer condition of many of the school buildings and facilities serving majority-minority populations (Hong & Youngs, 2008).

Leithwood, Steinbach, and Jantzi (2002) also advanced that NCLB practices had a negative impact on teacher anxiety and frustration, which, in turn, lessened their motivation to implement the accountability measures. Leithwood et al. (2002) concluded that administrators could serve as antidotes for the negative effects of the accountability policies. The researchers referred to the top-down, NCLB-type accountability measures as “control strategies” (p. 113) and contrasted these control strategies with “commitment strategies” (Leithwood et al., 2002, p. 113). They determined that control strategies’ effects are overrated by governments and, by contrast, commitment strategies look to develop educators’ commitment to their work in a manner that is more synergistic, unleashing energy and expertise without as much fear and anxiety.

NCLB is based on the premise that accountability motivates educators and leaders to perform at a higher level (Finnigan & Gross, 2007). Finnegan and Gross concurred
with Leithwood et al. (2002) and analyzed several studies related to the issue of accountability, concluding that accountability measures had a mild effect on teacher motivation and a negative effect on their commitment in low performing schools. They also found a misalignment of policy and individual teacher goals, as well as inadequate time and resources (Finnigan & Gross, 2007). Hong and Youngs (2008) opined that while students’ scores at the state level rose after the implementation of the system of accountability through high stakes testing, several studies indicated that these methods had a deleterious effect on the curriculum, instruction, student engagement, and increased dropouts, particularly for minority and socioeconomically disenfrenchised students.

NCLB’s accountability policies represented professional and evaluation consequences for teachers, administrators, and schools districts. The pressures created by these policies have lent themselves to manipulation, which has disproportionately affected minority students and students in poverty at a much higher rate (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008). McNeil et al. (2008) found that the disaggregation of data by race does not lead to greater equity. Quite the contrary, NCLB accountability policies created a system of evaluative pressures that caused some districts and states to manipulate student academic progress with the intent of showing greater gains. The researchers found that in Texas “the obsessive focus on test scores” (McNeil et al., 2008, p. 5) was the rationale for implementing a system of waivers causing students in the ninth grade to be retained if they showed signs of potentially not scoring well in standandized exams in 10th grade. When administrators used this waiver to strategically retain a child in ninth grade, they excluded those students from participating in the 10th grade administration of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) (McNeil et al.,
These retentions caused a number of ripple effects, including arbitrarily inflated scores that did not represent the true measure of proficiency and also caused an increased number of students dropping out of school due to academic frustration and related factors. The inflated results on standardized exams benefited educators and schools whose evaluations depended on these scores. As demonstrated, such government initiatives often fail to estimate the amount of influence teachers’ commitment and buy-in have in their implementation. Accountability policies may have the effect of increasing the popularity with some voters, but it comes at the cost of eroding the legitimacy of educators (Glass, 2008).

**NCLB’s Zero Tolerance and its Impact on Students**

The impact of NCLB has had other consequences that negatively affected minority student groups and those who come from low-SES communities. In 2013, the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania commissioned a study to look into the effects of the zero tolerance in Pennsylvania schools and found conclusive data on the effects of zero tolerance initiatives and their application under the guidelines of NCLB. Zero tolerance policies were developed in the 1990s. The term “zero tolerance” was adopted from the efforts to stop drug trafficking in the United States. The original intent behind the adoption of this term was to address many forms of violence occurring in schools throughout the nation in three main ways:

1. Develop violence prevention and conflict resolution programs;
2. Establish gun and other weapon control laws; and
3. Implement judicial forms of punitive measures (Casella, 2003).

Under the tenets of NCLB, zero tolerance was interpreted broadly, which widened
its scope to include guns and other weapons, drug related issues, and disciplinary issues dealing with violence, as well as non-violent disciplinary occurrences. Essentially, NLCB included school safety provisions which, in turn, required districts and states to adopt tough disciplinary measures in order to be in compliance with NCLB.

These practices of zero tolerance enhanced a school-to-prison pipeline and extreme disciplinary consequences that were most severely applied to minority students and students from poor communities (Casella, 2003). Suspensions and expulsions increased the likelihood of becoming involved in the criminal system, which also led to an increased number of school dropouts (Casella, 2003). A study conducted in Texas followed the application and expansion of tough disciplinary actions under NCLB and found that 31% of students who were suspended or expelled repeated grades. By contrast, only 5% of other students who were not excluded from school via punitive measures repeated grades. The report also found that only 3% of the expulsions and suspensions were within the mandates of the law and 97% of the cases were discretionary decisions made by school administrators (American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, 2013).

**Financial and Legal Impacts of Dropping Out**

The federal and state government’s role in education is a realization that educated citizens strengthen democracy and become more gainfully involved in the progress of their communities and the nation (Laud, 1997; National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). Furthermore, there is a direct relationship between the level of education and an individual’s socioeconomic status (D’Amico, 1984).

With the increased involvement of the federal and state government,
organizations, such as the National Governors Association through the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), provide policy guidance and recommendations on educational matters pursuing and prescribing educational goals and objectives (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). The Achieving Graduation for All report (Princiotta & Reyna 2009), commissioned by the NGA Center, provided a plan to assist school districts in addressing the dropout problem. A number of states and districts have implemented variations of these recommendations. The report directs school districts to address the dropout issues in three specific ways: actively promoting graduation or completion, assigning someone the responsibility for dropout prevention, and finding ways to reengage students who were determined at risk of dropping out. The report also suggested that school districts find rigorous and relevant ways for students to finish high school, whether through traditional pathways or by obtaining the GED (Fries, Carney, Blackman-Urteaga, & Savas, 2012). For instance, the wraparound support process was restructured to meet the NGA Center guidelines. These modifications to the wraparound support process aim to meet the educational needs of different states, which is an indicator of the influence the NGA has had on educational practice (Fries et al., 2012).

**Financial impact.** Dropping out of school not only impacts the lives of the students financially, but also their families, their communities, and various aspects of the economy. This is due to the fact that students who drop out of school form a population of Americans who are more likely to be unemployed or see long stretches of unemployment (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Cities with high levels of high school dropouts have higher levels of inter-generational poverty, lower tax revenues, higher social service expenses, more crime, and less civic participation (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Over a
lifetime, it is estimated that high school dropouts will require over $210,000 of public
sector support such as health, legal, economic, and other forms of aid relative to projected
lower earning and the needs for social services and court involvement (Levin et al.,
2007).

Students who drop out frequently perform “dead-end” jobs where advancement is not a possibility. There is a negative correlation between students who drop out, job attainment, and earning capacity, according to Kim (2013). The poverty line for a family of four is $23,850.00 a year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). The mean annual earning between 2006 and 2011 for someone without a high school diploma was $20,873.00, increasing over five years to $21,107.00 in 2011, a difference of $234.00. For high school graduates, the average annual earning was $31,071 in 2006, increasing to $32,404.00 in 2011, a difference of $1,333.00. For students who completed a bachelor’s degree, the average earning was $56,788.00 in 2006, increasing to $59,415.00 in 2011, a difference of $2,627.00.

For females, the situation is worse. The median hourly wage for women without a high school diploma is 25% less than men without a high school diploma. Women with a bachelor’s degree earn 22% less than men with a bachelor’s degree (Mason, 2009). This information is important because it demonstrates that female students who drop out of school are more likely to live below the poverty line, thereby initiating or perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Besides these economic indicators, poor or inadequate education of Black males creates a ripple effect of consequences that permeates every aspect of their lives. Besides the socioeconomic effects and considerably limiting their ability to have productive lives,
it also presents indelible signs of academic inadequacies, which contribute to enduring inequality, claims of inferior intelligence based on race, and inadequate early language development and cognitive stimulation (McCarthy & Morote, 2009).

**Legal impact.** Students who drop out of school are also more likely to become involved in the penal system. Sum et al. (2009) concluded that incidents of correctional institutionalizations among high school dropouts were more than 63 times higher than among four-year college graduates. Another study by Neild and Balfanz at The Johns Hopkins University (2006) conducted in Philadelphia found that 90% of students who had juvenile justice placements ultimately dropped out of school.

Noguera (2003a) advanced that if left unaddressed, the behavior and disciplinary issues exhibited by students in school escalate as they get older. Noguera further stated that as behavior problems escalate, so do consequences, frequently leading to entanglement with the penal system. Hirschfield (2009) found that there is a direct causality between dropping out of school and arrests. Hirschfield conducted a study of an inner city, majority-minority school in Chicago and found that students who were arrested in the ninth or 10th grade were 3.5 times more likely to drop out in those same grade levels.

**Academic disengagement.** Lack of academic engagement is often the beginning stage of the process of dropping out of school. Academic engagement incorporates behavioral, cognitive, and affective components that entice the students to remain committed to the learning process (Caraway et al., 2003). By contrast, some of the most common indicators of academic disengagement and subsequent academic failure are frequent low and failing grades, poor parental involvement, poor homework and study
habits, and poor performance on standardized exams, as well as grade retention (Jimerson, Woehr, Kaufman, Anderson, 2004). For the purpose of this study, disengagement is defined based on studies by Jimerson et al. (2002) and Caraway et al. (2003), as the process by which students become marginalized from the learning environment over the long-term concluding with dropping out of school.

The provision of timely support when students begin to deviate is a key element for the development of self-efficacy in academic reengagement (Bandura et al., 1996). Caraway et al. (2003) also concluded that there is a direct correlation between the provision of guidance and support towards self-efficacy and students’ higher academic aspirations and low levels of depression. The study concluded that successful student engagement involves affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. A prior study by Carlson et al. (1999) concluded that there is causality between early support and intervention at the childhood and early adolescent stages and high school graduation. The longitudinal study spanned 17-year and investigated students enrolled in 100 different schools. The study yielded the conclusion that there exists causality between early and timely intervention and academic success.

Concentrating on addressing the problem by targeting the at risk factors generalized to the race or the ethnic group of the student, such as Blacks and Hispanics, is not effective (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007). The focus should be on addressing the specific factors that contribute to students’ deficiency in school, such as academic failure, repeating grades due to failures, and different effects of low SES. Carpenter and Ramirez posited that school leaders should draft dropout prevention policies so that school-based practitioners can provide individualized practices of support in local conditions.
The structure where students can be provided foundational support for their development is often challenged by the context and socioeconomic conditions surrounding the schools and other institutions in students’ lives. Research sponsored by the Wallace Foundation concluded that: “Preparing all youth for meaningful, productive futures requires coordinated efforts and intentional practices by adults across all the settings youth inhabit on a daily basis” (Nagaoka et al., 2015, p. 1).

**Grade retention.** Academic failure is a process that develops over a period of time. One of the critical events of this process for some students is grade retention. Grade retention is when students are required to repeat a grade, which increases the possibilities of dropping out of school (Finn & Rock, 1997). A study concluded that 78% of high school students who dropped out were retained at least once (Jimerson et al., 2002). Students retained in elementary school have a more difficult time in the transition to middle and high school than students who are continually promoted (Im et al., 2013). Grade retention correlates to dropping out of school and has created an over representation of boys among retained students (Maslin-Ostrowski, 1992). Also, retained students are victims of stigma when they find themselves segregated from their age cohort (Maslin-Ostrowski, 1992).

Grade retention is not implemented equitably across different ethnic groups or across male and female students in American schools; the percentage of retention of Black students is higher than for White students and boys are more likely to be retained than girls (Eide & Showalter, 2000). Citing figures from the National Center for Educational Statistics, Eide and Showalter stated that the cost of retention nationally in 1997 was $2.6 billion, affecting over 450,000 students. According to Hauser, Simmons,
and Pager (2000), by age nine, the odds of retention for Black and Hispanic students were 50% greater than for White students. The researchers attributed the difference to socioeconomic deprivation and unfavorable geographic locations.

According to the Florida Association of School Psychologists (2015), retention in Florida has decreased over the last decade from over 201,000 to just over 101,000 students. These retentions occurred mostly in grades nine through 12, followed by students retained in grades K-2. But, due to the approval of high stakes accountabilities statutes by the state legislature, students in third grade are being increasingly retained if they fail to perform well on state assessments. The repetition of a grade by those students costs the state over $408,000 annually to cover the expenses of doing so (Florida Association of School Psychologists, 2015).

The Florida Association of School Psychologists (2015) encourages a multi-tiered support system and formative assessment measures to provide timely academic support and calls for the provision of an array of supportive measures for students identified as at risk of dropping out, among other evidence-based alternatives. The program of intervention must be considered along with the short and long-term effects on students as they look to regain the academic ground they have lost to retention. If the curricular program chosen as an intervention strategy is not strategically selected to meet the unique needs of the student, it may serve to perpetuate unrealistic expectations, thereby exacerbating academic proficiency problems for the student (Maslin-Ostrowski, 1992).

Since No Child Left Behind was signed into law, there have been more students retained than ever before due to an increase in the process of school accountability (Jimerson et al., 2006). Jimerson et al. found that from the time NCLB was enacted in
2002, more than three million students were retained, which represents an increase of up to 15% over the previous decade. The increase of accountability measures has caused states to augment overall grade retention practices, which in turn are linked to an increase in the number of students retained. The way to measure this accountability is through students’ scores on standardized exams in reading, math, writing, and science. Students are frequently retained when they fail to perform satisfactorily on these standardized exams.

For the purpose of this study, I collected data regarding the provisions for course recovery, academic reengagement programs, as well as academic and social support towards successful completion of high school. Besides studying academic supportive efforts to reengage students, I also collected data on how schools look to remedy the negative effects of grade retention (Im et al., 2013).

**Timely Intervention and Graduation**

Understanding the antecedents to dropping out can provide schools with vital information to implement timely interventions and address those indicators: poor academic achievement, disciplinary problems, low self-esteem, failing classes, truancy, and so on. In order to gain a better understanding of these early indicators, Carlson et al. (1999) conducted a study involving 10 researchers from the University of Minnesota seeking to find answers to three specific issues:

- The predictability of high school adjustment from early parent-child relationship variables;
- How early high school adjustment could be predicted from an individuals’ socio-emotional values; and
• The predictability of socio-emotional variables from early to middle childhood based on high school adjustment, controlling for achievement and social and emotional adjustment during middle childhood.

Independent variables included early parental support, student support for emotional health and self-esteem, and relations with peers. Key findings in this research were the ability to adjust as the student ages and progresses through grade levels.

“The findings support the predictive powers of pre-adolescent social and emotional factors” (Carlson et al., 1999, p. 87). Some of the findings were given ratings from excellent to very poor for overall adjustment:

• Excellent overall adjustment was reflected in socio-emotional functioning and attitude and motivation toward academic work.

• Good adjustment was reflected in both socio-emotional function and academic work.

• Adequate adjustment was reflected in minor problems with respect to attitude and motivation towards academic work.

• Fair adjustment was reflected in various socio-emotional problems and more significant problems. These students are frequently suspended and enrolled in correctional facilities.

• Poor and very poor adjustment was reflected in truancy, poor academic performance, and subsequent dropping out of school (Carlson et al., 1999).

A form of early and proactive intervention is the Head Start program, which enables low-income families to send their children to study at a younger age (Florida Head Start State Collaboration Office, 2018). McCarthy and Morote (2009) conducted
research in order to determine whether or not there was a causal link between Head Start and high school graduation. The study spanned from 1964 to 2005 and concluded that there is positive causality between preadolescent intervention addressing social and emotional factors and high school graduation. The study also examined how Head Start funding affected Black male graduation, showing a strong causality for high school graduation for Black males who participated in Head Start. This study also contributed to the conclusion that timely intervention and investment of resources have a direct effect on positively engaging students and neutralizing the adverse effects of academic problems caused by socioeconomic and other factors.

**Behavior and Disciplinary Problems**

Disciplinary problems in secondary schools represent a serious issue due to the fact that students in secondary schools have a higher propensity to engage in deviant behaviors (Matjasko, 2011). The behavior or disciplinary problems and poor adjustment to school affect students’ academic progress. When students exhibit poor adjustment and deviant behaviors, schools often resort to exclusionary tactics (Arcia, 2006). Exclusionary tactics are when schools exclude students from the classroom to serve as punitive measures for poor behavior. This supports the findings of Cairns, Cairns, and Nockermann (1989), who concluded that there is a direct correlation between aggressive behavior, retention, and academic disengagement. In the following paragraph, implications of behavior and disciplinary problems are discussed.

**Exclusion from school and its effect on students.** In the spirit of zero tolerance, which mandates predetermined and severe consequences for specific offenses, such as drug use, possession, and sales, and violence, many students are excluded from class for
disruptive behaviors and given internal or external suspension (Matjasko, 2011). This exclusion from the learning process has proven to have a direct correlation with dropping out of school (Arcia, 2006). Furthermore, this disciplinary consequence is applied more frequently to Black and Latino students and students from low SES backgrounds (Matjasko, 2011). Thompson and Webber (2010) found that students, particularly in majority-minority schools, come from very different cultural backgrounds from their teachers. This disparity creates further disciplinary obstacles for students who are forced to conform to the disciplinary norms of the dominant culture.

When schools resort to exclusionary discipline consequences to remedy disciplinary problems, they intend it to be a punishment. However, for students who are academically disenfranchised and show disinterest in school, this exclusion may be deemed as the reward they pursue with their poor behaviors (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013). Discipline is not just about behavior; it is also about academics. Toldson and Ebanks (2014) found that students of all races, who perceived their teachers to be caring, respectful, empathetic, and less punitive, generally reported higher grades. This study also concluded that Black students perceived their teachers to be significantly more punitive. Many suspensions are the result of cumulative disciplinary referrals, nonviolent events, and misinterpretation of cultural expression from Black students by non-Black teachers. Toldson and Ebanks also concluded in their research that Latinos were suspended at higher rates than White student, but at lower rates than Black students.

An article authored by Wayne Mahood (1981), challenged educators to question whether students who exhibit at risk of dropping out behaviors and truancy are “dropouts” or “push-outs.” The author urged educational systems to reconsider the
practice of exclusion and take into account the problems that students who drop out create for themselves and for society by providing examples of detrimental economic indicators for such students. Mahood also provided ideas for creating supportive schools for students who exhibit at risk behaviors. Blomberg (2004) concurred and stated that the way schools implement exclusion from classes due to poor behavior has been misapplied and unfairly used against minority students.

**Disciplinary gap and intervention.** The negative impact to students who frequently receive disciplinary consequences in schools should not be underestimated, according to Gregory and Weinstein (2008). In their research, Gregory and Weinstein studied the discipline gap in schools between non-White and White students. The researchers concluded that students who exhibit poor behavior are tracked as behavioral problems or are placed in lower-level classes, miss a considerable amount academic time, develop a negative academic identity, and have a higher potential of becoming truant. The authors also delve into the importance and benefits of developing a trusting relationship between students and their teacher as a way of addressing disciplinary problems as follows: demand the best, exercise authority as compassionate disciplinarians, and demonstrate that they, the teachers, genuinely care for the student. An ethnographic study by Ladson-Billings (1994) showed that teachers who combined warmth and demandingness were perceived as exemplary teachers with lower rates of disciplinary disruptions. The most successful teachers demand the best of their students, successfully exercise authority, establish trust and cooperation, and are seen by the students as compassionate disciplinarians.

Educational leaders should expose teachers to dialogues and cultural nuances to
improve their understanding of the application of school rules demonstrated by effective teachers-students relations in majority-minority schools. Trainings, such as multicultural awareness workshops, have also proven to be effective in lowering discipline problems because they increase teachers’ sensitivity to students’ social backgrounds and cultural particularities (Toldson & Ebanks, 2014). Building capacity through training is a key issue because teachers with poor teaching efficacy typically conclude that students’ potential is limited by factors outside the control of the teachers: home environment, family background, and parental influence. Teachers who reach such conclusions are less motivated to reach out to their students and often fail to attempt the implementation of positive disciplinary tactics or fail to elicit other types of support for their students (Pas, Bradshaw, Hershfeldt, & Leaf, 2010).

Efficacy has a direct causative effect on student behavior (Toldson & Ebanks, 2014). The higher the number of disruptions, the more likely teachers will resort to reactive and exclusionary forms of discipline. Teachers with low efficacy use more punitive and reactive strategies, such as exclusion and referrals, as behavior management. On the other hand, teachers with higher efficacy have demonstrated the positive correlation between effective instruction, classroom management, and student behavior (Pas et al., 2010).

Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013) concluded that there is a growing trend to supplant punitive behavior remedies that exclude students from the learning environment with positive behavior support strategies that seek to teach students how to gain the necessary coping skills to implement in adverse situations. During the 2009-2010 school year in the United States, over two million students were suspended from school, mostly due to
minor code violations, such as disruption in class, tardiness, dress code violations, and other violations not considered to be serious criminal behavior. Most of the suspended students were Black and Hispanic (Losen & Martinez, 2013). The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of a report produced by the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania (2013) that concluded that excluding students from class did not deter future misbehavior, but rather contributed to negative social and economic consequences for the surrounding communities. This study also concurred with previous findings that the most disadvantaged groups are being suspended, and also found that the trend has increased as depicted in Table 4. One of the most startling statistics found in the report is that nationally, 36% of all Black males with disabilities enrolled in middle and high schools were suspended at least once in 2009-2010 (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

Table 4


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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
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<td>Native American</td>
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In the State of Florida, teachers’ necessity for understanding societal and cultural dynamics in majority-minority schools is a factor because of the disparity in ethnic or cultural background between students and their teachers. According to the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) (2012), in 2012, 71% of all public school teachers in
the state were White, 13.16% were Black, and 13.15% were Latino. The teacher to student ratio in Florida that same year was as follows: 9:1 for Whites, 27:1 for Blacks, and 34:1 for Hispanics/Latinos. In TCPS, where this study was conducted, 75% of the student population is of minority descent, yet only 42% of teachers are Black, Latino, or another racial or ethnic minority (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2012).

**Attendance and Truancy**

Academic engagement, behavior problems, and poor attendance are interrelated. Student engagement in school includes cognitive, behavioral, and emotional connection (Niehaus et al., 2012). Missing school is not, necessarily, a sign of disengagement, as there are legitimate reasons for students to be out of school. For instance, socioeconomic factors associated with the family often play a role on obligating students to be out of school and miss participation in extracurricular activities, which have been proven to decrease the odds of dropping out (Randolph et al., 2006). Truancy is directly related to low expectations and low grades and is the most common determinant of dropping out of school (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009).

A study by Balfanz (2009) concluded that when students have not addressed attendance problems in middle school, their truancy is exacerbated by the time they get to high school, resulting in an increased possibility of dropping out. Balfanz expressed that measures must be taken where every absence elicits a response that can range from a simple outreach to a more complex and systemic parental engagement in order to acknowledge the importance of attendance. Schools can also celebrate attendance consistency, separate attendance from academic consequences, and remove punitive actions, such as lowering grades or not allowing make up assignments. Students cannot
learn if they are not in school. Districts with low graduation rates often have chronic student absenteeism (Balfanz, 2009).

Student absenteeism is prevalent across the United States. Over seven million students miss more than three weeks of school each year. Furthermore, a fifth of the nation’s schools report that 20% or more of their student body are chronically absent (Jordan & Miller, 2017). Jordan and Miller posited that schools should implement measures to hold themselves accountable and engage community leaders to address root causes of absenteeism, whether it be due to chronic illness, poverty, unsafe communities and schools, and unduly harsh disciplinary policies.

**Truancy due to assuming adult responsibilities.** When students assume adult behavior, such as full-time employment and parenting, their school attendance is negatively impacted. Pregnancy and early parenting responsibilities have been found to be linked to at risk factors of poor attendance, increasing the possibility of truancy, and dropping out school (Jones, 2003). Neild and Balfanz (2006) also found that although male students have a higher dropout rate than female students, two thirds of female students who gave birth during high school dropped out. Furthermore, Neild and Balfanz also found that young women who drop out are nine times more likely to be single parents. The adult lives of these students cause them to be absent from school with more frequency than their peers.

There are conflicting conclusions regarding high school students who work. A study conducted in 2007 by Lee and Staff found that there is a direct correlation between high school dropout and students who work “intensively” (p. 158), defined as working more than 20 hours per week. Lee and Staff also concluded that the evidence
demonstrating the correlation between the high number of hours students work and high school dropout was robust, even for students who experience certain success in school. They further advanced that this problem is exacerbated when students come from low SES and minority groups.

In contrast, a much earlier 1976 report on youth employment commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, found that students who work during their high school years increase their chances of graduation. The report concluded that such students are more successful finding work after they graduate high school because they learn to develop perseverance, dependability, and consistency, which are important attributes to being a successful student (Timpane, Abramowitz, Borrow, & Pascal, 1976).

D’Amico (1984) reached a different conclusion years later. D’Amico found that students who worked more intensively were more likely to drop out because their time at work negatively impacted study time and participation in extracurricular activities. Participating in extracurricular activities has a positive correlation to graduation.

Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson (2005) reaffirmed D’Amico’s 1984 conclusion, but also asserted a distinction between the type of work and the amount of work students perform while in high school. Entwisle et al. (2005) found that students who performed typical teenage work during high school, such as baby sitting, lawn mowing, etc., actually increased their chances of graduation, but students who performed worked similar to adults increased the possibility of dropping out of school. Their research found that this disparity affects mostly disadvantaged students and established that, often, these youngsters are forced to work to support their family for immediate financial benefit as
opposed to the long-term benefits of achieving a college education.

**Supportive Intervention Through Social Emotional Learning**

As previously discussed, the provision of timely support is a key component for student reengagement and success, specifically when students begin to deviate from self-efficacy in academic, behavioral, and attendance progress and require guidance towards reengagement (Bandura et al., 1996). In order to provide orientation, guidance, and other strategies for reengagement, schools resort to supportive programs. In this effort to understand and implement ways to support students and contribute to the development of their cognitive and non-cognitive skills to engage with societal demands, the topic of social emotional learning (SEL) has been getting much needed attention. This topic has emerged with such urgency that all 50 states have SEL standards at the pre-school level and many others have established standards in grades K-12 (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Jones and Doolittle concluded that SEL is a vital component of academic achievement and later success in life, hence the importance many school systems have given to SEL.

Structuring an objective framework that defines actionable plans for the implementation of SEL programs has proven to be difficult. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning offers an SEL model based on five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Jones and Doolittle (2017) organized an SEL framework around three competencias rather than five: self regulation, emotional processes, and social and interpersonal skills. A report by the The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (Nagaoka et al., 2015) sponsored by the Wallace Foundation proffered an SEL developmental framework centered on three key factors: agency,
integrated identity, and competencies. Agency refers to choice-making about one’s life plan, integrated identity refers to incorporating different aspects of oneself to positively engage the world around oneself, and competencies refers to the adaptability of demands of the context around oneself. The National Governors Association has also delved into offering goals for a supportive structure for students around the concept of SEL. The plan recommended a multi-faceted approach promoting four major areas of proactive interventions. Action one promotes high school graduation for all students. Action two targets youth at risk of dropping out. Action three reengages youth who have dropped out. Lastly, action four provides rigorous and relevant options for earning a high school diploma (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009).

**Emotional support.** Results of a research conducted by Curby, Rimm-Kaufman, and Abry (2013) concluded that there is a reciprocal relationship between emotional and instructional support. This research also advanced that providing teachers with training on the provision of emotional support contributes to improving instructional quality in later years. This research also suggests that organizational support for teachers to strengthen their ability to provide emotional support for students is conducive to better student-teacher relations. Such classroom support encompasses interaction of teachers and students in the classroom in three different areas: emotional, organizational, and instructional (Curby et al., 2013). In essence, providing student support in these areas enables teachers to provide better quality lessons and increase student engagement.

Many factors play a role in causing students to drop out, including many non-academic factors (Wells, Gifford, Bai, & Corra, 2013). Given this fact, Wells et al. also concluded that such a diversity of factors calls for diverse response that include various
aspects of social and emotional intervention. This study elaborated on the interventions of community organizations and the provision of social and emotional support, particularly from organizations such as the YMCA, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Club, United Way, and local city governments.

