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The Positive Effects of Education on African-American Students in Grades Three Through Eight in Alabama

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to research the effects of positive schools on African-American students in grades three through eight. There were a total of ten schools involved the research. All of the schools were located in the state of Alabama. There was a sample population of five schools and a randomly selected population of five schools. The sample population of schools were located in region six of Alabama. The randomly selected population of schools were located in three other regions of the state. School administrators and teachers were interviewed, and their interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed for themes. There were six themes with coded detail embedded. All of the schools in the study were public schools in the state of Alabama. Moreover, these schools met accountability standards for three consecutive years. All of the schools met adequate yearly progress based on the state department of education standards for curriculum based instruction.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge and thank several individuals who supported me during the process of completing my research and dissertation. It has truly been a life changing journey, and in that process, I have become more knowledgeable of research strategies in schools who are making positive results in students in grades three through eight.

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List of Abbreviations

AMSTI – Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative

API – Academic Performance Index

ARMT- Alabama Reading and Math Test

AYP- Adequate Yearly Progress

CCSS- Common Core State Standards

COACH- Math, Reading, and Science Resource Books

CNP- Child Nutrition Program

ECS – Education Commission of the States

ESEA- Elementary and Secondary Act

G.E.M- Girls Embracing Math

HCZ- Harlem Children's' Zone

INOW- Information Now Portal

IXL- (I-Excel) Computer Based Learning Program

KIPP- Knowledge is Power Program

NAEP- National Association of Educational Progress

NCATE- National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education

NCLB- No Child Left Behind

PLC- Professional Learning Communities

PD- Professional Development

PTO- Parent and Teacher Organizations

RISC- Restate, Include Details, Support Details, and Conclusion

RTI- Response to Intervention

RTL- Report on Teaching and Learning

SLCs- Smaller Learning Communities

SIGs- U.S. Department of Education

STEM- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

STAR- Renaissance Reading and Math

VAM- Value Added Model

Chapter I: Introduction to the Problem

In the field of education there have always been disparities in testing, equity, and achievement for selected minority groups. In recent years, more and more questions are being asked about the results of high stakes testing. Each state differs in its approach to testing with a different set of raw scores. There are differences in rate of progress which is contrasting state versus NAEP results (Fuller, Gesicki, Kang, & Wright, 2006). Studies are being done to research these problems. Whether rural or urban, problems exist for selected minority groups. From coast to coast in the United States there are enormous gaps in the progress of the education of selected minority groups. There are outlying factors that affect the education of African-American students, and these factors have an impact on the education of this selected group of minority students. Poverty is a major concern. However, poverty is not the single factor that contributes to achievement gap. The lack of access to challenging curriculum has also had a negative on the education of minority students. Peer pressure does not create achievement gaps; however, it may serve as a barrier to closing them. Additional barriers to gaps in achievement include transient students who move all over districts, teacher quality, lack of parental involvement, lack of access to preschools, test bias, academic losses over the summer, and other disparities. Students in dire need of good teachers often get the least qualified or least

experienced teachers (Viadero & Johnston, 2000). The impacts are enormous, and they tend to cause problems beyond K-12 education.

Alarming statistics report that over one million students who begin ninth grade every year fail to graduate with their peers. Seven thousand students in the U.S. drop out of school every day, and an estimated 1.2 million students fail to graduate from high school. Interestingly, more than half of these students are represented as minorities. Graduation rates in the U.S. for average freshman graduates concluded in the 2011-12 academic year that American Indian/Alaskan Native graduated at 68%, Asian/Pacific Islanders graduated at 93%, Hispanics graduated at 76%, African-Americans at 68%, and White Americans at 85% (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014).

Students who do not finish high school limit their opportunities to secure stable jobs and promising futures. In addition to these problems, there are other compounding factors that come into focus. Dropouts earn less, pay fewer taxes, are more likely to collect governmental subsidies, and are more likely to engage in criminal behavior (Pallas, 1987). Studies and research show that more than half the students who drop out leave by the tenth grade, 20% by the eighth grade, and 3% by the fourth grade. Gaps between dropouts and more educated people are widening as the job market for a skilled labor force continues to increase. In the last two decades, the level earnings for dropouts have doubled, while it nearly tripled for college graduates. Recent dropouts tend to earn about $200,000 less than high school graduates and over $800,000 less than college graduates over the course of their lives.

The facts become more staggering. Dropouts make up nearly half the heads of households on welfare and nearly half of the prison population (Schwartz, 1995).

African-American students tend to perform lower than white students on standardized tests. Moreover, they are more susceptible to lower standards of educational opportunities which lead to additional problems and concerns. African-American students graduate at a disproportionately lower rate than that of white and Asian students. They are less prepared to attend higher institutions of learning (American Psychological Association, 2012).

Many of these African-American students come from low socio-economic backgrounds, and many live in single parent homes. The parents are often not well educated or prepared to deal with their children's educational problems (Feldman & Eidelman, 2009). Often many of these students do not attend pre-k programs to prepare them for a solid education, and often begin kindergarten with little or no general knowledge of phonics or the basic foundations of math (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2000). Schools are often unprepared or ill-equipped to deal with these types of students.

In some cases, it is a cultural shock for many educational professionals because they have not been prepared to deal with issues of this magnitude. In addition to these compounding problems, typically school districts where these students attend schools are often operating with limited resources, less qualified staff, and inadequate and outdated texts.

Background of Study

As a result of these problems, the students are less exposed to 21st century technology and curriculum that is not conducive or adequate to address the disconnect to the mainstream of education that these students face. These factors play a large part in the disproportionate education of African-American students. Therefore, educational success rates, adequate yearly progress, and educational growth are systemic factors that are compounded by these areas of concern. Many of these students make gains but they are not consistent with other groups, and the problems become more persistent with age and growth. The correlation and continuity of impacted problems remain at the forefront of the education of African-American students. These troubles become more complex with elementary, middle school, and high school. Often students are mislabeled with educational handicaps, and parents/guardians are misguided because of their children's educational records. Sadly, many of these students never get on the right track until they have missed opportunities in life. So often, these students are not guided in the right direction. Curriculum is not diversified and differentiated to address the learning styles and needs of these students. Moreover, many of these students feel hopeless in a system that does not work for them, and they are discouraged because it appears that no one cares about their education.

What are the causes for the gaps in achievement of African-American students? In research and studies, it has been investigated over and over again to understand the effects of the differences between African-American and White

students. From socio-economic status, family structure, cultural surroundings, quality of teachers, and quality of schools, they all have an impact on the education of children. With these inconclusive factors, there are substantial gaps that remain after decades that are not accounted for. As these students move through school, the achievement gap widens.

The gap in academic achievement between African-American and white students is one the most complicated and problematic issues in education. This gap initially begins in elementary school years and grows over school years. On several scales of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), African-American 17-year old students performed at the level of white 13-year old students (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000). "These performance levels translate directly into high school graduation rates, college attendance and completion, and ultimately, the differences in income and socioeconomic status that underlie our most critical social problems" (Slavin & Madden, 2001, p. 3).

Statement of the Problem

Many African-American students perform significantly below performance levels of white and Asian students on standardized testing and achieve at lower academic rates than that of other segments of the U.S. population. From a historical standpoint, this has become known as the black-white test score gap which generally occurs before children enter kindergarten and widens over time (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). In a comparison of mean test scores, African-American students scored roughly one standard deviation below white students on standardized tests. When

other factors are placed in the equation such as: family structure, socioeconomic status, community, and school quality, a considerable test score gap remains. Fryer and Levitt conducted research to explain the trajectory of African-American students. After careful examination and analysis of data in this study, it was found that the results suggest the quality of schools attended by African-Americans and Whites are likely to be a major factor in the equation. Many components of schools were taken into account such as: quality of instruction, student to teacher ratio, nonstandard school inputs, percentage of students on free lunch, and school culture (Fryer & Levitt, 2004).

The education system in America provides education to all races and demographics, and it is based on equal education for all. However, this is not readily achieved among all student populations. Often standardized achievement tests are used to measure achievement gaps. Achievement gaps are also measured by using early childhood and college readiness measures, high school graduation rates, and college completion rates. From the beginning of pre-school years, achievement gaps appear (Burchinal et al, 2011). These achievement gaps grow as children move to different grade levels (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). Gaps remain throughout the educational span of and life of struggling students. Moreover, they pose problems for students into adulthood. Educational attainment and long term prosperity may be affected (McKinsey & Company, 2009; Olneck, 2005).

Additional research suggests that outlying factors contribute to the disparities, equity, and the education of African-American students. More African-American

students live below the poverty line median, and many are born at low birth weights. The United States, among the world's wealthiest nations, has one of the greatest divides between the rich and poor. Astonishing fact but true, the top 1% of United States families has more money than the bottom 40%. This gap has steadily increased over the past 70 years (Schifferes, 2002). Poverty does not discriminate. In 2007, research found that 24.7% of the African American population and 20.7% of the Hispanic population were below the poverty line compared to 10.2% of Caucasians (Capra, 2009).

Moreover, this research also found that American poverty continues its discrimination through affecting single women in larger numbers than males. When households are headed by women, they are more likely to experience poverty.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of schools that have demonstrated positive academic results on the education of African-American students and to analyze the success of those findings and how they translate to achievement and measurable results through academics from Grade three through eight.

Rationale

There have been huge gains and successes made in recent years with narrowing the achievement gap between African-American students and other student populations. However, in many instances, the gaps still remain prevalent across the nation. African-American students often attend schools that have their unique

challenges within themselves. The education of the African-American student has its fair challenges and schools across the nation are grappling with the idea of consistently closing the achievement gap and successfully eradicating the overall achievement gap of African-American students. Educators are concerned about what strategies and approaches have been most successful raising achievement for African-American students.

Research Questions

- For schools that are having a positive impact on the education of African-American students, what is working?
- For schools that made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in Alabama under NCLB, what factors can be attributed to the success of African-American students who took the Alabama Math and Reading Assessment in grades three through eight?
- Why are these things working in the schools that have success?

Significance of This Study in the Field of Education

This study is intended to further the understanding of learning patterns in African-American students and to summarize the educational achievement of black and white inequality in the U.S. Studies consistently show the differences in the educational achievement of black and white students. Gaps in reading and math appear at every grade level. The racial achievement gap is a serious problem in the U.S. and is one of the largest social problems that face the country. With respect to demographics and cultural aspects, the education of African-American students is

affected by socioeconomic conditions, disparities in school districts, inequity in education, cultural environment, family and home life, and teacher effectiveness.

Disparities in the education of African-American students can be attributed to many outstanding factors. This study will identify several underlying factors that contribute to the inequalities in the education of African-American students. The literature review in this paper will identify several underlying factors. The study conducted by the author will report on successful attempts to address this problem in several school in Alabama. The study results will describe the data, the factors that led to positive results and explore the reason for why they were successful.

Gaps in educational achievement often lead to major impacts on African-American students far beyond the classroom. Many of these students choose to dropout, and this is a costly decision. Dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty, receive public assistance, go to prison, be on death row, live unhealthy lives, divorce, and become single parents with children who dropout themselves. Our nation and local communities also feel the effects from the dropout epidemic because of loss of productive workers and higher cost associated with increased incarceration, health care, and social services (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006).

In schools around the country, there is a serious charge and job to do in closing the achievement gap and recognizing the disparities in our national educational system. Public education has not totally responded in a way to correct this problem. Year after year the problems exist and get persistently worse over time.

This also becomes crippling to educational systems and economy. Lower graduation rates lead to less employment including under employment because students are not adequately prepared to enter college, universities, trade schools, or the workforce. They simply lack the necessary skills to hold down skillful employment. In return, it becomes a vicious cycle and socio-economic status is devalued. Failure is simply not an option because it leads to intergenerational poverty, higher incarceration rates, chemical and substance abuse. Many brilliant minds go to waste in a system that does little to help change the dynamics and course of life for these young people. Children can learn when they are exposed to the proper environments and nurtured academically and socially. We are not able to change the past, but we can ensure that there is a brighter future for these students.

Local and state boards of education have to make it a priority and resources and accountability measures must be in place to guarantee that the gaps are closed. It must be a top priority to happen. School leadership has to effectively recruit and train the teachers who are passionate towards reaching and educating the whole child. Moreover, once teachers are hired, they must receive on-going support from leadership to help them to achieve this goal. Everyone has to share ownership in the process. Schools, leadership, teachers, students, and parents must all share in the entire process. High expectations must be placed on students to value their education challenges and the solutions of the achievement gap for African-American students.

Teachers must also present curriculum that has the rigor to challenge the students to move beyond the status quo. There must be a strong challenge a

commitment on the part of school officials and other leadership to closing the achievement gaps through new policy implementation and additional resources to ensure the fair equitable education of all students. Schools must form strong alliances within the community, with parental involvement being a key and central component for the success of all students. Closing the achievement gap will require careful and meticulous planning on the part of leadership from the federal, state, and local levels. These entities must work together to promote a culture of learning and adaptation for educators and students.

In 2003, 46% of African-American students performed below the basic level in the fourth grade. By 2011, the percent of African American students performing at the basic level in the fourth grade had dropped to 34 percent. There also was a shift as well in white students and their performance levels. In 2003, 13% of white students performed below the basic level, and that level of performance changed in 2011 to 9%. As noted both gaps narrowed, and the size of the gap between African American and white students narrowed by 8 percentage points. This is significant progress; however, African American students were more than three times as likely to perform within the lowest achievement category in 2011 (Bromberg & Theokas, 2013).

Our national public educational system has had a long standing history that points to achievement gaps between African American students and other ethnic groups of students. Full racial equality should be the goal for the nation's educational system. In the last decade, schools across the nation have focused on test results and achievement gaps. Policy makers and educators have created

accountability systems that only are a baseline for performance and may accelerate change for struggling students the most, but they fall short of driving achievement and gap-closing beyond that baseline (Bromberg & Theokas, 2013).

Now the pendulum is swinging again with a new wave of testing and achievement standards. Forty-five states along with the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core Standards to help raise academic standards and achievement nationwide. Some states have gone a step further by adding college and career readiness standards. The Common Core Standards define a rigorous and uniform set of standards for learning. The other method of reform is the No Child Left Behind waiver. Thirty-two states and the District of Columbia have implemented waivers which allow flexibility from the law in the areas of goal-setting and accountability. These reforms are raising the bar for expectations in all students (McMurrer & Yoshioka, 2013).

Ethnicity and culture are important variables in the education of all students. Ethnicity and culture are often misunderstood by educators and policy makers. By understanding the importance of these two factors, we can help promote educational equity and excellence for all students. Furthermore, understanding these two factors can greatly improve educational outcomes.

Assumptions and Limitations

It should be noted that the findings of this study were delimited to public schools in the state of Alabama. The study will be conducted in schools in northeast Alabama who were deemed by the Alabama State Department of Education as

successful schools who consistently met adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards under the (NCLB) No Child Left Behind Act.

Nature of the Study

This will be a qualitative study, and it will be conducted based on existing data from the Alabama Department of Education used to measure performance assessments in Alabama public schools in grades three through eight. The Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) test scores will be the unit of measure. These tests were utilized in Alabama under the NCLB act as a baseline of measurement for individual student scores and school performance to measure AYP in Alabama public schools. Districts were also held to accountability standards under these tests. Moreover, ARMT tests were utilized as universal screeners to document supporting data for successful and failing schools under the NCLB act. The results on these tests will guide selection of schools to be used in this study: schools that have been successful in raising achievement of African-American students as well as a broader sample group for comparison.

A series of qualitative interview questions will be asked to analyze what schools are doing to close the achievement gaps within African-American student population. Also, these questions will be utilized by current and former teachers and administrators who worked in schools who met AYP and who will be asked a series of questions to understand the correlation and impact of these particular successful schools on the education of African-American students.

Organization of the Study

Chapter Two will consist of literature that explains the ongoing problems from a historical perspective as it relates to the education of African-American students in the U.S. In the review of the literature, key elements will include specific gaps in achievement. Reading and math scores will be accessed over a span of years beginning with the implementation of NAEP in the 1973 to track the trajectory and progression of gaps between populations of students. Socioeconomic and poverty rates will be denoted to give a depiction of the environment that many of these students live in. High school graduation and college attendance numbers will be analyzed. The literature will also review schools who are having success with African-American students, and what those schools are doing to get results.

Chapter Three involves the methodology section and how the study is being conducted. The research questions and the interview questions are listed to give credence to support the nature of the study. Schools and demographics that pertain to this study are included in this section. Finally, this chapter sums up with the conclusion of the methodology and ethical concerns. Chapter Four of the study presents the results and findings, and Chapter Five concludes with the summary of the research, final analysis, the review of the results, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Section I

Education makes up a necessary part of the fabric within the United States, and it has been discussed and championed from the dining room table to the highest court of the land. Education has always had existing challenges, and it has always pivoted in different directions depending upon the political governance and shifts within public policy. It has been almost sixty years since the Supreme Court abolished legal segregation in our nation's schools. However, many students of color still face disproportionate ratios of low testing scores. There are few high schools which service a high number of minorities that offer calculus and other progressive math curriculum to students. Moreover, in schools where these types of classes are offered, there are still disparities found.

We are living in a global economy and market that is very competitive. How can we improve our national educational system as a whole? This is a question like others that we have asked ourselves over and over again. There are gaps in the education of selected minorities from kindergarten through twelfth grade, and those disparities spill over into higher education. It has been said and quoted that education opens doors and is the key to a successful career. However, schools that primarily educate minority students often fail to provide the educational opportunities for the

students that they serve. Racially correlated disparities in K-12 education are apparent in: test, scores, grades, retention, and drop-out rates (LeBeauf, 2008). There is a need to have more rigorous programs and standards. The question then becomes how to implement those programs consistently across the nation into individual classrooms. Teachers also need to have access to meticulous curriculum and professional development that provide models for developing culturally enriching lessons and assignments.

Historical Perspectives

In 1954, when Brown v. Board of Education began the process of school desegregation, social scientists confidently predicted that the racial gap in academic performance would soon be eliminated. However, this did not occur. As reflected in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results (Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999), the reading achievement of white fourth graders has remained virtually unchanged since the earliest national assessment in 1971. In the 1970s, African-American students made significant progress on NAEP reading, but there has been little further change since the early 1980s. For example, similar patterns have also been seen and significant gaps in performance still exist today and are no longer diminishing.

The gap reduction seen in the 1970s is important in demonstrating that the achievement gap is not immutable, but can be changed on a national scale. There are many explanations for progress made during this time frame. During this time, the nation saw the first fruits of new innovative programs including Title I,

desegregation, and other improvements in the education of African-American students. Some of the greatest improvements academically were seen in the south. The south had the most dramatic changes during this time in the social and educational arena.