**Synergistic Practices and Collaborations**

This study defines synergistic collaboration based on Bititci et al.’s (2007) definition of synergy. Bititci et al. advanced the following four perspectives of synergistic models:

1. Strategic synergy: ensures that participants have common ground, goals and expectations;
2. Operational synergy: ensures that each partner’s internal management processes and difficulties are understood and resolved;
3. Cultural synergy: ensures compatibility regarding mindset, organizational culture, and management styles; and
4. Commercial synergy: ensures that long-term and short-term expectations, benefits, and risks are understood and appropriately agreed upon.

Marks and Printy (2003) studied synergistic relationships particularly as they relate to transformational and instructional leadership. Their study found that transformational leadership is more powerful when it is integrated with coexisting and synergistic relationships with instructional leadership. Mark and Printy’s findings are consistent with those of Leithwood et al. (2002) who concluded that when principals in pursuit of transformational leadership involve the active participation of teachers and other stakeholders, students benefit.
**Multicultural and Culturally Sensitive Pedagogy**

Multicultural education should be considered, particularly in urban school districts in the United States, such as New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami-Dade, which contain majority-minority student populations. See Table 2 for details on select major urban school districts. In these aforementioned districts, most of the students are Black and Latino: in New York City, 52%; in Chicago, 88%; in Miami-Dade, 78%; and in TCPS, 74% (KewalRamani et al., 2007). In contrast, 90%, the vast majority of students of teacher preparatory programs are White, middle class, monolingual individuals. Many of these aspiring teachers come from families that enjoy economic and social stability and whose daily realities are distant from the experiences of predominantly minority, urban students (Fehr, 2010).

The chasm between educators and their students has been the subject of much discussion and research. Clark’s (1965) opinion was that leaders and school personnel engage in “educational neglect” (p. 144). Clark advanced that many educators attributed student failure on the part of parents because their children come to school unprepared to learn. These conclusions led teachers to have fewer expectations for these students and heightened teachers’ propensity for disciplining students. Clark (1965) also posited that the Head Start program was specifically designed to make up for the “inappropriate parental input” (p. 144) in these communities.

Sleeter (2008) concluded that the key issues affecting White pre-service or beginning teachers were as follows: failure to recognize pervasive racial inequity, holding lower expectations for students of color, adopting a colorblind approach thereby denying the significance of race in their practice, and the inability to see themselves as cultural
beings. This resulted in the assumption that their own cultural lenses represented that of their students’ cultural lenses. Sleeter (2012) further analyzed the topic of culturally-responsive pedagogy and concluded that after considerable progress had been made in multicultural approaches to teaching, these practices have been replaced primarily due to three factors: little research on connecting multicultural education with student achievement, faulty and simplistic conceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy, and elitist and White fear of losing national and global hegemony.

Understanding the societal and cultural structure of the community the school serves is a key factor for effective community engagement and support. Essentially, there is a disconnect between many educators whose personal realities are disconnected from the way students live while attending urban schools. Noguera (2003b) stated that many educators find themselves overwhelmed on the task of educating disadvantaged and neglected students, many of whose needs have little to do with academic learning.

Community and Contextual Consideration in Providing Support

Frequently, in majority-minority or poverty-stricken communities, researchers do not provide actionable practices because the studies do not contemplate the level of complexities in these communities (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012); at risk of dropping out instances occur in complex situations that are experienced differently by Black students and their White counterparts. Fantuzzo et al. posited that there is a lack of understanding of the symbiotic relationships between these at risk of dropping out behaviors and their contexts. The authors analyzed the “risk gap” (Fantuzzo et al., 2012, p. 562) between African American and White students around four questions:

• What is the achievement gap between White and African American students?
• What is the cumulative risk gap between these two groups?

• How are these cumulative risks experienced related to student academic achievement in third grade?

• How academic engagement, defined as school attendance and task engagement in the classroom, served to mediate the relationship between individual and cumulative risk experiences and academic outcomes?

A study by Lee and Staff (2007) showed a correlation between Black students’ perception of concern and support and positive interactions with their teachers. Toldson and Ebanks (2014) also recommended that teachers and administrators need to become more cognizant of student socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds for more effective interaction with students and the communities they serve.

According to Rodriguez and Conchas (2009), effective reengagement programs promote peer relationships, contain various forms of incentives, address the need for social networks, and have a youth advocacy component for institutional accountability. Noguera (2003b) also posited that in order to counterbalance academic inequities and poor achievement, particularly in poor communities, schools should seek to understand students’ socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds and their effects on student achievement. In order to provide support based on “actionable intelligence” (Fantuzzo et al., 2012, p. 561) that benefits students, it is important to comprehend the interaction between the multiple risks factors in their social context: the communities and the schools. Timely intervention would provide support for students as they go through a gradual process of disengagement, which may decrease the possibility of dropping out.

Latino students who are potential dropouts also exhibit various socioeconomic
conditions that, in the eyes of these students, sentence them to not be able to complete school. According to a study by the Pew Research Center (2011), nearly 90% of U.S. Latino young adults believe that a college education is important and 77% indicate that their parents feel that a college education is very important; yet, fewer than 50% of the students surveyed (ages 16–25) planned to attend college. Among the reasons cited were the need to support their families, lack of English skills, dislike for school, and the belief that the occupation they pursued did not require a college degree (McWhirter, Luginbuhl, & Brown, 2014). This research found that in the last five years, Latinos faced higher economic challenges due to higher rates of unemployment and job loss than Whites and Blacks. For Latinos, the role of contextual supportive services in order to increase academic success involves the following:

- Self-efficacy and outcome expectation, aspirations, goals, and academic performance;
- School-based support typically characterized by emotional and tangible academic support; and
- Personalized support from academic coaches and teachers.

McWhirter et al. also found that Latino students increased positive behaviors and academic engagement when they perceived that the teacher was caring, respectful, and willing to work and encourage them. This information is consistent with a subsequent study concluding that pre-k and kindergarten classes have the highest rate of absenteeism followed by high school (Jordan & Miller, 2017). This study also concluded that the schools with the highest percentages of student absenteeism are located in economically disadvantaged communities.
In conclusion, the provision of environments that are conducive to learning and engagement for students should be just as important as the emphasis on students’ personal adaptation to these environments. The combination of focusing on the environment and how students react to them affords schools with the opportunity to emphasize positive adaptive behaviors as opposed to negative adaptive behaviors (Felner et al., 2001). When there is a mismatch between these two conditions, the levels of at-risk indicators increase, such as social alienation, school-aged pregnancy, and other at-risk conditions that lead to dropping out.

**Data-Informed Interventions**

Schools intervene with students at risk of disengaging from the learning process in various ways. Research by Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, and Lehr (2004) concluded that the importance of building positive relationships between teachers and students has a long-term effect in academic and behavioral outcomes. School engagement entails specific actions and efforts as corrective measures, as well as establishing behavioral, affective, and cognitive components that reflect commitment to the learning process for students at risk of dropping out (Caraway et al., 2003). According Wang and Holcombe (2010), data also shows that teacher preparedness and quality are key factors in positively addressing the achievement gap. Darling-Hammond (2010) concurred and posited that recruitment and retention of teachers is related to sharing best practices, provision of support, and expertise.

**Wraparound Process**

Other methods of supporting students involve the concept known as the wraparound process, which aims to identify students at risk of dropping out and provide
personalized support through goal setting and other supportive structures (Fries et al., 2012). The process involves a wraparound facilitator who acts as a coach. This person helps students identify areas of need and provide guidance through the steps of stabilizing his or her life through short and long-term goal setting.

The National Wraparound Initiative (2007) identified 10 areas for support, including family voice and choice, community-based initiatives, and individualized student support (Penn & Osher, 2007). Led by the wraparound facilitator, the program is implemented in four phases over a span of time that ranges between three and 18 months, depending on the case: engagement and team preparation, initial plan development, plan implementation, and transition. These phases involve frequent conversations to establish relationships through face-to-face meeting and phone calls (Fries et al., 2012).

**Response to Intervention**

Addressing the symptoms of student disengagement and failure with proactive intervention, as opposed to reacting when students drop out, is at the core of an initiative known as response to intervention (RTI). RTI stems from the 2004 Individuals with Disability Act Reauthorization for dropout prevention. Originally, RTI was a means of identifying students with a specific learning disability. The concept behind RTI is that early identification of students with learning disabilities provided districts with more proactive intervention opportunities rather than having to wait for such students to fail socially or academically in order to intervene with supportive initiatives (Berkley, Bender, Gregg Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). The core components of the RTI process are as follows:

- Application of scientifically based interventions specifically targeted to the needs
of students;

- Continuous progress monitoring to ensure progress is well documented;
- Providing students with opportunities to respond to instruction; and
- Close monitoring to ensure integrity in the implementation of interventions (Berkley et al., 2009).

Due to RTI’s ability to be a useful tool for intervening in a proactive manner to identify and provide needed assistance for students with disabilities, it can also be used with students without disabilities who exhibit academic and behavioral difficulties (Berkley et al., 2009). The multi-tiered supportive structure of the RTI process includes three tiers aimed at creating a scaffolding structure of support and intervention for students with various levels of need for intervention (see Table 5).
### Table 5

**MTSS-RTI Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Academic System</th>
<th>Behavioral System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tier 1</td>
<td>Core Institutional Intervention</td>
<td>Core Institutional Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All students and all settings</td>
<td>All students and all settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preventive and proactive</td>
<td>Preventive and proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addresses 80% of students</td>
<td>Addresses 80% of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 2</td>
<td>Targeted Group Interventions</td>
<td>Targeted Group Interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selected students, at risk</td>
<td>Selected students, at risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High efficiency</td>
<td>High efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rapid response</td>
<td>Rapid response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addresses 15% of students</td>
<td>Addresses 15% of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 3</td>
<td>Intensive, Individual Intervention</td>
<td>Intensive, Individual Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual student</td>
<td>Individual student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment-based</td>
<td>Assessment-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intensity and durable procedures</td>
<td>Intense and durable procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addresses 5% of students</td>
<td>Addresses 5% students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Source: Florida’s Positive Behavior Support Project (2012).*

These interventions in a three-tiered model of prevention are being implemented in multiple variations throughout the country. The primary intervention is mainly based on supportive programs within the traditional education model. The secondary intervention is in small group-targeted and evidence-based interventions. The tertiary intervention involves individualized intensive services very similar to the services provided through ESE (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005). A number of states,
including Florida, are in the process of implementing various models of RTI. According to Berkeley et al. (2009), there are 22 states in the developmental phase of implementation; 10 are providing guidance to schools, including Florida; and only three states are not in the process of developing an RTI model. Other states are in different stages. TCPS follows the Multi-Tiered Support System Response to Intervention (MTSS-RTI) prescribed by the State of Florida.

In TCPS, the implementation of support includes identifying students who are over age, have exhibited truancy issues, have multiple suspensions, exhibit poor academic progress in classes, and demonstrate various other problems adjusting to their school environment as identified by teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators. TCPS’s problem-solving intervention, as part of RTI, involves four steps: problem identification, problem analysis, intervention design, and progress monitoring (TCPS, 2016a).

**Chapter Summary**

Students stray from academic success due to an array of circumstances and personal choices. Socioeconomic conditions, poor personal choices, and academic frustrations all play a role in creating at risk of dropping out factors that increase the potential of leaving school before completion (Verdugo, 2012), but when at risk for dropping out indicators are addressed in a timely manner and students find supportive programs and academic reengagement initiatives at their school, they have fewer propensities to deviate from academic engagement (Niehaus et al., 2012). These students may also realize positive social integration and be more likely to overcome obstacles that could arise throughout the course of their secondary school career (Bandura et al., 1996;
Caraway et al., 2003; Finn & Rock, 1997).

Prompted by various factors, government at the federal and state levels has increased their role in education. For instance, the landmark decision from the Supreme Court in Brown v. The Board of Education (1954) (as cited in Smith, 2005) caused the federal government to enforce the law in an unprecedented show of force, while the report, Ravitch (2010), explained that A Nation at Risk showed that education in the United States was in crisis. Other forms of involvement included NCLB, which conditioned federal funding according to stringent measures, prompting states to implement various high stakes accountability measures and causing local school systems to implement policies and practices that had serious effects on curricular diversity and depth. These measures in the name of accountability have represented a deterioration of sound curricular practice (Ravitch, 2010).

Federal and State governments’ involvement notwithstanding, one of the most persistent and pernicious problems has been students’ dropping out before completing high school. The causes are many and this study addresses three major areas: academic disenfranchisement, attendance problems, and behavior problems. Early identification and intervention for students who show signs of disengagement are critical. Scholars have stated that academic engagement is key to staying in school (Anderson et al., 2004). Various studies have shown that supportive programs have a positive effect when they are implemented as part of a synergistic plan with multiple stakeholders acknowledging and addressing the roles that they play. A study conducted by Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszyn, and Platt (2011) concluded that although many students were knowledgeable of their school’s negative stereotypes, when surrounded with the right
support, they looked to excel and take college courses to prepare them for post-secondary studies. Reddick et al. concluded that students overcame negative stereotypes about their schools and communities, while holding a more positive attitude toward education in general. According to Mitchell and Bradshaw (2013), when schools foster prevention and a positive school climate, students become increasingly engaged. This positive and proactive climate involves establishing goals, working closely with families, and fostering an atmosphere of collaboration among the staff (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Students at risk of dropping out who find timely support also display less disruptive behavior, perform better on standardized exams, and improve their chances of graduating from high school (Bandura et al., 1996; Caraway et al., 2003; Finn & Rock, 1997). In order to conduct this study in a fashion that is consistent with sound research practice for data collection and analysis, a detailed explanation of the research design, data collection and data analysis is provided in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative, multi-site, case study was to understand and describe how two pairs of schools from the same school feeder patterns, composed of a high school and its feeder middle school(s), have collaborated and instituted supportive programs for students that they have identified as at risk of dropping out of school. Data were collected regarding the implementation of supportive programs at two high schools, as well their respective feeder middle schools, in Tropical County, Florida. This study also analyzed the role of principals, assistant principals, and other stakeholders in the provision of support for students.

Restatement of the Research Questions

This study was guided by three research questions:

1. What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, each pair composed of a high school and its feeder middle (s), have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

2. What supportive programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the schools to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

3. What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders including teachers, counselors, support personnel, parents, and
students, involved in the process of identifying students at risk of dropping out and implementing supportive programs?

**Research Design**

This study used a qualitative, multi-site, case study design bounded by five schools within Tropical County, Florida in order to study a real-life setting in a contemporary context (Yin, 2009). The qualitative approach is considered most appropriate because it provides the means to conduct data collection, taking into account that schools are complex organizations and possess ontological characteristics, multiple realities, and perspectives stemming from different individuals or departments interacting with the students (Creswell, 2013).

The design of this study was shaped by an epistemological assumption where the researcher gets as close as possible to the participants and the data are assembled based on those individuals’ views (Creswell, 2013). This study paid particular attention to the schools’ various activities and initiatives, as well as different types of assistance for at-risk students. The research concentrated on three areas or at-risk of dropping out indicators: academic disenfranchisement, attendance problems, and behavior problems.

**Site**

This research was conducted in the TCPS (pseudonym) district. This district is located in Florida and serves over 225,000 students and is comprised of over 230 traditional public schools divided into feeder patterns, known as innovation zones. For the purpose of this study, the terminology “traditional public schools” excludes charter and private schools. The innovation zones, named after each high school in the zones, include the elementary school(s), the middle school(s), and the high school they feed into.
TCPS has 27 innovation zones (TCPS, 2015b). For the purpose of this study, observations were conducted at the secondary level, which includes middle and high school with students in grades 6–12. For the purpose of this study, traditional high school refers to high schools serving grades nine through 12, excluding charter schools, specialized centers, technical schools, or ESE Centers. Only traditional high schools were included in the population from which the paired schools were selected for analysis.

Paired Schools Selection

The paired schools selected for this study met the following four criteria for high schools:

1. Serves a population composed of at least 80% minority students, particularly African American and/or Latinos (see Appendix B for the rate of minority students in TCPS high schools). According to a report released by the FLDOE in 2016b, 11 of the 27 traditional high schools meet this criterion. The 11 high schools meeting this criterion were as follows: A High School, B High School, C High School, Chavez High School (CHS), D High School, E High School, F High School, G High School, H High School, I High School, and Lincoln High School (LHS).

2. Serves a population of students where at least 70% of the students qualify for the FRL program. According to the FLDOE (2016b), 12 schools meet this criterion, eight of which also met the first criterion. The 12 high schools meeting this criterion were as follows: A High School, B High School, C High School, CHS, D High School, F High School, G High School, I High School, J High School, K High School, L High School, and LHS. Although several schools have majority-
minority populations, such as M High School with 92% minority students and N High School with 80% minority students, these schools are located in more affluent communities and did not meet the FRL criterion.

3. Has a graduation rate of at least 80% for three consecutive years per federal graduation guidelines, with particular success in the at risk student population. TCPS identifies students as being at risk of dropping out if they can be identified as having any combination of at risk indicators such as over-age, low performance in reading and/or math, low SES, high transiency or mobility, and truancy. Four high schools that met criteria one, two, and three: C High School, CHS, I High School, and LHS (see appendix A for the study district’s high school graduation rates).

4. Demonstrates an accumulation of at least 500 points for learning gains of students scoring satisfactorily in the Florida State assessments for the 2014-2015 school year (see Appendix B). This means students scoring level three or higher in math, reading, science, and writing. The accumulation of points corresponds to the percentage of students who made academic gains in the different subject areas of the state assessments. For instance, if 65% of students scored level three or higher, that school earns 65 points towards the total points accumulated. Thus, the accumulation of points represents the sum of the percentages of students who made learning gains. Of the four high schools meeting criterion one, two, and three only CHS and LHS met the fourth criterion. CHS had an accumulation of 508 points and LHS had an accumulation of 521 points.

After applying the four criteria to the 27 traditional high schools in TCPS, the
selected schools were CHS and LHS, along with their feeder middle schools. Choosing to include the feeder middle schools was due to the interest in the level of synergistic collaboration between the middle and high schools, specifically regarding the eighth to ninth grade transition.

CHS is located in the southern part of Tropical County in a major city. It has a student population of just over 2,200 students. The student population is 50% Latino, 26.7% African American, 16.5% White, and the remaining 8% is a combination of different races/ethnicities. The principal at CHS is a White male and at the time of this study had been leading the school for the last nine years. CHS has only one feeder middle school, Challenger Middle School (CMS; a pseudonym). The race/ethnic composition of the staff at CMS and CHS was not available at the time of this study’s data collection.

LHS is located in the central part of Tropical County near a major city with an enrollment of approximately 1,900 students. As of 2015, the race/ethnic composition of the students was as follows: 89.6% African American, 4.80% Hispanic, and the remaining 6% was composed of other races/ethnicities. The principal at LHS is an African American female and at the time of this study had been leading the school for the last five years. LHS has two feeder middle schools, Adams Middle School (AMS) and Franklin Middle School (FMS) (pseudonyms).

**Interview Sample**

This study used purposeful sampling in order to collect data from various sources in each of the participating schools. This study pertained to dropout prevention programs and initiatives. In this study stakeholders were selected who are part of supportive
programs and who could provide information about the process of student reengagement from a variety of perspectives (Creswell, 2013). The interview sample included members of the leadership teams including administrators, literacy coaches, teachers, and guidance counselors. Permission was obtained for interviews with students as well. At one of the schools, CHS, interviewing students provided important data, specifically in regard to students’ perceptions and opinions on various topics associated with this research.

The overall sample size was 34 for the five schools in the study. The sample size per site was between 9-15 school-based participants and 3-5 parents. The leadership teams’ sub-sample had a range of 3-5 participants in each school and the teacher and support personnel sub-sample had 3-5 participants. These participants included administrators, counselors, and other support staff members including teacher assistants, and clerical workers. The principal of each school was also interviewed.

Interviewees were selected based on three initial criteria: knowledge of the topic being researched, willingness to participate, and be part of a diverse group in order to represent different points of view (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). For the purpose of this study, diversity was defined based on job classes or roles within the school, such as administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, and students. Participants were also limited to stakeholders associated directly with the school, which excluded district personnel. The principals were also asked to provide the names of the members of schools’ leadership team. Finally, selected participants were chosen based on recommendation by the principal and based on participation in the provision of support for students at risk of dropping out, with the exception of student participants. See Appendix B for the percentage of students qualifying for graduation, FRL, and minority rates in Tropical
County’s traditional high schools.

**Recruitment of participants.** After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) (see Appendix C) and permission from TCPS (see Appendix D), each principal was contacted to request permission to conduct research at their school and their participation in the interview process. They agreed to participate and the researcher met with them to discuss the purpose and procedures of the research to be conducted at their school, as well as to answer any questions they may have had (see Appendix E for recruitment scripts).

The stakeholders were chosen based on recommendations by the principals and based on participation in provision of support for students at risk of dropping out. The principals also provided the names of members of the schools’ leadership team. Participants were recruited through email, telephone, and face-to-face meetings. This study included student and parent participants. No incentive for participation was offered.

**Observation sample**

Meetings observed consisted of leadership meetings and collaboration meetings among stakeholders in which support for at risk of dropping out students was being discussed or provided. These meetings were either designated as public or closed to the public. Prior to observing meetings that were closed to the public, permission was obtained from the appropriate school authorities and consent was obtained from participants before the observations began. A schedule spanning four to six weeks was established for observations. A total of four hours of observations were conducted.
**Document and Artifact Sample**

Pertinent documents included curricular documents, mission statements, school improvement plans, and initiatives intended to reengage students and provide them with the subject area content they need to be successful. Documents were obtained on public web sites and directly from the selected schools. Some of these documents were curricular guides, budgetary information, staffing of programs, as well as mission and vision statement of the supportive programs implemented at the study schools.

Student archival data included those regarding expulsion, external suspension, internal academic progress or lack thereof, attendance, and disciplinary issues suspension. Furthermore, attendance data were gathered from information that is publicly available from the FLDOE and TCPS (see Appendix H for a complete list of documents and archival data that were collected).

**Data Collection**

Data were collected regarding various means of academic reengagement. The collection of data involved interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis. This study protected participants by not disclosing the names or information by which they can be identified. School identifiers have also been blinded for the purpose of protecting the identities of the participants.

**Interviews.** Interviews with stakeholders were conducted for the purpose of describing, understanding, and cross-referencing their involvement in the planning and implementation of preventive and supportive programs at the schools. One interview was conducted per participant and permission was requested for a second interview in cases where follow-up was necessary. There was a follow-up interview with 29 participants.
Interviews with adults ranged from 30 to 60 minutes in length. The length of interview time added up to approximately 5-7 hours per school. The questions used for the interviews were based on the literature in the areas of attendance, academic achievement, and student behavior; however, participants were free to bring up other areas. These interviews were conducted at the convenience of participants in their respective schools. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed for each role group and is described below.

**Focus group.** A focus group was used to interview students. This was done in order to facilitate discussion and collect data following some of the concepts as proposed by Berg (1998). Berg opined that focus group interviews provide the researcher the opportunity to obtain verbal opinions, experiences, and attitudes, while at the same time, observe the interaction of the participants of the focus groups. The focus group lasted approximately 30 minutes and was arranged before school when students did not have to attend class. A light breakfast was provided. A guided discussion format was employed to keep the discussion on topic. The focus group was composed of five student participants and the researcher served as the moderator. An interview protocol was used (see Appendix I). Probing questions were asked as needed.

**Interview protocols.** The standard format of the interview and focus group questions were open-ended and focused on expanding the understanding of the phenomenon of supportive programs for at risk students. The literature reviewed for this study guided the development of interview and focus group questions and was used to delve deeper in the operations of schools that have been implementing programs to provide support or intervention for students identified as at risk of dropping out or
disengaging behaviorally, academically, and with regard to attendance. All interviews were confidential. Prior to audiotaping participants, consent was obtained (see Appendix J for consent forms used in this study).

**Observations.** The researcher conducted observations as a transient observer following the structure of an observation guide (see Appendix F). The researcher also observed the interaction of students and staff, leaders and staff, and office personnel and students, as well as other interactions that were deemed relevant to this research.

Data were collected during on-site observations of meetings about and with students. Field notes were written for all observations and documents made available by the principals of each school were collected while on site. The average length of observation per school was five hours, for a total of 25 hours of on-site observations.

**Document analysis.** Document analysis was conducted in order to analyze trends in graduation rates, disciplinary issues, and attendance (see Appendix G for instrument used to collect and analyze document data).

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

The data collected from the participating schools in the two cases were analyzed separately to reflect each organization’s realities within their own contexts, following Wolcott’s (2009) and Miles and Huberman’s (1994) concepts of qualitative data analysis. Data were interpreted in order to “make sense” (Wolcott, 2009, p. 30) of the human activities that may include intuition, past-experience, emotions, as well as personal and professional attributes as they pertain to the at risk students in each school. Multiple interviews were conducted within each school and data from interviews, focus groups, and observations were cross-referenced with archival documents from the schools. In
order to increase the credibility of the data, member checking was implemented during interviews by restating questions from different angles, paraphrasing, or summarizing the answers provided by participants for their confirmation of accuracy and to provide any needed clarification.

All data collected: interview transcripts, field notes, comments, observations, documents, and so on, were coded in order to identify their relevance to the study and to the research questions. The coding and identification of categories occurred during the process of analyzing and drawing conclusions (Merriam, 2009). In the process of coding, data were aggregated into categories of information, both emergent and pre-determined (Creswell, 2013). Pre-determined were codes were used that were relative to the three research questions in the areas of synergistic relations, supportive programs, and principal leadership. Other pre-determined codes were those dealing with academic programs and performance, behavioral topics, and attendance. The initial master code list involved five master codes and 27 sub-codes. Subsequently, these codes and sub-codes emerged as the findings presented in this study.

Validation was maximized by persistent observation and prolonged engagement, triangulation, and making use of different data sources (Creswell, 2013). These activities also helped separate researcher bias from the the analysis. A self-reflective journal was kept in order to minimize researcher bias. Conscious efforts were made to control personal assumptions through reflective writing in the spirit of increasing the transparency of the research (Ortlipp, 2008).

Data were triangulated by comparing and contrasting various elements, facts, and assertions obtained from the interviews, observations, and documents. The analysis
involved establishing patterns and searching for correspondence between paired schools. After each case of paired schools was analyzed, a cross-case analysis was performed for the purpose of detecting programmatic patterns. The data were organized according to themes and trends through the process of coding in order to identify patterns in the application of supportive programs (Creswell, 2013). Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña’s (2013) concept of data representation was implemented by using various data display formats. I also implemented ATLAS.ti software to assist with data management and the identification of emerging categories, themes and findings.

**Descriptive Quantitative Data Analysis**

This study involved the descriptive analysis of various archival data from the participating schools, the district, and the FLDOE in order to provide a profile of each school (see Appendix H). Although, there were similarities in the student populations of each school, the schools were analyzed and are reported separately. Students’ scores and academic progress in reading, math, science, writing, participation in advanced classes, and involvement in extracurricular activities were analyzed to provide school profiles.

Ten years of archival data, such as graduation trends, suspensions and exclusion from classes, attendance rates, course recovery (recovering grades of classes they have failed), parent-teacher meetings, and other data produced by the intervention programs were reviewed to create a profile of the paired schools. The archival data collected were analyzed to further describe changes and trends among students, particularly as related to the study’s research questions. This included data related to attendance and truancy issues, as well as to social worker referrals to provide for support for families.
Delimitations and Limitations

This study was delimited to five majority-minority schools within TCPS: two high schools with their respective feeder middle schools. The study was also delimited to the secondary level: middle and high school.

This research had various limitations including the time limitation regarding the hours of observations and interviews. Other limitations included the researcher’s limited access to various stakeholders, such as students and parents. Further limitations included that students who have already dropped out of school were not interviewed. This study also encountered limitations from the participants interviewed including issues of selective memory and potential under or over-representing facts and accounts of events. In order to mitigate these limitations, a variety of stakeholders were interviewed. Other limitations included the timeline that bounded the study preventing the collection of longitudinal data and analysis.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the means by which data were collected and analyzed using a multi-site, case study, qualitative approach. The chapter began with a restatement of the research questions followed by details of the research design and the criteria used to select CHS and LHS as the sites where the study was conducted. The explanation of the sample criteria was followed by an explanation of how data were collected using interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis on CHS and LHS graduation success with at risk student populations in their respective majority-minority, low-SES communities. The findings of Case Study A are presented in Chapter Four. Case Study A involves data from CHS and its main feeder middle school, CMS.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS OF CASE STUDY A

The findings from Case Study A and Case Study B will be presented following Miles et al. (2013), who asserted that for case study data to be analyzed and conclusions drawn, it is important that human interactions not be considered in monolithic terms, rather as part of complex conditions and effects. This is particularly true in school organizations, which involve multiple stakeholders and communities. The researcher attempted to draw from these human networks involved in Case Study A and Case Study B in order to present multiple perspectives and explanations regarding academic, behavior, and attendance issues in majority-minority, low-SES communities. The analysis of Case Study A will be presented in this chapter, followed by Case Study B in Chapter Five. This study concludes by presenting a cross case analysis of Case A and Case Study B in the final chapter.

Case Study A tells the story of CHS and CMS and how they have collaborated to provide a 6th-12th grade continuum of support for students while serving students who are majority-minority, a high percentage of whom qualify for the FRL program. Findings depict an orchestrated series of professional practices at one school that are strengthened by their counterparts at the other school as the strategic engagement of stakeholders providing additional support for students and, in a more general sense, the school and the community as well.

Data were gathered from a variety of sources: archival, documents, interviews,
a focus group, and observations. The researcher interacted with a diverse population of lead personnel selected by the principals at CHS and at CMS. Pseudonyms are used for all participants. Students are referred to as “student” in reporting of interview data.

Findings and sub-findings emerged as the researcher looked for answers to the three research questions of this study:

1. What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, each pair composed of a high school and its feeder middle school(s), have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

2. What supportive programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the schools to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

3. What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders including teachers, counselors, support personnel, parents, and students, involved in the process of identifying students at risk of dropping out and implementing supportive programs?

Chavez High School

Description and demographics. CHS is located in the southern part of the district and serves over 2,250 students. The principal, Mr. Terrence DePalma, is a White male who has risen through the ranks in the district; he has been leading the school for the last seven years. The current racial composition at CHS is 50.4% Hispanic, 27.7% Black, 15% White, and approximately 7% Asian and Native American students. CHS
has seen a consistent improvement in the state’s school grading system rankings. Over the last 10 years, from 2007 to 2016, the school has gone from a “D” grade to “C,” then to an “A” grade for three consecutive years, followed by three years of “B” grades. In terms of graduation, using the federal graduation guidelines, CHS has seen an increase of 7%, outpacing the district’s average and the State of Florida’s graduation average by double digits between 2012 and 2016 (TCPS, 2016b).

**Participants.** The nine selected participants are members of Principal DePalma’s leadership team in the areas of academics, guidance, literacy support, and administration (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Participants at Chavez High School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role at CHS</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Terrence DePalma</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intern Principal</td>
<td>Anna Carty</td>
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<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Maxine Rossi</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Victoria Roman</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Florence Sheldon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literary Coach</td>
<td>Betty Beckford</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>“Student”</td>
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Challenger Middle School

**Description and demographics.** CMS has been led over the past four years by Principal Sara Fields, a White female whose administrative career began as an assistant principal at CHS. She worked for three years under the leadership of CHS’s Principal DePalma. CMS is located in the same community as CHS and sends 100% of its students to CHS. CMS serves just over 1,225 students made up of 43.1% Hispanic, 32.6% Black, 16% White, and 7% other ethnic groups (FLDOE, 2016b). During the 2016-2017 school year, 82% of the CMS student population qualified for the FRL program (FLDOE, 2016a). Over the last 10 years, from 2007 to 2016, CMS has seen a consistent improvement in the state’s school grading system rankings beginning with two “C” grades, followed by four years of “A” grades, then alternating between “C,” “B,” and “A” grades.

**Participants.** The nine selected participants are members of Principal Fields’ leadership team in the areas of academics, guidance, literacy support, and administration (see Table 7).

Table 7

*Participants at Challenger Middle School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role at CMS</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Victoria Batista</td>
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Finding 1. Purposeful Collaboration Between Schools, Community, and School Personnel

The first finding is that there is purposeful collaboration between CHS, CMS, the community, and school personnel. It addresses various elements of my first research question regarding synergistic practices and collaborations between schools to identify students exhibiting indicators that place them at risk of dropping out. It is based on data triangulated between the schools, including accounts by participants at both schools, such as Principal DePalma at CHS and Principal Fields at CMS. The collaboration between CMS and CHS is cultivated in order to identify the academic, behavioral, and attendance at risk indicators for students going to CHS and intervene proactively. According to both principals, the collaborative work between CHS and CMS may find part of its roots in the fact that Principal DePalma at CHS and Principal Fields at CMS have a personal and professional relationship that spans over 12 years.

This continuous and goal-centered collaboration on the topics of academics, behavior, and attendance provides students with ongoing support and consistency through the application of the key tenets of SEL. An example of how this collaboration benefits students at CMS and CHS is reflected in a study entitled, Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework (Nagaoka et al., 2015). The study concluded that there are three essential components for effective provision of SEL. The essential components cited in the study include: a) agency, the ability to make choices; b) integrated identity, the integrated consistency of who one is across time (in this case middle through high schools); and c) competencies, the ability to perform different roles in life.
This study has found that the collaborative structure between CMS and CHS provides a consistent continuum of support for the development of their students. That continuum of support is consistent with the three essential components of SEL as established by Nagaoka et al. (2015).

School personnel at CHS and LHS have different approaches to proactively identify students who are at risk and provide SEL support. In that regard, LHS’s guidance director discussed the importance of a robust SEL program as follows: “That SEL personalization is very important. I personally believe that socio-economic status impacts academic success because everything a kid needs is provided here at school.” AP Rossi at CHS explained:

If we start to see some behaviors that students are withdrawn, we would do a p-doc, which is a proactive document and we get involved quicker. That document would go to myself then I give to the counselor, the assistant principal or the social worker.

Furthermore, these two principals collaborate and plan together, participate in community meetings, and have established visions and missions that highlight the importance of maintaining strong bonds between both schools. As proof of this collaborative nature, on the day the researcher met with Principal DePalma, he was preparing a presentation that he and Principal Fields were going to deliver together for the TCPS that highlights their collaborative work. Examples included in the presentation were as follows: technology and industry certification programs where students begin at the CMS and take the second part of the course sequence at CHS, academic discussions, and extracurricular activities. Regarding the collaboration, Principal DePalma stated that:
There is very little that goes on where I do not include my two major feeders. For instance, I created the Lion Program (pseudonym) linking education to employment and that Lion Program was instituted as a six to 12th [grade] concept. So, Principal Fields has a sixth, seventh, and eighth [grade] program that leads to my ninth-grade program. That’s just one example. We also do several matriculation exercises. We go over there quite frequently. Our engineering program is tied to theirs because they have Aeronautical Engineering that’s tied to our Aeronautics program. We pretty much tie everything that they do over there to here and here likewise with them.

This collaboration can also be traced to the staff. The current guidance director for CMS, Maria Casilda, was a guidance counselor at CHS and hired as guidance director by Principal Fields. She now plays a major role in linking both schools’ guidance departments to collaborate and provide a continuum of support. For example, she is part of the CMS team working to proactively identify students at risk of dropping out in order to lead these students on to CHS where their identified deficiencies would be taken up by a supportive team established by Principal DePalma. Other staff members intervene with mainstreamed and advanced students, which involves establishing programs that are designed to have a component that begins at CMS and continues at CHS. This is done in an effort to increase the number of students participating in advanced placement (AP) courses at CHS, particularly in math and science.

Through the interviews, documents analyzed, and meetings observed, the researcher found various academic programs specifically designed to augment the collaboration between the two schools, such as their magnet programs, mentoring
programs, and events aimed at showcasing school partnerships. This finding is also supported by documented evidence with regard to the increased at risk student graduation rate at CHS and the increased number of high school classes at CMS that align to AP classes in high school, particularly AP math, science, and foreign languages, among others. This has resulted in the expansion of AP classes at CHS. For instance, when students take advanced or high school classes at CMS, they often track into AP at CHS. This finding will be detailed in the following three sub-findings that provide specific examples of purposeful collaboration: a) collaboration of schools to enhance students’ interest and community support, b) programmatic articulation, and c) creating short and long-term visions for student success. Over the last three years of AP data, CHS has had approximately 300 students participate in its AP program. These numbers in a majority-minority school such as CHS, were key in TCPS having a higher percentage of minorities taking AP classes than the State of Florida. In 2015, the percentage of students passing AP exams in TCPS exceeded 50% for the first time since 2003. In 2015, 52.6% of CHS’s students received a score of level 3 or more on their AP exams, over two percentage points higher than TCPS (TCPS, 2015a).

**Sub-finding 1.1. Schools collaborate to enhance students’ interest and community support.** The element of collaboration involves the promotion of the schools, which in turn involves key personnel communicating promotional information to the students and the community at-large and highlighting both schools, their programs, and their successes. The informational campaigns encourage middle school students to not only continue their studies at CHS, but also create the desire to want to be part of CHS’s excitement through visits, presentations, showcases, partnerships, and
collaboration in artistic, cultural, and community-based activities. Other initiatives in communicating for promotional purposes include exposing students to extracurricular programs and inviting students from CMS to visit CHS to experience academic programs, as well as arts and sports. This also involves guidance counselors communicating the wide variety of electives classes available as students transition from CMS to CHS.

CHS’s Assistant Principal, Victoria Roman, discussed that communication is vital to strengthening the curricular programs, as both schools’ educators collaborate in a process they refer to as “vertical teaming,” which occurs at least twice a year: “We have vertical teams where we talk to one another and discuss what are the expectations at the high school level for the students? What are they doing at the middle school level?” This vertical team also includes collaboration between CMS and its feeder elementary schools as CMS looks to obtain key information for incoming sixth graders in order to proactively align supportive measures.

**Sub-finding 1.2. Programmatic articulation.** There is a concerted effort by both schools to establish a structure of support based on students’ specific information, such as proficiency, student interests, academics, behavior, and attendance at risk factors. The intent is not only to engage those students who may be at risk academically, behaviorally, and who demonstrate attendance deficiencies, but also students who may be well-served to pursue AP classes, industry certifications, and other non-traditional classes at CHS. The goal is to foster consistent programmatic articulation for all students with a variety of programs in music, art, traditional academic, industry certifications, and other programs.
This is accomplished in various ways. In athletics, this is accomplished through the collaboration of coaches in different sports. In music and art, it is accomplished by joining both middle and high school bands in performances and offering showcases within the community. By working together, CMS students begin to develop relationships with their older peers at CHS and see high school in a different and more familiar light. Principal DePalma explained how this supportive structure is aimed at proactively assisting at risk students:

So, I have a ninth-grade administrator, I always have a ninth grade counselor, I also have a ninth grade ESE support facilitator, and this year we actually added to our proactive process a ninth grade ESOL program, so we really can target the lowest 100 students.

CMS has taken the same approach, implementing high school courses that are part of a curricular sequence of courses that begins at CMS and continues at CHS. This program allows advanced students to accumulate a greater number of credits while in middle school and when they get to CHS, they can opt to take AP classes, usually scheduled at the end of these curricular sequences. In an effort to include more students at risk of dropping out and provide them with the opportunity to obtain high school credits, both middle schools, CMS and FMS (see Chapter 5 for a summary of FMS and its relationship to CHS and LHS), have expanded the criteria for students to be able to take the high school credit classes by lowering the threshold. For instance, normally, only students who scored level four or level five on state assessments are able to take these classes. CMS and FMS take into account other criteria, as well as lowering the requirement to include students who score level three.
These AP classes give the students college credits upon passing the AP exam at the end of the course. For instance, when a student enrolls in Algebra I in the seventh grade and in Geometry in the eighth grade, that student can go on to CHS and continue to take that math curricular sequence leading them to AP Calculus AB, and AP Calculus BC by the time they get to 12th grade. This also occurs in the science curricular sequence when students take the high school Biology class in CMS. Those students can follow the science sequence they began in CMS all the way up to AP Chemistry, AP Physics, or AP Biology at CHS.

CHS’s Intern Principal, Ana Carty (IP Carty), second in command to Principal DePalma, discussed how she needed to strengthen and increase math scores as the administrator over the Math Department at CHS. She sought to meet with the Math Department Chair at CMS, as she explained: “What I did, I went and collaborated with their department head, I looked at their data and I provided suggestions as to how they can increase the number of students taking math high school classes while at middle school.”

IP Carty felt that the building of relations with the math team at CMS was the route to greater consistency and success with the math program at CHS. This particular relationship resulted in an increase in the number of students taking Algebra classes at CMS and creating a stronger pipeline for the AP math program at CHS.

At CMS, Principal Fields and Assistant Principal Martinez advised that industry-based programs provide students with classes that not only reflect students’ interests, but more importantly, the job market. In 2017, CMS received the National Magnet School of Distinction Award for its Technology and Science Magnet program. This is an example
of programmatic articulation because the industry certification courses in middle school are tracked into career and technical programs in high school. These courses at the high school level provide students with industry certification in different areas.

**Sub-finding 1.3. Creating short and long-term visions for student success.**

The collaboration also involves joint effort by CHS and CMS to create short and long-term visions for student success. As students progress from elementary to middle to high school, administrative plans and initiatives for short and long-term visions for student success emerge. This concept is more of a central initiative of CHS, but for it to work it has to have important components in place at CMS. Describing the concept, Principal DePalma referred to this initiative as follows:

So, you have to have short-term goals, you have long-term goals, and then you have a five-year plan. Where do you want to be in five years? So, short-term goals, really, are progress monitoring and making sure we’re evaluating as we’re going along and monitoring the processes of our school grade. So, not everything is predicated on school grade, right? Because we also, first and foremost, we want to do what’s right by kids. So, you start with a mission and a vision, it starts with what is your plan and how is it applied to the short-term, the long-term, and your 5-year plan? So, we put everything together for that.

Short-term goals at CMS involve monitoring the progress students are making toward, or deviating from, their goals. Some of the programs at CMS and CHS differ, specifically depending on what is being monitored. For incoming sixth graders, CMS chooses to focus on students’ behavior, maturity level, and the potentially overwhelming changes from the primary school setting to the secondary school setting.
The vision expressed by Principal DePalma is applied to long-term goals at CHS through various initiatives. He expressed that his main job as a principal is to “empower, mentor, and coach.” Thus, his vision takes effect through the work of his team. For instance, Principal DePalma expressed vehement pride in the expansion of industry-based programs for students who, at the moment, are not thinking of going to college. In turn, IP Carty, second in command, was cognizant of the fact that not all students will be pursuing college degrees. At the same time, she wanted to be careful not to condition students to give up pursuing higher learning. The result was to implement a combination of career and technology programs that grant industry certifications when students complete the programs, along with a mentoring system in order for students to realize the college pathways that the industry-based programs may offer.

Frequently, the design of the industry certification programs at CMS provides a pathway to an established high school course at CHS. By providing a continuum from middle grades all the way up to high school graduation, middle school students begin a road to classes that they hadn’t previously considered, such as: robotics; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)-based classes; debate; and so on. Furthermore, they go into high school feeling as if they have already started the graduation process and high school is simply on that continuum.

CHS also cultivates the long-term planning for high-achieving students through its “Aragna Program” (pseudonym). This program aims to expand students’ pursuit of college and apply to Ivy League schools, such as Brown and Yale, and other colleges that are traditionally not considered to be within their reach. CHS is proud of the success they have had with this particular program as several students have been accepted to Ivy
League universities, specifically Brown and Princeton, as expressed by the student focus group and other participants. Regarding the Aragna Program, one of the participants shared:

The advisor encourages students not to limit themselves because of their situation of socio-economics. Before she started the Aragna Program, all the kids were ending up in local schools. What she started made me think, “I want to expand my horizons. Just because you’re from Florida doesn’t mean you have to stay in Florida.” Like, we have kids at Yale.

Short-term goals at CMS involve monitoring the progress students are making toward their goals or deviating from their goals. As noted earlier, some of the programs at CMS and CHS differ, depending on what is being monitored and for incoming sixth graders, CMS focuses on their behavior, maturity level, and transition to the secondary school setting. On the contrary, the long-term vision for CMS is realized when CMS works with the elementary schools focusing on the incoming sixth graders and guides low-performing students towards calibrated reengagement for long-term success. It also ensures that advanced students are channeled into high-rigor classes.

In summary, the purposeful collaboration between the school, the community, and school personnel is part of a multifaceted approach to maintain a consistent message and continuity of programs and initiatives. These collaboration initiatives include promotion of the schools to the stakeholders, curricular planning, program showcasing to the community, and frequent visits and sharing by staff in both schools. It also involves promoting both schools’ initiatives and successes for the purpose of maintaining students in the community and increasing their interest in attending CMS and CHS. This
purposeful collaboration also includes programmatic consistency as guidance counselors interact with students and plan for the future in a sixth to 12th grade continuum. Finally, it is also manifested when the students receive support and establishes short and long-term goals for student success. Amidst socioeconomic difficulties, the participants find ways for students to see themselves succeeding in the future and aligning future visions for success with steps they can take in the present.

Finding 2. Proactive and Reactive Supportive Processes for Monitoring Student Progress

CHS has sought to establish a process of support that involves proactive and reactive monitoring of student progress, while CMS has also implemented processes that involve proactive planning, taking into account students with at risk indicators, as well as students with advanced academic potential. These schools also employ reactive intervention by addressing issues that come up on a daily basis, such as discipline and attendance. This second finding provides data to answer my second research question, which calls for supportive programs in order to re-engage students.

Principal DePalma stated the necessity to “micro manage” the support process for incoming ninth grade students. He posits that the continuum of programs provides teachers the opportunity to provide support for students. Principal DePalma has structured a team to work with incoming ninth graders and serve their needs in academics, behavior, and attendance:

The big adjustment for ninth grade students is really getting assimilated into the dynamics of what goes on in high school. So, I always have a ninth-grade administrator. I always have a ninth-grade counselor. I have a ninth-grade
support facilitator. What can you do? How can you react to those ninth graders that are struggling and, so, the key is to not lose them in the ninth grade and micro manage the process in the ninth grade.

This continually supportive process and programmatic continuum is part of CHS’s and CMS’s approach to create a sixth through 12th grade concept where personnel and their initiatives have a clear focus and provide students with uninterrupted support. The finding of proactive and reactive processes to student monitoring is composed of four sub-findings: proactive and reactive intervention programs, support through SEL, student academic support, and engagement and reengagement through extracurricular activities.

**Sub-finding 2.1. Proactive and reactive intervention programs.** CHS provides intervention guided by short and long-term visions for students through the implementation of proactive and reactive intervention programs. This translates into actionable programs in specific subject areas. Principal DePalma explained his vision of the proactive and reactive approach that is implemented at the middle and secondary levels as follows:

If students are struggling in math and we need to put some interventions for math, that’s the reactive approach. The proactive approach is to say, okay, where do we want to go with this department over this next year? Where do we want to be at the end of the day?

The research found that the implementation of the proactive and reactive intervention programs at CHS involves planning, collaborative data analysis, aligning personnel, curricular scoping, and prioritizing intervention, as well as providing
opportunities for students to explore areas of interests or strengths in extracurricular activities. In many occasions, the support for academics, behavior, and attendance at risk factors begins at CMS and students’ progress, or lack thereof, is passed on to the appropriate personnel at CHS, led by the ninth-grade administrator and/or guidance counselor for the provision of the appropriate support.

Various stakeholders are engaged in this endeavor. For instance, CHS Assistant Principal Rossi discussed how students are identified for the purpose of timely intervention:

There needs to be a thorough review of [the] file to see their history, whether it’s a socio-emotional issue before they come in or whether it’s behavioral, attendance, grades, or test scores. So, you’re evaluating where the students are before they get in.

This proactive identification of possible at risk students takes places as the personnel from CHS visit their counterparts at CMS in order to learn about their incoming students and be able create an individualized path for student success in high school. Assistant Principal Rossi explained: “We go over to the Middle School (CMS). We do scheduling through them and we tell them about the program and then they get the opportunity to do the scheduling.”

Assistant Principal Rossi is the lead administrator of a systemic approach to identifying students who exhibit behaviors that place them at risk of dropping out through forms known as “p-docs.” The p-doc, or “proactive documentation,” provides teachers and staff with a way of reporting students when they see or suspect any symptom of disengagement with academics, behavior, and attendance, as well as socio-emotional
issues. Assistant Principal Rossi receives the p-docs and aligns the appropriate support before a symptom becomes a more serious problem.

As revealed in documentation and through interviews with the assistant principals and literacy coaches, staff at CMS and CHS study a wide variety of data produced by students in the areas of academic proficiency, behavior, and attendance to create an academic profile: struggling, mainstreamed, or advanced. One of the literacy coaches at CHS described the process as follows:

We actually have enough capacity to kind of target those that are the level ones and twos and then we do have support that pull our level three to maintain. There are those who are low level three that we didn’t want them to slide. So, we’re kind of making sure that we hit and target each group and we made it flexible.

IP Carty attributed the increase in the graduation, in part, to this structure for monitoring students’ support. She discussed the extent to which the ninth-grade team provides students with guidance and monitoring from the moment they start at CHS:

The guidance counselor has an initial interview with the student as he or she transitions from the eighth to the ninth grade. We look at students’ interest and areas in terms of weaknesses and their strengths. Also, looking at the academic records in terms of whether or not the student is disciplined enough to be able to handle certain things… So, by the end of the ninth grade, we have another interview with the student and we look at the student’s whole portfolio and the progress he/she is making after one year at the high school. This is personalizing education and guiding them. Also, providing the support for students to be able to achieve.
Through interviews with various participants, the researcher concluded that reactive supportive programs do not necessarily denote a late reaction to events; rather, they denote necessary responses to an occurrence for the purpose of correcting an at risk factor and establishing corrective measures. They are referred to as reactive because they are responses to something that has already occurred: behavior, academic failure, or excessive absenteeism. The corrective measures can be disciplinary in nature, academic second-chances through course recovery opportunities, or incentives for improved attendance. An example of reactive interventions is when students obtain disciplinary referrals. The disciplinary intervention triggered by the referral is monitored to include SEL support and continued monitoring for re-occurring deviant behavior.

In another demonstration of reactive and proactive intervention, the same approach is used when a student accumulates an excessive amount of absences or begins to demonstrate academic failures in their progress reports. IP Carty explained:

What I do, as well as the other AP, we now have a social worker that in on site. So, she helps us out a lot with providing the resources. She steps in and has that conversation. She can meet with that child as well on a regular basis.

**Sub-finding 2.2. Support through social emotional learning.** Establishing SEL programs is a theme that emerged for how CHS and CMS attempt to neutralize the effects of poverty and graduation. While most of the participants agreed that students’ low-SES does have an effect on student achievement, they also agreed that school can play a key role in balancing the effects of coming from a low-SES background. Based on the p-doc process, the CHS SEL process seeks to engage students in owning their responsibility while the school makes provisions for the limitations of their SES as it
pertains to academic and social life at the school. This process involves administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, literacy coaches, and other school personnel.

SEL and related support has emerged as an important initiative in TCPS. Both of the schools have made this supportive initiative part of their plan and, by default, of their guidance departments, administrators, and other school staff. Both schools have provided SEL training for staff on how to address students’ issues. This includes mentoring, monitoring, listening, and the building of ongoing relationships between school stakeholders and students. Other participants from the district provide psychological, socio-emotional, and social work support for students.

The provisions of SEL are prevalent at CHS and CMS for different reasons. One of those is the high percentage of students qualifying for the FRL program, which indicates that the families in this community are mainly of low-SES and, therefore, can benefit from a supportive network at the schools. Participants from both schools felt that the families were too preoccupied with “making ends meet” and education does not rise to be their highest priority. This means that their present living conditions takes precedence over long-term future planning, such as obtaining an education. Furthermore, participants expressed that many of the families are immigrants and are undocumented, which compounds students’ limitations to fully integrate into the school system culturally and linguistically, making it difficult to achieve academically. For these reasons, the school acts as an SEL-facilitating agent between the school and the families regarding finances, health, school supplies, tutoring opportunities, provision of technology for homework and projects, and more. These areas are tied to SEL programs as foci to be addressed by various school personnel: assistant principals, literacy coaches, guidance
counselors, and so on. These timely interventions were defined in the documents from which this theme emerged.

The SEL model, according to program documents, seeks to create student-centered learning and ownership of their responsibility, albeit guided by the teachers. It calls upon teachers and staff, not only to be knowledgeable of the academic side of students’ lives, but also students’ lives holistically, including their interests, aspirations, or lack thereof. By focusing on the child holistically, CHS and CMS seek to engage their entire life as they grow academically, socially, and physically.

Supporting students through SEL takes on many dynamics at CHS. The principal at CHS has specifically given instructions to his leadership team to entertain students’ ideas and interests and foster opportunities to create extracurricular activities stemming from students’ interests. Other collaborations involve support for student athletes, CHS music band students, as well as collaboration between the school and the community. For example, an increase in the Muslim student population was the driving force for the creation of the Muslim Club, and similarly for the Haitian club, the Latino-In-Action club, and so on. This is a deliberate attempt to meet the diverse needs of students and solidify the school’s place in the community as a welcoming atmosphere for all students. The essence of these initiatives is a school-centered response to the diversity at CHS and its intent to collaborate with community-driven needs. Principal Fields at CMS has also led her staff to implement a series of programs, parental involvement opportunities, and creation of supportive structures ranging from giving students clothes, snacks, or food, to conducting field trips at very low or no cost to students.
Sub-finding 2.3. Student academic support. The provision of academic support and monitoring takes a variety of forms because the at risk of dropping out indicators are just as diverse. For instance, students with a long history of academic failure may also come to CHS with a history of a high degree of absenteeism. These students are provided opportunities to recover classes or be placed, temporarily, at specialized schools designed to accelerate the accumulation of credits so they can catch up to their graduation cohort. This variety of indicators for students at risk of dropping out calls upon the schools to micro manage student progress and develop an ongoing relationship with students to discuss their academic progress, or lack thereof. This is particularly true for incoming ninth graders and 12th graders as they are set to graduate. Principal DePalma stated:

I would say that there are two grade levels which really need to be micro-managed: the ninth and 12th grade. You need to make sure they’re graduating and you need to make sure that they’re on track to start with it and not playing catch-up for the next three years. So, really, it’s about an accountability issue and a monitoring issue.

This provision of academic support, while balancing the need for socio-emotional support, reverberates in many initiatives being implemented at CHS. Literacy Coaches, Betty Beckford and Vicky Sheldon, are key components of this plan as they work to provide curricular support for teachers to improve their practice and also work with students in “small group” format, providing them tutoring and academic support. These supportive initiatives include coordination with teachers to provide students who do not have access to technology at home with alternative work so that they do not fall behind.
This support also depends a great deal on having the students own their responsibility. Regarding this student awareness piece, Principal DePalma stated:

Right at the end of their junior year, I sit down and have an accountability conversation with those students coming to the 12th grade and, in that gym, you could hear a pin drop when I spoke, even though we had 600 or 650 students. Why? Because we’re going to talk expectations. We’re stepping into the senior year and I do not tolerate nonsense. Then, I go down to 11th grade and I have conversations with 11th graders. I work my way down to the 10th graders and then down to the ninth graders. I tell the ninth graders, “You have a chance to either make your next three years at CHS really good three or really struggling three years.”