From research according to NAEP, achievement for all ethnic groups has virtually become stagnate. African-Americans generally attend schools that are funded far less than schools attended by whites. Their teachers are less highly qualified (Slavin & Madden, 2001). Many of the students come from single parent impoverished homes, and these factors have affected the education of these students. Some researchers suggest that educational equality will not be achieved until economic and social equality is achieved. However, in review of the dependence of socio-economic status on educational attainment, it is difficult to see how economic achievement can precede academic success (Wirt, et al., 2001).

In the United States, research has shown that the problem with the achievement gap has been ongoing for decades between low income African-American students and middle income white students. Equality of Education, also known as the Coleman Report, published these findings through the U.S. Department of Education. This research suggests that factors at school, within the home, and community have an impact on the academic achievement of African-American students (Coleman, 1967). The achievement gap can be observed through different measures such as standardized tests, drop-out rates, academic success, graduation rates, and college enrollment and completion rates (Farkas, 2006).

There is an old proverb that says it takes a village to raise a child. Parental involvement is extremely important in the education of children. Research indicates that parental involvement, such as checking homework and maintaining household rules, may have more influence on student achievement than other involvement expressions (Jeynes, 2011). In single parent homes and those with low socio-economic status, parents are less likely to be involved in their children's education. Approximately 40% of all children born in the U.S. in 2007 were born to unwed parents, and this is more than double from 1980. Many of these children born to unwed mothers in most cases live with a single mother who is not residing with the child's biological father (Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). The impact of parental involvement on academic achievement is important across different demographic groups; however, it is often moderated by demographic characteristics (Jeynes, 2005). Home life and cultural aspects contribute to the characteristics of students. Many students from low socioeconomic backgrounds move frequently from school to school, and they are often transients living in homeless environments. All too often, these students spend very little time reading and learning enriching concepts. They are influenced by television, dysfunctional lifestyles, and environments. These factors contribute greatly to gaps in academic learning and achievement. Many of these gaps exist before students begin school because these students do not attend pre-k programs to prepare them for a mainstream education. Pre-k programs are designed to help children from a range of backgrounds develop school readiness skills. By improving school readiness skills, there are additional

possibilities for decreasing academic achievement gaps (Herman-Smith, 2013). These children are victims of situations that are beyond their control, and they are often misunderstood by many educators. African-American students are less likely to be taught by teachers who are highly qualified in specialized areas.

Closing the achievement gap was a primary component of the No Child Left Behind Act. This act held schools accountable for progress among all groups and all students regardless of their learning abilities or disabilities. In addition to closing the achievement gap, the No Child Left Behind Act was also purposed to close the gap in student achievement between students from different social and economic backgrounds (Blank, 2011).

African-American students are more likely to drop out of school. As a whole, minority students are more likely to drop out of high school. Every year in the U.S., one third of high school students fail to graduate. More alarmingly, nearly one half of African-American students do not graduate with their class (Bridgeland, et al., 2006). From the years 1990 to 2012, the dropout rates were lower for Whites than African-Americans. The White dropout rates declined from 9% to 4%, and the rate for African-Americans declined from 13% to 8%. Rates for African- American and White students both declined during these years, and the gap between African-Americans and Whites did narrow between 2000 to 2012 from six percentage points to three percentage points (Kena et al., 2014). However, these are still alarming statistics that have staggering implications for these young students who should be productive citizens who are qualified to join the workforce. However, many of these

students lack the education necessary to be an integral part of society and the work force. Moreover, many of them never are able to transition to a meaningful role in society. As a nation, this is not acceptable. The high school drop-out rate is more than alarming. It is a disastrous thing for K-12 education in the U.S. There are many problems and ills that are present within the African American community.

However severe and threatening those problems are, education is clearly a problem that has existed for years and even into the span of decades. The education of African-American students has placed our nation at risk and in a state of emergency. There is a risk to our nation for a segment of the student population to be under-educated. Scholars and researchers have attempted to dissect and answer this huge problem, but it has not been solved. Through research, surveys, interviews, documentaries, and further analysis, problems still persist. The public education system has done much in recent years to address the problems that prevail in the education of African-American students; however, in many ways, there are still failures on many fronts. Successful schools and successful educators have learned to reach the total child in a myriad of ways. The increased focus on high academic standards has brought a heightened awareness of the disparities in student achievement as measured on different types of assessments (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007).

There are no quick and easy solutions to fixing this problem. Therefore, schools must be innovative and resourceful in their efforts to find meaningful solutions to reaching at risk youths and educating the whole child. Solutions are necessary to

ensure that every child receives a proper and fitting education. If solutions are not found, many African-American students will not obtain the quality education that is needed for success in the years to come. Many people believe that schools must shift their focus from the supposed deficiencies of the African-American student and the alleged inadequacies of African-American family life to the barriers that stand in the way of academic success posed by the outdated, outmoded Eurocentric systems of education and the ineffective methodologies of the instructional process that do not meet the learning needs of our children (Multi-Ethnic Think Tank, 2002).

Further research suggests efficacy and equity of effective cultural strategies which aid in the education of African-American students (Ramsay, 2005). Schools and educators have to be sensitive to the needs of these students. Culture affects the way that students learn. Therefore, instruction has to be culturally sensitive and thought provoking to keep these students interested in subject matter. Changes have been made and are currently taking place to address the achievement gaps of African-American students. Major legislation and policy implementation has been passed on the local, state, and federal levels. No Child Left Behind legislation brought with it a new sense of obligation facing the education of the nation's children. Even with all of those indicators, the achievement gaps have been narrowed but are still present.

In many ways, the education of African-American students is rendered ineffective by different forms of evidence. These academic disparities occur in the form of achievement gaps from rural to urban setting all over the nation. The problem is further exacerbated by disproportionate low academic achievement.

African-American students are over represented in special education programs and the juvenile justice system. Moreover, African-American youth are 4.5 times more likely and Latinos 2.5 times more likely than white youths to be detained for the same crime (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2007).

Many of these students are not involved in school cultivated activities other than sport-centered activities. Other factors include discipline referrals, suspension, and in some cases, expulsion which lead to low performance at grade levels and eventually high drop-out rates. There is also a digital divide within the population of African-American students. Often these students come from homes in which low socio-economic factors affect them having access to modern technological advances (Cartledge, Tillman, & Johnson, 2001). These students are often not adequately prepared for college entry, and they are often under-represented in preparatory programs that prepare students for the workforce. There are other conditions that contribute to problems in the education of African-American students. Culture and the awareness of culture are important in the education of all students. Drawing from others and defining her position, Tillman (2002) states that culture is a groups' individual and collective way of thinking, believing, and knowing, and this includes their shared experiences, consciousness, skills, values, forms of expression, social institutions, and behaviors. Culturally responsive teaching is one methodology that helps students to connect more successfully. This is based on the assumption that life experiences and frames of reference have more of a personal and meaningful interest to the students. Therefore, they connect and learn more easily and thoroughly.

> Culturally responsive teachers are critically conscious of the power of the symbolic curriculum as an instrument of teaching and use it to help convey important information, values, and actions about ethnic and cultural diversity. They ensure that the images displayed in classrooms represent a wide variety of age, gender, time, place, social class, and positional diversity with and cross ethnic groups and that they are accurate extensions of what is taught through the formal curriculum. (Gay, 2002, p. 108).

Often low expectations are present for these students, and low expectations are communicated from academics to behavioral norms. Educators rarely or seldom interact with students, their parents, or their guardians which creates communication barriers that affect the education of African-American students. These students are often plagued by comments that make them feel inferior to others because much of what they see or hear about themselves is negative. In their educational world, they are presented a framework that is not conclusive of their view of the world, and they operate fundamentally from a deficit that leaves little room to engage learning, global perspectives, and multiple intelligences.

Socioeconomic Disparities

The gap that exists between and with minority students in the U.S. can be attributed to many factors and, of those factors, economic disparity and inequity are considerable contributors. Current educational data shows that approximately 70% of high school students in America graduate on time. However, those figures change with minority students. For example, only 56% of African-American students

graduate on time from high school (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). Schools in the twenty-first century face major challenges in being responsive to the unique cultural diversity challenges and low income students. The academic achievement gap for low income and ethnic youth is staggering. The growing academic achievement gap with lower success rate for inner-city impoverished youth has been clearly documented and is associated with fewer educational opportunities, a poor quality of education (Carey, 2004), high drop-out rates as a of result cultural misunderstandings, negative stereotyping (Carey, 2004), and fewer resources. Although youth problems stem from a wide range of both internal and external forces (Grant-Thompson & Atkinson, 1997), students having problems in school are often with concerns outside the school setting. This is evident when youth are faced with challenges from social problems, such as poverty, violence, and racism, and may result in disruptions in family and community life that can hinder the emotional, social, and academic growth and development of children and youth (Sapp, 2006).

There are several theories concerning the gap in achievement of African-American students. From a traditional viewpoint, the conservative reasoning is centered on the notion of culture and poverty as the underlying reason for a number of social pathologies, particularly poor families, among whom racial minorities are disproportionately represented. On the other hand, from a more liberal perspective, the suggestion is made that the achievement gap is the result of a difference in socioeconomic status between white and African-American families. Research shows that household income does effect student academic achievement, graduation rates,

and college graduation rates. Research also suggests that wealthier parents have the resources to provide their children better opportunities for learning. Moreover, research suggests that children who come from poorer homes are more prone to chronic stress (Duncan, Magnuson, & Vortruba-Dizal, 2014). This transcends down to resources of the schools that these students attend. In review of these two viewpoints, both leave unanswered questions. Lately, more promising research has focused on interactions between various aspects of schooling including the school environment and the characteristics of the students. Additional, more promising research shows evidence that small class sizes and improved opportunities for preschool education can benefit the performance of low socio-economic students in public schools and can make a considerable differences in narrowing the achievement gap between African-American and white and low and high income students (Stearns, 2002).

School Choice

School choice policies lack consistency. Research shows that current mechanisms of choice lack proper public justification. Moreover, the research shows that these policies are not consistent with goals that have been recognized by advocates, particularly for minority families (Ben-Porath, 2012).

As our school landscape changes, there are options for school choice that are offered to parents and students across the United States. Publicly funded school choice options are growing. There are five main categories and subcategories for

public school choice options consisting of: open enrollment, charter schools, homeschooling, private schools, and online virtual schools.

Open Enrollment

Some districts offer open enrollment programs to their district families. In these districts, children are allowed to attend different schools across the district. With open enrollment, magnet schools are a prevalent option. Magnet schools typically feature pedagogical or topical focus. These schools often receive some federal funding. Career and Technical Education schools also operate within the parameters of open school enrollment. These particular schools offer courses that prepare students for jobs in technical fields where they learn a skill or trade. Open enrollment schools were first introduced as alternative education in the 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s, magnet schools saw an increase in implementation with the hopes of increasing racial integration (Miron, Welner, Hinchey, & Mathis, 2012).

Payment Vouchers

With school choice, there has also been public support for private school choice. Private school choice in some states is provided to students through the use of voucher programs, tuition tax credits, and deductions. Originally, school vouchers were put in practice in the 1970s and made popular by economist Milton Friedman. Through recent years, these programs have been made available to give aid to low-income families and students (Miron et al., 2012).

Charter Schools

Charter Schools are also part of our educational landscape. Charter schools operate publicly under a charter. Just as public schools, they receive local and state funding. However, these schools are not tied to regulations like regular public schools. They have greater flexibility. However, charters schools are held to contractual performance targets, and if these targets are not met, they may lose their charter and face the possibility of their charter not being renewed. Charters schools were started in Minnesota in 1991. Over the years they have grown to enroll approximately 3.7% of students in the United States.

Online and Virtual Schools

Online and virtual schools can also be known as cyber schools. These schools tend to offer supplemental programs to students who are currently enrolled in the traditional framework of school settings. Virtual schools are not full time. Districts also have the option of utilizing online schools. Single district supplemental programs are among the fastest growing online components for schools. Online and virtual schools are recent school choice options (Waston, Murin, Vasha, Gemin, & Rapp, 2011).

Homeschooling

Homeschooling is another option that is available to families. Children attend school from home with parents or tutors without being actually enrolled in public or private schools. Depending upon the state, guidelines and requirements may differ.

Homeschooling became very popular during the 1980s and is currently in all 50 states (Mead, 2012).

Many solutions have been put forth in an effort to reduce or eliminate this gap, but the findings of this research study point to early childhood education as one of the most promising. As part of the results from the nationally representative Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 (ECLS-K), kindergarten and first-grade data sets were utilized to examine mathematics and reading performance in relation to child care arrangements prior to kindergarten. Studies have shown that children from wealthy families acquire more experiences through provisions of social and cultural capital which may be supportive in explaining the disparities between African-American and White students in academics, including reading achievement and intrinsic motivation. African-American students, on average, attain poorer academic outcomes on all educational levels and academic domains than their White counterparts (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Lee, 2002). Researchers have attempted to explain this robust phenomenon in empirical studies. The influence of socioeconomic status (SES), stereotype threat, oppositional identity, and cultural discontinuity are among the most common explanations of the underperformance of African-American students (Boykin, 2001; Hill, 2001, 2006; Ogbu, 1997; Steele, 1997). Research suggests there are no single factors to account for the achievement gap (Champion, Rosa-Lugo, Rivers, & McCabe, 2010). Research also shows that skill gaps and differences in home

academic supports, effort, and motivation play a role in the completion of homework and getting lower grades than whites (Ferguson, 2002).

"No Child Left Behind" legislation requiring states to publicize annual test scores has increased the awareness of large academic achievement disparities among U.S. students. The NCLB act mandated that states hold teachers and administrators accountable for the testing capabilities of students. However, the NCLB act did not hold states accountable to the schools to provide sufficient resources and funding to prepare and meet standards. Statistics reveal disproportionately low college admission rates among African-American and Latino students. The United States cannot afford to face the future with large numbers of its youth uneducated and poor. Therefore, it is imperative that K-12 schools and higher education join forces to reframe the nation's educational agenda (Rousseau, 2007). Evidence has been presented that demonstrates opportunities to learn mathematics are not equally distributed among all students. Some data exhibits that African- American, Latino, and low-income students are less likely to have access to experienced and qualified teachers. Therefore, they are more likely to get low results and less likely to receive equitable funding per student (Flores, 2007).

There are disparities in education across the nation, and this will not be a quick fix. The problems are numerous and have been in existence for years. Equity is possible to achieve, and it is a necessary element that must be in place to fulfill educational equality. In today's society, many forms of research focus on civic progress, and less time and effort is spent to better understand urgent problems and

promising possibilities in education (Tate, 2012). Research has identified a litany of factors that likely contribute to the disparity in achievement, and there is no one size that fits all (Winton, Buysse, & Zimmerman, 2007). Some of the issues that contribute to the African-American/White achievement gap are: socioeconomics, parental involvement, peer pressure, testing disparities, policy issues, teacher quality, and school quality.

Achievement Disparities

Disparities in educational outcomes remain an especially formidable barrier. Recent research on the Black and White achievement gap points to a significant pattern. The trend in school data tends to show large gaps in black and white achievement. On the other hand, the research also shows a slowing in the growth of social class gaps (Condron, 2009). Achievement gaps in reading have become associated with the observed disparities on educational measures between the academic performances of Black and White students (Russell, 2011).

In addition, a large number of African-American students are failing mathematics courses. Identifying the causes of the students failing mathematics courses will solve a problem that has existed for almost a century. Current research has shown that disparities in mathematics exist in American schools. These disparities explain real world differences in the services provided to African-American students in U.S. Schools.

Making American schools adequate learning institutions for all students will be a work in progress (Johnson & Kritsonis, 2006). Achievement disparities among

racial and ethnic groups persist in the U.S. educational system. Asian and white students consistently perform better on standardized tests than Hispanic and African-American students (Richwine, 2011). Since the passage of Lyndon Johnson's 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, standards-based testing has demonstrated the underperformance of African-American students (Boykin, 2001; Hill, 2001, 2006; Ogbu, 1997; Steele, 1997).

Achievement Gaps – Math and Reading

One of the most pivotal developments in a child's education and overall development is literacy. The development of reading and writing skills are major factors in determining children who will be adequately prepared academically for school compared to those who have not. Early difficulties in literacy have negative effects on children's future success which may place them at risk for reading and math problems, low performance in other academic domains, placement in special education services, social deviance, school dropout, and a number of other academic and social problems (Baydar, Brooks-Dunn, & Furstenberg, 1993; Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000; Morrison & Cooney, 2002; Senechal, LeFeyre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). In the United States, African-American children start school behind their white peers on standardized reading and math tests. Moreover, racial disparities in achievement increase in subsequent years.

From beginning developmental years in the pre-school setting, African-American children tend to perform less well on assessments in early reading, writing, basic vocabulary, and decoding skills than their white counterparts (Fryer & Levitt, 2004;

Jencks & Phillips, 1998). These years are crucial to the development of a solid educational background. Often, during this period in a child's life, they are also developing socially, and as these problems continue in children, they transmit into more problems that affect their academic learning. Racial gaps in literacy extend throughout elementary, middle, and high school years which increase in magnitude per academic year (Carter & Wilson, 1996; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Irvine, 1990). Research has also shown consistent gender differences favoring girls at the elementary school level (Coley, 2001; Gambell & Hunter, 2000; Lummis & Stevenson, 1990; Ready, LoGerfo, Burkam, & Lee, 2005). These studies have shown that girls nationwide enter kindergarten with stronger literacy skills and show faster growth in literacy than boys (Ready et al., 2005). This research implies that African-American boys may be at risk for experiencing difficulties with reading and math skills early on in academics. The general underachievement of African-American boys has been documented in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009).

Studies have shown that African-American children are lagging behind other children in their reading skills. There are multiple factors that have been examined to explain the literacy gap. Socially disadvantaged children with academic difficulties at school entry age are at increased risk for poor health and psychosocial outcomes. Public investments in early childcare are increasing in many countries with the intention of reducing cognitive inequalities between disadvantaged and advantaged children (Geoffroy, et al., 2010).

The disturbing Black-White achievement gap has been shown to be present in both mathematics and reading at every grade studied, from grades one through twelve (Jacobson, Olsen, Rice, Sweetland, & Ralph, 2001).

Research from NAEP shows that minority students have made considerable gains over the past four decades in reading and math. There have been efforts made to decrease the achievement gaps of minority students; however, the achievement gaps between African-American and white students remain wide (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013). NAEP reading and math data gives a depiction of 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds, and 17-year-olds age span of progress made since the first year of NAEP in 1971 until 2012. Reading results show that 9-year-olds have made significant gains in achievement from 208 to 221 a total of 13 points. This is equivalent to just over one year of learning, and racial gaps have also narrowed over the past four decades. African-American students have increased their scores by 36 points, while white students improved their scores by 15 points. The results for 13-year-olds show that considerable gains have also been made. The overall score of student reading has increased from 255 to 263, which is equivalent to nearly a year's worth of learning. During this time, African-American students increased their scores by 25 points nearly 2.5 years of learning, and white students achieved a 9 point gain over this period of time. However, on average in the United States 17-year-olds have made very little progress since 1971. The scores from 1971 to 2012 were not significantly different. The reading scores in 1971 were 285 and in 2012 it was 287. African-American students in this age category for reading increased their scores by

30 points roughly three years of growth, and white students increased by four points (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013).