Assistant Principal, Victoria Roman, approaches this awareness and responsibility as she moves from year to year with her class. Now she will be moving to the 12th grade and, even before the end of their 11th grade year, Assistant Principal Roman showed me a report where she can account for every single student and their graduation status: grade point average, credits, community service hours, exams, as well as other graduation requirements. She has specific targets on the students who have deficiencies or are on target to meet the needed graduation requirements. Assistant Principal Roman senses the urgency of time and explained:

I can’t wait to September or August….So, what I’ve done is I’ve highlighted all their requirements. If there’s too many “nos,” that’s a red flag for me. But, primarily, anyone who’s below a 2.0 (in GPA). I had 63 juniors who fell below
Another way of providing students with academic support is through professional learning communities (PLCs). Through PLCs, teacher-leaders in the schools, such as department chairs and coaches, conduct weekly discussions as they implement the curricular programs and take into account students’ results on various ongoing assessments. The PLCs produce additional supports for teachers whose students do not show proficiency on the assessments. CHS and CMS use PLC data strategically to implement data-informed academic decisions, provide teachers support, and ensure accountability, as well as use their literacy coaches and assistant principals to provide professional support for teachers.

The identification of the academic, behavior, and attendance at risk factors triggers the intervention of the social worker, family counselors, ESOL facilitators, as well as school and district personnel. In the interview process, Assistant Principal Roman discussed how a team composed of administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors working to identify incoming freshmen and begin interventions from the outset is assembled. This intervention may include, as noted earlier, temporarily placing some students at specialized centers where they can “catch up” and recover credits, particularly if they are over-age due to multiple years of grade retentions.

In summary, there are multiple supportive initiatives throughout the schools and across grade levels working with students whose academic, behavior, and attendance needs have been duly identified in order to triage the urgencies with support before students get to the 12th grade. Besides the school staff’s urgency to identify at risk students, the other intent is to have students take increasing responsibility for their own
progress following the SEL model.

**Sub-finding 2.4. Engagement and reengagement through extracurricular activities.** Both principals are deeply convinced that extracurricular involvement is a consistent way of improving student engagement and involvement in schools. In the interviews, both principals discussed how they have exponentially increased the clubs and associations at their schools. Principal DePalma sees extracurricular activities as a way of developing leadership for both teachers and students. He posits that extracurricular activities provide opportunities. For instance, after realizing that many of the top students only applied to in-state colleges and universities, he discussed the issue with his AP Calculus teacher. In turn, the teacher created the “Aragna Program.” This club conducts college-visits around the country and provides assistance for students with SAT and ACT exams. As a result, a number of students have been accepted to Ivy League schools.

According to Principal DePalma, Assistant Principal Rossi, and Assistant Principal Roman, extracurricular activities and school organizations led by students are seen as a breeding ground for leadership, and personal and professional growth. Principal DePalma described the process of leadership building as follows:

You have teachers who are aspiring administrators. So, by providing opportunities, you have just created a small army. I’ll call it a small army of teachers that really have the best intentions for students because they want to do best by themselves, as well. So, when you have 90 clubs and organizations on the campus, now what you have is 90 student leaders. So, now, you have a big army being led by 90 students that are on a campus.
At CHS, organizations are geared to provide students with the opportunities to explore, to serve the school, to serve the community, to serve their fellow students, and to engage or reengage positively with school life. At CMS, Principal Fields feels the same way and pursues other ways of increasing student buy-in to school life. For Principal Fields, it’s about exposure: museums, theaters, clubs, and more. She makes it a point to provide these opportunities as inexpensively as possible or completely free of charge. Furthermore, she has made it her task to expand the school’s elective classes to include those based on the extracurricular interests of students. Guided by the success of a variety of elective classes, she has created academic competition clubs and has earned top prizes in county, state, and national competitions. Principal Fields remarked that a big source of pride for her was that the science-based SECME (science, engineering, communication, mathematics, and enrichment) team, made of up mostly female students, achieved one of the top prizes at a national competition. Principal Fields posited:

Kids from more affluent households have the opportunity to travel more, to be exposed to more. We try to keep the costs way down on the field trips. We take the kids to New Southern University (a pseudonym). They have a grant through the Arts Department and activities with the Museum of Science and Discovery in Sun City (a pseudonym). We received a grant to be able to take our kids to Kennedy Space Center. So, they all went (to the Kennedy Space Center) at no cost because I think it’s important that they see their possibilities, makes sense.

It is clear that for this sub-finding, both schools seek ways to provide the students with an array of support stemming from having identified at risk of dropping out indicators through the process of collaboration. Student intervention involves proactive
and reactive programs. Proactive programs involve intervening to prevent the possibility of potential disengagement. On the other hand, reactive programs involve intervening following an occurrence, particularly in the areas of discipline, academics, and attendance. Based on interviews and documents, the researcher concluded that the intervention often involves various forms of SEL, which is meant strengthen students’ self-reliance and accountability. Some of the interventions involve activities, such as athletics, technology, the arts, field trips, service organizations, alignment with faith-based organizations, and more.

The growth of these initiatives was quite evident under these principals’ leadership. Quite a number of the interest-based extracurricular activities were so successful in terms of student engagement that the principals made them part of the regular master schedule during the regular school day as elective classes at both middle schools. This was the case with robotics, debate, and STEM-based classes. This is an indicator that, just as the day programs can shape extracurricular activities, the extracurricular activities may also have an effect on the day programs.

**Finding 3. Principal Leadership as a Guide for Stakeholders and Community Engagement**

In this section, the third finding that principal leadership serves as a guide for stakeholders and community engagement is elucidated. This finding addresses my third research question by seeking to explain the vision and mission of the principals and how they work and guide stakeholders, managing the relationship between the school and the community, and seeking support for school initiatives that includes financial support, job opportunities for the students, and increased community pride in their schools.
The role of the principals and other stakeholders provides a view of how these schools function as related to the vision and mission established by the principals. Guided by the vision of Principal DePalma and Principal Fields, members of the schools participating in this study have independent, dependent, and interdependent roles to play around that vision. This finding will be detailed in the following two sub-findings: principal vision and mission and the role of teachers and school leaders, and community and parental involvement.

Sub-finding 3.1. Principal vision and mission and the role of teachers and school leaders. There is a principal-centered vision in the articulation process, programmatic continuum, and commitment to foster interpersonal relations on the part of staff in both schools, CMS and CHS. Principals’ influences in the proliferation of extracurricular activities, the implementation for SEL practices, the approach to stakeholder involvement, and the expansion of specialized career-oriented programs were traced from the data collection and analysis. In the process of providing the students a plethora of opportunities for extracurricular involvement, it also serves to provide participating teachers and staff with a variety of opportunities to receive mentoring and leadership experiences.

The influence that these principals have had in mentoring and fostering more supportive and SEL-driven leadership has not gone unnoticed by other schools and district offices. Over the last five years, CHS has been a breeding ground for principals, assistant principals, district-level leadership positions, as well as other promotional positions throughout TCPS. Principal DePalma stated:

We’ve had multiple people that have moved on to be promoted. We have about
45 promotions. Just in the seven years I’ve been here, we’ve had five that have moved on to principal positions, five that moved on to assistant principals, three that moved on to guidance directors, and about 20 that moved on to district positions. I also have others that are leading at other schools as department chairs as well as magnet coordinators.

The strength and distribution of the vision and the influence of the leader through distributed leadership was apparent when the researcher visited the leadership meetings under the chairmanship of IP Carty. In the meeting, I noticed that Principal DePalma was not present. IP Carty was chairing the meeting with the participation of department chairs, literacy coaches, assistant principals, and leading staff. The meeting took place toward the end of the school year and the agenda was to go over some of the goals established early on the year. There were several occasions where the goal was not met and IP Carty was persistent in wanting to understand the rationale. She also made clear her intent to provide those leaders with the resources and accountability necessary to meet their goals. This finding is consistent with Principal DePalma’s empowerment and mentoring approach, but is being rolled out from the perspective of the Intern Principal and the curricular leaders. During subsequent interviews with some of the participants who were present in that leadership meeting, clear references were made to the goals and vision Principal DePalma has established for the school.

**Sub-finding 3.2. Community and parental involvement.** CHS has had an increased footprint in the community, according to the student focus group and other participants. While the evidence showed that CHS does have a prominent role in the community now, this was not always the case. Principal DePalma admits that during his
first year, in his desire to have full accountability of the schools’ academic progress, he didn’t pursue community involvement as much. He felt that his major priority was to address the fact that the school had a state school grade of “C.” He expressed the following:

My first year, I had no interest or worries about the community. It was not on my mind. We were a “C” school and everything was turning around that fact. I felt that I needed to move my school grade, I needed to work on instructions with teachers and instruction with students.

However, after the second year, Principal DePalma began to see an increasing value in community involvement and became more involved by integrating the local businesses bringing career-centered programs, which provided students with internships and scholarship, as well as industry certification opportunities. He also looked to integrate other business by having the school perform at community events. Principal DePalma sits on the City’s Educational Board and collaborates with the City’s Commission and has evolved in his understanding of how the local government, the business community, and local leaders can become gainfully involved with the school: “I didn’t know the importance of this type of involvement my first year. It took time to develop those skills. It took time to figure those dynamics out.”

Schools in this case study struggled to engage parents and provide such engagement as an additional support for students. They strive, albeit with varying degrees of frustration, for parents to have a better understanding of what their role should be with regard to their children’s education. The guidance director at CMS described the difference between parental involvement and engagement:
Involvement is a way for the parents to have basic facts about the schools, including activities and calendars; however, engagement represents a deeper level of involvement. Engagement means knowing the teachers, understanding the college application process, being present in school activities, and being responsive every time the school seeks support or discussion.

Principal DePalma at CHS expressed a somewhat contrasting opinion. Although he expressed valuing parental engagement and looks to enhance it at every opportunity, he does not rely on such engagement, nor does he hold parents responsible for the accountability the teachers and staff should have. Principal DePalma strongly believes that educators must own the responsibilities of engaging their students and improving students’ academic and social engagement at school. He feels that parents play a role, but using parental involvement, or lack thereof, as an excuse for not owning such responsibilities as teachers is akin to a dereliction of the most essential roles of a teacher.

I don’t hold parents accountable for anything. In fact, in my pre-planning four years ago, my theme was “remove the parents.” What if you had 300 students [who] were homeless? What would you do when Little Johnny’s not performing in your classroom? Or if you don’t have a parent to go home to? Now, fast forward, it could be socio emotional learning, it could be instruction, it could be a lot of things and lots of variables that could be going on with Johnny that we control. I think all too often we want to rely on the parents to take care of our stuff, right? So, we’ve removed the parent.

To recap, the principals at CHS and CMS have expressed clear visions and missions for their schools and have sought to establish a cadre of leaders around them.
The main responsibility for these leaders is to implement the vision and mission through programs, building community relations, enhancing parental involvement without relinquishing their responsibility for accountability to the parents, and lastly, understand and owning the fact that the role of the educator is to improve the life of the student, academically and socially, as expressed in the interviews by several participants.

**Finding 4. Students’ Perspectives of CHS and Responsibility for Success**

The fourth finding is that students interviewed accept responsibility for their success, and that a supportive environment at school and home contribute to their greater engagement. The data from the students’ in the focus group provides answers to the first two research questions: synergy and continuum support, and the provision of supportive programs. Some students further concluded that in those instances where support from home is deficient, schools provide them with opportunities and intervention to help overcome those deficiencies. All of the students in the focus group discussed their urgency to succeed in spite of the limitations due, in part, to low-SES. They relied on the school as they took part in school clubs, organized events, found meaningful relationships with various school staff, had a clear vision for continuing on to college, and provided assistance and support to fellow students. The school’s supportive role through the educators complimented the role of parents.

At CHS, I met with five students who were eager to discuss their experiences during a focus group. The age of the students ranged from 15 to 18 years. The students were from diverse ethnic backgrounds and, for the most part, were academically successful. The principal delegated the responsibility of identifying the students to the teacher working with Student Government and also the sponsor of various clubs at CHS.
The teacher discussed the research and five students were selected to participate and proceeded to complete the necessary documentation. Thus, the students were not at risk students academically (although they were in the past), but several were dealing with the hardships of poverty and having to stay focused in school. All, however, were knowledgeable about the role the school plays in their lives and how they had benefited from the support CHS and their middle schools have provided for them.

We met before school started and I provided a light breakfast. Although the focus group interview lasted into first period, the administrator advised that she would provide the students with an excused late pass.

The students were fully cognizant of the sacrifices that led them to being at the threshold to completing high school and being on their way to college. They discussed their reasons to succeed, mentors and influence, responsibility to give back to the school, and the community and their families’ influence. The focus group members’ views are expressed in the following two sub-findings: student urgency to succeed despite socioeconomic limitations, and the supportive role educators and parents had in their success.

**Sub-finding 4.1. Student urgency to succeed despite socioeconomic limitations.** The five students were remarkably candid about their yearning for success and satisfaction. They discussed family situations, relationships with siblings who were academically successful, and siblings who had experienced failures. They also shared about their economic limitations and having experienced poverty. They saw themselves as having a better opportunity to succeed than their parents’ generation. The students
interpreted success as possessing wealth or fame, with most defining success as a way of making their family “proud” of them.

These students were experiencing academic and social success at CHS; they were not in danger of dropping out. For three of these five students, this success came after a life-long struggle academically to stay afloat as they learned English. For the other two, it took the struggles of family and friends to awaken their own necessity to do well in school. A few became emotional as they discussed their families’ sacrifices as they live limited lives and hope that “their children have better lives.” Others discussed how fortunate they were to have parents who were educated and were able to provide various types of academic, social, and family support.

All five students in the group felt extremely proud of CHS and are now involved in various service clubs, organizations, and advocacy groups to make a difference for other students. The students agreed that they must play a role in leveling the playing field for other less fortunate students. They serve as mentors, visit English as a Second Language classes, pursue civic involvement in school-wide projects, and more. Their sense of urgency is really a conscientious approach to the tremendous work and hardship endured by their families to be able to provide them with the opportunities they now have at CHS. On the sense of urgency, one student offered her perspective:

I’m the first generation because I was born here. My parents really don’t speak English that well. The situation didn’t allow my dad to finish college and had to drop out. Parents should set expectations. It doesn’t have to be academic wise. We have to do good in school, find something that you like or love and chase. Students also demonstrated a sense of urgency to foster better racial relations and
expressed their pride in the school for establishing the Muslim Club for the first time in the school’s history. One of the students’ views captures this effort in the following statement:

So, if someone does something you don't like, or someone is completely different from you, you just have two different viewpoints on how to go about life. I mean you learn to tolerate and still interact with that individual and still be able to get along with. So, I feel like CHS just exposes you to a kind of mini world in diversity and what the world is going to be like.

Another student in the group expressed:

I’m very happy that I grew up somewhere that is very diverse. I’m happy that I didn’t grow up somewhere like Minnesota where everyone is White, and, because of that, I can appreciate the Hispanic culture, I can appreciate African American culture.

While all the students felt they were responsible for their own success, some were keen to emphasize that life’s realities forced them to choose between surviving and being successful students. They felt that, indeed, the school’s teachers and administrators were called upon to neutralize these societal barriers to success. One student shared:

Like for me, my sister and my parents influenced me a lot. But, for those who don’t have that, like their parents or a sibling active in their life, it could have been a teacher or even organizations like National Honor Society. Even if a kid doesn’t have a good relationship with their parents or even teachers, I’ve seen peers help lift someone up and help them get them involved.

Another student said:
So, it’s teachers. Because for some kids, school is not their niche. It could be the arts or just sports. I feel [teachers] should just encourage you to do something with your life. For teachers, their main goal should be to try help us get us somewhere, encourage you to do what you want to do and provide you with the sources that you don’t know.

Sub-finding 4.2. Supportive role of educators and parents. The students in the focus group seemed eager to share who influenced their life and success. For most of them (4:6), their parents topped the list, but a close second were educators. One discussed her love for science and possibly pursuing a career in medicine because a teacher awakened in her the love for science. Another student discovered the importance of community service and tolerance thanks to a middle school teacher who pursued community service through the Spanish Club. For a young lady in the focus group, volleyball and track were the result of a coach who saw in her the potential for athleticism and leadership. Now, this student feels that those encouraging words from her teacher and coach made her believe more in herself and she proceeded to act upon those encouraging words with hard work, more confidence, and tenacity. She is now a top scholar and athlete at CHS.

It is important to note that all of the teachers to whom they referred as their role models, were teachers these students had at the middle school level. One student summarized:

You have to take personal ownership of what you’re doing. But also, conditions matter. You can’t expect someone to just go out and defy the odds with a student who was put in a bad scenario with a teacher who doesn’t really care and an
administrative staff who isn’t active.

In summary, I met with five students who were selected by one of the lead teachers. The students were from diverse backgrounds racially, socioeconomically, and in terms of gender. The students showed a mature analysis of their individual personal stories and acknowledged that their being cognizant of their past gave them a sense of urgency to work hard, be successful, and contribute to help other less fortunate students. The students were also able to speak to their quality of life at CHS and spoke candidly about how the schools and their surroundings have an impact on student achievement. Many held themselves accountable for their success, but they also held the school, and teachers and administrators in particular, accountable as well.

**Chapter Summary**

The findings revealed in this chapter capture the stories that arose in Case A in answering the research questions. On one hand, each school has different approaches to dealing with the provision of a supportive structure for students. On the other hand, both schools coincide in three approaches: provide students with a short-term vision to meet longer-term goals, provide a systemic continuum that addresses at risk indicators, and encourage and hold stakeholders responsible to commit to their individual roles in supporting student success.

Led by the principals’ visions, these schools have demonstrable evidence of building professional relations with their colleagues at CMS and CHS, as well as establishing meaningful and supportive relations with their students and communities. They also expressed the pressure of professional accountability for student success. The CHS student focus group provided data that contributed an incisive look at how these
students view their school. They were clear-minded about their past, their families’ history, their urgency to succeed, and their responsibility to give back by helping other students. They also expressed a sense of trajectory that started with varying degrees of barriers and now see in themselves the possibility of reaching higher social and economic status than that of their parents. The expanded horizons they see for themselves, such as career and college, are in large measure due to the influence and guidance of school staff.
CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS OF CASE STUDY B

The findings in Case Study B tell the story of LHS and its feeders, AMS and FMS. Pseudonyms are used for the three schools, their leaders, staff, and parents who participated in this study. These three schools serve low-SES communities derived from the fact that over 88% of the schools’ total population of students qualifies for FRL. Their African American student population makes up over 90% of the total students in the three schools (FLDOE, 2016a). The three schools have the distinction of longevity, with LHS leading the way being in existence over 110 years. Myriads of notable Americans are counted as LHS alumni: politicians, educators, national athletes, musicians, and various professionals. Case Study B is followed by a cross-case analysis in Chapter Six of both cases examined in this study.

Four findings emerged from archival documents, observations made in the schools, and interviews conducted at the schools. Interviewees included the principals and members of their leadership teams. Findings and sub-findings emerged as answers were sought for the three research questions of this study:

1. What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, each pair composed of a high school and its feeder middle school(s), have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?
2. What supportive programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the schools to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

3. What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders including teachers, counselors, support personnel, parents, and students, involved in the process of identifying students at risk of dropping out and implementing supportive programs?

**Lincoln High School**

LHS is located amidst a historically African American community with a rich history of traditions and people of statewide and national recognition. LHS is regarded as one of the “crown jewels” of the community, stated Principal Roberta Morgan (a pseudonym). Principal Morgan, a Black female, has been leading the school for the past six years. Prior to her principal role at LHS, she served as the principal at AMS; thus, she has first-hand knowledge of the AMS community and admittedly brings the perspectives of pride and tradition to her job as principal at the historical LHS.

LHS serves a total student population of just over 2,050 students comprised of 90% African American, 5.6% Hispanic, and 2.6% White students (FLDOE, 2016a). Three years prior to this study, LHS’s boundaries were redesigned to include students from a middle school that was closed by TCPS. In the process, LHS became Lincoln 6-12. The students from the discontinued middle school were dispersed by re-zoning LHS, as well as other adjacent middle schools. For clarity in this study, the main identifier for this school will be LHS, despite its new designation.

LHS has seen a resurgence in academic proficiency and graduation rate, using the
federal graduation guidelines (see Table 8). LHS is established in a community where 88% of the student population qualifies for FLR (FLDOE, 2016a). Notwithstanding its low-SES conditions, LHS has managed to surpass TCPS and State of Florida graduation rates in the last five years (see Table 8).

Table 8

Graduation Rates: Lincoln High School, Tropical County Public Schools, and Florida

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Graduation</th>
<th>LHS</th>
<th>TCPS</th>
<th>Florida</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LHS is considered a “powerhouse” in sports and music, according to the parents and school members who participated in this study. Over the past six years under the leadership of Principal Morgan, the school has sought to develop various programs in technology (including computers and robotics), debate, and other programs that are aimed at deepening academic rigor and engaging students’ interests in technology. It has established programs, such as the Digital Entrepreneurship Academy and Emerging Computer Technology Innovative Program, and Performance and Visual Arts magnet program, including studies in music, dance, theater, and visual arts.

LHS has experienced academic improvement with a range of state school grades from “D” to “A” over the last 10 years (see Table 9).
Table 9

*Florida School Grades for Lincoln High School over a 10-year Period (2008–2017)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Source: FLDOE (2016a).

**Participants at Lincoln High School.** After an initial meeting with the principal where the intent of the research was discussed, she identified six members of her staff and a parent (see Table 10).
Table 10

*Participants at Lincoln High School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role at CHS</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Roberta Morgan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Carol Brown</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Lawrence Steele</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance Director</td>
<td>Carmela Banks</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Coach</td>
<td>Rosa Francis</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Rebecca Rivers</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Curtis Bell</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Franklyn Middle School**

FMS is located just a few blocks from LHS and is considered a countywide magnet school. FMS serves a population of just over 1,600 students, 86% of whom qualify for the FRL program. The students’ racial and ethnic composition is 86% African American, 7% Hispanic, and 5% White (FLDOE, 2016a).

The principal at FMS is Henry Jackson, an African American male, who has a long history of service and work in the community. In his interview, he expressed a deep commitment to this community where he has lived his entire life, including having attended LHS as a high school student.

In 2015, FMS began a program of Gifted Student Education that includes students from the third, fourth, and fifth grades. Thus, this school has expanded in range of grades to become a 3-8 grade school. For the purpose of this study, the analysis concentrated on the grades 6-8 student population and the identifier continues to be FMS.
FMS has a Music and Arts magnet program as well as a STEM Innovative Program. These programs attract students from outside its boundaries. The school has obtained a letter grade of “C” in nine of the last 10 years, with the exception of 2013 when it obtained a grade of “D” (FLDOE, 2016a).

**Participants at Franklyn Middle School.** All participants at FMS were identified by Principal Jackson (see Table 1).

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role at FMS</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Henry Jackson</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Mario Booker</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Coach</td>
<td>Andria Temples</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Coach</td>
<td>Rita Gooden</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Adams Middle School**

AMS is located just a few miles northeast of FMS in the same general neighborhood. During the timeline of this study, AMS was being led by Leticia Marley, who is Black of West Indian descent. She was district-assigned to lead AMS while the official principal was working in TCPS as part of an internship program for one year. AMS boasts two countywide magnet programs: Pre-Law and Public Affairs and Pre-Med. According to the TCPS (2016b) website, the Pre-Law magnet program provides students with realistic experiences and foundations in the field of law, criminal justice, or public affairs, while the Pre-Med magnet program is designed to offer students unique opportunities for those who are interested in medicine, dentistry, veterinary science,
nursing, and health.

These magnet programs were originally created with the intention of attracting high performing students to AMS. A majority of the 1,038 student population is made up of students in its surrounding vicinity. AMS’s student population has one of the highest poverty rates in the district with 95% of its student body qualifying for FRL (FLDOE, 2016a). AMS’s ethnic composition is 99% minority students, broken down as follows: 95% African American, 3.1% Hispanic, and 0.57% White. Over the last 10 years, the school’s grade has declined as follows: from 2008 through 2013 it received a grade of “A,” followed by three years of “B” grades, and two years of “C” grades in 2016 and 2017 (FLDOE, 2016a).

**Participants at Adams Middle School.** After discussing the research project and criteria provided for participants, Principal Marley selected members of her leadership team who could provide different perspectives (see Table 12).

Table 12

*Participants at Adams Middle School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role at FMS</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Leticia Marley</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Sharon Summers</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>Marcus Lenoit</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnet Coordinator</td>
<td>Lucille Bell</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Coach</td>
<td>Rose Lyon</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Finding 1. Program Articulation Based on STEM and the Arts

The articulation between these three schools is somewhat complex in that they all have popular countywide magnet programs. The data described in this finding provides information to answer the first research question, particularly as it pertains to the synergistic approach and continuum of programs from the middle to high schools. These programs are selective and are for students who are high achievers. In order to be accepted into a magnet program, a student must have a level four or five in reading and math (on scale of 1-5) in state assessments. Applicants must also have “good conduct” and a grade point average of at least 3.0. Furthermore, some of the programs are performance-based, such as music and art, and require auditions (TCPS, 2016b). These schools were chosen to participate in this study because they met all of the established criteria: serve a majority-minority student population, increase graduation rates, have high percentages of students who qualify for FRL, and have over 500 points in the state school grading system. This finding highlights the efforts that the schools in Case Study B have implemented to (re)engage students and prevent dropouts, which is the reason these schools were selected to participate in this study. For many students who are able to demonstrate academic proficiency, their socio-economic condition creates an array of at risk factors that require the schools to intervene accordingly.

This is the case for the LHS and FMS performing arts programs. The students wishing to be considered have to provide copies of their report cards and, if the student does not have the state’s test scores, then the student must provide nationally recognized standardized achievement scores in reading and math. In order to attract students from across TCPS, magnet schools provide showcases and special information sessions.
This careful selection of students, as well as the curricular content of the programs, creates a special dynamic with regards to the program-based articulation of the three schools. For instance, AMS’s Pre-Med and Pre-Law magnet programs have more in common with other neighboring high schools that possess high school level versions of those programs, whereas LHS does not. However, FMS’s Performing Arts and STEM magnet programs have a clear programmatic continuum with LHS’s Digital Entrepreneurial and Performing Arts magnet programs. This finding will be further detailed in the following two sub-findings: programmatic articulation based on STEM and Performing Arts; and showcasing talent and expanding opportunities.

**Sub-finding 1.1. Programmatic articulation based on STEM and Performing Arts.** LHS’s Principal Morgan explained that although AMS is part of the LHS feeder pattern, many of its students go to other neighboring high schools. She further explained that FMS students overwhelmingly attend LHS due to boundary and programmatic articulation. She expressed the existence of a deliberate effort on the part of the staff to maintain good communication, showcasing programs and professional collaborations in several formats with both schools.

FMS’s Performing Arts program has a sound reputation throughout TCPS, according to Principal Jackson, and is a source of pride in the community. FMS Math Coach, Rita Gooden, discussed how students at FMS are performing intricate and high-level productions, such as The Lion King, Little Shop of Horrors, Aida, and more. Mrs. Gooden posited the following:

My own daughter’s experience, she is an eighth grader and is taking three high
school classes: physical science, algebra, and dance, because of our Performing Arts program. That is not common in middle schools. Through the arts, she has been able to experience that for three years now. She has traveled to New York. They go to the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

Literacy Coach, Andria Temples, opined that students at FMS are cognizant of what FMS has meant to them. Successful FMS students come back to the school and share their life story, sometimes as famous professionals and sometimes as standout high school students at LHS. Mrs. Temples explained how various nationally recognized artists attended FMS and rattled off their names. She was also quick to point out that when LHS’s jazz band won the distinction of being named one of the best of the country, all of the students in the band were former FMS students.

Assistant Principal Mario Booker celebrated the importance of promoting articulations with LHS based on the arts, but takes a different approach based on the other programs at FMS, such as the STEM programs, which have a direct curricular continuum with LHS’s Digital Entrepreneurship Academy and Emergent Technology programs.

Assistant Principal Booker is deliberate in his approach, as he explained:

We have STEM, kids that are over-performing in mathematics and engineering, pre-engineering program, and then we have the Performing Arts and then we have STEM programs. We have kids who are coding here, girls who are coding. We have cyber security for our girls. We have coding for our guys and girls, we have the robotics program that mirrors programs at Lincoln High School and (mentioned another high school).

To summarize, the articulation is very deliberate, more so between FMS and LHS
than between AMS and LHS due to the fact that AMS’s multiple boundaries and programs articulate better with other high schools. FMS and LHS have taken a multipronged approach to this relationship by showcasing and highlighting the continuum in technologies where FMS has deliberately expanded its technology-based programs and maintains very close ties with the performing arts programs at LHS.

**Sub-finding 1.2. Showcasing talent and expanding opportunities.** LHS showcases its magnet programs to various TCPS middle schools, but specifically to families and students of its two feeder middle schools, particularly showcasing students who attended AMS and FMS. These showcases are traditionally before December when the district opens the student school choice window, which is when students select their next schools. For LHS, these showcases targeting their feeder middle schools serve two purposes: first, it is meant to entice students to continue their high school education at LHS attracted by the special programs and academics; and second, when the middle school students see their fellow students from their own school and community succeeding at LHS, it serves to strengthen their resolve to emulate them and enroll at LHS as well. In essence, LHS shows these middle school students that they can also be successful at LHS.

LHS’s success in the emergent technologies initiatives, winning competitions at the state and national level, as well as their nationally celebrated performing arts programs is portrayed by FMS as their own success as well, hence, the frequent invitation of current LHS-former FMS students to visit and mentor at their former middle school. However, the intent is more than simple feeding of students to LHS; it is to address the students’ needs in attendance, behavior, and academics in order to expand student choice
and opportunities beyond FMS and LHS. In the process, students are made aware that these coveted magnet program have rigorous academic, attendance, and behavior requirement that must be met for acceptance into these programs. These indicators of academics, behavior, and attendance are monitored at FMS and AMS by guidance counselors, administrators, and other school personnel.

At LHS, Principal Morgan discussed how they look to prepare their own middle school students:

We are now able to have some of my best high school teachers work with the middle school students and being able to provide those high school courses. We have students who are taking Algebra 2 and Geometry. We offer the students everything that they need, assuming that they are eligible to take them.

LHS is also aware of the opportunities that their students have had at the national level. Many students, prepared with a strong academic base from LHS, have gone on to the best schools in the country. Principal Morgan shared:

So, many of our performing arts students have even gone on to the big Ivy League schools, Juilliard, Berkeley, UCLA, Michigan, and the same thing on the technology side, many of our students continue with a HBCU (Historically Black College or University), legacies that they’re following from their parents by going to FAMU and Bethune-Cookman and Howard University and it’s just a great place; Lincoln High is just a great place to work and a great place to learn.

The data demonstrates that the three school leaders see the schools as having the obligation to neutralize the effects of being from low-SES backgrounds. This urgency to provide for students’ deficiencies, socially and academically, involves the
implementation of SEL as the basis upon which the schools can provide academic, attendance, and behavior support. According to Assistant Principal Booker and Principal Jackson, students come to school displaying academic deficiencies as measured by state assessments, being over-age due to retention, and having poor attendance and a history of behavior problems.

These at risk concerns prompted TCPS to implement SEL initiatives throughout the district and meet the demands of a state statute and the district strategic plan requiring support for students through SEL initiatives (TCPS, 2017). SEL involves a series of supportive network for families, mainly through outreach initiatives from local government agencies, as well as district and school personnel, such as social workers, family counselors, school resources officers, and various types of community liaisons and leaders.

The schools look to create student-centered ownership of their responsibility and integration so that they can engage in school life to the fullest extent possible. The supportive structure involves various types of support for students, such as mentorships, counseling, financial assistance, expansion for the school day with extracurricular activities, and so on. The three principals see this process as a key factor, due to the fact that “survival” for the students has a higher priority than academic proficiency. With the implementation of a well-structured SEL model, students engage the school in positive activities and do not have to “survive” following the “laws of the streets” as Principal Jackson puts it:

So, all of my departments, my teachers, my social worker, my school psychologist, my guidance department, my behavior specialist, my administrators,
all understand that their job is to provide whatever support there is for these students, to identify those at risk indicators that you mentioned (academics, behavior, and attendance), and to utilize their own campus resources. If we can’t provide those necessary resources to these kids to advance and move forward, then they’re to identify outside resources, not only ones that are already coming to the school, but additional ones that can also help the family structure as a whole providing support for these kids. Because these kids don’t have a sense of hope. They’re just going to succumb to the laws of the streets, if you will. Just strictly survival. And they’re not worried about education, they’re not worried about their future, they worry about living day to day and you have to break that cycle because there is a future for these kids.

Finding 2. Social Emotional Learning as a Base for Academic Learning

It is essential to bear in mind that well over 90% of the general student population meets one or more criteria to be identified as at risk (TCPS, 2017). Therefore, the implementation of the various programs includes mostly low-SES and potentially at risk students. The data obtained provides answers to the second research question pertaining to how schools intervene with supportive programs, in this case, SEL and academic programs and opportunities. This provision of programs aims to promote academic advancements, such increased enrollment in AP classes, expansion of technology classes, and participation in extra-curricular activities. It also provides SEL support through mentoring opportunities and behaviors, and working with families through social workers and school personnel. This finding will be further explained in the following two sub-
findings: providing holistic support for students academically and socio-emotionally, and extracurricular engagement for positive relationships with and within students.

**Sub-finding 2.1. Providing holistic support through social emotional learning.** It was found that providing holistic support through various components of SEL for the schools in Case Study B begins with the importance that the principals attribute to the schools’ presence in students’ lives. Representing this perspective, Principal Morgan interprets her presence and small conversations with students as a way to establish relationship and trust, a factor that provides the setting to engage students in deeper problem-solving conversations later on. When discussing the effects of low-SES conditions in students’ lives, Principal Morgan explained:

I know that there is a lot of research that (low-SES has a negative effect on student academics) says, and obviously, to some degree, I do believe that. But, I’m a product myself of this same community. I mean literally right around the corner with parents who were divorced early. So, I have people who grew up with me on the same street who didn’t finish high school and didn’t go to college, and, so, I think that, while, of course that does have some effect, I also think that if you’re fortunate enough to have someone in your life who is pouring into your spirit and in your soul and building your self-esteem and telling you that you can do it, it doesn’t really matter where you come from.

Other participants at LHS shared similar experiences in their personal lives that led them to conclude that school and SEL support can effectively neutralize the effects of negative life experiences. Guidance Director, Carmela Banks, is an experienced educator with almost 30 years in education, including 14 years at AMS, and proudly stated that
this is her 13th year at LHS. Guidance Director Banks explained that she has found primarily three types of students: 1) students who function at a very high level regardless of what “type of box” you put them in, 2) borderline students who may just be lacking coping skills, and 3) students who struggle academically and socially. Regarding the third type of student, Guidance Director Banks stated:

We have those that come and they’re not quite where we want them to be academically or socially and those kids, we believe, are our top priority. For Lincoln High, this group of low performing students outnumbers that middle and that higher-level group I spoke about. We try to put things in place to address that large number, without excluding in our middle and our high kids.

Mindful of the fact that many students come to LHS, these supportive programs are aimed at addressing at risk deficiencies and reengaging students toward graduation. During the interviews, Assistant Principal Steele and Assistant Principal Banks shared that teachers discuss students who exhibit at risk indicators in academics, behaviors, and attendance and report their findings to the guidance counselors or their respective administrators. Once a student has been identified, guidance follows up and, if it’s warranted, the school social worker visits the house to follow up with the family and potentially provide support or information, as warranted. Principal Morgan also shared that, often, the coaches or faculty club advisors take the opportunity to intervene with students when they are participating in their extracurricular activities.

At FMS, Assistant Principal, Mario Booker, explained his way of finding the right approach to provide the precise type of SEL needed. Assistant Principal Booker is an experienced educator in his forties who came to the United States from Jamaica and
struggled as a new immigrant, but with support and hard work, he was able to overcome adversities. Today, he sees himself as a “success story” and an “example” for his students. His feels that being proactive gives him the opportunity to provide the right type of SEL support. To this end, he utilizes a computer program that the district provides to all schools known as, Basis. This program creates different categories of indicators: standardized test scores, grade retention, ESE, ELL, FRL, and so on. Each school has the ability to arrange and categorize students and identify student deficiencies.

However, Assistant Principal Booker expressed the urgency for more personalized student information to provide support for incoming students. According to district criteria for identifying students at risk of dropping out, a majority of incoming students meet one or more at risk indicators. Assistant Principal Booker collaborates with the feeder elementary school and studies the content of the cumulative record folders to determine the history of “struggles” for students who are identified as at risk. Documents and archival data illustrate that over 70% of the student population entering FMS have academic deficiencies and come from schools have had a history of being graded “F” by the state (TCPS, 2016b). Assistant Principal Booker stated:

We do talk to the teachers at the elementary school before they come. We do look at the data. We do look at their formative and summative test data. I have experience on the elementary level. I’ll pull “cume” (cumulative record) folders for kids to see if they had a history of struggle at elementary school. Here, at Franklyn, it’s a unique position, as an administrator, I loop with my students, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. So, it behooves me to learn the student completely. So, that way, I can prescribe their path or whatever other supports I
could get them from sixth grade going into seventh, going to eighth.

Assistant Principal Booker expressed his admiration for Principal Jackson and shared that he wholeheartedly ascribes to his leadership approach, particularly as it pertains to students support and SEL. This acceptance possibly emanates from Principal Jackson’s directive to his leadership team, and his directive is quite clear. Principal Jackson explained his leadership approach and philosophy regarding SEL as follows:

So, all of my departments, my social worker, my school psychologist, my guidance department, by behavior specialist, my administrators, and teachers they must understand that their job is to provide whatever support there is for these students, to identify those indicators that you mentioned (academics, behavior, and attendance) and to utilize their own campus resources. If we can’t provide those necessary resources these kids need to advance and move forward, then they’re to identify outside resources, not only ones that are already coming to the school, but additional ones that can also help the family structure as a whole.

**Sub-finding 2.2. Extracurricular engagement for positive student relationships.** Providing extracurricular programs is more than finding positive activities to engage the students. For these schools it is a deliberate approach to connect students’ interests and opportunities and discover new things in a positive environment. For instance, at LHS, Guidance Director Banks discussed how she personalizes students’ interests in some of the elective tracks as a way to address, among other things, attendance concerns. Expanding the elective options provides the students the opportunity to have a class that allows them to expand their horizons and, often, it becomes their favorite class. Guidance Director Banks explained:
What we do with that at risk group (showing at risk indicators in academics, behavior, or attendance) is we spend a lot of time in the classroom with those students and then at the end of each marking, we are constantly checking for the grades, for the attendance, and we try to keep up with their elective courses.

For Principal Morgan, having a sound extracurricular program staffed with the right educators increases the possibility of building supportive relations. Principal Morgan posited that LHS has some of “brightest students in the district,” but further explained that, often, “They don’t take themselves seriously until it’s almost too late.” She concluded that one of the ways to remedy this is through extracurricular activities and provided various examples, such as mentoring, clubs, service organizations, community pride, and seeing how other students reengage and take themselves seriously. Principal Morgan contemplated:

They don’t take themselves seriously. How do you make the connection of potential with a young man so he could take himself seriously? It is through these extracurricular engagements. It is through the mentoring. It is a combination of programs, is that personalization piece within whatever they’re involved in. For example, I’m just going to use basketball. They may be a part of the program and, sure, they learn team concepts, but it’s when the coach pulls them aside and has that one-on-one conversation and says: “Dude, you could do this! I’m so proud of you” or says, “I’m so disappointed in you!”

At FMS, Principal Jackson seizes the opportunity of extracurricular activities to accomplish a number of goals. When he arrived at FMS, he considered the fact that many students come to school struggling in reading and math and, by State directive, had
to be given double periods of intensive classes, thereby limiting the opportunity to take electives classes, such as music, the arts, physical education, and others. To remedy this, Principal Jackson met with his team and decided to go from a straight 6-period day to a 7-period day. This innovative scheduling strategy provided FMS students the opportunity to take an additional elective class. He proudly refers to this supportive initiative as “Jackson’s Magnet Program.” It proved to be a great opportunity for students to explore different interests.

This initiative was coupled with the expansion of clubs and organizations for after school activities. FMS has increased its number of clubs and organizations from just a few to over 35 clubs, all of which are student-interest based and include: emergent technology, sports, chess, music, performing arts, theater, coding, among others. The expansion of clubs and extracurricular activities had to be carefully planned for true integration of the students. Principal Jackson and other participants are mindful of the fact that having magnet programs creates the sense of a “school within a school,” with the implication that there is a separation of high performing students from low performing students. For instance, although many of the students participating in the magnet programs meet several at risk indicators, they have higher academic standing than regular non-magnet program students.

In order to mitigate the academic division between regular students and higher achieving magnet program students, students are not separated during extracurricular activities. The integration of both student groups creates a positive role model concept when students of all academic standings simply learn as they’re having fun in various activities, such the STEM clubs. Principal Jackson explained:
We also incorporate a lot of clubs, a lot of after-school programming for these kids, for those kids that normally don’t have opportunity during the day. I provide opportunity for them after school: we have the 21st Century program, we have YMCA, we have Student Government, we have Future Educators of America Club, we have robotics, we have engineering, we have chess club, we have math competitions here, drawing competition. I expose those kids and it’s not just for the gifted kids in the STEM or magnet program or the kids in the performing arts, it is for everybody. There is no special designation of students. They are all together.

To summarize, my findings show that under the leadership of the principals these schools have methodically implemented a series of extracurricular programs to provide opportunities for students to discover varying possibilities to excel and build relationships. These activities set the table for mentoring and uplifting conversations with coaches or faculty advisors. It also serves to connect with the community through service organizations and, as in the case of FMS, intermingle with students who may have different academic proficiency profiles.

**Finding 3. Principals’ Commitment to Mission and Vision**

In this finding, the principals’ leadership and vision serves as a guide for the work and engagement of different stakeholders: administrators (principal and assistant principal), school leaders, teachers, students, parents, district personnel, and members of the community. Data provides answers to my third research and demonstrates that Principals Morgan, Jackson, and Marley exhibit a passionate commitment to the vision and mission they have for their school, thereby creating a positive effect on stakeholders.
This finding will be further explained in the following three sub-findings: principals’ passion for mission and vision, the role of parents as support for students, and the greatest impact on student achievement.

**Sub-finding 3.1. Principals’ passion for mission and vision.** The three principals involved in this case expressed how they are deeply committed to the success of their schools. The expressed intent is to reengage and empower students to succeed beyond the boundaries of their community and overcome the barriers they encounter as a result of their low-SES. To accomplish this goal, their leadership teams and stakeholders need to wholeheartedly understand the mission and the vision of encouraging students to enhance their opportunities, be provided with a variety of supportive programs, and feel accepted in the schools’ academic and social life. The principals’ mission, vision, and daily work looks to level the students’ playing field and improve their opportunities for success.

The role of the principal, as they see it, is well defined because in a professional and personal way, much of it is emanating from their own personal stories. For instance, Principal Jackson at FMS was born and raised in the community and attended LHS as a young man. Subsequently, he joined the U.S. Air Force and served for eight years. He makes it a point to lead by example and establishes clear expectations for all of his stakeholders, such as using all available resources to make up for students’ shortcomings: academically, socioeconomically, or emotionally. His posited that all stakeholders’ decisions must be made in the best interests of students.

On the day data collection at his school began, Principal Jackson’s father had passed away the night before, he was nursing a severe cold, and he was working on the
school budget under a tight deadline; yet, he found time to provide guidance to a young lady who was making poor decisions. He explained:

We’re talking about protecting children. So, whenever I have opportunity to speak with the kids, I will always put whatever is going in my life on the back burner and I will give that kid my full attention. I think one of the hardest things for us as principals or teachers is being a good listener.

He continued to discuss how he expects his leadership team to get students to focus on not only identifying a career goal, but also providing their support to help students remain focused: “So, my guidance counselors, my social worker, my school psychologist, my ESE specialist, my support facilitators, my administrators, my behavior specialist all must work with these students to help them to try to identify career goals.”

LHS is very active in presenting itself as a historic school that is the center of the community that local students consider “an honor” to attend, as expressed by Principal Morgan. The middle schools have reacted in-kind and portray LHS as a desirable high school with ample opportunities. Principal Morgan also feels that her stakeholders, starting with her leadership, have to play an active role. Her story is also community-rooted and personal. She began her professional career as a substitute teacher at LHS. Under her motto, “Together we make it happen,” she feels the value of the school is in the strength and vision she has for her team:

So, one of the things that I do is I value them, and I value their input. I know as the principal of the school I can make all the decisions and I know all the decisions ultimately rest on me. But I always enquire and get input from the team. And not just my leadership team of administrators, not just the support
team. I take it to curriculum council, where all the leaders are there and all teachers are invited. I take it to our faculty meetings, because it’s just my leadership style. I believe that you have to have buy-in to be successful.

**Sub-finding 3.2. The role of parents as support for students.** Parental involvement is a supportive structure that is cultivated with varying degrees of success by these principals. Principal Marley at AMS stated:

I want parents to really try to be present in their student’s life. Stay involved in their education and it’s not that you have to know everything that we’re teaching them. We are not asking to be content strong. I’m asking them to be quality strong, just be present for when your child needs you at home.

Assistant Principal, Marcus Lenoit, at AMS feels that for parents to become engaged, more than involved, they need to trust; thus, it’s up to the school to provide the reasons to trust. For some members of his community it means translation. He feels that parents do not feel comfortable when a language barrier interferes with effectively communicating with school personnel. He explained:

Many parents are not going to come in because they feel that if they go to a location that doesn’t speak their language, they don’t feel at ease because: “They are not going to understand me.” So, I offer them the opportunity to come to the school and fill out the free and reduced lunch form with the parent and tell them to bring whatever problem they have: “We will help you.”

Guidance Director Banks and Principal Morgan feel that for effective parental engagement, parents have to be educated in terms of what type of involvement they’re seeking. Guidance Director Banks explained:
When we call them in, it is about educating them about education. How to help your kid do the homework. It’s like when they tell you on the airplane, “first take care of yourself, then take care of the other person.” That’s what we need to do for our Lincoln community parents.

**Finding 4. Leveraging School Value to the Community: Personally and Socially**

After triangulating the data, the participants at the five schools demonstrated that they were fully cognizant that the community places a great value historically, culturally, and politically, on their schools. Therefore, leveraging their influence and providing the community with various pieces of information and propaganda became a response to the expectations the community already had of the schools. Furthermore, the schools also wanted to establish themselves as those where these community members would want to send their kids. Therefore, this data provides certain answers for all three of the research questions: synergistic collaboration of stakeholders; supportive practices through mentoring, SEL, and community engagement; and principal-centered vision for community engagement and involvement.

They leveraged the value that the schools had in the community by cultivating positive relationships with civic organizations, government agencies, clubs, and faith-based organizations. Leveraging this influence became a natural response because the participants, particularly the principals and the parents, were quite emphatic of the weight and value the schools have on the community, historically, socially, ethnically, and academically. This emerged as a centerpiece of the schools because the schools utilized this consciousness to appeal to different forces in the community to provide support, mentorship, advocacy, and active participation in events such as the arts, athletics, and
family outreach. This finding is detailed in the following two sub-findings: awareness of the school’s place in the community, and garnering community engagement for student support.

**Sub-finding 4.1. Awareness of the school’s place in the community.** Over the years, LHS has gotten a facelift that includes modern buildings, a state-of-the-art theater, an auditorium, new classrooms, and new offices. The architecture encloses over 110 years of history and traditions that were very present in the mind of Principal Morgan, as she explained that the relationship between the school and the community is no coincidence. Principal Morgan posited:

> This is the beloved community school. This is the pillar of this community because this, at one time, was the only school for African Americans to attend and we are now celebrating 110 years. Even those who didn’t attend Lincoln High have a respect for Lincoln High. My oldest brother went to Lincoln and all the older kids in the neighborhood went to Lincoln, that’s all we knew. Whether you attended Lincoln High or not, you still rooted for Lincoln High and you wanted Lincoln High to be successful. There is just love for this school like no other.

Principal Morgan explained that, much to her continued frustration, being one of the youngest in her family, LHS became over-crowded, prompting the construction of newer high schools and subsequent boundary modifications. As a result, she was forced to go to another high school. She would have loved to be part of the LHS tradition.

Principal Jackson explained his commitment to FMS and that, by default, as his students transition to LHS, he also works for the success of LHS. He expressed his devotion to FMS and its relationship to the community:
But, for me, simply knowing the neighborhood because I was born and raised here, I know where these kids live. I know the areas they come from. I have conversations with these students. I’ve talked to them. I speak with their parents and so it’s my job to try to create an opportunity for these kids to be successful and these kids to feel a part of something. By understanding where they’re coming from and where they’re trying to go, I’m trying to instill in them that they have the ability. I try to provide hope for them, but also to provide that support for them.

Assistant Principal, Carol Brown, at LHS discussed the community’s identity with LHS, but has higher expectations of involvement. She posited that she would like to see a higher degree of involvement in school matters, particularly as it pertains to the kids’ academics and operational support for school organizations, such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the School Advisory Council (SAC). She was assertive as she expressed how important the school is to the community and made it known that this fact was not lost on any school or government officials:

So, that pride is there, but it doesn’t always translate into everything that you need from the community. But, I think if anyone were to say that they were going to close down Lincoln High School, there would be an uprising like you would not believe because this was their school. Lincoln has a very strong community when it comes to school pride in the sense that a lot of our students’ parents went to Lincoln, their parents went to Lincoln, and their parents before them went to Lincoln. So, you know, there is that kind of community pride that doesn’t always translate into support as far as PTA and SAC and those kinds of things.
**Sub-finding 4.2. Garnering community engagement for student support.**

Mindful of the fact that all stakeholders should have a vested interest in the progress of the school and, ultimately, in the capacity of the students to be citizens that gainfully contribute to their community, LHS Assistant Principal, Lawrence Steele, set out to share this conclusion with local businesses. Assistant Principal Steele shared the story of how they visited the local businesses in pursuit of opportunities for jobs, mentorships, and internship for students. He stressed that “community outreach is very important to Principal Morgan.” Many of these businesses, from the local car wash to the convenient store, have all been in the neighborhood for years and were now in the hands of second-generation owners. Assistant Principal Brown and Assistant Principal Steele advised that there has been an increase in their involvement and support for their programs. For instance, Motorola sponsors the Robotics Club and local businesses provide support as needed through job opportunities for students, mentorship, and contributions.

At AMS, the concept of community involvement centers on a comprehensive mentorship program that involves faith-based organizations, local business, and school personnel. Assistant Principal, Marcus Lenoit, feels that it is important to create a supportive structure around students in order to motivate the right behavior toward success in academics, behavior, and attendance. This mentorship program looks to establish goals and celebrate students who meet their goals. AMS mentors meet with their mentees weekly for support and monitoring purpose, and local businesses provide gift cards and incentives for the occasions when they need to celebrate accomplishments. Assistant Principal Lenoit explained the mentoring program:

We have over 25 teachers in school that mentor kids. They meet with the students
once a week or twice. We also meet with the parents. We have a dinner with the parents. We do that, usually, in January. Parents are all invited to meet with the mentors. And we simply talk. We are not talking about behavior; we are talking about how to support this kid.

Assistant Principal Summers, also at AMS, discussed the ways that AMS has cultivated the involvement and support of the faith-based community through local churches. She reached out to the community churches and forged a relationship with the pastors who “felt passionate” about providing their own mentorship to students. What occurred pleasantly surprised Assistant Principal Summers. The desire to contribute with support from the participating churches spread from the pastors to the congregants. After receiving the appropriate mentor training and district clearance, the mentors were aligned with students identified as at risk of dropping out. Assistant Principal Summers vetted these volunteers through the established district process for safety and compliance. She explained the faith-based mentoring program as follows:

So, the church mentoring started because I forged a relationship with our community churches and reached out to them and asked if any of the pastors would be interested in mentoring. So, the parents would actually come to the school with the child and they would provide support to the entire family: job assistance, donated items, a bed in their home and things of that sort and, then, from there, I expanded it because a lot of the other congregants also wanted to participate. So, I definitely think that it’s beneficial because they can engage with them at the park, at church, and walk home.

Summarizing the fourth finding, the role the community has played, and
continues to play, in these schools is important. Historically, LHS serves as a reminder of a past when it once was a segregated school for African Americans. Presently, the school is seen by the community as a symbol of resilience and pride. The principals know this fact, as two of the three principals either attended LHS or have family members that attended LHS. The community role is not merely relegated to the historic role; there is an active sector of local faith-based organizations involved through mentoring and other forms of support.

**Chapter Summary**

The findings of Case Study B capture the story of three schools that are pillars of their community with many years and multiple generations of students passing through their classrooms. Poverty is a factor, at close to 90% FRL, yet these schools have found ways to establish modern technology and science-based and performing arts programs to motive student engagement in the areas of academics, behavior, and attendance. Just as important, they have also structured multiple-tiered supportive programs to address the many factors that play out in a student’s life, particular in high poverty communities.

The principals’ visions, along with their personal and professional commitment to their schools and their community, are the cornerstone of the leadership teams’ approach to serving their students. Principal Jackson encapsulated this approach to educational leadership as follows:

You’re doing it because you see the bigger picture that each school in those communities are helping to improve the family structure of that community and all is knitted together globally as we are all doing this work. We are sustaining humanity to improve because we are here educating these children.
CHAPTER 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this qualitative, multi-site, case study was to understand and describe how two pairs of schools from the same school feeder patterns, composed of a high school and its feeder middle school(s), have collaborated and instituted supportive programs for students that they have identified as at risk of dropping out of school. Case Study A was composed of CHS and its only feeder school, CMS. Case Study B was composed of LHS and its two feeder middle schools, FMS and AMS. These schools are located in a large school district in the State of Florida, TCPS.

Schools were selected using purposeful sampling after applying four criteria to all the high schools in TCPS in the following order: serves a population composed of at least 80% minority students, particularly African American and Latinos; serves a population of students where at least 70% of the students qualify for the FRL program; has a high school graduation rate of at least 80% for three consecutive years using federal graduation guidelines; and has accumulated at least 500 points in the State of Florida school grading system. Two high schools in TCPS met all of the criteria. For the purpose of capturing a more complete story regarding the provision of supportive programs, the three feeder middle schools that send students to the selected high schools were included, for a total of five schools.

Communication was established with the principals in the five schools for the purpose of explaining the research project. The need for participants who met the criteria of being knowledgeable about implementation of supportive programs, being willing to
participate, and being from a diverse professional group in order to provide perspective from different points of view in the schools, was discussed with the principals. Aside from interviews and focus groups, additional data were collected from publicly available archival data, and observations. The study was conducted in the State of Florida, and pseudonyms were used in order to ensure confidentiality and protection for the participants, the schools, programs, and TCPS. The collection of data necessary for the analysis of supportive programs in majority-minority schools with high graduation rates was guided by three research questions:

1. What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, each pair composed of a high school and its feeder middle schools, have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

2. What supportive programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the schools to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

3. What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders including teachers, counselors, support personnel, parents, and students, involved in the process of identifying students at risk of dropping and implementing supportive programs?