In the U.S., the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) is used as the primary source of information that relates achievement gap patterns. The NAEP measures the performance of students in multiple subject areas. However, primary focus is placed on the areas of math and reading. The NAEP shows comparisons of achievement and student performance throughout the nation. NAEP tests are given to a sample of students and does not report findings for individual schools (Maleyko, 2012).

Math results also show significant gains for African -Americans since the first year of NAEP for math in 1973. In the 9-year-old age category, student achievement has also increased by two and a half years' worth of learning (25 points). African-American students have increased their scores by 36 points, and white students have increased their scores by 27 points. In the U.S., 13-years-olds have made improvements in long term and short term gains. Research shows that student scores have increased by 19 points which is approximately two years' worth of learning. African-American students increased their scores by 36 points while white students increased their scores by 19 points. In math as well as in reading, the 17-years-olds in the U.S. have made very little progress since 1973. African-American students increased their scores by 18 points, and white students increased their scores four points (NCES, 2013)

Reading and math scores have improved for black students across the U.S. However, white students are also improving, and the disparity between blacks and whites has lessened only slightly. On average, the gap narrowed about seven points on a 500 point scale from 1992 through 2007, with black students scoring about 28 points behind white students. The disparities in test scores between black and white students are vast which creates a challenge for public education (NCES, 2009)

In summary, the first NAEP assessments were administered in the early 1970s, and the assessments measured and documented gaps in reading and math between African-American students and White students. NAEP assessments are used as the U.S. chief source of information about achievement gaps patterns. Since the inception of these tests, the achievement gaps have existed between African-Americans and Whites. The research from these tests showed a narrowing in the 1970s and the 1980s in math, but the gaps flattened and even increased in math in the 1990s. The gaps slightly narrowed again and flattened since 2004. African-American students scored approximately one standard deviation below White students. This amounts to a difference of performance of a 4th grader and an 8th grader (Barton, & Coley, 2010).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act was passed, and one of its major fundamental elements was to close the achievement gaps within various student groups. This law became a major premise for educational accountability from the federal government level. It was taken seriously by local schools, school districts, and state departments of education. Under this law, schools and districts were

required to disaggregate data from individual and group student test scores. It created a heightened sense of awareness surrounding achievement. Emphasis was placed on intervention and differentiated instruction to reach all students. During the decade of the NCLB, African-American students made gains in improving reading and math scores. The Center for Education Statistics showed that African-American students trailed their white peers by an average of more than 20 test-score point on the NAEP math and reading assessment at 4th and 8th grades. This is a difference of about two grade levels. These gaps have persisted even though score differentials between these two groups of students have narrowed (NCES, 2009, 2011). Other data from the U.S. Department of Education show that students across the board greatly increased the average number of course credits that they earned by graduation in 2009. African-American students went from taking the least credit hours in 1990, 23.5, to the most of any student group in 2009, 27.4. On the other hand, white and Asian American students were at least nearly twice as likely to take classes considered academically rigorous than African-American students. In these correlations, fewer than ten percent of African-American students participated in rigorous courses in 2009 (Planty, et al., 2009).

From the time that NCLB was implemented, all ethnic Ngroups have shown progress on the tests. However, the gap between whites and African-Americans performing at or above grade level remains at 30 percent. This gap is somewhat smaller than it was in 1994. However, it is still substantial. Under NCLB, African-

American students improved their test scores more proportionally than white students and at a faster rate.

Reading and math scores were a major focus of NCLB efforts. In most states with three or more years of comparable test data, student achievement in reading and math has gone up since 2002 when NCLB was enacted. Moreover, there is more evidence of achievement gaps between groups of students narrowing in reading and math since 2002 than of gaps widening. Even with those variables, the magnitude of the gaps is still substantial. It is virtually impossible to determine the extent of the trend results in tests because, under NCLB, each state sets its parameters for testing growth and gains to make AYP on a yearly basis. Policies were set in states to raise achievement. Even though NCLB emphasized public reporting of state test data, in many instances the data necessary to reach conclusions about achievement were sometimes difficult to find or unavailable, or had holes or discrepancies (Planty, et. al., 2009).

Since 2002, the number of states showing increases in test scores is greater than the number of states that show declines. Of 24 states with percentage proficient and effect size data for middle school reading, 11 demonstrated moderate to large gains of at least a percentage point. Five of 22 states with percentage proficient and effect size data at the elementary, middle, and high school levels made moderate to large gains in reading and math across all three grade spans. In reading, seven states showed moderate to large increases across all three grade spans. In math, nine states showed gains across three grade spans, and the remaining states had different trends

at different grade levels. Most states showed improvements in math, and more states showed declines in reading and math achievement at the high school level than at the elementary or middle school levels (Snyder & Dillow, 2009).

Based on NAEP results and research, gaps in Grade 4 mathematics existed in 2007 in the 46 states for which results were available. In 15 states, the 2007 gaps were narrower than in 1992. African-American students demonstrated a greater gain in average scores than that of white students. In Grade 8, mathematics gaps existed in 2007 for 41 states for which results were available. The gaps were narrower in four states: Arkansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Texas. For each of these states, scores increased for both groups. Scores for African-American students increased more. In Grade 4, five states had mathematics gaps in 2007 that were larger than the national gap of 26 points, while ten states had gaps that were smaller. In Grade 8, seven states had mathematics gaps in 2007 that were larger than the national gap of 31 points, while 12 had gaps that were smaller (Planty et. al., 2009).

Even though scores have increased for African-American and white students, on average African American students do not perform as well as their white peers. On a national level, the fourth-grade achievement gap between African-American and white students was narrower in mathematics for 2007 than in 1990. At the eighth grade level, the gap in mathematics was narrower in 2009 than in 2005. The reading gap did not change significantly compared to either prior assessment year.

From research conducted from NAEP, at grade 8 reading gaps existed in 2007 in 44 states for which results were available. Gaps narrowed from 1992 to 2007 in

Delaware, Florida, and New Jersey. This was due to a larger increase in African-American student scores. In Grade 8, reading gaps existed in 2007 in 41 of the 42 states for which results were available. In the state of Hawaii, there was a seven point difference between African-American and White students' scores in 2008 were not statistically significant. There was not any significant change in the gap in any state during the years of 1998 to 2007. In Grade 4, eight states had reading gaps that were larger than the 2007 national gap of 27 points, while nine had gaps that were smaller. In Grade 8, one state had a reading gap that was larger than the 2007 national gap of 26 points, while nine had gaps that were smaller (Planty, et. al, 2009).

There are several elements that researchers suggest and give credence to that have led to improving reading scores for African-American students. From a historical perspective, it has been said that teachers who use effective teaching strategies should be able to reach and teach all children. Many disagree with this notion. Many researchers suggest that educators must teach African-American students to decode and comprehend different types of texts (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Recent research for improving the reading scores of African-American students suggest that educators must adopt the belief system that African-American students can become good readers, and they must do all they can strategically to ensure that this process happens. Forming alliances with parents and community is essential. The use of effective and culturally stimulating techniques are also important.

Case Studies—Math and Reading Strategies

Research from Berry (2008) conveyed information from African-American students who were successful in mathematics which showed several themes. These themes greatly influenced the academic success of students. Support systems were in place to ensure that the students were successful. Early educational experiences attributed to their growth and success. Moreover, from these experiences, the students could identify with mathematics in a positive light, and students were also given opportunities to learn math in alternative ways. Berry concluded that through these approaches those students were more successful in mathematics. In addition, he concluded that parents, educators, and community stakeholders must constantly remain conscious of these priorities (Berry, 2008).

An additional study was conducted by Berry, Thunder, and McClain (2011). This study examined the academic constructs of mathematics with 32 African-American boys in grades five through seven in a southern rural school division. These boys were considered successful in mathematics accordingly to their scores on state standardized mathematics assessments. The boys who participated in this study attended a two week summer program which focused on algebraic reasoning and problem solving. These boys were the only students who attended the summer program. They were chosen for the program because of their placement and their potential to take other advanced mathematics courses. There were seven boys in fifth grade, 12 boys in sixth grade, and 13 boys seven seventh grade. Data collection from

this study consisted on focus group interviews, mathematic autobiographies, grades, teacher comments, tests, and observations (Berry et al., 2011).

There were three themes which arose from the data collection: construction of their mathematics identities, construction of their racial identities, and the relationship between these processes that helped to redefine their mathematics identities. When examining the academic construct of mathematics, four contributing factors were identified: the development of computational fluency by third grade, extrinsic recognition in the form of grades, achievement test scores, gifted identification and tracking, relational connections with teachers, families, extra-curricular activities, and engagement with specific qualities of mathematics.

When interviewed, the boys overwhelmingly stated that computational fluency was a characteristic that helped them to be good at math. They gave their accounts of how speed and accuracy helped them to draw them to mathematics because they were good at it. For most of the boys, they recognized the trait by third grade.

Extrinsic recognition was another factor that the boys believed that made a significant difference with their success in mathematics. They believed strongly that these factors served as motivators by providing proof of their mathematical success. These extrinsic factors showed that they could advance to greater heights. Also, by being placed in advanced courses, they realized that others recognized their success as well.

Relationships and connections with others also factored into the theme of correlations. Teachers, families, and extracurricular activities helped them to stay connected to their mathematical identities. Through these relationships and connections, the boys were encouraged to further their educational opportunities because of their fluency and success in mathematics. Descriptions were given of teachers and parents stating that they pushed them to their limits by helping them problem solve, use multiple strategies, and helped them to make other connections to other disciplines.

Racial identities also helped these boys to connect by their own perception of others through school engagement. These boys perceived that teachers treated students differently which in turn resulted in different levels of engagement. The boys made reference to treatment based on race, gender, and ability. The boys were a minority in their mathematics classes, and they often felt isolated from others. Through their interviews, they explained that African-Americans can be successful in mathematics and that there were stereotypes that African-Americans could not be successful in mathematics. Collectively, there was a belief system among the boys that to be successful in mathematics certain elements had to be present: following directions, perseverance, collaboration, a want or need to learn, a willingness to meet challenges, and certain abilities (Berry et al., 2011).

Across the United States, school districts are utilizing multiple resources to close achievement gaps and improve their school climates. In a case study of Belle Air Elementary School located in San Bruno, California, achievement gaps were

closed within their student population (Symonds, 2004). Teachers in this particular school developed a cycle of inquiry by asking questions that surrounded data, challenging themselves with new approaches, and monitoring results. They used an acronym and entitled this process Bell Air School Cycle of Inquiry (BASRC). They began with the inquiry questioning phase by asking how data could be used to drive instruction and improve student achievement. Measurable goals where then developed, and major strategies were put into place to support meeting the goals. As a school community, they took actions to ensure that the strategies were supported through: professional development, offering before and after school programs, formative assessments, and focusing on their student populations. Data analysis was then used to maintain their academic focus while improving efficacy for all students (Symonds, 2004).

A major factor in making their inquiry work was through the use of diagnostic data. Belle Air administered reading assessments for grades two through six. When tests were administered, data was broken down into several components to include fluency, vocabulary, decoding, comprehension, and letter recognition (Symonds, 2004). These assessments were developed for other existing assessments. At Belle Air, they developed a belief that reading was fundamental and the cornerstone of learning. Considerable time and effort was put into professional development that was focused on literacy. The school developed high expectations for all children. Moreover, they adopted a slogan that "all children can learn."

In another case study at Roosevelt Middle School in Oakland, California the achievement gap is closing between African-American and Asian students (Symonds, 2004). At the school, data is utilized to constantly improve and drive decision making. When Principal Stockey became the principal, a needs analysis was completed, and she led teachers through student data by examining achievement. Once that was complete, she conducted focus groups with parent, teachers, students, and community stakeholders. The findings showed that African-Americans were underrepresented in every area. African-American students were in the first quartile of the existing data including detention, suspensions, and referrals (Symonds, 2004).

From a leadership perspective, Principal Stockey began to focus on student data achievement. The administration at Roosevelt worked with staff to evaluate and use data to reflect on their current status and to development a continual process for growth. Throughout the school, a variety of diagnostic assessments were used to improve achievement including a Curriculum Embedded Assessment (CEA) for writing, reading tests, and a math Problem of the Week (POW). From these assessments along with the STAR testing, teachers began to analyze data and disaggregate by race and ethnicity. An infrastructure was developed to support the consistent use of data. Time was allotted in the schedule so that teachers could have time for data analysis on a weekly basis. Staff, committee, and departmental meetings were structured so that the busyness of the school day did not crowd out time for discussing data. The staff meeting was entitled Standards in Practice, and

everyone was given data to ensure that it was understood by the entire faculty and staff (Symonds, 2004).

When Principal Stockey started at Roosevelt, 60% of African-American students received suspensions during the school year. This calculated to three out of every five African-American students missing valuable classroom time. Administration conducted a needs assessment and began candid discussions. Many were shocked by data because they did not realize the severity of the discipline. Administration invested in professional development on classroom management. The results showed a reduction in suspension and tardy rates for the number of African-American students being punished. The suspension dropped 18% representing a 70% decrease. The benefit was that these students were spending more time in the classroom. To help with this process, students who were suspended spent Saturday morning at school. They attend a group counseling session and then completed chores on school grounds. Administration refers to this as equity and access.

At Roosevelt, students spend a minimum of two hours daily in reading class. Across the curriculum, not excluding math and science teachers, every teacher teaches a period of reading. Students also have literature class every day that consists of thirty-five minutes of silent sustained reading. Journal writing is also encouraged. As explained by the principal, this took buy in to reading focus by analyzing data. 90% of the school's students were below grade level, and of that 90%, African-American students were at the very bottom. This gave priority and focus to reading and writing. Therefore, the school schedule was altered radically to build this

necessary time in. Once again, professional development was a key element in getting staff trained and prepared. By the spring of 2002, the school began to see growth in reading scores. Two to three times of the students had reached grade level and some were above reading level, and this ranged from twenty-three percent to thirty percent from grades six through eight.

Roosevelt Middle School also supports an equitable and supportive school climate. The school has a health center, student rewards program, student support team, and specific supports for African-American students. Medical services are provided including vision, dental, and hearing screenings. Students are able to receive mental health services through counseling. Health education is provided through the curriculum and in the school clinic on different topics including nutrition, fitness, and substance abuse prevention (Symonds, 2004).

The Student Support Team (SST) was developed to discuss at-risk students. Moreover this team creates intervention plans, and it ensures that students are given the necessary viable options to be successful. This group consists of administrators, teachers, counselors, and parents if they are needed in the process. Decisions are made to determine next steps and what directions are needed to provide academic support to increase academic achievement.

Through classroom based curriculum and school wide assemblies, a goal and realization for creating a more positive climate has been developed through the Justice at Middle School Program (JAMS). JAMS includes positive incentives in the form of coupons that contribute to positive behavior by rewarding students being

caught doing something good. Lesson plans also reflect positives by providing articles and discussions on stimulating interests to include appreciating diversity, tolerance, identity, and gender stereotyping.

The school has increased the number algebra sections offered to specifically support African-American students, especially African-American boys. In previous years, African-American students at the school simply did not enroll in Algebra. Special efforts were put into staffing to hire an algebra teacher which increased the enrollment of African-American students by forty percent (Symonds, 2004).

E.L. Musick Elementary School is located in Newark, California. Musick Elementary is K-6 school and is located within a residential community. In this particular school, there was a stable teacher workforce. However, there was high turnover in the principalship. Within a ten year time frame, there were a total of six principals who had been at the school.

Musick was strong in math across grade levels. One of the processes used was Excel Math, and teachers maintain the use of this program. On the other hand, there was a problem in reading. The school worked to build their reading program through providing a stronger foundation (Symonds, 2004).

At Musick, they maintained an exceptional and strong primary grade foundation from kindergarten through third grade. In these grades, guided reading, running records, and a reading specialist gave students an edge. Musick also uses diagnostic assessments to help teachers use data to drive instruction. Teachers keep a running record on all of their students included below level learners. The reading

specialist worked with about a third of school intensive students one on one and in small group remediation. The teachers in these grades also do small group with students using leveled books on a daily basis. Throughout the school, "Buddy Writing" is used to help students write better by collaborating with other students from different grade levels.

There is a shared level of leadership at the school. The literacy coordinator provides an intermediary role by working with administration and teachers, and the reading specialist also helps to provide guidance and leadership for the school by working directly with teachers providing coaching strategies and processes. Through the principal turnover, veteran teachers and other faculty and staff members have been able to keep the processes moving forward (Symonds, 2004).

High School Graduation Rates

The achievement gap between African American students and whites has been documented on all educational levels. Recent research indicated that students who attended postsecondary institutions for the first time found 36% of white students attain bachelor's degrees within six years compared with only 17% of African-American students (Radford, Berkner, Wheeless, & Shepherd, 2010). Of fourth-graders and eighth-graders who scored above the 75th percentile in reading and math on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in 2011, more than 70% were white and fewer than 8% were African- American despite some narrowing of achievement gaps since the early 1990s (NCES, 2011).

For decades there have been disparities in the graduation rate of African-Americans compared to other ethnic groups in the United States. Work has been done in this area to improve the graduation rate of African-American students in the last decade. A review of the national adjusted cohort graduation rate trends shows that African-American students were among the subgroups of students that had made some of the greatest gains respectively from 15 and 9 percentage points within the last three years. The report shows that African-American students have shown improvement of 3.7 percentage points. From 2011 to 2013, the graduation rate for African-American students has improved from 67% to 70.7%, in comparison to White students at 86.6 in 2013. For years White students have maintained higher rates. However, in recent years the growth has been sluggish increasing only 2.6 from 2011. Even though there have been significant gains made in the graduation rate of African-American students within the last years, African-American students still fall below the national average of 81.4%.

With respect to state data and graduation rates, improvement has been made on different fronts. From 2011-2013 thirty-nine states reported that their adjusted cohort graduation rate increased their graduation rates by one percent during that period. This shows an improvement to 80% across the U.S. There is a goal to reach 90% graduation rate by 2020. Unless some additional improvements are made, the goal of 90% will not be reached (Civic Enterprises, & Everyone Graduates Center, 2015).

Importantly, there are ten states Nevada, Alabama, New Mexico, Utah, Florida, Georgia, Missouri, North Carolina, New Jersey, and California that have increased their overall graduation rates by four percentage points. Moreover, this shows a better pace than the national average. However, within the group of the ten states, the graduation rates were relatively low from 70-78% making it difficult to achieve 90% by 2020. Throughout the nation, ten states gained less than one percentage point over the past three years, and other states that are close to reaching the goal of 90% by 2020 have made little progress. The challenge to reach the goal is evident in graduation rates (Civic Enterprises, & Everyone Graduates Center, 2015).