The data obtained from interviews, observations, and archival documents were used in the analysis and creation of findings for Case Study A in Chapter Four and Case Study B in Chapter Five.
Addressing the educational needs of students in high poverty areas has been a source of great discussion, research, and policy-driven initiatives throughout the United States, particularly in the last 50 years (Ravitch, 2010). The State of Florida has amended its application of the federal law, No Child Left Behind, originally passed in 2002, with its interpretation of the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. This new legislation requires school districts, such as TCPS, to address the educational needs of underprivileged students and have a greater system of accountability to the State and the stakeholders (FLDOE, 2015). These demands have resulted in various processes of accountability, requiring schools to implement programs and initiatives that are conducive to leveling the educational playing for students living in communities of poverty (TCPS, 2016a). This study provides findings that depict an array of programs and initiatives implemented at five schools with the intention of increasing graduation rates and where students find themselves in a safe and secure learning environment in order to meet their academic and social goals.

Summary of Findings

In Chapters Four and Five the findings resulting from the data analysis were discussed. The focus was on collecting a variety of data regarding the provision of supportive programs and initiatives to address students’ academic, behavior, and attendance challenges. The schools selected serve majority-minority populations, mostly Hispanic and Black, 85% of who qualify for FRL (FLDOE, 2016a). In order examine how two different schools provide supportive programs and synergize with their middle schools, two separate case studies were conducted. Identical processes were followed in order to answer the three overarching research questions.
In this section, a cross case analysis of the two cases is provided. The analysis was guided by the research questions and concludes with research-based opinions to support the findings. This research-based support can also be found in Chapter Two of this study. The findings included in the cross analysis are as follows: synergistic collaboration between middle and high school; identification and provision of supportive programs; principal leadership; and other stakeholders, students, and parents’ engagement and perspectives on accountability.

**Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

This section provides a cross-case analysis to identify similarities and differences in the approaches between case studies. Four themes emerged and will be discussed in the context of the literature (see Table 13). The first theme is purposeful collaborations involving stakeholders and established programs. The second theme involves the provision of SEL strategies in order to provide students with an array of support in order in improve academics, behavior, and attendance engagement. The third theme has to do with a very deliberate principal-centered vision and the empowerment, by the principal, of stakeholders to enact initiatives to improve student achievement and support sound educational practices. The fourth and final theme relates to how the high schools engage the communities they serve from different vantage points: one school, LHS, has a historically deeply-rooted community significance; the second, CHS, engages the community and the principal increases the community’s role by discovering the important role the principal envisioned for the community.
Table 13

Summary of Findings of Case A and Case B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Case Study A</th>
<th>Case Study B</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THEME 1</td>
<td>Purposeful collaboration between schools, community, and school personnel</td>
<td>Program articulation to strengthen academic learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME 2</td>
<td>Provision of SEL through proactive and reactive supportive processes of monitoring student progress</td>
<td>SEL as a base for academic learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME 3</td>
<td>Principal leadership as a guide for stakeholder and community engagement</td>
<td>Principal leadership as a guide for stakeholder and community engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME 4</td>
<td>Community engagement was cultivated by principal’s vision to engage stakeholders</td>
<td>Awareness of the school’s value to community: personally, socially, and historically</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Synergistic collaboration between middle and high school. The first theme resulting from the cross-case analysis that there was a synergistic collaboration between middle and high schools, provides possible answers to the first research question: What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, each pair composed of a high school and its feeder middle school(s), have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

Schools in Case Studies A and B have various ways in which the middle schools and the high schools show evidence of synergistic collaborations. For instance, in Case Study A’s CHS and CMS, the data show a deliberate process of collaboration that involves programmatic articulation with efforts to provide students with programs and opportunities, with the clear intent to establish a sixth to 12th grade continuum from
CMS to CHS. This is accomplished by proactively setting the structure of support in academic remediation, AP classes, or a pathway to a career technical program at CHS. It also involves an intricate network of supportive programs to identify struggling students in the areas of behavior and attendance.

Similarly, for the schools in Case Study B, the collaboration dynamics contain many of the same elements of programmatic articulation and proactive identification and support in the areas of academics, behavior, and attendance as in Case Study A, particularly between LHS and FMS. The difference in the implementation of the articulation of programs stems from the fact all three schools in Case Study B cater to a district wide student population through their magnet programs, and not all schools in Case Study A, have countywide magnet programs. However, in the case of LHS and FMS, their countywide music and art magnet programs are, indeed, perfectly aligned and unique in TCPS. This fact increases the students’ interested at FMS to continue their music and art programs at LHS.

Another difference in the dynamics is that the three schools in Case B are part of a community replete with historical relevance going back to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond. The findings borne by the data demonstrate that the historical and community kinship plays an important role in the collaborative process and the community support that the schools receive. For instance, LHS was the only school for African Americans during the segregation period. Furthermore, it has personal significance to the principals, as Principal Morgan’s older siblings all attended LHS and Principal Jackson at FMS attended LHS himself.
This theme of synergistic relations among professionals within and between the schools is consistent with research conducted by Anderson et al. (2004) that concluded that positive, supportive relationships with adults are associated with good outcomes for children. The relationships and communication between staff and students positively affects students’ academics, behavior, attendance, and retention and promotion indicators. Research by Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, and Durlak (2017) also concluded that timely intervention and relationship building positively alters behavior. They stated, in a meta-analysis of 213 interventions with students from K-12, that students reported “significant effects on positive social behavior, conduct problems, and academic performance” (Greenberg et al., p. 17).

Research supports the finding of increasing student engagement through the provision of relationship-building initiatives such as clubs, mentoring programs, rewards. When students experience healthy and consistent relationships in schools, they experience better academic outcomes where they can develop a stable sense of identity. Barber and Olsen (1997) found that relations between students and educators (teachers and support staff) might deteriorate as students progress to middle and high school. They concluded that it is due to the fact that the emphasis at the secondary level transitions to discipline and control, rather than staying focused on students’ socio-emotional needs, which is prevalent at the elementary level.

This study found that there is a collaborative relationship within and between the schools involved in this study for the express purpose of creating an educational sixth to 12th grade continuum. This finding is consistent with research by Wang and Holcombe (2010), which stated that students’ academic achievement is affected by school
environment in three specific areas: participation in school activities, identification with schools, and use of self-regulation strategies. Wang and Holcombe also asserted that the social, instructional, and organizational climate of schools influences both students’ engagement and their academic achievement. Similarly, this study found evidence of student engagement being influenced by the social, instructional, and organizational climate at CHS and CMS.

Identification and provision of supportive programs. In the cross-case analysis, schools in both case studies place considerable emphasis in the provision of an intricate and systemic process of SEL and other supportive programs for their students. These provide potential answers for the second research question: What supportive programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the schools to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

The supportive initiatives implemented at participating schools take different forms at all five schools, but the intent is the same: to address the needs of the students holistically. Both case studies showed ways of implementing robust and varied extracurricular activities as part of an effort to integrate students with the community and vice-versa, the community with the schools. The extracurricular programs in all participating schools are a bridge to their communities and a way for the communities to celebrate and visit the schools. It also a way of obtaining support from the community and promoting the school’s athletics, arts, showcases, academic fairs, joint performances, mentoring between high school and middle school students, and so on.

SEL is emerging as a cornerstone, providing students with a supportive approach
to meet their social, developmental, and academic needs (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones & Doolittle, 2017; Nagaoka et al., 2015). Schools in both case studies resort to this supportive practice by maximizing the intervention of different stakeholders: administrators, counselors, district personnel, social workers, and parents. The SEL component is seen in both cases as a necessary condition for some students to engage academically, behaviorally, and in attendance. SEL initiatives are implemented across the board with both low and high-performing students. The concept behind this is that all students, independent of their academic proficiency, need to feel like they are a part of the school community.

The SEL process in Case Study A involves proactively identifying students who may exhibit at risk indicators. It also involves a considerable expansion of extracurricular programs and service-oriented clubs and organizations. The guidance departments at both schools collaborate in these efforts, as well as students who advocate for one another and form clubs and organizations that provide an atmosphere of inclusion for a diverse population of students: economically, ethnically, and socially. Just as in Case Study A, in Case Study B, the provision of SEL is made through consistent support from the guidance counselor, social worker, school psychologist, and school resource officers. However, one marked difference is that schools in Case Study B have cultivated a stronger faith-based organizational involvement that provides mentoring and support for students.

Other researchers support the premise of reengaging students through the provision of supportive programs. For instance, Reilly (2017-2018) stated that the goal of education is to offer students opportunities to develop interrelated academic, personal,
and social competencies that have long-term impact on their lives. Reilly further asserted that this objective may conflict with localized priorities and urgencies driven by state statutes and district policies. According to Reilly, to attain SEL-centered schools, two conditions have to be met: the first is to establish a caring, responsive school climate for students and teachers; the second is that student behaviors, learning, and regulations are inextricably tied and cannot be considered separate.

Promoting SEL is more than promoting an emotionally supportive environment for students and the school in general; it also promotes student achievement, decreases absenteeism, and strengthens students’ motivation and perseverance (Nagaoka et al., 2015). Other studies that have delved into the provision of supportive services through wraparound models of student support. This model looks to identify students’ individual strengths and areas of growth and provide support through goal setting, mentoring, and other supportive initiatives (Fries et al., 2012). This supports the finding that the schools in this study provide students with a variety of services and intervention from the time they enter middle school. The services include an array of interventions in the areas of academic support, behavioral modification provisions, attendance assistance, and family support.

Principal leadership and other stakeholders. The cross-case analysis showed evidence of how the principals’ visions and mission shape the work and initiative of their staff and leaders. This provides potential answers for the third research question: What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders including teachers, counselors, support personnel, parents, and students, involved in the
process of identifying at risk students of dropping out and implementing supportive programs?

This principal-based strength does not mean that there is a lack of or weakened creativity on the part of the leadership team. Quite the opposite, it really translates into what can be referred to as “focused creativity.” This focused creativity among all stakeholders takes into account the non-negotiable tenets of the principals’ vision: a strong component of SEL, rich and diverse extracurricular programs, contemporary and student interest-based programs, and cultivating community relations by providing information about the schools in order to enhance trust, pride, and participation.

There are also nuances that can be highlighted. For instance, the principals in Case Study A have a professional and personal relationship that plays an important part of how their schools align around their vision and how their staff looks to implement their vision. As for Case Study B, although the principals also have a close relationship, the conclusion is that the unifying aspect in this case is their commitment to the community. This commitment is passed down to the leadership team and the rest of the stakeholders.

Another contrast is that in Case Study A, Principal DePalma at CHS and Principal Fields at CMS admittedly come from different realities with higher socio-economic dynamics than the community that they serve. While in Case Study B, Principal Morgan at LHS and Principal Jackson at FMS expressed a connectedness to the community because they were born and raised within it. In fact, Principal Jackson attended LHS and Principal Morgan was raised around the corner from the school. Thus, they come from
the same realities as their students and see themselves as a part of a community history of which LHS, FMS, and AMS play a stellar role.

The type of leadership displayed by the principals participating in this study has been the topic of a great volume of research, particularly that which highlights the effects of principal leadership on the academic and social achievement of students (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). This is worth noting because Principal DePalma, Principal Jackson, and Principal Marley all stated that their leadership style empowers and mentors other educators to act within their organizations. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) supported that notion and posited that the relationship between leaders and student outcomes is indirect (not statistically speaking), because leaders establish the conditions in which teachers and students can engage in learning. In another study highlighting the effect of principal leadership, Leithwood and Wahlstrom (2008) opined that when leadership is seen as “part of the solution” and effectively establishes a “followership,” people in the organization allow themselves to be influenced (p. 455). Fullan (2014) concurred with Leithwood and Wahlstrom (2008) and advanced that principals today are expected to run a smooth school and manage a healthy and safe building. They are also expected to be innovative without upsetting the politics, and connect with students, teachers, and the community they serve (Fullan, 2014).

Based on data from meetings and interviews, it was concluded that the principals who participated in this study look to establish a cadre of leaders through whom they can implement their vision and mission. It is the principals’ expressed expectation for their leadership teams to address the multiple barriers associated with serving low-SES communities while they mentor and guide their teams’ practice. These leaders ascribe to
a transformational leadership style that looks to exercise leadership through the establishment of a common and accepted vision while developing capacity to work collaboratively and overcome challenges to reach ambitious goals (Robinson et al., 2008).

**Stakeholders and community engagement.** This study also sought to understand the dynamic of the community’s involvement in the schools and, by contrast, the involvement of the schools in the community they serve. In Case Study A, when asked who has the greatest impact on student achievement, the overwhelming answer was educators: teachers, followed by administrators. Participating students felt that the environment and parents play an important role affecting their opportunities for success.

With regard to the role of the community and stakeholders in Case Study A, Principal DePalma discussed how he discovered its importance after his first year as principal. This realization prompted Principal DePalma to get involved with businesses, city council, and community leaders. The result was greater opportunities for the students and staff. By contrast, participants in Case Study B were already conditioned by history and tradition to the fact that, in many ways, the community revolves around the school and vice versa.

In conclusion, prior research supports my findings regarding the importance participating schools have placed in cultivating positive relationships with their communities. For instance, Frick and Frick (2010) concluded that in order to build an expanded school community, leaders require an “ethic of connectedness” (p. 118) as a necessity for collective moral leadership. They further posited that community building may represent a variety of situations and that the school must play a major role in
community building practices. The community must be “acculturated” within the school (Frick & Frick, 2010, p. 118). The community building effort was an evident finding at CHS, while the acculturation aspect was prevalent at LHS, conditioned by history and tradition.

The community acculturation found in this study’s participating schools share similarities with Sleeter’s (2012) research on the concept of community engagement through culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). CRP is premised on a close interaction between the school and its community, taking into account ethnic identity, cultural background, and student achievement (Sleeter, 2012). Data from this study’s interviews with parents, teachers, administrators, and students bares out that in these five schools there has been a concerted effort to cultivate the support of their respective communities through actively engaging their communities and acculturating the schools to reflect their communities’ needs and interests.

Conclusions

These case studies led to three conclusions that have the possibility of actionable initiatives for practitioners working in schools serving majority-minority, high-poverty populations. These conclusions have the potential of reengaging students academically and socially. The three conclusions are as follows: first, collaboration and synergy; second, supportive programs; and third, principal leadership.

Collaboration and synergy among school leaders and staff of middle schools with leaders and staff of the high school they feed into. This study concluded that when there exists consistent communication and sharing of pertinent student data, particularly to highlight at risk indicators, students find a continuum of support and
proactive, as well as reactive, interventions. This synergistic approach increases the ability to maintain student engagement or reengage those who have fallen off track as they progress from one school to another in a feeder pattern.

**Continual supportive initiatives provided to students in the areas of academics, behavior, and attendance.** Monitoring and sharing student data and at risk indicators are limited to the programmatic and supportive structures schools enact to help students engage or reengage. The schools in this study provided programs and initiatives that directly addressed students’ deviant behavior: extra-curricular programs, expanding elective classes, mentoring opportunities, academically challenging classes, and much more. Furthermore, SEL has proven to be a consistent initiative in all of the participating schools in this study. In this regard, it could be concluded that the academic proficiency of a student has a direct relationship to the socio-emotional status of that student.

**Principals’ vision-centered leadership matters, particularly that which empowers other stakeholders in the schools to pursue or enact initiatives.** Without exception, the five principals that participated in the study saw their roles as clear definers of the visions of their schools, but also saw their role as empowering their leaders to enact ideas and programs to accomplish the tenets of those visions. Two of the principals actually keep track of how their school’s staff have moved to higher positions, exemplifying their empowering approach and the mentoring their staff received in their schools.

**Implications and Recommendations**

**Implications.** There are several implications this study has for school leaders, educators, and policy makers serving high poverty communities that can be derived from
the findings of this study. The first implication is that students attending schools in majority-minority and impoverished communities will respond to a supportive structure that combine various tenets of SEL with improved academic proficiency, greater success socially and behaviorally, and improved attendance. The second implication this study brings to practitioners is the importance of personalizing data and student information to have a clearer picture of the deficiencies, barriers, and potential each student possesses. The implication is that principals, teachers, guidance counselors, administrators have to know the human student behind the numbers and how to intervene accordingly. The third implication is related to principal leadership. This study implies that clear-vision leadership sets the tone for the expectation and professional growth opportunity for stakeholders and it’s directly related to their own roles in helping students become more successful socially and academically.

The leadership implication for principals, teachers, members of the leadership team, guidance counselors, community and other stakeholders is the need to provide a directional intent to concentrate their contributions and efforts on student success. It may also foster the proper atmosphere for them to enhance existing practices or find new ways of meeting the needs of students. As a result, many education professionals may find opportunities to be mentored and coached, explore career advancements, and truly find their voice and philosophy in educational leadership, particularly in communities serving majority-minority student populations.

The final implication is the importance of the community and its characteristics that may represent the school and how the school should seek to engage the community it serves, including city officials, businesses, faith-based organizations, parent
organizations, non-involved parents. The schools who identify key partners enhance the possibility of support for students. Furthermore, it may serve to showcase schools as a source of community pride and increase the number of students from the community that may want to feel that pride by attending the showcased schools. Whether conditioned by historical events, such as LHS was, or envisioned by the principal, communities and surrounding neighborhoods have great influence in schools. School personnel should identify the soul of the community by understanding its dynamics, characteristics, potential partnerships, as well as areas of concern, such as violence, gangs, and poverty that may play out and affect life inside the school.

In summary, I proffer that schools working amidst poverty-stricken, transient, and disengaged populations have various choices to make: attempt survival mode by being mired in disciplinary problems, academic poverty, and attendance inconsistencies; or be proactive, look for ways to engage students and families, and accept the conclusion that present socio-economic and academic conditions a student is facing is not necessarily a life sentence. As educators, we are called to believe in and act upon our abilities to make a lasting different by acting proactively in the lives of the students we serve.

**Recommendations.** Many students in majority-minority communities have to overcome barriers due to their socio-economic conditions. Schools are called upon to level the academic playing field for their students by identifying possible barriers, such as language deficiency, poor academic progress, attendance issues, behavior problems, access to technology, etc. Improving education conditions is a conscious economic and future-planning investment, just as the lack of education and higher dropout rates represent greater economic dependency, higher incidence in criminal activities, and an
overall vicious cycle of decadence that affect families, schools, and communities (Mason, 2009). Therefore, more information through research is needed to provide practitioners with an array of tools to combat the effects of poverty and years of academic disengagement and neglect. For instance, the provision of SEL initiatives provides students with a mechanism of support in order to be able to focus on goals, thus increasing ownership of their responsibilities and better equipping students to handle social pressures.

Further research is recommended in principal leadership. Principals also need to expand their resources and visions they may have for their schools, and at the same time, allow their school leaders and educators to possess independent creativity to implement the tenets of their visions while being mentored, guided, and held accountable.

With more qualitative research delving into the lives of all stakeholders, educators can re-enforce effective support for students identified as at risk when they invest time to strengthen communication and data sharing with the schools that students feed into as they move from middle to high school. Research can potentially expand the concept of synergistic practices and provide stronger communication channels and information for schools to use data to effectively address the students’ new schools and act on at risk indicators, particularly in the areas of academics, behavior, and attendance.

More research is needed in schools serving students of low-SES, but also serving communities that may be different in language, traditions, and customs. Furthermore, more research is needed in the ways that these disenfranchised communities may perceive their own role in getting involved in their local schools. There is much work to
be done in the area of community engagement. Community involvement affects schools and the view the community has of their schools, and vice versa.

Another area that can potentially benefit from further research is the expansion of the integration of middle and elementary schools into K-8 schools or integrating middle and high schools into 6-12 schools, like LHS. Longitudinal studies may shed light on how these practices affect students in the attempt to lessen the impact of transitioning from three different school levels: elementary, middle, and high.

The provision of supportive programs can also benefit from further research. Areas, such as exclusionary practices for academically low-achieving students, should be re-addressed. Many schools’ specialized programs are, by design, meant to attract high-achieving students and thereby create a sense of exclusion for students who do not get accepted into coveted magnet programs. With intense work, the participating schools in this study have been able to provide inclusive programs that meet the needs of low-achieving as well as high-achieving students.

Finally, future research would be welcomed in the area of combining schools to provide more health and social services, such as vision and mental health, to low-SES communities. Poor access to health services impedes student participation in their schools to the fullest extent. Further research may bear out that investing in the expansion of the provision of health benefits to students may be economically and educationally sounder than the cost of letting untreated health needs go for poor students.
Closing Thoughts

Many schools and school systems become obsessed with quantitatively demonstrating the progress of their students. Given our nation’s system of rating schools, this does have its value. In the pursuit of that quantitative goal, however, many lose sight of the fact that many students and their families that depend on public schools to improve their potential for success in life come from extremely precarious socioeconomic conditions. Students cannot learn academics, or care to learn, if they do not have a sense of personal purpose, direction, accountability, and socio-emotional support. It is the responsibility of school leadership to cultivate the engagement of families and have them become cognizant partners of their public schools.

The educators who participated in this study believe that in order for students to gain proficiency academically, their socio-emotional needs have to be met. That said, the demands of academic proficiency and urgency to get students to perform at or above grade level on state math and reading assessments can outweigh the urgency for meeting their socio-emotional needs, and those of their families. This dichotomy affects the school through the state’s grading process, professional evaluations, and the way schools and their communities are viewed.

There is a sense of urgency to provide educational practitioners with carefully considered frameworks for SEL programs, opportunities for extracurricular activities, and research-based staff development in order to meet the needs of students. That said, it could be concluded that the school leaders in this study were satisfied with the support and guidance provided to their schools through the district’s RTI initiative. The researcher was inspired in speaking to teachers, students, parents, and principals who
truly believe at their core that their schools and their services to the community matter, one student at a time.

**Collado’s supportive programs model to prevent student dropout.** There is no magic initiative that can do it all. There is no computer program, sport, art, parent, club, reading or math strategy, teacher, principal, or community that can singularly accomplish the task of increasing student achievement, improving student behavior, and contributing to building a school environment that is socio-emotionally strong and supportive of all students. It takes all of these forces working in a dynamically and synergistically way to foster a successful school. Many students may not get to achieve at the highest level, but, certainly, with a supportive school that looks to invest in a child holistically, that child can begin to ascend academically, behaviorally, and socially, as well as have improved attendance.

This research has reaffirmed the conviction that in the public school system there are schools that work to develop a child’s potential to the fullest. They provide a healthy organization to help students overcome the barriers created by their socio-economic poverty and other negative forces of their communities. After reviewing a considerable amount of research, it can also be concluded that just as the participating schools provided an oasis of hope for their impoverished communities, there are many other schools that reflect the community’s poverty in their own poor approach to education and in the way that they fail to adequately or appropriately address at risk students (Casella, 2003; Cairns et al., 1989; Jimerson et al., 2002).

In contrast to the five schools that participated in this study, in many schools across the United States there exists pedagogical and professional poverty. These
professionally and pedagogically impoverished schools often serve majority-minority and low-SES communities. Where many educators and leaders have accepted students’ present low-SES condition, those students’ academic underdevelopment and social behavior are the inevitable indicators of a lifetime sentence. As a result of the data analyzed in the present study, I offer five main pillars that should be in place with serving majority-minority impoverished communities as part of a model of supportive programs to prevent students from dropping out (see Table 14).

Table 14

*Collado’s Supportive Programs Model to Prevent Student Dropout*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillars</th>
<th>Key Elements</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Support</td>
<td>Coaching and mentoring</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Formative feedback</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cultural sensitivity training</td>
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<td>Proactive Intervention</td>
<td>Data informed intervention</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Holistic analysis of student’s needs and potential</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Goal setting: Short and long term goals</td>
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<td>Socio-Emotional Support</td>
<td>Students owning responsibility</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social emotional learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Academic and behavior support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Synergy Between MS and HS</td>
<td>Programmatic continuum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal-Centered Vision</td>
<td>Clarity of vision from principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empowerment and execution of vision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

165
**Teacher support: Coaching, feedback, and guidance.** School personnel have to be trained to provide classroom environments and lessons that are sensitive to the barriers that many at risk students face. Cultural sensitivity allows teachers to provide an inclusive classroom. Leaders should be working diligently to provide mentoring and supportive opportunities for new and experienced teachers alike.

**Proactive data informed intervention.** Most student data can potentially be a part of a larger picture that allows educators to learn what is the best the way to improve student engagement. Academic proficiency, socio-economic status, attendance, behavior, language classification, and other information are part of an array of elements that can provide educators with information to build student-specific intervention plans. It could also provide teachers with opportunities to create student-specific support.

**Social emotional support, mentoring, and goal setting.** As educators, we often can over play our involvement, depriving students the capacity to be responsible for their own progress. SEL support can include a supportive structure where students come to know and understand responsibility, goal setting, and establishing a plan of action based on short-term goals that puts the student en route to meeting long-term goals academically, behaviorally, socially, as well as have better attendance.

Many schools implement mentoring programs with students that serve as a support without removing the ultimate responsibility from the students being mentored. A good mentoring relationship teaches students the value of success, and perhaps most importantly, the value of overcoming one’s challenges.

**Synergy: Middle and high school collaboration.** When students graduate from high school, those students also graduate from elementary and middle school. As
students progress through their grade levels, additional developmental elements become part of their story. No two students are alike and amassing them is a professional and pedagogical mistake. Effective schools have effective collaborative measures and build relationships with their colleagues in order to discuss the potentials, challenges, and opportunities for each individual incoming student.

**Principal leadership: Vision-centered and directional.** Effective schools are led by leaders who have a clear and direct line between commitment to work ethics and the goals of the organization. Effective leaders seek to understand their strengths and shortcomings and create a learning organization where stakeholders are independent, interdependent, and dependent.

Based on this study, the researcher can responsibly conclude that in the case of CHS, CMS, LMS, FMS, and AMS there is a richness of spirit in providing schools that are dedicated to elevating students academically and socially. There is also a sincere approach to dignifying the lives of their students through a plethora of extracurricular activities so that they, in the future, can enjoy the fruits of their success to their fullest potential.
Appendix A. Tropical County’s Traditional Public High School Graduation Rates

2011–2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Total Graduation Rate</th>
<th>At Risk Graduation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A High School</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>87.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B High School</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C High School</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>93.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D High School</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E High School</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F High School</td>
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<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G High School</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>H High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>J High School</td>
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<td>84.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>K High School</td>
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</tr>
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<td>L High School</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>M High School</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>96.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>O High School</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>87.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P High School</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>78.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lincoln High School</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>91.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q High School</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>86.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R High School</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>S High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>T High School</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W High School</td>
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<td>95.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chavez High School</td>
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<td>89.8</td>
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<td>V High School</td>
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<td>District Total</td>
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*Note.* Source: FLDOE (2016b).
## Appendix B. Tropical County Traditional Public High School Indicators 2014-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Points Earned for FSA Gains 2014-2015</th>
<th>Four-Year Graduation Rate 2014</th>
<th>Four-Year At Risk Graduation Rate 2014</th>
<th>FRL-eligible Min Majority Rate</th>
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<td><strong>73</strong></td>
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*Note. Source: FLDOE (2016b).*
Appendix C. FAU IRB Letter of Exemption

DATE: January 26, 2017
TO: Patricia Maslin-Ostrowski, PhD
FROM: Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB
PROTOCOL #: 626817-1
PROTOCOL TITLE: [626817-1] How Supportive Programs are used with At-Risk Students in Middle and High School to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropouts
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #A3
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
EFFECTIVE DATE: January 26, 2017

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM FEDERAL REGULATIONS. Therefore, you may initiate your research study.