College Graduation Rates

The Education Trust has looked at colleges and universities that have made improvements in the graduation rates of African-American students. It has been found that colleges and universities can benchmark their progress mainly by two ways. Some may focus their interests on making gains in graduation rates while others focus on closing achievement gaps between African-American students and Whites (Nguyen, Bibo, & Engle, 2012).

When analyzed, college graduation rates for African-American students have remained basically stagnant over time. From the years of 2004 to 2010, there were some regressions in rates. There were 41.2% of African-American graduates in 2004, and that rate changed slightly to 40.6% in 2010. Progress has been slow. However, when the overall graduation rate of all students is taken into account, there is an

increase by 2.8 percentage points from 2004 to 2010. This is an increase from 57.3% to 60.1% during these years (Nguyen, et al., 2012).

During these years, African-American graduation rates remain flat over time. In studies conducted, the figures show that African-American graduation rates increased in more than half the schools in this particular study. However, this study also showed that the graduation rates of African-American students decreased at four of ten schools. From a student perspective, this can be alarming because African-American students are more concentrated in those particular schools which document decline in their graduation rates of African-American students (Nguyen, et al., 2012).

When analyzed, we see that work needs to be done in the area of helping more African-American students to obtain college degrees. It is projected that by 2018 that the U.S. will need 22 million new college graduates to fill positions in jobs market. In addition to that, it is anticipated that 63% of these jobs will require a post-secondary degree. From an education perspective, great strides have been made in the last 40 years that have opened doors to higher education for African-American students. However, additional work still needs to be done. Research shows that nearly 40% of White 25 to 29-year-olds have earned degrees. When African-Americans are looked at in the same age group category, that number is only one half that rate (Nguyen, et al., 2012).

Section II: Issues and Causes of the Achievement Gaps

There are a myriad of reasons for the achievement gap between African American and other student groups stemming from home environments, political influences,

cultural problems, and curriculum issues. On average African-American children live in poorer households than that of white children. Typically, African American children are also more likely to live with only one parent in early and middle childhood. African- Americans are more likely to be born into poverty which affects their socio-economic status. Often these students feel alone because they are not provided the help and support that is needed to compete with other peers. Furthermore, these students feel alone at school also because they are often not offered differentiated instruction to meet their educational needs. Being raised in a low socio-economic background has several negative effects on students. Educational resources are limited, and these students often have limited health care options and poor nutrition. In spite of those facts, studies have also shown that children in the same conditions with parents who provide engaging learning environment in the home do not start school with the same academic readiness gaps that are typically seen in lower social-economic conditions (Viadero & Johnston, 2000).

Students from low socio-economic backgrounds attend schools that generally have imbalanced resources for teachers and students. Many of these schools are Title I schools. Funding for Title I schools goes to high poverty schools. More than two-thirds of these funds are to be used for instructional purposes (Nelson, 2006). In 2004, there were 84 percent of schools identified to receive Title I monies. The average allocation per low income student was 11% lower for identified Title I schools than for non-identified Title I schools. These Title I eligible schools received

$556.00 vs. $624.00 for programs. Under NCLB, thresholds were lowered for school-wide programs from 50% to 40% for low income students (Nelson, 2006).

Parental Involvement

Parent involvement figures centrally in national goals for improving education (National Education Goals Panel, 1994) and in many current school reform models. Educators have proposed that increased parent involvement can improve student achievement and, subsequently, the importance of parental support has been emphasized in discussions about the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and middle class children (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In numerous studies, there have been patterns that show low income parents valuing education as a way to economic and social freedom (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Goldenberg, 2001). However, the pattern of their actual involvement falls short of school expectations (Casanova, 1996; Fine, 1993; Fuller & Olsen, 1998; Lareau & Shumar, 1996).

Parental involvement is paramount in a child's education. Studies have also shown in parental practices that the parents of younger children are more likely to be involved in their education. As those children get older, parents tend to become less involved in their education (Griffith, 1998; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Additional research show a strong correlation between family background and the achievement gap. Yeung and Pfeiffer (2009) tested this correlation via the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) on an initial sample of approximately 3,500 children under the age of 13 in 1997, followed to 2002 and 2003 with participant ages ranging from eight to

18. The research showed gaps in letter words scores through the sixth grade and applied problems scores up to the third grade were accounted for by children's early family backgrounds. Some of the correlations included grandparent's education, characteristics related to the mother, teen birth, child birth weight, and other family characteristics (Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009).

Peer Pressure

Student behavior attributes to its share of problems, also. Many of these influences range from individual influences of problem behavior such as poor self-esteem, low achievement, low school attachment, and low or no participation in school activities. These things are compressed by inconsistent discipline styles, stressful family environments, and low parental involvement. School influences such as school size and school climate also have their effects on students. Researchers have found a large school size and a poor school climate to be associated with student behavior problems (Giancola, 2000). Research on the social influences of behavior problems centers on factors that are influenced by a student's peer group (Giancola, 2000). A Heritage Foundation study (2000) found that negative peer pressure is a factor in lower test scores about as much as being an African-American or Hispanic group member and more than living in a low income family. Researchers analyzed different responses to questions of students taking the 1998 NAEP reading test and correlated the results with the scores of the test. They found among fourth graders that nearly 36% of African-American and 29% of Hispanics said that their friends make fun of people who try to do well in school in contrast to just over 17% of

whites. When eighth graders were asked the same questions, the numbers were more even, but they were still high. Nearly 30% of Hispanics and 23% African American and whites agreed with the above statement (as cited in Johnson, 2000).

Policy Issues

Policies have had long standing impacts on education in the United States. Through those policies and implementations, progress has been made in the education of African-American students. Historians who have researched the origins of the comprehensive high school or African-American education in the first half of the 20th century document that the lack of secondary schooling opportunities for African-American students undermined any possibility of raising their high school completion rates. Mississippi was a state with majority of the population of African-Americans well into the twentieth century. African-Americans had virtually no opportunity to attend school beyond the elementary grades. In 1940, of the 115,000 educable African American children of high school age, only 9,473 were enrolled in a high school. In contrast, there were 575 high schools for white students, and they enrolled 62,747 students. In 1950, 261 schools in Mississippi were doing some high school work. However, only a handful of these schools were considered equivalent to a comprehensive high school. Before Brown v. Board of Education, the state never developed a system of high schools to prepare young students for citizens, college, work, and leadership opportunities (Span & Rivers, 2012).

According to economist Derek Neal (2005), by the 1970s, the shock that the African-American community suffered from being denied access to a quality high

school education resulted in African Americans being not prepared to take advantage of the newfound and economic opportunities in a post segregated society. Neal analyzed that African-Americans without a quality education or high school diploma were caught in a vicious circle of poverty. As a result of these realities it has caused some of the halted progress than can be expressed in NAEP reading and math scores during 1980s and 1990s. In addition, many African-Americans were not able to achieve economic mobility because of limited educational preparation (Neal, 2005).

Neal (2005) concluded that, based on convergence rates that represent best case scenarios for African-American youth, even approximate skill parity is not possible before 2050, and equally plausible scenarios imply that the skill gap between African-Americans and Whites will remain quite significant throughout the 21st century. Absent changes in public policy or shocks to the economy that facilitate investment in African-American children, Neal alluded to the point that it is difficult to be optimistic about the future pace of the black-white skill convergence (Neal, 2005). Based on Neal's analogy, African-Americans in the 21st century will never gain economic parity or skill sets needed to effectively compete in the workplace unless additional investments in the form of compensatory education.

In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk*. In this publication, he argued that 10% of the African American population should obtain a baccalaureate degree from a college or university. Du Bois's desire was to produce what he called the "Talented Tenth." This was a group of individuals who were classically trained,

college educated African-Americans who could serve as the leaders of their race (DuBois, 1903; Span & Rivers, 2012). Du Bois (1903) stated that,

> The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the best of this race that they may guide the mass away from the contamination and death of the worst, in their own and other races. (DuBois, 1903, p. 33)

It has been nearly 90 years since DuBois's "Talented Tenth" would be realized. In 1940, only 1.3% of African Americans aged 25 or older had baccalaureate degrees. That figure has changed as time has progressed. In 1950, just 2.2%, in 1960, 3.5%. By 1980, the initiation of Title I and the Higher Education Act had been in existence for 15 years. The percentage of African Americans receiving baccalaureate degrees had doubled to 7.9%, and by 2009, 19.7% of all African-Americans 25 or older had baccalaureate degrees. In 1940, one in seven African-Americans graduated from high school also graduated from college. By 2008, the percentage improved as one in four African-Americans graduated from high school also graduated from college (Span & Rivers, 2012).

In 1965, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was drafted. It is the largest federal education law in the United States. Federal money only makes up roughly 10% of total public school funding. Most of the funding leverage in schools comes from states and school districts. However, the Elementary and Secondary Act affects every aspect of the nation's educational system including standards and

testing, qualifications for becoming a teacher, how schools with low income students get funded, and strategies for turning around low performance schools. When this act was signed into law, it was slated to be changed and updated every five years to stay aligned with occurring changes in education. The law was last reauthorized in 2002 when it was renamed No Child Left Behind, or NCLB. The law was slated to be changed again in 2007. However, events have led to the delay. Political challenges and calculations threaten to stall the law's renewal processes (Ayers & Brown, 2011).

In September of 2011, the Obama Administration asked states to apply for waivers of key requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). At that time, NCLB had been in effect for nine years. This was four years beyond its intended date. Many educators and policymakers agreed that the major provisions of this act were not working as they were intended. There was a concerted effort and interest in revamping the law; however, congressional efforts to reauthorize ESEA reached a stalemate in the midst of a bitter political climate. The waiver initiated an offer of flexibility to move away from the flawed provisions of NCLB. The waivers gave states an opportunity to move away from the previous accountability standards and an opportunity to design a new accountability system that incorporated the Common Core Standards (CCSS) and common assessment being developed with the leadership and cooperation of many states. By September of 2012, the U.S. Department of Education had approved waiver applications from 33 states and D.C. These waivers were to remain in effect

through 2014, and states have an option to request for an extension for years (Kober & Rentner, 2012).

There are several policy issues that also contribute to equity problems and gaps in the educational achievement of African-American students (Levine, 2011). Public awareness and public opinions have been a present force in channeling reform in schools across the country. Some of the reforms initiatives that address change include reducing class sizes, creating smaller schools, raising academic achievement, improving teacher quality, and creating pre-school programs to address the early educational deficits in African-American students.

School and Class Size

Does school size matter? This is the suggestion of some reformers throughout the U.S., and it leaves them calling for reforms in converting large high schools into smaller units throughout schools that provide close knit relationships and culturally responsive education for all students. Literature argues that this type of conversion within high schools should be divided into small schools rather than smaller learning communities (SLCs). In a case study conducted by (Levine, 2011) four potential advantages of SLCs were identified: support teaching and learning of specific academic subjects, promoting of learning from other subunits within the high school setting, reduce the stress and eliminate confusion from high school conversions, and support being offered to new teachers (Levine, 2011).

Some common features of conversion high schools include being broken into smaller units. The U.S. Department of Education has identified five distinct features

of conversion high schools. In these schools, teacher advisory and adult advocacy systems were put into place to allow for the social development of individual students. These advisory groups serve as coaches for these students. In addition to these advisory teams, academic teaming is also recommended which allows teachers to share students. As a result, teachers get to know all students. Another distinct feature focuses on multi-year groups which allows teachers to stay with students for two or more years. Transitional activities are also a part of the equation to prepare incoming freshman students for career options as they transition to the high school level. The U.S. Department of Education also alluded to alternative scheduling blocks (Levine, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Heavy focus has been and will continue to be placed on achievement gaps in the continued authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act. Of the requirement of schools, districts, and states, socio-economic status remains one of the few parts of NCLB with broad bipartisan support for reauthorization. In retrospect, the economic stimulus laws pass by Congress in 2009 required states to close achievement gaps and provide more fair distribution of high quality teachers for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Policymakers and educators have worked together to find ways to accomplish closing the achievement gaps and providing college and career readiness standards to all children.

Gaps in the achievement between poor and more advantaged children and minority and non-minority students of all ages continue to be the most central problem in the field of education (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2010). Evidence

shows that African-American students benefit more than others from reduced class size in the earlier elementary grades (Shin, 2012).

Evidence shows that African-American students benefit more than others from reduced class size in the earlier elementary grades (Shin, 2012). Research from the Tennessee's Project STAR suggests that smaller class sizes make a difference in the education of African-American students. In 1985, the Tennessee State Legislature funded the largest experimental study of class size ever conducted. It was entitled the Tennessee's Project STAR (Schwartz, 2003). In this study, 11,600 students and teachers were assigned at random to small class sizes consisting of 13 to 17 students and large class sizes consisting of 22 to 25 students. In this study, students were clustered in beginning classes from kindergarten through third grade. This study consisted of one cohort of kindergartens starting in 1985, and it followed them through the third grade ending in 1989. As researchers examined the results and data, on average they found that students in smaller classes outperformed those in that were in larger classes. In addition to those findings, the effects of smaller class sizes were twice as large for African-Americans as Whites (Schwartz, 2003). Moreover, it was found that students that students who were in small classes maintained their achievement throughout high school, and these students were more likely to take college admissions exams. When each variable was examined, the results showed that smaller class sizes were a greater advantage for African-Americans than Whites (Schwartz, 2003).

The Tennessee Project was implemented in three phases. The first phase took place from 1985 through 1989, and it consisted of the educational system of Tennessee. This project was entitled Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR). In this phase of the study, the research analyzed the effectiveness of small classes compared to regular sized classes. It also compared classes with teacher aides in regular sized classes from kindergarten through third grade. Summative assessments were used in the form of standardized tests to measure growth and achievement. These tests were the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) and the Basic Skills First Test (BSF). The areas of reading and math scores were measured. In this experimental study, 180 schools offered to participate. Out of the schools who offered to participate, only 100 were considered large enough to qualify. When the study was implemented, 79 schools actually participated in the study starting with the kindergarten year (Mosteller, 1995).

Phase two began in 1989. It was entitled the Lasting Benefits Study (LBS). This was an observational study that analyzed the consequences of the original experimental program based on children that returned back to their regular sized classes from grades four through six and beyond. The main question of focus asked in this study concerned whether or not the children who started in smaller classes were able to maintain their continued performance in later years. Researchers observed three types of experimental classes from kindergarten through third grade, and they also observed these students after they returned to regular sized classes in grades four through six. The research showed that the fourth and fifth grade students

who had originally started in smaller classes scored higher than those students who had originally been in regular sized classes. The fourth grade students in this study showed about one-eighth of a standard deviation of growth which was averaged over a span of six cognitive subjects. The fifth grade students showed two-tenths of a standard deviation of growth across the span of six cognitive subjects. This was encouraging, and as a direct result of the findings, Tennessee implemented Project Challenge in 17 school districts in their state which had the lowest per capita income with the highest free and reduced lunch rates (Mosteller, 1995).

Phase three also began in 1989. Project Challenge was an additional way to report the progress and rank in the 17 participating school districts in Tennessee compared to remaining districts within the state. There were a total of 139 school districts in Tennessee during the implementation of these studies. The districts were ranked from one to 139 with one indicating the best and 139 indicating the worst performance within the state. In mathematics, the average rank of the participating schools during the years of 1991 through 1993 averaged below 60 which was considered above the median. The results showed improvement and a gain of 20 ranks in reading for the second grade. In this study, the research showed strong evidence that smaller classes during the early school years improve the performance of children on cognitive tests. Also, the students that were originally placed in smaller class sizes showed improvement in later years in regular class sizes with or without a teacher's aide (Mosteller, 1995).

In the state of Wisconsin, research has also been conducted with the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) Program. The Wisconsin Sage program works to achieve academic success through the implementation of improvement strategies. Class size ratio is an important element with this program. Teacher to pupil ratio is 18 to 1 or 30 to 2 in grades kindergarten to first grade, and grades second to third. Collaboration is done between schools and community stakeholders. Professional development is provided to staff to improve processes. Curriculum is aligned carefully to include rigor. This program was a five-year effort that was initiated by the Wisconsin Department of Education. It benefits schools serving low income students. A total of 80 schools across the state of Wisconsin were a part of the research, and research was conducted by the University of Wisconsin, Madison involving 31 schools in 21 districts. The study design was a quasi-experimental and not based on random assignments. When comparisons were made, it was found that where class sizes were reduced in earlier grades compared to regular class sizes of similar schools, the gap in achievement for African-American v. Whites were roughly 0.75 standard deviations in both the SAGE and similar schools within the study. The results from the SAGE project that biggest advantage of smaller classes were found among first graders. These results are very similar to the findings of the Tennessee's Project STAR (Schwartz, 2003).

As new policies are currently being developed to assist in closing the achievement gap, Stearns documented and stated in his research that, "it is a well known fact that health, attendance, neighborhood disorganization, and tardiness

explain a large part of the difference in academic achievement between ethnic groups independently of what happens in the classroom" (Stearns, 2002 p. 3) Therefore, the solution to the achievement gaps may be found only partially within the school walls and may require extensive support from the community surrounding those schools." As policy implementation changes, it is unclear as to the relevance of the most effective and also most costly reforms, such as reducing class size.

Teacher Quality

Educational policy is currently making additional shifts in the way that teacher quality is being viewed. The Race to the Top program has shifted away from investing in credentials and other measures towards polices to build teachers' skill levels through observations linked to teaching standards. Nearly $4.35 million dollars have been put in place to help with initiatives for this program. Teacher evaluations are critical in serving a method to help identify high and low performing teaching standards. Research has shown that teacher observations can help teachers improve in their teaching on a daily basis. Observations and conversations that support the development of teachers help to build their profession capacity (Sawchuk, 2011).

Teachers are pivotal forces in the education of children. Teachers are taught to believe that all children can learn, but their own experiences may lead or tell them otherwise. More and more research shows that students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be taught by under qualified teachers (Gimbert, Bol, & Wallace, 2007). Research is continuing to show that quality teaching matters in the

education of African American students. Even though this area of concern is being researched, there is a great deal of debate over practices and policies to help promote high standards and quality in teaching. With research, there is a preponderance of evidence that teachers are capable of inspiring significantly greater learning gains in their students. In 1998, several economists estimated that approximately 7.5% of the variation in student achievement resulted from teacher quality and noted that the actual number could be as high as 20% (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). Depending on class level, all in school factors, and teachers, it further estimated that 8.5% was directly the result of teacher effectiveness (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000). Most research points to various characteristics such as certifications, academic degrees, and years of experience. Of these characteristics, they explain only a fraction of teacher quality, perhaps as little as 3 percent of the overall variation in students' test scores (Brewer & Goldhaber, 2000; Rivkin, et al., 2005). Teacher experience has consistently been linked to student scores. Some research suggests that on average beginning teachers produce smaller learning gains in their students compared to more veteran and seasoned teachers. Studies also show that teachers grow in effectiveness over their first five years in the profession (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2008; Harris & Sass 2007a; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004).

One of the major outcomes of the educational reform movement in the United States during the past decade has been the increased focus on the professional preparation of educators (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In that process, schools of preparation have turned to reflective practice. Reflection uses the past to inform our

judgment, reflect on our experiences and face new encounters with a broader repertoire of information, skills and techniques (Killion, Joellen, Todnem, & Guy, 1991). Reflective practices are also being put into place at some of the nation's historical Black college and universities to better prepare educators to work with students. Some of those key factors require reflective practitioners to be active, persistent, careful, skeptical, rational, and proactive. Active engagement requires that practitioners are active and search energetically for information and solutions to problems that arise in the classroom. Persistence requires that practitioners are committed to thinking through difficult issues in depth. Practitioners should also be careful by respecting students as human beings. Reflective practitioners also realize that there are few absolutes and maintain a healthy skepticism about educational theories and practices. They must be rational and demand evidence while applying criteria in formulating judgments, and finally, they must be proactive and translate reflective thinking into positive actions. Most teacher quality issues, including preparation, certification, tenure, evaluation, and licensing continue to be the areas of concern for schools and districts. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required that every teacher be classified as highly qualified who taught core academic subjects. In return, this required that teachers be certified in their area of concentration, pass a subject knowledge test, obtain advanced certification, use an alternate method, or the states determined method for certification. However, in many instances these rules have been criticized because they are said to have few effects on the overall teacher practices (Keller, 2007).

Teacher educators have to ensure that teacher candidates have the means and opportunity to develop the valuable skill of reflection. This type of research involves the same cycles of plan, act, observe, and reflect that reflection does (Liston & Zeichner, 1990). One of the main purposes of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was to ensure greater opportunities for learning in students. However, this has been sometimes undermined by local inability or unwillingness to provide the students with teachers who have the skills to meet their needs. The promotion of teacher quality is a key element in improving primary and secondary education in the United States.

A continual focus has to be placed on the relationship between teacher productivity and teacher training. Previous research on teacher training has yielded highly inconsistent results and has fueled a wide range of policy prescriptions. There are many factors that contribute to student's academic performance and success. When it comes to student performance on reading and math test, a teacher is estimated to have two to three times the impact of any other school factor, including services, facilities, and even leadership. Quality teaching matters in the education of students. The importance of good quality teachers cannot be over stated. For that reason, many laws and policies are being written to encourage and promote teacher quality. In 2003, the ECS study on teacher preparation suggested that there was no available research on which to base policy conclusion regarding teacher preparation accreditation. However, Linda Darling-Hammond found that the strongest predictor of the percentage of well qualified teachers both major and full certification in a state

is the percentage of teacher education institutions in a state who meet national accreditation standards through NCATE (Darling-Hammond, L. 2000). Studies on under-prepared teachers working with at-risk students vividly demonstrate how schools are failing our most vulnerable students (Decker, Moyer, & Glazerman, 2004). Throughout research conducted by Linda Darling-Hammond, there are a pattern of themes that emerge as it relates to teacher quality. Moreover, she places these traits in groups of bundled personal traits, skills, and understandings. One major elements include teachers having a strong general intelligence and verbal ability. This particular skill sets allows teachers to observe well and think diagnostically. Darling-Hammond suggests that teachers definitely need a strong content knowledge in the areas that they teach. With this knowledge and skill set, teachers are able to reach others in that particular area. Darling-Hammond implies that teachers must also possess the knowledge of understanding learners and how those learners understand and process their learning. Teachers must also be adaptive which allows them to make judgments about is likely to work for a student in given situations. With all of these elements and traits, research from Darling-Hammond suggest that teachers must have the capacity and willingness to support learning for all students (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Teach for America was founded in 1989 to prepare and train additional teachers for the workforce to assist with the disparities in educational achievement of low socio-economic communities throughout the United States. Teach for America works to recruit recent graduates and seniors from colleges and universities around

the country. If these students are selected, they agree to serve and commit themselves to at least two years of teaching in a low socio-economic community. The recruits to Teach for America do not necessarily have an education related major. Therefore, many of the candidates have not received the same educational training as other education majors. If the candidates are chosen for the program, they participate in a summer institute that is rigorous and intensive. During the program, candidates attend workshops and carry out numerous preliminary assignments, and the training continues once they are place in classrooms to teach (Decker et al., 2004). Since its inception, the candidate pool has grown over the years. Between 2000 and 2003, the candidate pool grew from 4,068 to 15,706. Moreover, during this time, the number of corps members doubled from 868 to 1,656 (Decker et al., 2004).

In a national study conducted, Teach for America candidates were compared to a group of control teachers (Decker et al., 2004). Control teachers attended traditional education programs and were already certified teachers with experience in the classroom. Research showed that Teach for America candidates had a positive impact on math achievement. The results of Teach for America candidates were higher than control group of teachers. The achievement of the control group classes scored in the 15th percentile in the fall and maintained that standing until the end of the year. The control group students experienced normal achievement growth. However, the Teach for America group of classes increased in rank from 14th to the 17th percentile over the same period. The growth rates were significantly different. The growth rate an impact was approximately 0.15 standard deviations which

translates into ten percent of a grade equivalent or a month of math instruction (Decker et al., 2004). When reading scores were analyzed, Teach for America candidates did not have the same impact on students. The study found that the control group of teachers and Teach for America candidates showed nearly the same growth rate in reading. There was an increase that was equivalent to one percentile (Decker et al., 2004). Findings show that Teach for America has made great strides in reducing inequities in education. When reviewed, Teach for America teachers have success not dependent upon having a great deal of exposure to teacher practice or training. However, these teachers test scores showed higher test scores in many instances than other novice teachers, veteran, and certified teachers.

Quality teaching also requires quality professional development. Teaching is an ongoing learning process which requires high quality professional development for teaching. Teachers have to stay abreast in the field of education to learn concepts and research strategies to keep them adequately prepared to deal with the changes. Therefore, districts and schools must develop programs that are designed to improve the quality of teaching. Professional development should encompass training that provides training on how to utilize data and assessments to improve classroom instruction and student learning.

There are few educational problems that have received more attention than the failure to ensure that elementary and secondary classrooms are staffed with qualified teachers. Under NCLB, every state was required to have teachers certified to teach in their specific content area. In areas such as math and science, there is a shortage of

teachers. There are severe shortages, and it is believed that these shortages are negatively affecting our elementary and secondary schools. Behind the thoughts of the negative effects of shortages on education as a whole is that demographic trends, increasing student enrollment, and a graying teaching force all are factors that contribute to failing schools and lower performance. This has resulted in a shortfall of teachers in critical high need areas, and as a result, several school districts and systems result to hiring teachers and staff with lower standards to fill teaching positions. As a result, schools have an elevated number of under qualified teachers and lower school performance. The teacher shortages often compound themselves in disadvantaged schools and are a major factor in school and student performance. These schools are also unable to match the salaries, benefits, and resources offered by more affluent schools. Critics argue that high poverty schools have difficulty competing for the available supply of adequately trained teachers. This leads to unequal access to qualified teachers and quality teaching (Darling-Hammond 1990; Kozol, 1991; Oakes 1990; Rosenbaum, 1976).

As teacher quality is reviewed, research indicates that everyone does not agree on the specifics of teacher quality or how it is measured. Therefore it cannot be assumed that there is a clearly defined answer to teacher quality. When the term quality is reviewed, it can often be used with other terms such as master, good, and effective. These terms themselves can be very broad in interpretation. Under President Bush's education act of 2001, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) specified that all teachers be highly qualified, and it was left up to the states to define

highly qualified. Once again, this left a broad scope interpretation in terms of teacher quality, and the process was based largely on teacher licensure requirements for each state. In context, teacher quality rests on established qualifications to provide high quality instruction to students (Data Quality Campaign, 2011).

When current literature is reviewed, there are different perspectives on teacher quality. Therefore perspectives are not uniform. Research from Kennedy reflects on three perspectives that are associated with quality teaching: cognitive resources, teacher performance, and the effect of a teacher (Kennedy, 2008). From a cognitive resource perspective, teacher quality is related to knowledge, beliefs, attitude, and the overall disposition of a teacher. With this perspective, teacher quality is connected with teacher programs, GPAs, and alternative programs compared to traditional teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Teacher quality is associated with credentialing. A second perspective looks at teacher quality from the perspective of performance. This may involve experience that teachers have in and outside of the classroom environment. There are several factors that can affect performance: mentoring programs, professional connections to organizations, and other supports (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). A third perspective of teacher quality focuses on quality teaching as an effect. Therefore, the impact and focus is centered on outcomes and results. From this perspective, different notions are considered. There is a belief that teachers can influence students in the forms of knowledge, skills, and values that they need to succeed within a global market (Loomis, Rodriguez, & Tillman, 2008).

Efforts are being made all over in our nation's public schools to close the achievement gaps. Successful public schools are imploring vast options to ensure the success of their schools, students, and teachers. Collaborative planning time and collaborative strategic teaching schools can create high performing teaching teams. Research shows that teachers value effective collaboration and support of their peers and leadership more than small changes in compensation (Kirkpatrick, 2009). Teachers also need to be part of teaching teams that collectively include skills and experiences matched to student needs. With access to accurate and timely assessments of student progress, they are able to analyze data and adjust instruction under the guidance of a qualified coach, teacher, or other experts who can interpret data, model and observe instructional techniques, and provide feedback (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004).

Section III: Examples of Schools and School Models That are Working/Not Working—Why? What Does Work?

Schools can create environments where students learn the importance of achieving a quality education. In these environments, they learn the importance of producing quality work, test taking skills, regular attendance, and performance. There is a positive relationship between teachers' expectations and students' achievement (Irvine, 1990; Irvine & Irvine, 1995; Polite, 1999). The expectation can influence the type of information that they pass on. Studies have shown that relationships with school staff can strengthen students' educational values. In addition, students who develop positive relationships with teachers value their

educational process and are often committed to school. African American students have indicated that they try to please their teachers by doing well in school (Casteel, 1997) and teacher expectation often have more influence than parents. Schools can serve as a beacon of light by helping students develop their educational and career goals, open their perspectives, and connect their goals. As a result, teachers can cultivate students through educational norms and values. These norms and values can be expanded by making them feel that someone cares about them, and the exposure can help students make real world connections between their education and career goals. Through these various interactions with students, teachers can help them by connecting academics to the real world.

Schools can expand the educational opportunities of students through opportunities that their families are not able to provide. From a secondary level, schools can encourage students to take academic courses to prepare them for the challenges in postsecondary education. Schools can also provide students the opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities that contribute to their academic and social development. Many social programs are also channeled through school to create opportunities to help poor African American students succeed (Jencks, 1993). Programs such as Upward Bound and Title I help economically disadvantaged students gain academic skills and take advantage of opportunities beyond high school (McElroy & Armesto, 1999; McLure & Child, 1998; Myers & Schirm, 1999). Through these types of programs, students are able to form lasting

relationships that can further develop their school experiences to better prepare them for postsecondary options.

Students often rely on their teachers and schools to help them develop educational goals that help them make the transition from secondary to postsecondary education and future careers. This is particularly true for African-American students whose families and communities may simply lack the necessary information and educational resources to help them get into college (Gándara, 2001). Successful schools and teachers interact as personal advocates for these students by navigating the school terrain and providing these students opportunities that they otherwise would not have been afforded.

School relationships can help explain why African American students are less likely to pursue postsecondary education that their white peers. Studies show that African American and white students both benefit from strong relationships. However, African American students are not developing the types of school relationships to the same extent as white students that can enhance their educational expectations and increase their postsecondary participation. Adults who encourage students, monitor academic progress and social development, and have a general interest in students' futures can turn educational expectations into realistic goals (Grant & Sleeter, 1988; Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; O'Connor, 2000). If student relationships with teachers and other staff members are to enhance educational outcomes, they must be based on trust, mutual respect, and a sense of

obligation (Coleman, 1988, 1994; Wimberly, 2000). Through these positive relationships, students are able to learn more effectively.

It is necessary for schools and teachers to recognize the differences between the school culture and the students' own ethnic and cultural identities. Students develop trust and respect for their teachers when their cultural identity is supported in the classroom. On the other hand, social, economic, and cultural gaps between African American students and their teachers may make it difficult for students to form cohesive relationships (Murrell, 1999). Schools and districts must evaluate their school relationship models to determine the characteristics and needs of their students. Research gives descriptors of several indicators that analyze current trends of school relationship characteristics. 1) The school's academic emphasis focuses on individual student success and the trajectory of students completing secondary education with a continuum into postsecondary education. 2) The school's personnel expectations are expressed to the student body. 3) Student feelings towards the faculty set the climate within the school environment. 4) Extracurricular participation helps students to connect and have pride in themselves and their schools. Moreover, research shows that these clusters measure how experiential outcomes affect educational outcomes (Wimberly, 2000). Every student is unique in their own way, and each student brings a different set of norms and values into the equation. Therefore, one school relationship model does not fit all students and all schools. Schools must develop models that best fit the characteristics of the students that they serve because students bring with them various academic and social resources that

reflect their families, communities, and experiences. Students need to know that their teachers and schools care about them. Study results show that when students perceive high expectations from their teachers and school personnel both that enhance their own expectations and the odds they will pursue postsecondary education increase. African-American students care what school personnel want for them (Casteel, 1997) and need to know that there is concern being implemented on their behalf.

Schools should include cultural, social, economic diversity awareness, and other training components in their professional development to ensure that staff members are sensitive to the needs of African-American students (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). This is crucial because teachers and other staff members need to know how to form effective relationships with students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, schools should work to involve themselves in understanding the dynamics of the home and family situations that these students come from. Schools should also work to recruit minority teachers, counselors, coaches, school administrators, and staff who may be familiar with the culture of the students. Schools should also take initiatives to improve these relationships by responding to cultural norms and values of each student. These cultural differences should be taken in account of on different fronts. For example, during Black History Month, African-American History could be incorporated into the curriculum to celebrate heritage and culture.

Regardless of the factors, every student has the capacity to succeed in school and life. However, too many students, especially those from poor and minority

families, are placed at risk by school practices that are based on a sorting paradigm in which some students receive high expectations in instruction while the rest are relegated to a lower quality of education (Borman & Rachuba, 2001). This research also suggests that the most powerful school characteristics for promoting resiliency were represented by a supportive school community model which included elements that shield children from adversity.

The National Network of School Partnerships has conducted several qualitative studies that suggest schools with strong action teams for partnerships who met regularly, evaluate their efforts, and obtain support from their districts have quality partnership programs that improve over time (Sheldon, 2005). Moreover, these studies also relate that district school leaders who support program planning and evaluation improved their leadership on partnerships and reported that their schools made more progress with family and community involvement. In addition, student outcomes with longitudinal data indicate that in elementary, middle, and high schools, family involvement does have positive effects on achievement in math, reading, and science (Sheldon, 2005).

The Education Trust has identified 4,577 highflying schools throughout the nation that are in the top third of poverty in their state and also are in the top third of academic performance. These schools are meeting the challenges in dire situations. Something is happening in these schools that affects the practice of all teachers in the school, and the success extends into the student body and raises achievement (Whitehurst, 2003). Information and analysis from a survey conducted by the

Education Trust of 1,200 schools with over 50% of high poverty levels found that: these schools use state standards to design curriculum and instruction. Moreover, in these schools, student work is assessed, and teachers are evaluated. Also, more time during the school day is allotted to instructional time in reading and math to ensure that students meet every standard. Professional development is also a key component in the life of these schools, and monitoring systems are put into place to guide the instruction in an individualized manner. Efforts are also made to involve parents in the processes of the children's education. In these successful schools, accountability is a central element (Barth et al., 1999).

A common theme that is noticed at each of the highflying schools is a cohesive learning environment that is there based on the attitudes of administrators, teachers, faculty, and students. To a greater extent, this attitude extends to parental involvement and community stakeholders. Moreover, in these schools, there is a sensitivity to the needs of individual students and their families. Therefore, instructional programs are developed to meet these needs and challenge student students to achieve at higher levels. Curriculum is also a key element, and instructional approaches are creative and contain critical elements of learning (Whitehurst, 2003). These instructional approaches include things such as: literacy, basic skills, and higher order of thinking. Instructional approaches are also aligned with state standards and curriculum to ensure that the process of teaching and learning is viable. With all of these things in place, schools are able to create a major

theme or characteristic which ensures a coherent instructional program (Whitehurst, 2003).

In many high performing schools today, technology is at the forefront of instructional practices. These high performing schools have crafted instructional programs that reflect a coherent approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are supported by administrators and teachers throughout the school. These schools place a special interest on the use of technology within content areas and describe uses of technology that are specific to certain content areas. In these schools, students use technology to master and build skills (Sweet, Rasher, Abromitis, & Johnson, 2004).

At successful schools technology is generally linked with the curriculum and standards. Technology is not viewed as a means to the end result. However, it is used to link learning with the curriculum to master skills, reinforce learning, and often to remediate skills not learned. Students are required to work in large group settings independently and also with computers. Students utilize technology to connect to the core curriculum, and they also use technology to acquire their computer skills (Sweet et al., 2004).

In recent years, the nation's lowest performing schools have been in the spotlight. Policymakers have called for decisive action to improve the nation's 5,000 lowest performing schools. These policymakers argue that the enormity of dysfunction requires immediate attention. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Education has expanded the funding for School Improvement Grants (SIG), with the

stated goal of improving the nation's 5,000 lowest performing schools (de la Torre et al., 2013).

In 2009, the U.S. Department of Education released the description of four school intervention models that were aimed at the lowest performance schools in the nation. These models are: the turnaround model, the restart model, the school closure model, and the transformational model. Each model has its own specific identity aimed at increasing the effectiveness of performance in schools. In the turnaround model, it is based the practice and assumption of realigning staff, replacement of the school principal, and at least 50% of staff members. The restart school model closes and reopens under the management of a charter school operator or other educational management organizations. In the school closure model, students enroll in other high achieving schools within their district, and the last model is the transformational model that replaces the principal in those low achieving schools (de la Torre et al., 2013).

Results from turn around schools in the model suggest a process rather than an event that happens. It is not instantaneous, but it can occur when planning and resources are aligned. Additional studies imply that organizational strength of a school has to be built over time. Staff changes are not the only thing that has to happen; however, the climate and culture of the schools also matter. Research based on case studies show that major improvement starts with leadership of schools (de la Torre et al., 2013).