- Please submit a copy of IRB approval upon receipt.

We will keep a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Please keep the IRB informed of any substantive change in your procedures, so that the exemption status may be re-evaluated if needed. Substantive changes are changes that are not minor and may result in increased risk or burden or decreased benefit to participants. Please also inform our office if you encounter any problem involving human subjects while conducting your research.

If you have any questions or comments about this correspondence, please contact Danae Montgomery at:

Institutional Review Board
Research Integrity/Division of Research
Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, FL 33431
Phone: 561.297.1383
researchirb@fau.edu

* Please include your protocol number and title in all correspondence with this office.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within our records.
Appendix D. TCPS IRB Approval

IRB Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval Date:</th>
<th>4/5/17</th>
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<tr>
<td>Protocol ID#:</td>
<td>RR956</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of Submission:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator:</td>
<td>Mr. Washington Collado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocol Title:</td>
<td>How Supportive Programs are used with At-Risk Students in Middle and High School to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropouts</td>
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<td>Approved Change Requests:</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Approved Renewals:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval is granted to contact principals at:</td>
<td>[Redacted]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval Notes:</td>
<td>Per the Common Rule, requests to change any aspect of the research process or informed consent procedure must be submitted to this IRB for approval before the change is implemented. A Change Request must also be completed for any instruments or protocols not developed at the time of review.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY: Participation in this research is strictly voluntary. To assist school-based staff in their decision to participate, present this Certificate to the principal and outline the research activities to be conducted at their school. Based on this information, each principal would then make a decision to participate or not.

SECURITY PROTOCOL: All researchers must complete security protocol to receive a Security ID Badge before entering a school or sponsored school event, or having contact with staff, students, or parents under any circumstances. Researchers not completing these procedures before visiting a school site will have their IRB approval suspended.

CONTACT INFORMATION: School-based or District staff with questions about this Certificate may contact IRB staff at [Redacted] or by email at [Redacted].

Signature of IRB Chair 4/5/17  Date

1If you are unable to complete your research by the annual expiration date, you must submit a Renewal Request one month prior to the expiration date. Research not completed within the timeframe specified in the protocol approved on the original Research Request will require re-approval by participating schools and staff.

Educating Today’s Students to Succeed in Tomorrow’s World

172
Appendix E. Recruitment Scripts

Recruitment Script for Principals

Dear Colleague,

I ask for your cooperation. Currently, I am serving as principal at [Redacted]. I am completing my doctoral dissertation at Florida Atlantic University in the Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology. My study will investigate the programs developed to support students who have been identified as at-risk of dropping out, particularly in the areas of discipline, attendance and academic achievement. This study will also examine the synergistic process of these programs, your role as the principal as well as the role of the assistant principals, and other stakeholders in their efforts to provide support.

Your school was selected because it has demonstrated success in graduation, specifically the graduation rate of at-risk students while serving a community of students who are minority-majority and come from low socio-economic households. Furthermore, your school accumulated over 500 points for the 2014-15 state assessment.

Your participation will mean taking part in a 30-60 minutes interview discussing your role, in the provision of supportive programs and initiatives at your school. Your responses will be kept confidential, and you may end your involvement at any time, should you desire. Your participation would be greatly appreciated. Please respond to this request via email or by calling my cell phone 954-309-3597 or you can reach me by email at wcollado@fau.com.

I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Washington B. Collado
Doctoral Candidate, Florida Atlantic University
Recruitment Script for Assistant Principals

Dear Colleague,

I ask for your cooperation. Currently, I am serving as principal at [Redacted]. I am completing my doctoral dissertation at Florida Atlantic University in the Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology. My study will investigate the programs developed to support students who have been identified as at-risk of dropping out, particularly in the areas of discipline, attendance, and academic achievement. This study will also examine the synergistic process of these programs, your role as assistant principal as well as the role of the principal, and other stakeholders in their efforts to provide support.

Your school was selected because it has demonstrated success in the graduation, specifically the graduation rate of at-risk students while serving a community of students who are minority-majority and come from low socio-economic households. Furthermore, your school accumulated over 500 points for the 2014-15 state assessment.

Your participation will mean taking part in a 30-60 minutes interview discussing your role in the provision of supportive programs and initiatives at your school. Your responses will be kept confidential, and you may end your involvement at any time, should you desire. Your participation would be greatly appreciated. Please respond to this request via email or by calling my cell phone. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to call me at 954-309-3597 or you can reach me by email at wcollado@fau.com.

I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Washington B. Collado
Doctoral Candidate, Florida Atlantic University
Recruitment Script for Teachers

Dear educator,

I ask for your cooperation. Currently, I am serving as principal at [redacted]. I am completing my doctoral dissertation at Florida Atlantic University in the Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology. My study will investigate the programs developed to support students who have been identified as at-risk of dropping out, particularly in the areas of discipline, attendance and academic achievement. This study will also examine the synergistic process of these programs, your role as a teacher as well as the role of the principal, the assistant principals, and other stakeholders in their efforts to provide support.

Your school was selected because it has demonstrated success in the graduation, specifically the graduation rate of at-risk, albeit serving a population of students who are minority-majority and come from low socio-economic households. Furthermore, your school accumulated over 500 points for the 2014-15 state assessment.

Your participation will mean taking part in a 30-60 minutes interview discussing your role in the provision of supportive programs and initiatives at your school. Your responses will be kept confidential, and you may end your involvement at any time, should you desire. Your participation would be greatly appreciated. Please respond to this request via email or by calling my cell phone. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to call me at 954-309-3597 or you can reach me by email at wcollado@fau.com.

I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Washington B. Collado
Doctoral Candidate, Florida Atlantic University
Appendix F. Observation Guide

Site __________________________________________ Date __________

Start Time _______ End Time _______ Length of Observation _______

**Description of Setting**

**Description of Events**

**Description of: Social Interaction, Nonverbal Behavior, Individual Characteristics**

**Observer Comments**
Appendix G. Document Summary Guide

The data included, but was not limited to, the following: academic data reports for standardized assessments, report cards, as well as retentions and participation in AP classes. Disciplinary data included expulsions, external suspensions, and internal suspensions. This study also included attendance data, such as truancy, patterns of absenteeism reports, excessive absence reports, and other data that contains attendance information.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Document</th>
<th>Date Received/Picked Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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**Significance**

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<tr>
<th>Brief Summary of Contents</th>
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**Belongs to Case**
## Appendix H. Archival Data Guide

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<tr>
<th>Type of Archival Data</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Data from state standardized exams in math, science, language arts, reading, as well results from advanced placement exams given by the College Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>Data related to attendance, such as absenteeism, frequency of absences, number of days absent, and attendance percentage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course recovery</td>
<td>Data related to the opportunity to recover failed classes, as well as opportunities to improve low grades such as Cs and Ds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular activities</td>
<td>Data related to student involvement in extracurricular activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>Data reflecting graduation trends in the last five years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent participation</td>
<td>Data related to the community and stakeholders’ involvement, such as parent-teacher meetings, orientations, and opportunities for the community to visit the schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>Data related to student retention and over-age students, including retention in previous grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker Referral</td>
<td>Data related to the use of social workers to reach families and address different issues to provide student support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td>All data related to the exclusion of students from class for disciplinary reasons: internal suspension, suspension, expulsion, and arrests.</td>
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Appendix I. Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol for High School Principals

Topic: How Supportive Programs are used with At Risk Students to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropout
Name of Researcher: Washington B. Collado
Name of Participant and Position: ________________________________________________
Place: _____________ Date: ____________ Start Time: ________ End Time: ________

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to better understand how ____________ school addresses students who display at risk factors such as poor academic, behavioral issues, and poor attendance in order to decrease the possibility of them dropping out. This study will examine the articulation and synergistic processes between middle and high school, and how supportive programs or initiatives are implemented at _______. Supportive programs will be defined as programs and initiatives that proactively address the effects of at risk indicators related to academic, attendance, and behavior problems. This study will define synergy based on how schools can identify common ground, have internal and well-structured operational processes, have compatibility and communication between the middle and the high schools, and finally, have a clear understanding of the short and long-term goals of student achievement and re-engagement.

As principal, this research aims to have a better understanding of the role you play with dropout prevention, whether through direct contact or adopting and implementing programs and initiatives.

All names and any other identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential. May I have permission to record this interview? The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we get started?

INTERVIEW FORM FOR H.S. PRINCIPALS

Focus on articulation and early identification of at risk students

In your answers, please emphasize the role you play in this school as it relates to student support:

1. Research Question: What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, composed of a middle and a high school, have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

   a. How long have you been at _____H. S.?
   b. What is your mission and vision for this school?
   c. How do you work to accomplish these goals?
d. In your opinion, what are the key elements that must be in place for incoming 9th grade students to improve their opportunities for success?

e. Tell me about your school’s relationship with the middle school(s).

f. How would you define synergistic collaboration in this I-Zone?

g. How do involve yourself in a synergistic collaboration?

h. What is the articulation process with the middle school and how do you actively participate in the articulation process?

i. How do you implement a curricular continuum and articulation?

j. What staff from this high school is part of the articulation process?

k. In your opinion, what are the most common at risk characteristics for incoming students?

l. Based on this answer, what do you do remedy the situation?

m. Do you feel that socio-economic factors, which have been proven by research to create additional obstacles to academic success, can be remedied from a school perspective? If so, how?

n. After students start at this school, how do you intervene to monitor students as they progress from grade to grade once they get to this school?

o. What are any challenges that we have not yet addressed regarding the articulation between middle and high school?

p. Probe: How can your school be more successful in your articulation process for incoming students?

q. What do think explains your school success in raising and sustaining student achievement?

r. How do involve yourself in a synergistic collaboration?

2. Research Question: What support programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the school to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

a. In your opinion how would rank the three at risk indicators selected for this study in order of urgency: attendance, academic disenfranchisement, and behavior problems, and why?

b. How, specifically, do you as the principal work with the middle schools to identify at risk indicators in in-coming students:

i. Attendance and truancy

ii. Academic disenfranchisement

iii. Behavior problems (suspension and expulsion or other forms of exclusion from class.

c. How do you decide what type of support needs to be put in place for students who have been identified as being affected by the aforementioned at risk factors?

d. What supportive programs do you have in place at this school?

e. How do you evaluate effective implementation of these programs?

f. Which one of these programs and initiative do you feel has the most effect on student achievement? Why?

g. What are other issues that you are addressing or would like to address?

h. Do you feel it can be replicated at other schools?
3. Research Question: What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders involved in the process of identifying students and implementing supportive programs, including teacher, counselors support personnel, parents, and students?

a. How would you define synergistic relationship among stakeholders at this school?
b. What type of support do you seek from stakeholders:
   i. Students
   ii. Teachers and staff
   iii. Parents
   iv. Business
   v. District
c. Does yours school have some type multicultural and/ or cultural sensitivity training? If yes, discuss the content.
d. In your opinion, which of those stakeholders have a bigger impact on student achievement and how do they levy that influence?
e. How do you involve these stakeholders?
f. How do you improve the involvement of your stakeholders?
g. What responsibility do you attribute to the students who are at risk of dropping out?
h. How do you let the students become accountable for that responsibility?

Closing: Thank you for your time as well as the contribution you have made to this research project. This interview will be kept confidential. I plan to transcribe the interview soon; may I then send you the final write-up to verify responses and provide clarification? What email address should I use? May I contact you if I have any additional questions? Have a great day!
Interview Protocol for High School Assistant Principals

Topic: How Supportive Programs are used with At Risk Students to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropout
Name of Researcher: Washington B. Collado
Name of Participant and Position: _____________
Place: _____________ Date: ___________ Start Time: ________ End Time: ________

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to better understand how ______________school addresses students who display at risk factors such as poor academic, behavioral issues, and poor attendance in order to decrease the possibility of them dropping out. This study will examine the articulation and synergistic processes between middle and high school, and how supportive programs or initiatives are implemented at ________. Supportive programs will be defined as programs and initiatives that proactively address the effects of at risk indicators related to academic, attendance, and behavior problems. This study will define synergy based on how schools can identify common ground, have internal and well-structured operational processes, have compatibility and communication between the middle and the high schools, and finally, have a clear understanding of the short and long-term goals of student achievement and re-engagement.

As assistant principal, this research aims to have a better understanding of the role you play with dropout prevention, whether through direct contact or adopting and implementing programs and initiatives.

All names and any other identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential. May I have permission to record this interview? The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we get started?

INTERVIEW FORM FOR H.S. ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

Focus on articulation and early identification of at risk students

In your answers, please emphasize the role you play in this school as it relates to student support:

1. Research Question: What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, composed of a middle and a high school, have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

   a. How long have you been at ____H. S. and what are your areas of responsibilities?
   b. What students are you responsible for?
   c. How do you identify students at risk of dropping out, starting with the middle school 8th grade students and incoming 9th grade class?
d. In your opinion, what are the key elements that must be in place for incoming 9th grade students to improve their opportunities for success?
e. Tell me about your school’s relationship with the middle school(s).
f. What is the articulation process with the middle school?
g. How do you actively participate in the articulation process?
h. What type of curricular continuum do you have in place with the middle school?
i. What staff from this high school is part of the articulation process?
j. In your opinion, what are the most common at risk characteristics for incoming students?
k. Based on this answer, what do you do remedy the situation?
l. Do you feel that socio-economic factors, which have been proven by research to create additional obstacles to academic success, can be remedied from a school perspective? If so, how?
m. What are any challenges that we have not yet addressed regarding the articulation between middle and high school?
n. Probe: How can your school be more successful in your articulation process for incoming students?
o. What do think explains your school success in raising and sustaining student achievement?

2. Research Question: What support programs are implemented as a response to the at-risk factors identified by the school to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

a. In your opinion how would you rank the three at risk indicators selected for this study in order of urgency: attendance, academic disenfranchisement, and behavior problems, and why?
b. How, specifically, do you as an assistant principal intervene with in-coming students in the following areas:
   i. Attendance and truancy
   ii. Academic disenfranchisement
   c. Behavior problems (suspension and expulsion or other forms of exclusion from class). How do you use data to make decisions around these topics?
d. How do you decide what type of support needs to be put in place for students identified as being affected by the aforementioned at risk factors?
e. What supportive programs do you have in place at this school?
f. How do you evaluate effective implementation of these programs?
g. Which one of these programs and initiative do you feel has the most effect on student achievement? Why?
h. What are other issues that you are addressing or would like to address?
i. Do you feel that these initiatives can be replicated at other schools?
j. Do you have the liberty to bring supportive programs and initiatives? If you have, provide an example of initiatives you have brought into the school.

3. Research Question: What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders involved in the process of identifying students and
implementing supportive programs, including teacher, counselors support personnel, parents, and students?

a. How would you define synergistic relationship among stakeholders at this school?
b. Does yours school have some type of multicultural and/ or cultural sensitivity training? If yes, discuss the content.
c. What type of support do you seek from stakeholders:
   i. Students
   ii. Teachers and staff
   iii. Parents
   iv. Business
   v. District
d. In your opinion, which of those stakeholders have a bigger impact on student achievement and how do they levy that influence?
e. How do you improve the effective involvement and participation of your stakeholders? If so, how?
f. What stakeholders do you involve or seek their involvement as part of your job?
g. How do you involve these stakeholders?
h. What responsibility do you attribute to the students at risk of dropping out?
i. How do you let the students become accountable for that responsibility?

Closing: Thank you for your time as well as the contribution you have made to this research project. This interview will be kept confidential. I plan to transcribe the interview soon; may I then send you the final write-up to verify responses and provide clarification? What email address should I use? May I contact you if I have any additional questions? Have a great day.
Interview Protocol for Middle School Principals

Topic: How Supportive Programs are used with At Risk Students to Increase Re-engagement and Prevent Dropout

Name of Researcher: Washington B. Collado
Name of Participant and Position: _____________
Place: _____________ Date: __________ Start Time: ________ End Time: ________

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to better understand how ______________school addresses students who display at risk factors such as poor academic, behavioral issues, and poor attendance in order to decrease the possibility of them dropping out. This study will examine the articulation and synergistic processes between middle and high school, and how supportive programs or initiatives are implemented at ________. Supportive programs will be defined as programs and initiatives that proactively address the effects of at risk indicators related to academic, attendance, and behavior problems. This study will define synergy based on how schools can identify common ground, have internal and well-structured operational processes, have compatibility and communication between the middle and the high schools, and finally, have a clear understanding of the short and long-term goals of student achievement and re-engagement.

As principal, this research aims to have a better understanding of the role you play with dropout prevention, whether through direct contact or adopting and implementing programs and initiatives.

All names and any other identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential. May I have permission to record this interview? The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we get started?

INTERVIEW FORM FOR M.S. PRINCIPALS

Focus on articulation and early identification of at risk students

In your answers, please emphasize the role you play in this school as it relates to student support:

1. Research Question: What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, composed of a middle and a high school, have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

a. How long have you been at ____M. S. and what is your vision and mission for this school?
b. How do you identify students at risk of dropping out of high school?
c. In your opinion, what are the key elements that must be in place for outgoing 8th grade students to improve their opportunities for success at the high school level?
d. Do you participate in the articulation process with the high schools? If so, how?
e. How would you define synergistic collaboration in this I-Zone?
f. How do involve yourself in a synergistic collaboration?
g. What type of curricular continuum exists between your schools and the H.S?
h. How do you intervene to monitor students as they progress from grade to grade once they get to this school from the elementary school?
i. What are the most common at risk characteristics for incoming 6th grade students?
j. Do you feel that socio-economic factors, which have been proven by research to create additional obstacle to academic success, can be remedied? If so, how?
k. How can your school be more successful in your articulation process for incoming elementary students who display at risk factors behaviorally, academically, and poor attendance?
l. How do you work in collaboration other members of this school to support incoming students?

2. Research Question: What support programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the school to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

a. In your opinion how would rank the three at risk indicators selected for this study in order of urgency: attendance, academic disenfranchisement, and behavior problems.
b. How, specifically, do you as the principal intervene in the following at risk indicators:
   i. Attendance and truancy
   ii. Academic disenfranchisement
   iii. Behavior problems (suspension and expulsion or other forms of exclusion from class.
c. Do you think that the fact that your school is majority-minority school affects student achievement?
d. What is the most effective intervention your school has established? Why?
e. As principal, what programs have you brought to this school?
f. What responsibility do you attribute to the students who are at risk of dropping out?
g. How do you let the students become accountable for that responsibility?
h. What supportive programs do you have in place at this school?
i. Which one of these programs and initiatives do you feel has the most effect on student achievement? Why?
j. What are other issues that you are addressing or would like to address?
k. How do you use data to make decisions?
l. What is the most successful supportive program or initiative at your school?
m. Do you feel it can be replicated at other schools?

3. Research Question: What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders involved in the process of identifying students and implementing supportive programs, including teacher, counselors support personnel, parents, and students?

a. What stakeholders do you involve or seek their involvement as part of your job?
b. How do you involve these stakeholders?
c. What type of support do you or your staff seek from stakeholders:
   i. Students
   ii. Teachers and staff
   iii. Parents
   iv. Business
   v. District

d. In your opinion, which one of those stakeholders have a bigger impact on student achievement and how do they levy that influence?

e. Does yours school have type multicultural and/or cultural sensitivity training? If yes, discuss the content.

f. Does yours school have type multicultural and/or cultural sensitive training? If yes, discuss the content.

g. How do you improve the effective involvement and participation of your stakeholders? If so, how?

Closing: Thank you for your time as well as the contribution you have made to this research project. This interview will be kept confidential. I plan to transcribe the interview soon; may I then send you the final write-up to verify responses and provide clarification? May I contact you if I have any additional questions? Have a great day!
Interview Protocol for Middle School Assistant Principals

Topic: How Supportive Programs are used with At Risk Students to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropout
Name of Researcher: Washington B. Collado
Name of Participant and Position: 
Place: Date: Start Time: End Time: 

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to better understand how school addresses students who display at risk factors such as poor academic, behavioral issues, and poor attendance in order to decrease the possibility of them dropping out. This study will examine the articulation and synergistic processes between middle and high school, and how supportive programs or initiatives are implemented at ________. Supportive programs will be defined as programs and initiatives that proactively address the effects of at risk indicators related to academic, attendance, and behavior problems. This study will define synergy based on how schools can identify common ground, have internal and well-structured operational processes, have compatibility and communication between the middle and the high schools, and finally, have a clear understanding of the short and long-term goals of student achievement and re-engagement.

As a middle school assistant principal, this research aims to have a better understanding of the role you play with dropout prevention, whether through direct contact or adopting and implementing programs and initiatives.

All names and any other identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential. May I have permission to record this interview? The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we get started?

INTERVIEW FORM FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

Focus on articulation and early identification of at risk students

In your answers, please emphasize the role you play in this school as it relates to student support:

1. Research Question: What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, composed of a middle and a high school, have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

a. How long have you been at _____ M. S. and what are your areas of responsibilities?
b. What students are you responsible for?
c. How do you identify students at risk of dropping out as they go onto high school?
d. In your opinion, what are the key elements that must be in place for student as they go into the 9th grade to improve their opportunities for success?
e. Tell me about your school’s relationship with the high school(s).
f. What is the articulation process with the high school and how do you actively participate in the articulation process?
g. How would you define synergistic collaboration in this I-Zone?
h. How do involve yourself in a synergistic collaboration?
i. Do you have curricular articulation with the high school? If so, how?
j. What staff from this middle school is part of the articulation process and how do involve yourself in the synergistic collaboration?
k. In your opinion, what are the most common at risk characteristics for incoming 6th grade students?
l. Based on this answer, what do you do remedy the situation?
m. Do you feel that socio-economic factors, which have been proven by research to create additional obstacles to academic success, can be remedied from a school perspective? If so, how?
n. What are any challenges that we have not yet addressed regarding the articulation between middle and high school?
o. Probe: How can your school be more successful in your articulation process for incoming students?
p. What do think explains your school’s success in raising and sustaining student achievement?

2. Research Question: What support programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the school to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

a. In your opinion how would rank the three at risk indicators selected for this study in order of urgency: attendance, academic disenfranchisement, and behavior problems, and why?
b. How, specifically, do you as an assistant principal intervene with in-coming students in the following areas:
   i. Attendance and truancy
   ii. Academic disenfranchisement
   iii. Behavior problems (suspension and expulsion or other forms of exclusion from class.

c. How do you decide what type of support needs to be put in place for students who have been identified as being affected by the aforementioned at risk factors?
d. Explain how you use data to make decisions about the topics selected?
e. What supportive programs do you have in place at this school?
f. How do you evaluate effective implementation of these programs?
g. Which one of these programs and initiative do you feel has the most effect on student achievement? Why?
h. Do you feel it can be replicated at other schools?
i. Do you have the liberty to bring supportive programs and initiatives? If you have, provide an example of initiatives you have brought into the school.
3. Research Question: What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders involved in the process of identifying students and implementing supportive programs, including teacher, counselors support personnel, parents, and students?

a. How would you define synergistic relationship among stakeholders at this school?
b. Does yours school have type multicultural and/ or cultural sensitivity training? If yes, discuss the content.
c. What type of support do you seek from stakeholders:
   i. Students
   ii. Teachers and staff
   iii. Parents
   iv. Business
   v. District
d. In your opinion, which of those stakeholders have a bigger impact on student achievement and how do they levy that influence?
e. How do you improve the effective involvement and participation of your stakeholders? If so, how?
f. What stakeholders do you involve or seek their involvement as part of your job?
g. How do you involve these stakeholders?
h. What responsibility do you attribute to the students at risk of dropping out?
i. How do you let the students become accountable for that responsibility?

Closing: Thank you for your time as well as the contribution you have made to this research project. This interview will be kept confidential. I plan to transcribe the interview soon; may I then send you the final write-up to verify responses and provide clarification? May I contact you if I have any additional questions? Have a great day!
Interview Protocol for High School Teachers

Topic: How Supportive Programs are used with At Risk Students to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropout
Name of Researcher: Washington B. Collado
Name of Participant and Position: ________________
Place: _____________ Date: ___________ Start Time: ________ End Time: ________

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to better understand how _______________ school addresses students who display at risk factors such as poor academic, behavioral issues, and poor attendance in order to prevent the possibility of dropping out. This study looks to examine how supportive programs or initiatives are implemented at ________. Supportive programs will be defined as programs and initiatives that proactively address the effects of at risk indicators related to academic, attendance, and behavior problems. This study will define synergy based on how schools can identify common ground, have internal and well-structured operational processes, have compatibility and communication between the middle and the high schools, and finally, have a clear understanding of the short and long-term goals of student achievement and re-engagement.

As a high school teacher, this research looks to have a better understanding of the role you play intervening with these, whether through direct contact or adopting and implement programs and initiatives.

All names and any other identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential. May I have permission to record this interview? The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we get started?

INTERVIEW FORM FOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

Focus on articulation and early identification of at risk students

In your answers, please emphasize the role you play in this school as it relates to student support:

1. Research Question: What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, composed of a middle and a high school, have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

   a. How long have you been at __H. S. and what is role do have at this school?
   b. How do you identify students at risk of dropping out in your class?
   c. In your opinion, what are the most common academic deficiencies students display when they enter your class?
   d. How can these deficiencies be remedied?
e. Do you play a role in articulation discussions with other teachers at the middle school level about at risk students? If so, how?
f. How would define synergistic collaborations in this school among teachers?
g. Do you participate curricular articulation with other teachers at middle school level?
h. In your opinion, what are the most common at risk characteristics for incoming students?
i. Do you feel that socio-economic factors, which have been proven by research to create additional obstacle to academic success, can be remedied from a school perspective? If so, how?
j. How can your school be more successful in your articulation process for incoming students?
k. How do you work in collaboration other members of this school to support incoming students or upper classmen?

2. Research Question: What support programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the school to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

a. In your opinion how would rank the three at risk indicators selected for this study in order of urgency: attendance, academic disenfranchisement, and behavior problems.
b. How, specifically, do you as a teacher intervene in the following at risk indicators:
   i. Attendance and truancy
   ii. Academic disenfranchisement
   iii. Behavior problems (suspension and expulsion or other forms of exclusion from class

c. Does your school have type multicultural and/ or cultural sensitivity training? If yes, discuss the content.
d. Do you think that the fact that your school is majority-minority school affects student achievement?
e. What is the most effective invention your school has established? What responsibility do you attribute to the students who are at risk of dropping out? And how do you let them, the students, see that responsibility or lack thereof?
f. What are parent’s responsibilities for the deficiencies in these issues?
g. What responsibility do you attribute to the teachers for success in these areas?
h. What supportive programs do you have in place at this school?
i. Which one of these programs and initiative do you feel has the most effect on student achievement? Why?
j. How do you address students in your class that show at risk indicators: academic failure, attendance and disciplinary issues?
k. What is the most successful supportive program or initiative at your school?
l. Do you feel it can be replicated at other schools?

3. Research Question: What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders involved in the process of identifying students and implementing supportive programs, including teacher, counselors support personnel, parents, and students?
a. What type of support do you or your staff seek from stakeholders:
   i. Students
   ii. Teachers and staff
   iii. Parents
   iv. Business
   v. District
b. In your opinion, which one of those stakeholders has a bigger impact on student achievement and how do they levy that influence?
c. What stakeholders do you involve or seek their involvement as part of your job?
d. How do you improve the effective involvement and participation of your stakeholders? If so, how?

Closing: Thank you for your time as well as the contribution you have made to this research project. This interview will be kept confidential. I plan to transcribe the interview soon; may I then send you the final write-up to verify responses and provide clarification? May I contact you if I have any additional questions? Have a great day!
Interview Protocol for Middle School Teachers

Topic: How Supportive Programs are used with At Risk Students to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropout
Name of Researcher: Washington B. Collado
Name of Participant and Position: __________________________________________
Place: _____________ Date: ____________ Start Time: ________ End Time: _______

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to better understand how ________ school addresses students who display at risk factors such as poor academic, behavioral issues, and poor attendance in order to prevent the possibility of dropping out. This study looks to examine how supportive programs or initiatives are implemented at ________. Supportive programs will be defined as programs and initiatives that proactively address the effects of at risk indicators related to academic, attendance, and behavior problems. This study will define synergy based on how schools can identify common ground, have internal and well-structured operational processes, have compatibility and communication between the middle and the high schools, and finally, have a clear understanding of the short and long-term goals of student achievement and re-engagement.

As teachers, this research looks to have a better understand about the role you play with at risk students and how you intervene.

All names and any other identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential. May I have permission to record this interview? The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we get started?

INTERVIEW FORM FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS

Focus on articulation and early identification of at risk students

In your answers, please emphasize the role you play in this school as it relates to student support:

1. Research Question: What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, composed of a middle and a high school, have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?
   a. How long have you been at ______ M. S. and what is role do have at this school?
   b. How do you identify students at risk of dropping out?
   c. In your opinion, what are the key elements that must be in place for outgoing 8th grade students to improve their opportunities for success at the high school level?
   d. Do you participate in the articulation process with the high schools? If so, how?
   e. How would define synergistic collaborations in this school among teachers?
f. How do you intervene to monitor students as they progress from grade to grade once they get to this school from the elementary school?
g. In your opinion, what are the most common at risk characteristics for incoming students?
h. Do you feel that socio-economic factors, which have been proven by research to create additional obstacle to academic success, can be remedied from a school perspective? If so, how?
i. How can your school be more successful in your articulation process for incoming elementary students who display at risk factors behaviorally, academically, and poor attendance?
j. How do you work in collaboration other members of this school to support incoming students?

2. Research Question: What support programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the school to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

a. The previous questions centered on articulation and early identification of at risk students. In your opinion how would rank the three at risk indicators selected for this study in order of urgency: attendance, academic disenfranchisement, and behavior problems.
b. How, specifically, do you as the middle school teacher address the following at risk indicators in your class?
   i. Attendance and truancy
   ii. Academic disenfranchisement
   iii. Behavior problems (suspension and expulsion or other forms of exclusion from class

c. Does your school have type multicultural and/ or cultural sensitivity training? If yes, discuss the content.
d. Do you think that due to the fact that your school as a majority-minority plays a major role on student achievement or lack of student achievement? Why?
e. What is the most effective invention your school has established?
f. What responsibility do you attribute to the students who are at risk of dropping out?
g. How do you let them, the students see that responsibility or lack there-of?
h. What responsibilities do you attribute teachers for at risk students?
i. What supportive programs do you have in place at this school?
j. Which one of these programs and initiative do you feel has the most effect on student achievement?
k. What are other issues that you are addressing or would like to address?
l. What is the most successful supportive program or initiative at your school?
m. Do you feel it can be replicated at other schools?

3. Research Question: What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders involved in the process of identifying students and implementing supportive programs, including teacher, counselors support personnel, parents, and students?
a. What type of support do you or your staff seek from stakeholders:
   i. Students
   ii. Teachers and staff
   iii. Parents
   iv. Business
   v. District

b. In your opinion, which one of those stakeholders has a bigger impact on student achievement and how do they levy that influence?

c. What responsible do you attribute to parental involvement?

d. How do you improve the effective involvement and participation of your stakeholders? If so, how?

e. What stakeholders do you involve or seek their involvement as a teacher?

f. How do you involve these stakeholders?

Closing: Thank you for your time as well as the contribution you have made to this research project. This interview will be kept confidential. I plan to transcribe the interview soon; may I then send you the final write-up to verify responses and provide clarification? May I contact you if I have any additional questions? Have a great day!
Interview Protocol for Support Personnel at Middle and High School Levels: Guidance Counselors, Literacy Coaches

Topic: How Supportive Programs are used with At Risk Students to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropout
Name of Researcher: Washington B. Collado
Name of Participant and Position: ____________________________________________
Place: _____________ Date: ____________ Start Time: ________ End Time: ________

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to better understand how ______________ school addresses students who display at risk factors such as poor academic, behavioral issues, and poor attendance in order to prevent the possibility of dropping out. This study looks to examine how supportive programs or initiatives are implemented at ________. Supportive programs will be defined as programs and initiatives that proactively address the effects of at risk indicators related to academic, attendance, and behavior problems. This study will define synergy based on how schools can identify common ground, have internal and well-structured operational processes, have compatibility and communication between the middle and the high schools, and finally, have a clear understanding of the short and long-term goals of student achievement and re-engagement.

As support personnel, this research looks to have a better understanding about the role you play with at risk students and how you intervene.

All names and any other identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential. May I have permission to record this interview? The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we get started?

INTERVIEW FORM FOR H.S. LITERACY COACH

Focus on articulation and early identification of at risk students

In your answers, please emphasize the role you play in this school as it relates to student support:

1. Research Question: What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, composed of a middle and a high school, have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

a. How long have you been at __________ and what role do you have at this school?

b. How do you identify students at risk of dropping out?

c. In your opinion, what are the key elements that must be in place for incoming students to improve their opportunities for success?

d. Do you participate in the articulation process? If so, how?
e. How do you intervene to monitor students as they progress from grade to grade once they get to this school?
f. What are the most common at risk characteristics for incoming students?
g. How would define synergistic collaborations among support personnel at this school?
h. Do you participate in curricular articulation between the schools?
i. Do you feel that socio-economic issue with the students in this school, which have been proven by research to create additional obstacle to academic success, can be remedied from a school perspective? If so, how?
j. How can your school be even more successful in your articulation process for incoming students?
k. How do you work in collaboration other members of this school to support incoming students?

2. Research Question: What support programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the school to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

a. The previous questions centered on articulation and early identification of at risk students. In your opinion how would you rank the three at risk indicators selected for this study in order of urgency: attendance, academic disenfranchisement, and behavior problems.
b. How, specifically, do you as the literacy coach intervene in the following at risk indicators:
   i. Attendance and truancy
   ii. Academic disenfranchisement
   iii. Behavior problems (suspension and expulsion or other forms of exclusion from class

c. Do you think that due to the fact that your school as a majority-minority plays a major role on student achievement or lack of student achievement? Why?
d. What is the most effective intervention your school has established? Why?
e. What supportive programs do you have in place at this school?
f. Which one of these programs and initiatives do you feel has the most effect on student achievement? Why?
g. What are other issues that you are addressing or would like to address?
h. What is the most successful supportive program or initiative at your school?
i. Do you feel it can be replicated at other schools?

3. Research Question: What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders involved in the process of identifying students and implementing supportive programs, including teacher, counselors support personnel, parents, and students?

a. What type of support do you or your staff seek from stakeholders:
   i. Students
   ii. Teachers and staff
   iii. Parents
iv. Business  
v. District  
b. Does your school have type multicultural and/ or cultural sensitivity training? If yes, discuss the content.
c. In your opinion, which one of those stakeholders has a bigger impact on student achievement and how do they levy that influence? 
d. How do you improve the effective involvement and participation of your stakeholders? If so, how? 
e. What responsibility do you attribute to the students who are at risk of dropping out?  
f. How do you let them, the students, see that responsibility or lack there-of?  
g. What responsibilities do you attribute teachers for at risk student? 
h. What responsibilities do you attribute parents?  
i. What stakeholders do you involve as part of your job?  
j. How do you involve these stakeholders?  

Closing: Thank you for your time as well as the contribution you have made to this research project. This interview will be kept confidential. I plan to transcribe the interview soon; may I then send you the final write-up to verify responses and provide clarification? May I contact you if I have any additional questions? Have a great day!
Interview Protocol for High School Students

Topic: How Supportive Programs are used with At Risk Students to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropout
Name of Researcher: Washington B. Collado
Name of Participant and Position: ____________________________________________
Place: _____________ Date: ____________ Start Time: ________ End Time: ________

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to better understand how ______________ school addresses students who display at risk factors such as poor academic, behavioral issues, and poor attendance. This study looks to examine how supportive programs or initiatives are implemented at ________.
Supportive programs will be defined as programs and initiatives that proactively address the effects of at risk indicators related to academic, attendance, and behavior problems.

As students, this research looks to have a better understanding on how you work and relate to the teachers and staff at ______________ as well as how their intervention is viewed by you, the student.

All names and any other identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential. May I have permission to record this interview? The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we get started?

INTERVIEW FORM FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Focus on articulation and early identification of at risk students

In your answers, please emphasize the role you play in this school as it relates to student support:

1. Research Question: What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, composed of a middle and a high school, have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

a. What grade are you in? How long have you been at __________ school?

b. What staff worked with you at the middle school level, particularly in the 8th grade? How did they work with you?

c. In your opinion, what support should be in place for you to improve your opportunities for success?

d. What did you know about this school before getting here?

e. How did you learn about it?

f. Do you think you can succeed? If so, why?

g. Who intervenes with you to monitor your progress?

h. In your opinion, what were the most common problems you faced when you entered high school?
2. Research Question: What support programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the school to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

a. What do you think affects your graduation the most: attendance, academic disenfranchisement, and behavior problems?
b. In your opinion how do the following areas affect your success?
   i. Attendance
   ii. Academic problems
   iii. Behavior problems (suspension and expulsion or other forms of exclusion from class)
c. Do you think that due to the fact that most of the students in your school are Black and Latino affects the way your school viewed? Why?
d. What teachers and staff work with you?
e. How do they work with you?
f. What responsibility do you attribute to students who are at risk of dropping out?
g. What responsibilities do you attributes parents and teachers?
h. Do you participate in extracurricular activities?
   i. What extra-curricular programs do you enjoy the most?
j. If you participate, how do these programs benefit you?

3. Research Questions: What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders involved in the process of identifying students and implementing supportive programs, including teacher, counselors support personnel, parents, and students?

a. What type of support do you seek from stakeholders:
   i. Fellow students
   ii. Teachers and staff
   iii. Parents
b. How does your school prepare you to co-exist with a diverse student population?
c. In your opinion, who or what has the biggest impact on student achievement?
d. How can that influence be expanded?

Closing: Thank you for your time as well as the contribution you have made to this research project. This interview will be kept confidential. I plan to transcribe the interview soon; may I then send you the final write-up to verify responses and provide clarification? May I contact you if I have any additional questions? Have a great day!
Interview Protocol for High School Students Focus Groups

Topic: How Supportive Programs are used with At Risk Students to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropout
Name of Researcher: Washington B. Collado
Name of Participant and Position: __________________________________________
Place: _____________ Date: ____________ Start Time: ________ End Time: ________

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to better understand how ________________ school addresses students who display at risk factors such as poor academic, behavioral issues, and poor attendance. This study looks to examine how supportive programs or initiatives are implemented at ___________. Supportive programs will be defined as programs and initiatives that proactively address the effects of at risk indicators related to academic, attendance, and behavior problems.

As students, this research looks to have a better understanding on how you work and relate to the teachers and staff at ______________ as well as how their intervention is viewed by you, the student.

All names and any other identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential. May I have permission to record this interview? The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we get started?

INTERVIEW FORM FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FOCUS GROUP

Focus on articulation and early identification of at risk students

In your answers, please emphasize the role you play in this school as it relates to student support:

1. Research Question: What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, composed of a middle and a high school, have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

   a. What grades are you in?
   b. What staff worked with you at the middle school level, particularly in the 8th grade? How did they work with you?
   c. In your opinion, what support should be in place for incoming students to improve their opportunities for success?
   d. What did you know about this school before getting here?
   e. How did you learn about it?
   f. Do you think you can succeed? If so, why?
   g. Who intervenes with you to monitor your progress?
   h. In your opinion, what were the most common problems you faced when you entered high school?
2. Research Question: What support programs are implemented as a response to the at-risk factors identified by the school to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

a. What do you think affects your graduation the most: attendance, academic disenfranchisement, and behavior problems?
b. In your opinion how do the following areas affect your success?
   i. Attendance
   ii. Academic problems
   iii. Behavior problems (suspension and expulsion or other forms of exclusion from class)
c. Do you think that due to the fact that most of the students in your school are Black and Latino affects the way your school viewed? Why?
d. What teachers and staff work with you?
e. How do they work with you?
f. What responsibility do you attribute to students who are at risk of dropping out?
g. What responsibilities do you attributes parents and teachers?
h. Do you participate in extracurricular activities?
   i. What extra-curricular programs do you enjoy the most?
j. If you participate, how do these programs benefit you?

3. Research Questions: What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders involved in the process of identifying students and implementing supportive programs, including teacher, counselors support personnel, parents, and students?

a. What type of support do you seek from stakeholders:
   i. Fellow students
   ii. Teachers and staff
   iii. Parents
b. How does your school prepare you to co-exist with a diverse student population?
c. In your opinion, who or what has the biggest impact on student achievement?
d. How can that influence be expanded?

Closing: Thank you for your time as well as the contribution you have made to this research project. This interview will be kept confidential. I plan to transcribe the interview soon; may I then send you the final write-up to verify responses and provide clarification? May I contact you if I have any additional questions? Have a great day!
Interview Protocol for Parents

Topic: How Supportive Programs are used with At Risk Students to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropout

Name of Researcher: Washington B. Collado
Name of Participant and Position: ________________________________
Place: _____________ Date: __________ Start Time: ________ End Time: ________

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to better understand how ___________ school addresses students who display at risk factors such as poor academics, behavioral issues, and poor attendance in order to decrease the possibility of them dropping out. This study will examine the articulation between middle and high school, and how supportive programs or initiatives are implemented at __________. Supportive programs will be defined as programs and initiatives that proactively address the effects of at risk indicators related to academic, attendance, and behavior problems.

As a parent of a student, this research aims to have a better understanding of the role you play with dropout prevention, whether through direct contact or adopting and implementing programs and initiatives.

All names and any other identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential. May I have permission to record this interview? The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before we get started?

INTERVIEW FORM FOR PARENTS of AT RISK STUDENTS

Focus on articulation and early identification of at risk students

In your answers, please emphasize the role you play in this school as it relates to student support:

1. Research Question: What is the synergistic process by which two pairs of schools, composed of a middle and a high school, have identified and addressed three major indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out: academic failure, high frequency of disciplinary problems, and poor attendance or truancy?

   a. What grade is your son/daughter in?
   b. Describe the school your child attends.
   c. In your opinion, what are the strength and weaknesses of this school?
   d. Do you participate in school parent organization: SAF, SAC, PTSA, etc.?
   e. When you have communication with the school, who communicates with you?
   f. In your opinion, what support should be in place for incoming students to improve their opportunities for success?
   g. What did you know about this school before your son/daughter got here? How did you learn about it?
h. In your opinion, what are the most common problems students face when they enter high school?
i. How can your school be even more successful preparing students for graduation?

2. Research Question: What support programs are implemented as a response to the at risk factors identified by the school to intervene in the areas of academic achievement, behavior disengagement, and absenteeism?

a. In your opinion, what do think affects student success the most: attendance, academic disenfranchisement, and behavior problems? Why?
b. What is your son/daughter’s greatest area of strength in the following areas?
   i. Academic problems
   ii. Behavior problems (suspension and expulsion or exclusion from class

c. What are your son/daughter greatest challenges?
d. Do you think that due to the fact that your school as a majority-minority plays a major role on student achievement or lack of student achievement? Why?
e. What is the most effective intervention your school has established? Why?
f. What supportive programs are in place at this school to help struggling students?
g. Which one of these programs and initiative do you feel has the most effect on student achievement?

3. Research Question: What is the role of the principal and assistant principals and how are different stakeholders involved in the process of identifying students and implementing supportive programs, including teacher, counselors support personnel, parents, and students?

a. What type of support do you seek from the school staff, parent organizations, or the District?
b. In your opinion, which one of those stakeholders has a bigger impact on your child’s achievement? Why?
k. How do you think parents should be involved to support their child’s education?
Appendix J. Consent Forms

ADULT CONSENT FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Version & Date Basic Protocol Format. Version 1.0 – November 1, 2016

1) **Title of Research Study:** How Supportive Programs are used with At-Risk Students in Middle and High School to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropouts

2) **Investigator(s):** Principal Investigator, Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, Doctoral Student, Washington B. Collado.

3) **Purpose:** The purpose of this multi-site case study is to understand and describe how two pairs of schools, from the same school feeder patterns, composed of a high school and a middle school, have collaborated and instituted supportive programs for students who have been identified as at-risk of dropping out.

4) **Procedures:**
   - As principal, you will be asked to identify stakeholders who could be invited to participate in the study, including the leadership team, and stakeholders who are knowledgeable or involved in the provision of supportive programs.
   - You will be asked to conduct classroom walk-throughs on-site with the researcher for the purpose of visiting classes and seeing teachers and students interacting.
   - You will be asked to participate in an interview that will take 30-60 minutes and be audio recorded with your permission. The interview will take place at your school at a time and place convenient for you.

5) **Risks:** The risk involved for you will be minimal. This study does not present physical, psychological, legal, social risks or any other risk to the participants. This study will respect all confidentiality and protect your identity by not disclosing your name or information by which you can be individually identified.

6) **Benefits:** As a principal participating in this study, you will potentially increase your own insights and awareness on how supportive programs reduce the effects of the at-risk factors by assisting students to be re-engaged in their academic life. Furthermore, you may also able to increase your awareness regarding the necessity of timely or proactive identification and intervention for students. We do not know you will receive any direct benefits by taking part in this study. However, this research may contribute to a greater understanding of how school personnel provide support for students and improve their progress toward graduation from high school.

7) **Data Collection & Storage:** All interviews will be recorded using a password-protected telephone and will be subsequently downloaded to password-protected computer. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and the study will not contain information by which you can be identified. Any information collected about you will be kept confidential and secured. Only the people working with the study will see your data, unless required by the law. Data will be kept for five years electronically and in print format. After five years, the data will be deleted and any printed format of the data will be destroyed. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, your name/identity will not be disclosed, unless you give us permission.

Participant’s Initials _________

FAU
Institutional Review Board

Approved On: January 26, 2017

Expires On: N/A

206
8) Contact Information:

- If you have questions about the study, you should call or email the investigator(s) Washington B. Collado at wcollado@fau.edu. You may also contact Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, FAU Faculty Advisor at 561-267-3550 or via email at pmaslin@fau.edu.

- If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research, Research Integrity Office at (561) 297-1383 or send an email to researchintegrity@fau.edu.

9) Consent Statement:

*I have read or had read to me the information describing this study. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree _____ I do not agree ___ to be observed in meetings.

I agree _____ I do not agree ___ to be audiotaped.

Printed Name of Participant: __________________________________________________________

Signature of Participant: __________________________________________ Date: _______________ 

Printed Name of Investigator: __________________________________________________________ 

Signature of Investigator: __________________________________________ Date: _______________
ADULT CONSENT FOR SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS
AND MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAM


1) **Title of Research Study:** How Supportive Programs are used with At-Risk Students in Middle and High School to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropouts

2) **Investigator(s):** Principal Investigator, Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, Doctoral Student, Washington B. Collado.

3) **Purpose:** The purpose of this multi-site case study is to understand and describe how two pairs of schools, from the same school feeder patterns, composed of a high school and a middle school, have collaborated and instituted supportive programs for students who have been identified as at-risk of dropping out of school.

4) **Procedures:**
   - As an assistant principal and member of the leadership, you will be asked to conduct classroom walk-throughs on-site with the researcher for the purpose of visiting classes and seeing teacher and student interactions.
   - The principal has recommended I speak to you to discuss the implementation of supportive programs and initiatives for at-risk students in order to prevent dropouts from this school. You have been invited to participate because you have played an active role in the provision of these initiatives or you are knowledgeable about these initiatives.
   - You will be asked to participate in an interview that will take 30-60 minutes and be audio recorded with your permission. The interview will take place at your school at a time and place convenient for you.

5) **Risks:** The risk involved for you will be minimal. This study does not present physical, psychological, legal, social risks or any other risk to the participants. This study will respect all confidentiality and protect your identity by not disclosing your name or information by which you can be individually identified.

6) **Benefits:** As an assistant principal or member of the leadership team, participating in this study will potentially increase your own insights and awareness on how supportive programs reduce the effects of the at-risk factors by assisting students to be re-engaged in their academic life. Furthermore, you may also be able to increase your awareness regarding the necessity of timely or proactive identification and intervention for students.

We do not know you will receive any direct benefits by taking part in this study. However, this research may contribute to a greater understanding of how school personnel provide support for students and improve their progress toward graduation from high school.

Participant’s Initials _________
7) **Data Collection & Storage:** All interviews will be recorded using a password-protected telephone and will be subsequently downloaded to password-protected computer. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and the study will not contain information by which you can be identified. Any information collected about you will be kept confidential and secured. Only the people working with the study will see your data, unless required by the law. Data will be kept for five years electronically and in print format. After five years, the data will be deleted and any printed format of the data will be shredded. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, your name/identity will not be disclosed, unless you give us permission.

8) **Contact Information:**
   - If you have questions about the study, you should call or email the investigator(s) Washington B. Collado at [wcollado@fau.edu](mailto:wcollado@fau.edu) or via email at wcollado@fau.edu. You may also contact Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, FAU Faculty Advisor at (561-267-3550) or via email at pmaslin@fau.edu.
   - If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research, Research Integrity Office at (561) 297-1383 or send an email to researchintegrity@fau.edu.

9) **Consent Statement:**
   *I have read or had read to me the information describing this study. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form.

   I agree ____ I do not agree ____ to participate and be observed in meetings.

   I agree ____ I do not agree ____ to be audiotaped.

   Printed Name of Participant: __________________________________________________________

   Signature of Participant: ___________________________ Date: _____________________________

   Printed Name of Investigator: _________________________________________________________

   Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: _____________________________

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**FAU**

Approved On: January 26, 2017

Institutional Review Board

Expires On: N/A
Title of Research Study: How Supportive Programs are used with At-Risk Students in Middle and High School to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropouts

2) Investigator(s): Principal Investigator, Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, Doctoral Student, Washington B. Collado.

3) Purpose: The purpose of this multi-site case study is to understand and describe how two pairs of schools, from the same school feeder patterns, composed of a high school and a middle school, have collaborated and instituted supportive programs for students who have been identified as at-risk of dropping out of school.

4) Procedures:
   • As a teacher, you will be asked to participate in a one-to-one interview with the researcher for the purpose of discussing your role and views on addressing the academic, behavioral, and attendance problems displayed by at-risk students.
   • Your class may be visited by one of the administrators and the researcher during a walk-through for the purpose of seeing your interaction with the students.
   • The principal has recommended I speak to you in order discuss the implementation of supportive programs and initiatives for at-risk students in order to prevent dropouts from this school. You have been invited to participate because you have played an active role in the provision of these initiatives or you are knowledgeable about these initiatives.
   • You will be asked to participate in an interview that will take 30-60 minutes and be audio recorded with your permission. The interview will take at your school at a time and place convenient to you.

5) Risks: The risk involved for you will be minimal. This study does not present physical, psychological, legal, social risks or any other risk to the participants. This study will respect all confidentiality and protect your identity by not disclosing your name or information by which you can be individually identified.

6) Benefits: As a teacher, participating in this study will potentially increase your own insights and awareness on how supportive programs reduce the effects of the at-risk factors by assisting students to be re-engaged in their academic life. Furthermore, you may also able to increase your own awareness regarding the necessity of timely or proactive identification and intervention for students.

We do not know you will receive any direct benefits by taking part in this study. However, this research may contribute to a greater understanding of how school personnel provide support for students and improve their progress toward graduation from high school.

Participant’s Initials _________
7) **Data Collection & Storage:** All interviews will be recorded using a password-protected telephone and will be subsequently downloaded to password-protected computer. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and the study will not contain information by which you can be identified. Any information collected about you will be kept confidential and secured. Only the people working with the study will see your data, unless required by the law. Data will be kept for five years electronically and in print format. After five years, the data will be deleted and any printed format of the data will be shredded. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, your name/identity will not be disclosed, unless you give us permission.

8) **Contact Information:**

- If you have questions about the study, you should call or email the investigator(s) Washington B. Collado at [email protected] or via email at wcollado@fau.edu. You may also contact Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, FAU Faculty Advisor at (561) 267-3550 or via email at pmaslin@fau.edu.

- If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research, Research Integrity Office at (561) 297-1383 or send an email to researchintegrity@fau.edu.

9) **Consent Statement:**

*I have read or had read to me the information describing this study. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form.*

I agree____ I do not agree ___ to participate and have my classes visited.

I agree____ I do not agree ___ to be audiotaped.

Printed Name of Participant: __________________________________________________________

Signature of Participant: ___________________________ Date: ____________________________

Printed Name of Investigator: __________________________________________________________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: ____________________________
PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Consent Form Version 1.0 – November 1, 2016

1) **Title of Research Study:** How Supportive Programs are used with At-Risk Students in Middle and High School to Increase Re-Engagement and Prevent Dropouts

2) **Investigator(s):** Principal Investigator, Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, Doctoral Student, W. B. Collado.

3) **Purpose:** The purpose of this case study is to understand and describe how two pairs of schools, from the same school feeder patterns, composed of a high school and a middle school, have collaborated and instituted supportive programs for students who have been identified as in need of dropout prevention support.

4) **Procedures:**
   - The expected time commitment from your child is a one-time only 30 minutes focus group interview. In the focus group interview your child will be interviewed along with four other students at the same time in a group format.
   - Potentially, the interviews will take place during lunch or breakfast and discuss the questions as they eat. If your child meets with me during his/her lunchtime or breakfast time, lunch or breakfast will be provided. There will be no other types of gifts provided.
   - Your child’s answers will be audio taped with your permission.
   - Your child is free to decline participation. He or she may decline to participate at any time without having to provide a rationale.

5) **Risks:** The risks involved with participation in this study are minimal and no more than your child would experience in regular school activities. However, your son/daughter may experience discomfort discussing his/her participation in extra-curricular or supportive programs, and may stop the interview at any time.

6) **Benefits:** We do not know if your child will receive any direct benefits by taking part in this study. However, this research may contribute to a greater understanding of how school personnel provide support for students and improve their progress toward graduation from high school.

7) **Data Collection & Storage:** All interviews will be recorded using a password-protected telephone and will be subsequently downloaded to password-protected computer. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. The study will not contain information by which your child can be identified. Any information collected about you will be kept confidential and secure and only the people working with the study will see your data, unless required by the law. Data will be kept for five years electronically and in print format. After five years, the data will be deleted and any printed format of the data will be shredded. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, your child’s name/identity will not be disclosed, unless you give us permission.

Parent's Initial __________
8) **Contact Information:**
- If you have questions about the study, you should call or email the investigator(s), Washington B. Collado at [wcollado@fau.edu](mailto:wcollado@fau.edu) or via email at wcollado@fau.edu. You may also contact Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, FAU Faculty Advisor at (561-267-3550 or via email at pmaslin@fau.edu).
- For questions or problems regarding your child’s rights as a research participant, you can contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research at (561) 297-1383 or via email at researchintegrity@fau.edu.

9) **Consent Statement:**
I have read, or had read to me, the information describing this study. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I allow my child, ____________________________, to take part in this study.

First Name / Last name: __________________________________________________

My child can refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without giving any reasons and without penalty. I can ask to have the information related to my child returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed. I have received a copy of this consent form.

My child

may ___ may not _____ participate in the focus group

may ___ may not ___ be audiotaped.

Signature of Parent or Guardian: ___________________________ Date: ____________

**Printed Name of Parent/Guardian***:

First Name _____________________ Last Name_______________________________

*Note: If you are not the biological or adoptive parent, please ensure you are the legal permanent guardian or have other court-appointed privileges to consent to research for your child.*

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: ____________
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U.S. Const. amend. X.

U.S. Const. amend. XIV.