Research from turnaround school models suggests essential conditions for success. Aligning needs, goals, and actions are necessary for success. As research indicates, it is important that the mission and vision is communicated to school staff. Moreover, research suggests that resources need to be put in place to help with the alignment of goals. Another essential condition for success is addressing safety and discipline. By ensuring that safety and discipline is in place, schools are able to spend more time focusing on teaching and learning. Research also indicates that a positive work environment is crucial for teachers (Villavicencio & Grayman, 2012).

Other models such as the Value Added Model (VAM) have also caught the interest of policymakers. Value Added Models (VAM) measure student growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the academic year to determine how much gain was obtained throughout the year. It is based on individual student growth. These particular models do not use student test scores solely for the purpose of accountability. However, they purport to level the playing field by implying and reflecting only on a teacher's effectiveness, not whether they teach high or low income students. With this model, there are some concerns that teacher effects from value added measures will be sensitive to the characteristics of their students. Especially, they believe that teachers of low-income, minority, or special education students will have lower value added scores than equally effective teachers who are teaching students outside these populations. On the other hand, others suggest that the opposite might be true that some value added models might cause teachers of low-income, minority, or special education students to have higher value added scores

than equally effective teachers who work with higher-achieving, less risky populations (McCaffrey, 2013).

Over the last decade, teacher performance has been examined, and the effects of teachers on student performance have been evaluated through state standardized testing. Value added models are used by many states to rank teachers. Value added models are also used to measure teacher performance in lieu of student achievement gains. Value added models are aimed at promoting student achievement gains from grade to grade. Student gains are monitored from year to year (Konstantopoulos, 2014).

Schools and school districts are in a new era of accountability, and the performance of all students is counted. Schools are charged to ensure that every student succeeds. In this era of accountability, data are used to identify areas of strengths as well as weaknesses. In this new age of accountability, many schools are struggling with this challenge while others are making significant progress in narrowing and completely closing achievement gaps. In a study conducted through the U.S. Department of Education, four high schools across the country were chosen based on performance over a four year span (Billig, Jaime, Abrams, Fitzpatrick, & Kendrick, 2005). The schools were: Del Valle High School in El Paso, Texas, a school that completely closed its achievement gap between Hispanics and white students. El Camino High School in Oceanside, California narrowed its achievement gap in mathematics by 24 percentage points and in reading by 14 percentage points for Hispanic students. Florin High School in Sacramento, California narrowed its

achievement gap in reading by 10 percentage points for African-American students and by 14 percentage points for Hispanic students, and North Central High School in Indianapolis, Indiana narrowed its achievement gap in English/language arts by 10 percentage points and in mathematics by 15 percentage points for African American students (Billig, et al., 2005). These gains represent huge milestones for the schools, administrators, teachers, students, and community stakeholders.

To help analyze and understand how these gaps were closed and narrowed, the U.S. Department of Education held a series of focus groups with school leaders and teachers. The focus then explored and analyzed teaching and learning strategies in content areas, culture and school climate issues, change leadership, and entirety of the change process itself. Each school that participated in the Closing the Achievement Gap Focus Group had their own unique features; however, through the study, it was found that they all had similar underlying core themes with common practices.

Schools in the focus groups had a culture that was paramount to their successes. These schools required high levels of academic achievement from their students. Moreover, plans were in place to support teachers and students through the use of after school programs and tutoring to ensure that student expectations were met. Accountability was a major focal point in these schools to make certain that they were on the right track. In each of the schools, there was a fundamental belief that all children could achieve. Teachers were essential in facilitating support mechanisms for these students. Once again, these teachers placed high emphasis on

accountability standards. The teachers were attentive to state and classroom level scores. From this, they adjusted their teaching strategies to ensure the success of their students. Teachers collaborated together and were excited about instruction and learning. Data drove decision making and decisions were not made unless the data showed reasons to make changes. The schools made changes in class schedules to allow more time for reading and math instruction. Administrators adopted different class schedules to offer more time for instruction. The blocks of time ranged from ninety minutes of uninterrupted time to double blocks where the first class period was used to teach the lesson, and the second was used to practice what was taught. With the additional allotted time, teachers used techniques that included hands-on activities and individualized instruction to meet the needs of the different types of learners. In addition, teachers utilized problem solving techniques to help students to develop better ways of analyzing information. Time was also provided for students to discuss books and math problems with each other to gain a better understanding. More time was spent teaching vocabulary and students used technology more often. In these schools, change was led sometimes by teachers and other times by administrators. Resources in the form of funds and time were used for professional development, materials, acquisition, and student support services (Billig, et al., 2005).

Educational achievement can be fundamentally attributed to economic status and higher income equality. Achievement gaps in education lead to greater disparities in life. Many of these students do not get the life changing skills that they need to be successful and productive citizens. As an end result, they do not attain a

higher standard of living because education is often the gateway to a better life. Education is often called the key to a better way of life or gateway to successful. Academic achievement and educational obtainment are both crucial in getting students to a better means of livelihood.

Positive School Models

KIPP Schools

As the disparities and achievement gaps continue to widen, policy makers are initiating and calling for more reforms in education. With these reforms, more charters and private schools are being established around the nation. These schools often focus on minority achievement. Often, the traditional format and formulas for schools were set and governed from localized districts and individual states with federal oversight. Therefore other positive models are being implemented around the country based on new approaches to include disruptive innovation.

One example of a unique school model is KIPP Schools (Knowledge is Power Program). This is a huge effort to create a network of charter schools that are designed to transform and improve the educational opportunities of low income families. The Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) is a network of public charter schools, approximately 125 KIPP schools operating in 20 different states and the District of Columbia (DC). KIPP's goal is to prepare students to enroll and succeed in college. Ninety-six percent of all KIPP students are either African American or Hispanic.

More than four-fifths (83%) are from households with incomes low enough to be eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. When analyzing the KIPP school population, it is noted that the schools serve student populations that have high concentrations of African-American students relative to the elementary schools that feed middle schools. KIPP schools have a smaller proportion of Latino or Hispanic students (31%) than feeder schools (34%). From a gender based perspective, KIPP schools proportion of female students is higher in elementary schools that feed them.

Results show that KIPP schools are 52% female compared to 49% at feeder schools. KIPP schools have a larger proportion of low socio-economic students; however, KIPP schools have lower proportion of special education students and students with limited English proficiency compared to feeder schools (Tuttle, Gill, Gleason, Knechtel, Nichols-Barrer, & Resch, 2013). Analysis show that prior to KIPP entry, more proportions of KIPP students are eligible to receive special education services (83%) than students at the feeder elementary schools (75%).

When comparisons are made regarding prior entry, a smaller proportion of students at KIPP schools receive special education services (9%). When comparisons regarding baseline math and reading achievement. KIPP students have lower baselines than students at elementary schools that feed KIPP schools. Students entering KIPP schools have lower scores than their peers at feeder schools. Results show that the baseline scores reflect 0.09 standard deviations in math and 0.06 standard deviations in reading (Tuttle et al., 2013).

KIPP schools are public, charter schools. Therefore, there is no tuition associated with KIPP schools. KIPP schools are free to all students in the school localized area. In some cases, more students apply than available slots in schools. In these particular cases, admission is determined by random lottery. KIPP schools pay for their operations from public funding, federal, state, and local sources. KIPP network of schools are charter based; therefore, KIPP schools do not receive more funding to fund the longer days and school year. KIPP schools also seek out private philanthropy to assist with the additional costs that are incurred. Each KIPP school designs its their own curricula. Moreover, each school leader and administrator have a great deal of autonomy within their individual schools. There are basic elements that make up each and characterize KIPP schools. Students spend more time in school which in turn creates a longer school day, week, and year. High academic expectations are placed on all students through rigorous curriculum designed to boost academics and student achievement. There is a strong awareness placed on measurable results. At each school, leadership makes school level decision making. The KIPP school model also invests in students, parents/guardians, and teachers by having them to sign a pledge for commitment to excellence (Newstead, Saxton, & Colby, 2008).

Once again, KIPP seeks to actively engage parents in the process of their children's education and future. Through parental involvement in the educational process, KIPP schools hope to give these students the skills necessary to succeed in school, and ultimately, the goal of KIPP is to prepare students for college. The

Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) is a bold effort to create a network of charter schools designed to transform and improve the educational opportunities available to low/income families. KIPP schools seek to actively engage students and parents in the educational process, expand the time and effort students devote to their studies, reinforce students' social competencies and positive behaviors, and dramatically improve their academic achievement. Ultimately, the goal of KIPP is to prepare students to enroll and succeed in college. The KIPP Foundation is guiding this effort by selecting and training school leaders, promoting the program model, and supporting the KIPP network schools. This report presents preliminary findings from a matched, longitudinal analysis designed to estimate KIPP's effect on student achievement. The author's preliminary work estimates effects in 22 KIPP middle schools--making this the first report that applies a rigorous (non-experimental) methodological approach across a nationwide sample of KIPP schools. They selected schools for which they were able to collect longitudinal, student/level data, and that were established by the 2005/06 school year or earlier to ensure that a minimum of two entering cohorts of students per school would be observed for multiple years. They find that students entering these 22 KIPP schools typically had prior achievement levels that were lower than average achievement in their local school districts. For the vast majority of KIPP schools studied, impacts on students' state assessment scores in mathematics and reading are positive, statistically significant, and educationally substantial. Estimated impacts are frequently large enough to

substantially reduce race/and income/based achievement gaps within three years of entering KIPP.

Impacts on student achievement.

Studies conducted in KIPP middle schools show positive impacts on student achievement across all years and all subjects areas. The effects of KIPP schools on student achievement are consistent and positive. Students that enter KIPP schools after four years of entry show significant performance on state assessments in both reading and math. Moreover, the impacts for student subgroups are similar to the average overall impact among all KIPP students. There is also a significant and positive effect that can be seen in science and social studies, and the magnitude of these effects are similar to the estimated impacts in reading and math after three to four years. Based on the findings, KIPP average impacts in all subjects are large enough to be educationally meaningful. After three years of enrollment in a KIPP school, the estimated impact in math for a student is 0.36 standard deviations which is equivalent to moving a student from the 44th to 58th percentile of a district's distribution. This suggests that average KIPP middle schools produce nearly 11 months of additional learning growth in math their students after three years (Bloom, Hill, Black, & Lipsey, 2008). In return, this is equivalent to approximately 40% of the local Black-White test score gap. In reading, the impact on student achievement is approximately 0.21 standard deviations which are smaller than math, and it is equivalent to moving a student from the 46th to 55th percentile. In comparison to

national norms, the reading impact in KIPP schools represent approximately eight months of additional learning (Bloom et al., 2008).

KIPP schools also impact science and social studies as well. After three to four years of being in a KIPP school, students show an estimated 0.33 standard deviation which is equivalent to moving a student from the 36th to 49th percentile which represent nearly 14 months of additional learning growth. In social studies, KIPP schools show a measurement of 0.25 standard deviation which equivalent to moving a student from the 39th to 49th percentile representing approximately 11 months of extra learning and growth. This is also equivalent to about a third of the local Black-White test score gaps in these subjects. Evidence from these studies suggests that KIPP is among the highest performing charter school networks in the nation (Furgeson et al., 2012).

Boston Fenway High

Boston Fenway High School was founded in 1983. It was one of Boston's first six original pilot schools in 1994. Boston Fenway High has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a Blue Ribbon School. The school utilizes a three way approach to education: intellectual challenge, personalized relationships, and collaborations with outside organization. Students are required to complete portfolios, projects, and exhibitions. At Boston Fenway High, seniors are involved in six week internship programs to prepare them for real world experiences. The school has also been recognized for the success of young men of color and Latino students. Boston Fenway High envisions diversified, respectful, community spirited students and

faculty. The school also offers a dual enrollment with Emmanuel and Fisher Colleges and Wentworth Institute. Relationships and cohesive bonds are important at the school, and they are formed through student group advisories. Students form strong bonds with staff and classmates during their time together at Fenway (Boston Public Schools, 2014a). Fenway High has a graduation rate of 90% with 95% of graduates going on to college. The school has also been recognized with numerous awards gaining pilot school status within the state of Massachusetts. Fenway High has broken the cycle for failing schools who serve low socioeconomic populations with limited resources. Fenway attributes part of its success to the teacher as a youth mentor program that places students first in their programs. The educational model at Fenway has an integrated curriculum which supports emotional, cultural, and academic needs of each student (Ayalon, 2011). Moreover, research show that caring relationships matter between teachers and students. It creates social emotional learning, and students are able to integrate their thinking (Ayalon, 2011).

Admissions.

Boston Fenway High School's mission is to create a socially committed and morally responsible community of learners, which values its students as individuals (Boston Public Schools, 2014b). In addition, the school goal is to encourage academic excellence by developing intellectual habits of mind, self-esteem, and leadership skills in every student its serves. The Fenway School in Boston also uses themes that are embedded in the culture and curriculum to include invention, refinement, connection, and ownership. There are different questions that are asked to define the

different habits. Invention is one of the major habits. Invention involves having passion and taking risks to accomplish tasks and goals. Refinement involves tools that are needed to be successful. Questions that are posed to the students include things about their strengths and weaknesses, how to finish work, and skills that they may need. Connection involves relationships and associations for the students who attend Fenway. Students are asked about their relating to their audiences. They draw from their personal experiences to problem solve. Ownership is also key and central to the culture of the school. Students are held accountable for their work and processes. There is also a commitment to their work. The Fenway school is a highly sought after school for families and students in the Boston metro area. Currently, there is a waiting list for students to be enrolled in the Fenway School. Unfortunately many more applications are made than the school has space for. For the 2013-2013 academic year, Fenway received over 700 applications for 80 vacancies. The school reacts to confirmations and no shows until several weeks after the school has opened. As vacancies become open, more students are selected (Boston Public Schools, 2014b).

At Fenway, school begins later in the morning at 8:40 a.m. This is much later than most comprehensive high schools, and the school ends the day at 3:30 on Monday and Wednesday. On Thursday, school ends at 2:30 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. on Friday. By controlling the schedule, the school has the ability to accommodate adolescent sleep needs. Fenway's class schedule is set up on a block system. This allows time for teachers to have time to use different modes of instruction, and they

are able to give attention to students who may need help in certain areas. The teacher workload is nearly half that of teachers in a conventional high setting. Fenway teachers only have three classes a day. As a result, the teachers can spend additional time with students plus an advisory of students they also teach.

House System.

Students at Fenway are grouped into of learning families called the House System. When students enter Fenway, they are grouped and assigned to House System, and they remain there until they are finished with school. This system allows and enables teachers to push the students academically while also giving them personal support. Every House has its own faculty. In the core content areas of math, science, and humanities, teachers typically teach the same cohort of students in Grades 9, 10, and 11. This allows the teachers to get to know their students. There is another faculty within each House to include: a student support counselor, special education teacher or coordinator, and teachers who teach minor courses. The faculty members in each House meet once a week to discuss how individual students are doing. This system allows teachers and students to develop an intricate relationship that fosters personal achievement and a close-knit cohort (Boston Public Schools, 2014b).

Impacts on student achievement.

The Boston Public Schools Report on Teaching and Learning (RTL) reported its findings for the 2012-2013 academic school year to include: enrollment, student specs, and accountability information. For this academic school term, Fenway had a

total enrollment of 320 students. African-American student population 40.6%, Hispanic 46.3%, White 6.3%, Native American 0.6%, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander 0.3%, multi-race/non-Hispanic 2.2%, and 16.6% special education students. Based on gender, Fenway had a population of 47.2% male and 52.8% female students. English Language Learners included 11.6% of the population, and 67.2% of students were eligible to receive free and reduced lunches (Boston Public Schools, 2014a).

Boston Fenway High maintained an average daily attendance of 94.1% for their student population. 97.8% of the student population were promoted to the next grade. For the 2012-2013 academic year, the student mobility rate was 3.4%. The student dropout rate for 2012-2013 academic year was at 1.2%.

The accountability measures show success in all areas of measurability: all students 89%, high need students 89%, low income students at 90%, African-American students 81%, and Hispanic/Latino students 89%. The target goal was 75%, and every group succeeded and achieved beyond the goal for the percentile ranking. These scores represent the students who made yearly progress and benchmarked according to state standards as defined under the NCLB Act. The accountability data details in English Language Arts show gaps narrowing and proficient scores for every group of students: all students 98%, high need students 98%, low income students 98%, African-American students 96%, and Hispanic/Latino students at 99%. In this category, African-American students did not meet the schools targeted goal for growth; however, the students were still proficient in this area. Data details for 2013

show that all groups of students were also proficient in math: all students overall scored 93%, high need students 92%, low income students scored 92%, African-American students scored 93%, and Hispanic/Latino students scored at 92%. Data details for 2013 science scores show: all students overall scored 87%, high need students scored 86%, low income students scored 85%, and Hispanic/Latino students scored at 83% (Boston Public Schools, 2014a).

High Tech High

High Tech High is an urban charter school located in San Diego, California that enrolls 450 to 500 yearly. There are approximately 120 students per grade from ninth to twelfth grade. To ensure outreach and proportional recruitment, High Tech High holds a lottery for each of the city's ten zip code areas. The school admits students with poor achievement records with the requirement that students have been promoted from the prior grade that they attended. High Tech High also works diligently to ensure that there is a balance of students by gender. Typically, the number of female applicants is lower than that of males. Therefore, applications are separated by gender and then selected from lottery pools. In one enrollment and application period, there were more than 3,000 students who applied for 268 vacancies at High Tech High. In the 2005-2006 academic school year, the student body was composed of 44% White, 25% Hispanic or Latino, 12% African American, 9% Filipino, 8% Asian, 2% other, and 20% having socioeconomic disadvantages (High Tech High, 2006a).

High Tech High educational programs are located on the former Naval Training Center site in the Point Loma area of San Diego. All of the buildings have been renovated at the average cost of renovations for school. The architecture of the buildings have very high ceilings that are paneled by windows that shine light on exposed structural framing and air ducts. As visitors enter the school, they will find a reception area with a front counter that resembles a modern office setting. There is a great room that is adjacent to the reception area that is used for large gatherings. The great room is used for weekly meetings. High Tech High has internet wired workstations which enhance the openness of the school. The closeness of the workstations allow teachers to organize students into groups within the classroom and outside at workstations. In return, this helps in the accommodation of small groups. Other rooms are arranged for conferences with large tables and accommodations for audio/visual presentation capabilities. The school has biochemistry, engineering, and animation labs. High Tech High gives visitors the impression of a hip high tech firm (High Tech High, 2006a).

School model.

High Tech High is different from the conventional and traditional school models in that it implements new methodologies. The school size is much smaller than the average high school with 450 -500 students and approximately 25 teachers. In the traditional setting, student population can range from 1,000 to 4,000 students and 50-200 teachers.

Teachers at High Tech High have extended roles and they interact with students to include guidance and counseling. In the traditional format, teachers interact with students only in relation to subject, and there is usually one counselor that services 400-500 students. Students enroll at High Tech High by choice through lottery systems. In the traditional setting, students are assigned to schools based boundaries and district lines. There are individualized education programs that are set up at High Tech High. The conventional high school offers individualized education for collaboration with teachers and students for special education. At High Tech High, community-based learning is a part of the learning process.

Critical thinking is applied, and students are engaged in active learning by doing and problem solving. Moreover, they conduct research and are able to make new discoveries through research based strategies. On the other, with the traditional model, learning is passive, and 70 to 90% of teacher hands on experience and talk comprises the learning model. More emphasis is placed on direct instruction. High Tech High has an integrated and multidisciplinary format. While, the traditional high school model focuses on learning that is circumscribed by discipline project-based learning experiences with boundaries, at High Tech High there is no tracking, and each student is an equal. The traditional format tracks students and their status related to the individual and group track assignments (High Tech High, 2006a).

Impacts on student achievement.

High Tech High was awarded two perfect scores of ten on the California Academic Performance Index (API). This places the school in the top ten percent of

all high schools in California and all high schools in the state with similar demographics. From 2002 to 2005, High Tech High averaged less than 0.5% for its dropout rate (High Tech High, 2006a). Moreover, High Tech High has recorded that African-American students in the school achieve higher scores than that of their peers in the district and throughout the state on standardized test. Also, more of their African-American students enroll in chemistry, physics, and advanced math courses and enter college. In 2005, 80% of graduates enrolled in a four-year institution and 20% went on to two year colleges. Furthermore, High Tech High reports that more than half of its graduates are the first in their families to attend higher institutions of learning (High Tech High, 2006c).

Out of fifteen students that were questioned and interviewed, they all stated that they favored High Tech High over their previous schools. Moreover, all students were asked to compare their academic learning at High Tech High and other schools. They all addressed project learning as the major difference in their academic learning. Overall, this was the major factor the stood out in their learning. Students also stated that they found course work and academics at their former schools to be boring and dull. Some of the students interviewed were involved in internship experiences, and they concluded that those experiences were educative and worthwhile (High Tech High, 2006c).

The approaches to educating students at High Tech High are different in that there is a promotion of schooling practices that are promoted by educators. High Tech High incorporates technology into the learning process. High Tech high does

not operate like the conventional high school in America. However, High Tech High is one charter school that has met the promise of success with innovation in learning formats (High Tech High, 2006a).

Harlem Zone

The Harlem Children's Zone has a long standing commitment to the community in which it serves. The Harlem Children Zone is a network of schools and programs that service urban city students and citizens. The Harlem Children's Zone paradigm is designed to fight poverty by overcoming the traditional approaches to education. To accomplish this task, the model focuses on the social, health, and educational development of children. Harlem Children's Zone provide wrap around programs that improve the children's family and neighborhood environments (Harlem Children's Zone, 2009).

Harlem Children's Zone of change underlying the model uses five core principles to create change: serve neighborhoods comprehensively, create a pipeline of support, build community among residents, institution, and stakeholders, evaluate program outcomes, and cultivate a culture of success. Through these principles, the Harlem Children's Zone is able progressively educate the students that are serviced through the organization (Harlem Children's Zone, 2009).

Principle 1: Neighborhood.

By engaging an entire neighborhood, three primary goals are achieved: children are reached in significant numbers that affect the culture of a community; in return it

transforms the environments that impact the development of children; and programs are created at a large enough scale to meet the local need.

Principle 2: The HCZ Pipeline.

The HCZ Pipeline is a continuation of services provided for children and families that offer a series of free, coordinated, best practice programs. HCZ focuses on the needs of children regardless of their developmental stages. These programs address pre-natal care, infants, toddlers, elementary school, middle school, adolescents, and college. HCZ focuses on academic excellence as a part of its missions and values; however, HCZ uses a wealth of programs to ensure this success through: nurturing stable families, supporting youth development, improving health through fitness and nutrition, and cultivating and involving adults and community stakeholders.

Principle 3: Building community.

It is the belief of the HCZ that it takes an entire community working together collaboratively to solve problems within an existing community. Moreover, it is the belief of the organization that a child's development is affected by their environment. Also, in that environment, there are important variables present challenges such as safety, continuity, and a stable environment for children. HCZ uses leadership training, neighborhood beautification, connection to social services, and other related activities to build strong partnerships throughout the community.

HCZ works to accomplish wrap around programs throughout its community by connecting as a non-profit agency in conjunction with other agencies to meet the needs of their individual communities. It is the belief of the HCZ that collective

programs that are offered in the community must reach approximately 65% of the total children in the area (Harlem Children's Zone, 2009). Also, one of the core values of the HCZ is that it must help to shape the physical and social environment surrounding the child. Therefore, it is necessary to reach out to other organizations to aid in poverty stricken situations. The focus then becomes a particular finite area where concentration can be placed on children and families. By doing this, HCZ is able to change its strategies to reach further into the neighborhood to enable more to beat the odds (Harlem Children's Zone, 2009).

To ensure the success of the program, HCZ offers a continuum of services by providing opportunities of free, coordinated, and best practice programs. The program and services that are offered focus on every developmental stage from pre-natal care, infants, toddlers, elementary school, middle school, and adolescents, and college. There is no certain age that children have to enter the program. It is offered at any age, and they receive high quality instruction, help, and assistance. It is the belief of HCZ that once they have entered the program that they will stay because of the structure and support that it provides (Harlem Children's Zone, 2009).

Principle 4: Evaluation.

Evaluation is a key essential for HCZ. By thorough evaluation, HCZ managers are able to make decisions based on conclusive data and drive program improvements. HCZ treats the evaluation process as an ally, and in return, it helps the organization to refine and upgrade performance where it is needed most.

Principle 5: Culture of success.

HCZ strives within its organizational culture to place special emphasis on accountability, leadership, teamwork, and passion. HCZ also holds itself to the highest standards, and it strives to present itself as a role model to students. The HCZ views the combination of shared values and high standards leads to great morale and staff pride. Staff members consider it a privilege to work for HCZ in the interest of Harlem's children. Careful hiring practices help bring individuals with the right values and ethics to work for HCZ. Ongoing staff training and leadership development help to build and upgrade human capital within the organization (Harlem Children's Zone, 2009).

Summary of Literature Review

In careful review of the literature surrounding and supporting the research of the effects of positive schools on the education of African-American students, there are several themes and strategies that the research highlights. In many instances through the literature review, these themes and strategies overlap with connecting interests.

Students

The literature shows that students who develop positive relationships with teachers tend to value their education. As a correlation of those relationships, students often remain committed to school. Moreover, students who are provided educational opportunities are better equipped than those who are not provided those same

opportunities. These educational opportunities often transcend from secondary education into postsecondary educational opportunities.

Schools

Throughout the existing literature review, schools are a vital and important element in connected students to the real world. The literature review and research show that schools have an important role to play in the education of students. Schools and districts who align their resources The research also denotes that schools who utilize data to track student growth and individualized plans through interventions tend to foster positive results through data driven instruction. By doing this, the individual needs of students are met through goal setting. In addition, schools and districts that align curriculum and instructions with their state standards show better results with their student populations.

Also, research shows signs of success for school and districts who develop conceptual frameworks, and school safety and orderly environments that include specified routines throughout the school day reflect positive climates. Elements through the literature show that the recruitment of minority teachers, counselors, coaches, school administrators, and staff reflect positive outcomes in student success and achievement. School and district level leadership supports student learning, and there is a valued sense of the direction of the schools with the alignment of the mission and vision for the school. The mission and vision does not stop within the walls of the school. It is supported by parental support and community stakeholders.

Leadership also maintains a high level of accountability, and that accountability is relayed to teachers, faculty, and other staff members.

Teachers/Administrators

The literature suggests and gives reflection to the concept that teachers and administrators should understand the dynamics of a student's home life and family situations. Awareness of these external factors are an important aspect of student success from an educational standpoint. By bridging the gap and communicating openly, the research shows that it also yields positive results. In addition, the research shows that relationships are key in the development of the whole student.

Technology

In many of the schools and research, technology is front and center in instructional practices. These schools show that technology is embedded in instructional programs within the curriculum, and this technology is also used to aid with assessment tools. Within core content areas, technology is used to enhance and connect the standards with alignment standards. Technology is used to differentiate instruction and to connect the students to the world. Moreover, each student was important, and student learning was a top priority. In addition, technology is embraced by administrators, teachers, and other faculty members.

Non-Traditional Programs

In non-traditional school programs and models, the literature review gives a litany of strategies that aide in the assistance of closing the achievement gaps with the African-American student population. One of those areas is the Value Added Model.

This model measures student growth from year to year. This is an individual student approach, and there is no one size that fits all. Some of these schools models reflect that by have longer school days and school years that this helps students to retain more knowledge. Also, this research suggest that it helps students academically to stay more closely connected with school. Some positive results reflect high expectations for students along with youth mentoring programs. Project based learning focuses on learning

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is present in curriculum and faculty has an understanding of the students' background and family status. The faculty is also sensitive to the needs of individual students and their home cultures. In these schools, they make an asserted effort to understand the unique ability of each student. Research shows that is important for schools to focus on health, social aspects, and development of children. Culture awareness enables students to connect with their environment.

Chapter III: Methodology

This study will be conducted in selected rural and urban schools consisting of grades three through eight. This study will examine what schools are doing to have positive results in helping to close the achievement gap with African-American students. The achievement gaps in testing will be a main focus.

This study will be conducted in schools located throughout Alabama's eight geographical regions. The control group of schools will be located in region six of the state, and the sample group of schools will be randomly selected from three other regions across the state of Alabama. The schools that will be chosen have consistently met AYP for three consecutive years under the NCLB legislative act. Moreover, these schools have been identified by the Alabama State Department of Education (SDE) as successful schools. They are accredited by the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools (SACS). Alabama Reading and Math Tests (ARMT) scores will be used as the primary sources of data to measures success rates within these particular schools. The ARMT was given to grades three to eight in Alabama to measure AYP for schools and districts across the state of Alabama. The results will be taken directly from the SDE data. Several identifiers are included

within the data that measure: reading and math scores, free and reduced lunch, race and ethnic background, and demographics.

The primary goals and purpose of the ARMT were to access students' mastery of state content standards in both reading and math. The ARMT was also utilized to report findings on group as well as individual performance. These reports related strengths and weaknesses in the different groups around the entire state. This data provided information to analyze changes over the period of testing. Results from ARMT testing were used for accountability by the state department of education and as part of the requirement for meeting NCLB standards. The ARMT was a criterion-referenced based test that was 100% aligned with the Alabama state content standards in reading and mathematics. Items on the ARMT consisted of selected items from the Stanford Achievement Test which is also known as the Stanford 10 which matched Alabama's content standard in reading and mathematics. The Stanford Achievement. Tests are used nationally for standard testing across different states. Performance levels were reported in the following categories:

- Level I—Does not meet standard
- Level II—Partially meets academic standards
- Level III—Meets academic content standards and proficient at grade level
- Level IV—Exceeds academic content standards

Research Questions

- For schools that are having a positive impact on the education of African-American students, what is working?
- For schools that made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in Alabama under NCLB, what factors attributed to the success of African-American students who took the Alabama Math and Reading Assessment in grades three through eight? If they did not make adequate yearly progress, why not?
- Why are these things working in the schools that have success?

Primary Categories of Questions

- Impact of schools on learning and achievement of African-American students.
- Interaction of parent and social skills of students.
- Questions to identify approaches that are working with students in areas of reading, math, students with learning issues, and other general strategies that work.

Interview Questions

1. What effects do low socio-economic conditions and living in poverty have on students in a classroom environment and how are those effects demonstrated? Are these students able to function in and adapt to a typical classroom setting? If so, what has helped them adapt and function well?
2. Describe some specific activities, techniques or methods utilized in your school that you believe will help your students to succeed in a global world.

3. Describe strategies that you have utilized to help students improve ARMT scores in reading and math.
    a. What types of reading and math initiatives have you used to address the learning deficits of these students? Which ones were most effective and why?
    b. What strategies were being utilized that you believe helped the students who are succeeding in reading and math? Why do you believe they were helpful?
4. Describe aspects of your school and instructional programs that you believe are making a difference with students who are succeeding academically.
    - Physical environment
    - Organization of the school day
    - Approaches to teaching and learning
    - Specific curriculum

    Why do you believe that these elements have been effective?
5. In your school setting, describe parent participation/ involvement in the students' education?
6. What is your school doing specifically to contribute to positive results? Please include the following: teaching strategies, parental involvement, community stakeholders, curriculum, etc.

Objectives – Qualitative Study

The objectives of this study will be to research and analyze the schools that have a positive impact on the education of African-America students. This study will also find and analyze strategies that are having a positive impact on the education of African-American students in grades three through eight. This will be accomplished by interviewing leadership in schools which have demonstrated success by the ARMT scores for African-American students in grade three through eight.

Subjects

Teachers and administrators from these schools will be interviewed. The results from ARMT testing will be used to determine how well these schools are doing to prepare students in grades three through eight. There will be a control group and sample group of schools in the research model. The control sample group of schools will consist of five schools from geographical region six in the state of Alabama whose scores on the ARMT demonstrate successful results. There also will be five schools selected for a sample group schools. The sample control group of schools will be randomly selected from three of the remaining seven geographical regions in the state of Alabama. Extensive qualitative research, in the form of interviews, will be done to analyze results from successful schools as attribute by the Alabama State Department of Education. The research will be conducted in schools that successfully met AYP standards in the state of Alabama under the NCLB guidelines. Moreover, these schools were deemed as successful schools under NCLB

guidelines. The schools in this study will have African-Americans represented within their student populations.

Setting

The focal point and setting of this research will be conducted in K-8 Alabama public schools. There are a total of ten schools that research will be conducted in: five from region six of Alabama Public Schools and five selected at random from other areas of the state. Existing data and results under the NCLB act will be reviewed. Alabama accountability tests will be used to analyze growth. Administrators and teachers will be interviewed during the research.

Process of Study

To understand the underlying causes of varied achievement gaps, qualitative research in the form of interviews with teachers and administrators will be completed to gain a depth of knowledge as to why these problems exist and what currently successful schools and programs are doing that result in positive progress in achievement. The purpose of this study is to give answers to the needs of what can be done to address the achievements gaps for African-American students. Moreover, this process will serve to answer questions that are impossible to answer through selected testing variables, but it will be a solid foundation of research to understand the learning styles and problems that exists for these students.

Field Test

A field test was conducted with three professional educators who were tenured teachers. These teachers were professional educators who had taught in

different and diverse settings. They were contacted ahead of time, and the interview questions were also given to them. These professional educators were open and expressive with their remarks. Two of the interviews were completed face to face, and one was completed via telephone. Each interview varied in length ranging from 35 to 45 minutes. The interviewees were all engaged in the conversation incorporating the interview process. While conducting the interview, the researcher utilized a recorder while also dictating information to include all details to ensure accuracy and validity. Those who were interviewed in the field study tests were not included in those who were interviewed to collect the data.

There were a wide range of responses given during the interview session. Many of the responses were similar in their answering pattern. However, there were some outlying responses as well. Each of the interviewees gave detailed responses to the questions. Before and during the process of the field test and data collection, communication took place with dissertation committee members to fine tune questioning to encompass the research methodology in its entirety.

Data Collection

Prior to the data collection, the researcher will receive approval to conduct the study of schools through the IRB at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. The researcher will conduct interviews with administrators and faculty at the identified schools. Questions will be designed with open ended responses to allow the interviewee to have an opportunity to express themselves fully. NVivo software will be utilized to analyze themes and patterns from the responses given in during the

interviews. The data from interviews and questioning samples will serve as a major component for the research information.

Limitation and Delimitations

This study will be viewed with limitations and delimitations. This research will be conducted in schools where success and failure rates in specific targeted schools will be analyzed thoroughly through existing data that relates different patterns within the education of African-Americans students verses their counterparts. This is done intentionally as an exclusionary measure to analyze the sample of the student population which is being researched. The particular schools have been chosen because of the sample of the population of students in which they service on yearly basis. They have been selected in part because their school models that have been created to address the needs and specifics of educating selected groups of African American students. Data will be collected from resources found within the schools existing records to support the research. As the data relates to the population of students, they will come from varied backgrounds that are not typical to societal norms. This study is designed to understand the underlying causes and effects of the barriers within the educational systems and outside factors that influence the education of these students and to identify strategies and approaches being implemented to overcome these barriers. Moreover, this study is conducted this way to connect the variables that are not found in the correlation of testing and academia. These factors will be addressed through careful research and interviews of administrators and teachers.

Ethical Considerations

This study will consist of work with humans. Rights must be protected and the needs of others have to be respected in the entire process of the research. In doing ethical research, issues that relate to the researcher and the variables must be respected. All research that is conducted must comply with Federal and State Laws. As a researcher, I must ensure that I operate within specifics boundaries of ethical considerations.

Ethics is defined in many ways. Fieser (2004) offered the following definition. He asserted that the field of ethics, also called moral philosophy, involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior. Marshall (1998), in his *Dictionary of Sociology*, attempted the following definition. Ethics is often defined as the concern with what ought to be, whereas science is concerned with describing reality as it actually exists.

Chapter IV: Results

Chapter four breaks down the actual interview process and research conducted and presents the resulting data. The interview questions were analyzed carefully in interwoven themes from school interviews with administrators and teachers. In each question, specifics were asked concerning the school's processes and procedures intended to achieve positive results from the students that they were educating. During the interview process, many of the interviewees made segues into other questions because the information given was often connected in various ways. The narratives describe first-hand accounts of the interviewees' knowledge of students and successes in their individual schools. The following section summarizes what each person interviewed had to say regarding each research question.

Subjects

The subjects in this research were African-American students who attended schools in the state of Alabama. The schools in both the control group and sample group had high poverty levels. Free lunch rates also were high in each of the schools.

In this study, there were two groups of schools that were selected for the study and research, ~~a~~ total of ten schools involved in the research and data. Five of those schools were a part of the control group and five additional schools were a part of the randomly selected sample group of schools. All of the schools in the control group were located in region six in the state of Alabama. The randomly selected schools in the sample group were located in three additional locations and regions of the state: region three, region four, and region five. As outlined in the methodology, every

school selected had positive results on the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) from grades three through eight and adequately met yearly standards for progressions as approved by the Alabama State Department of Education. Every school selected for the study and research had African-Americans students within the student populations of the schools. Local school administrators and teachers were interviewed regarding their schools, students, curriculum, and results.

There were a total of ten schools with grade levels ranging from grade levels three through eight. These schools were chosen due to their performance and adequate yearly progress over a three year academic period from academic years 2010-2013. These schools were able to consistently show and maintain adequate yearly progress in reading and math.

In the control group of schools, there were four elementary K-5 schools (Schools 1-4 in Table 1) and one 6-8 middle and feeder pattern school selected (School 5 in Table 1). Feeder pattern schools are schools that students transfer directly to once a certain grade has been completed. Poverty levels were higher in the elementary schools than the middle school. Overall and in comparison, the control group of schools had a higher concentration of African-American students within the student population of students tested than the sample group of schools (See Table 1). There were high averages of free lunch rates in these schools also. These schools maintained a high average of African-American students who took the ARMT from years 2010-2013. In the sample group of schools, there were three elementary K-5 schools and two 6-8 middle and feeder pattern schools selected.

Test Results (See Table 1)

During the implementation and usage of the ARMT (Alabama Reading and Math Test), Alabama used a single accountability system that met state and federal requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB. Alabama based its criteria on student assessment results in reading and mathematics. Criteria was also incorporated from this act to remain in compliance with meeting yearly established baseline goals. Under the criterion testing, every public school within the state of Alabama was required to meet AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) under these guidelines to be considered a successful academic school within the state. AYP is a term that is used to describe accountability goals within schools and school systems across the state. Within that framework, annual measurable objectives for reading and math were also established. This required students to meet or exceed the state's measurable objectives. Additional academic indicators were also used such as attendance and participation rates to determine AYP. Results from the ARMT were reported in four academic achievement levels. Level IV –exceeds standards, Level III- proficient at grade level, Level II – partially meets standards, and Level I – does not meet standards. Schools were also allowed to count half of the Level II scores of testing for students who partially meet those standards. Level IV, Level III, and 0.5% of Level II scores were counted to get the total percentage of students who proficient in either reading or math on the ARMT.

Table 1

ARMT Test Data Three-Year Summary

School/ Grades	Aver Rdg Proficiency	Aver Math Proficiency	F/R lunch % Rate	Poverty % Rate	% A-A students Tested	% African American Students
Elementary Schools						
1: 3 - 5	92.10	90.00	92.45	93.42	98.84	98.16
2: 3 – 5	89.95	88.00	95.92	96.57	91.85	91.60
3: 3 – 5	94.62	84.55	72.62	79.36	100.00	72.79
4: 3 – 5	88.47	80.63	94.13	94.99	99.75	97.11
6: 3 – 5	95.43	92.67	58.44	65.88	98.99	6.37
7: 3 – 5	90.23	85.22	81.08	88.75	99.74	73.82
8: 3 – 5	92.54	84.01	72.05	80.71	100.00	25.65
Middle Schools						
5: 6 – 8	93.66	86.47	62.97	72.64	98.55	37.42
9: 6 - 8	84.75	78.53	77.82	86.89	98.46	70.01
10: 6 – 8	89.49	85.55	50.78	55.99	98.19	37.21

Note. Schools 1-5 are Control Group Schools; Schools 6-10 are Sample Group Schools

When the data was analyzed, the results were tabulated as follows. The reports of the elementary schools testing reported results for grades three through five, averaged over a three year testing period. Middle school testing reports were for grades six through eight over a three year testing period. There were two groups of schools involved in the study for a total of ten schools in the study which consisted of five schools in the control group of schools, Region 6, and five schools in the sample group of schools from three additional regions in Alabama. In the control group of schools, there were four elementary schools and one middle school. The pseudonyms given were: School #1, School #2, School #3, School #4, and School #5. In the sample group of schools, there were three elementary schools and two middle schools. The pseudonyms given were: School #6. School #7, School #8, School #9, and School #10. Data from each of the schools were tabulated and analyzed in reading proficiency, math proficiency, free and reduced lunch rates, poverty rates, African-American students tested, and African-American population of students. Additional data on each individual school can be found in the appendix that breaks down each school's information on a yearly basis in math, reading, and other demographic information.

Data was collected with ARMT testing scores over a three-year time span to analyze consistency within each of the school groups. Additional information was also collected in the form of demographics, poverty, free and reduced lunch rates, population of African-American students within the schools, and the percentage of African-American students tested throughout the study and research.

In reading, the proficiency levels varied slightly in both groups of schools. When data was analyzed over a three period of time and calculated, the schools performed as follows. In the elementary schools in grades three through five, schools maintained a close calculated average, with a range of reading proficiency between 85% and 94%. The ranges were similar for both control and samples groups.

In the sample group of schools, averages in reading were consistent among the elementary group of schools as well. In grades three through five, the sample group of schools measured as follows. From the highest to the lowest, the calculated averages for the schools maintained average ranges between 95.43% and 90.23%.

In reviewing and analyzing data from the middle school grade levels sixth through eighth grades, the overall grade level data for these grades are reflected in the study as follows. In the control group of schools, there was one middle school selected in the study. In the sample groups of schools, there were two middle schools selected in the study. The control group middle school averaged 93.56% proficiency over three years. In the sample group of schools, the range of scores reflected averages of 84.75% to 89.49%. In combining the ranges of averages in the control and sample groups, the span of proficiency in these groups ranged from 84.75% to 93.56%.

In math, the proficiency levels reflected varied averages for each of the schools in both groups of schools involved in the study. In the four elementary schools selected in the control group of schools, the ranges of proficiency scores in math on the ARMT were as follows. Over a three year time span, averages ranged

from 80.63% to 90.00%. Schools in the control group varied nearly 10.00% in their score ranges.

In the sample group of schools, math scores for the ARMT also varied among selected schools. There were a total of three elementary schools selected for the sample group of schools. Scores of proficiency ranged from 84.01% to 92.67% over a three time span in math on the ARMT. Schools in the sample group varied nearly 8.00% in their score ranges over a three period.

In the middle school grades, math scores on the ARMT reflected as follows. In the control group school in grades six through eight, scores on the ARMT averaged 86.47% over a three year time span. In the sample group of schools, scores in math on the ARMT ranged from 78.53% to 85.55%. Within the control and sample group of schools, the ranges in math on the ARMT varied from 78.53% to 85.55% for middle schools. Schools in both groups varied nearly 7.00% over a three year period.

Some of the highlights in reading and math from schools include proficiency being met in all schools involved in the study. When the actual data is broken down, the elementary schools showed consistent averages over 90% in reading for five of the seven schools in both groups, and two of the seven schools measured proficiency at over 80%. The overall performance was better at the elementary level compared to the middle school level in reading and math. In reading, one school averaged over 90%, and the two other schools measured over 80% for reading proficiency. Two of the middle schools averaged of 80% proficiency, and one school averaged over 70% proficiency.

Sample Procedures Used to Prepare Students

In school #1, in the control group, the administrator mentioned that the school also had tutoring and intervention before school started. Once the students got off the bus and had breakfast, tiered instruction began. Students who needed extra help in reading and math were given opportunities geared to their targeted needs. Students who had not mastered particular standards of the curriculum had focal areas that they worked on specifically. Every student in the school was given the opportunities to read while waiting for the school day to begin. The administrator believed that providing opportunities for teachable moments and experiences helped students to stay focused while at school.

In school #3, the administrators highlighted some of their successes and attributed them to some particular things that they were doing in the school. The administrator stated that they focused on preparation leading to the test by teaching students standards and how to approach a test situation by: underlining or circling details, reading and predicting, using the process of elimination, explaining, interpreting, and comparing answer choices.

Free and Reduced Lunch Rates

Most schools in this study had relatively high free and reduced lunch rates. In the sample population of schools, rates varied depending on the school populations and demographics that were served. In the control group of schools, free and reduced lunch rates maintained averages from 72.62% to 95.92% over a three year period. Free and reduced lunch rates in the control group of schools varied nearly 24.00%

between schools in the control group. In the sample population of schools, free and reduced lunch rates also varied depending on school population and demographics that were served. Free and reduced lunch rates in this group of schools ranged from 58.44% to 81.08% over a three year time period. There was a variance for nearly 23.00% in free and reduced lunch rates for the sample population of schools.

In middle school populations of both the control group and sample group of schools, the rates for free and reduced lunch varied also depending on the school population and demographics. In the control group of schools, the free and reduced lunch rates were at an average of 62.97% over a three period. The sample population of schools varied from each other ranging from 50.78% to 77.82%.

Child nutrition was extremely important in these school settings. All schools had free and reduced lunch rates significantly over 50%. In many of these extreme cases, schools took extra initiatives to place special emphasis on the importance of eating a balance diet.

Poverty

Most schools in this study had high poverty rates within their student populations. Poverty rates were determined by family size and income, and free and reduced lunch rates were determined by each school's Child Nutrition Program eligibility requirements. In the elementary control group of schools, the rate of poverty was higher than the elementary sample group of schools. Three of the four elementary schools in control group of schools were only within small percentage points of each other based on the poverty level of students. Poverty rates in these

schools ranged from 93.42% to 96.57% over a period of three years. In the sample group of elementary schools, averages also varied depending on the school demographics and individual school populations. Averages of poverty in this group of schools reflected an average 65.88% to 88.75% within a three year period.

In the middle school populations of schools, rates were varied in each of the schools. The control group of schools averaged 77.64% within the student population. In the sample group of schools, poverty rates in schools varied from 50.78% to 86.89%. The overall variance between both school groups was 50.78% to 86.89%.

Percentage of African-American Students

The percentage of African-American students in each school and both groups of schools was also collected and tabulated over a three year time to understand the demographics of each school involved in the study and research. The percentage of African-American students in grades three through five was higher in the control group of schools than the sample group of schools. In the control group of elementary schools, the percentage of African-American students ranged from 72.79% to 98.16%. In the elementary sample group of schools, the numbers of African-American students varied. In these schools, the demographics had the largest variance from 6.37% to 73.82%.

In the middle schools involved in the study and research, the numbers of African-American students in each school varied as well. In the control group of schools, 37.42% of African-American students were reported within the population of

the school over a three year period. In the sample group schools, the percentage of African-American students over a three period reflected an average that varied from 37.21% to 70.01%.

Percentage of African-American Students Tested

A major part of adequate yearly progress for the ARMT was also the requirement for students to be present for the tests in math and reading. Schools did well across the board in the study and research. There were two schools who averaged 100% of their African-American students who took the ARMT. Both of these schools were in the elementary group of schools. One was in the control group of schools, and the other school was in sample population of schools. In the control group of schools, the ranges were from 91.85% to 100.00%, and in the sample population of schools, the ranges were from 98.99% to 100.00%. The middle schools ranges for both groups of schools with African-American students tested over a three year period were similar with ranges from 98.19% to 99.89%.

Overall, the schools attributed the high level of students who completed the ARMT to working collaboratively together to see the process through. When interviewed, many of the interviewees stated that it truly was a team effort. Before testing, a special emphasis was placed on getting a good night's rest before the test. Schools also worked closely with the Child Nutrition Programs to ensure that students had a balanced meal and breakfast so that the students would be prepared when testing. Communication was also critical between the home and the school. Administrators, counselors, and teachers communicated through various forms of

communication to include: telephone calls, notes and correspondence home, and school messengers were also relay the messages concerning testing.

Interview Questions Summaries

There were two people interviewed from each of the research schools. They are notated the following ways: 'A' interviews denotes the building administrators and principals, and 'B' interviews denotes teachers who participated in the interviews. The interview process took place at the local individual schools with administrators and selected teachers. Before the interview process was conducted at schools in the control group and the sample group of schools, approval was given to conduct research and interviews by school districts and school administrators. Every administrator and teacher interviewed were asked the same questions throughout the interview process. Interviews were recorded and transcribed following the interview process. NVivo software was used to code and analyze themes embedded in the interviews.

Interview Questions

1. What effects do low socio-economic conditions and living in poverty have on students in a classroom environment and how are those effects demonstrated? Are these students able to function in and adapt to a typical classroom setting? If so, what has helped them adapt and function well?
2. Describe some specific activities, techniques or methods utilized in your school that you believe will help your students to succeed in a global world.
3. Describe strategies that you have utilized to help students improve ARMT scores

in reading and math.

a. What types of reading and math initiatives have you used to address the learning deficits of these students? Which ones were most effective and why?
b. What strategies were being utilized that you believe helped the students who are succeeding in reading and math? Why do you believe they were helpful?

4. Describe aspects of you school and instructional programs that you believe are making a difference with students who are succeeding academically.
    - Physical environment
    - Organization of the school day
    - Approaches to teaching and learning
    - Specific curriculum

    Why do you believe that these elements have been effective?
5. In your school setting, describe parent participation/ involvement in the students' education?
6. What is your school doing specifically to contribute to positive results? Please include the following: teaching strategies, parental involvement, community stakeholders, curriculum, etc.

Table 2

Data Collection: Overview of Interviews

Respondent Pseudonyms	**Interviews**	**Interview Time**	**Interview Location**
School #1			
Principal	1A	34 minutes	School
Teacher	1B	23 minutes	School
School #2			
Principal	2A	22 minutes	School
Teacher	2B	18 minutes	School
School #3			
Principal	3A	32 minutes	School
Teacher	3B	26 minutes	School
School #4			
Principal	4A	22 minutes	School
Teacher	4B	25 minutes	School
School #5			
Principal	5A	24 minutes	School
Teacher	5B	22 minutes	School
School #6			
Principal	6A	24 minutes	School
Teacher	6B	19 minutes	School
School #7			
Principal	7A	31 minutes	School
Teacher	7B	28 minutes	School
School #8			
Principal	8A	23 minutes	School
Teacher	8B	26 minutes	School
School #9			
Principal	9A	19 minutes	School
Teacher	9B	22 minutes	School
School #10			
Principal	10A	24 minutes	School
Teacher	10B	22 minutes	School

Table 3 summarizes the themes that emerged during the interviews. Following Table 3 is a written summary of the results from the interviews.

Table 3

Summary of Themes That Emerged During the Interviews

	Control Group of Schools Number of Responses					**Sample Group of Schools Number of Responses**				
School #	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10
Theme #1										
Social Developmental										
Codes										
*Cultural/Environment	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*Safety	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*Basic Needs	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*Supplies	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Theme #2										
Specified Curriculum										
Codes										
*Uninterrupted Math/Reading	2	2	2	2		2	2	2		
*Data Meeting/Goal Setting	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*PLPs	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*Data Driven Decisions	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*Research Based Strategies	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Theme #3										
Tutoring										
Codes										
*General Tutoring	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*Before School	2	2								
*After School	2	2	2	2						
*Strategies Times					2				2	2

Theme #4
Balanced Nutrition
Codes

*CNP-Balanced Nutrition	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*Breakfast	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*After School Snacks	2	2	2	2						
*Blessing in a Backpack	2	2	2	2						

Theme #5
Volunteer Participation
Codes

*Parental Involvement	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*Community Stakeholders	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*PTO	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

Theme #6
Technology
Codes

*Smartboards	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*Interactive Technology	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
*STAR	2	2	2	2		2	2	2		
*IXL	2	2	2	2	2	2	2			
*Read 180					2					
Total	46	46	44	44	38	38	38	36	34	34

Interview Questions and Summaries

Interview Question 1

What effects do low socio-economic conditions and living in poverty have on students in a classroom environment, and how are those effects demonstrated?

Are these students able to function in and adapt to a typical classroom setting? If so, what has helped them adapt and function well?

Overwhelmingly, out of the interviews conducted, most administrators and teachers shared similar experiences regarding the participation of parents. In the sample control group and random sample group, the interviewees made references to the lack of parental support for the students in their schools. The research suggests that parental involvement was limited during the school day and also at certain events hosted by the various schools. Some of the interviewees stated that many of the parents work schedules would not allow them to attend day time functions. However, in some cases parents tried to provide support to the schools in other ways or at other times when things were needed.

The interviewees revealed their student populations relative to demographics. Many of the parents were single with multiple children in the household. Often, these parents of students worked different shifts to support their families. Many of them were underemployed which led to them working multiple jobs to make ends meet, making it more difficult for the parents to attend events during the day or even during afterschool hours.

Other segments of the parents did not have jobs or were often between jobs, and some did not have transportation to come to the schools for various events or conferences. Several schools noted that they tried to provide some kind of transportation to the parents in extreme cases such as providing transit on buses or through other local means from various school stakeholders.

The results overwhelmingly show that students from low socio-economic backgrounds often come to school ill equipped and without proper resources. Numerous interviews suggested that proper hygiene and poor diet was often a major problem. From a school standpoint, this was seen as an issue. Most of the school personnel interviewed spoke and alluded to particulars that their schools have done to address these concerns and issues. Interviewee #4A stated that, "You must feed the child before he or she can focus on school work or be attentive in class." In the sample group of schools, there was a major initiative with their child nutrition programs to make sure that the students were fed breakfast every morning before they entered the classroom. Even if a child arrived late, these schools went the extra mile to make sure that food was made available before these children entered the classroom. The school communities as a whole shared the responsibility in caring for these students to ensure that they received a good balanced diet to get through the school day.

As it related to hygiene and proper clothing, the results supported that initiatives were also put into place in these schools to provide basic necessities such as: clothing, coats for the winter, soap, deodorant, toothbrushes, and dental hygiene

products. Schools partnered with local physicians and dental practices to help provide the fundamentals to students and parents with support mechanisms. Interviewee #2B stated that at her school even a local barber volunteers to come into the schools during the year to provide haircuts to young men who are in need.

The schools' results from both the sample population of schools and the randomly selected schools revealed that their student populations often came to school not knowing how to adapt to the educational environment at school. Many of them lacked social norms and skills to communicate and survive in the daily school setting. Often behavior problems would arise in the classroom environment. One interviewee suggested that sometimes it is a defense mechanism. Students often go into survival mode because they are used to fending for themselves. In some cases, as one interviewee recalls, older students often care for their younger siblings in the evening while parents are working. Therefore, they are the actual adult in the absence of parents in the home during certain hours of the day. Here is what the interviewees had to say during interviews.

Interviewee #4A made reference to lives of students who live in impoverished conditions. "It is tough to think about school when your stomach is growling and you are unable to function." He also stated that there are differences in rural poverty and inner city poverty. "Children who live in rural settings have to worry about food and basic shelter. However, students in the inner city have to focus on basic life skills for survival. Many of these students run the risk of being attacked by gangs or being involved in other turf wars." He suggested that there is an instinctive difference based

on where students live. This is what other interviewees said regarding question one. All of the following interviews are summaries and exact transcripts from the interviews.

Interview #4A.

During the interview with interviewee #4A, reference was made to the importance of nutrition. The interviewee also stated that when students are hungry it affects their concentration. Therefore, the interviewee felt that it was important to start the day off right with the students eating breakfast. The interviewee also mentioned the students' home environment, and in some instances, the school liaison went out to individual student homes to find that the power had been turned off. These conditions were poor and affected learning at the local school level. The interviewee also alluded to understanding and adapting to the needs of students because of the type of environment that exist. Reference was made to having empathy and understanding of the students' background to enable to teachers to better serve their students.

Interview #10A.

Interview #10A addressed the concern of low socio-economic conditions and poverty. In this particular school setting, students came to school hungry, and the school ensured that every child got a balanced and universal breakfast. The interviewee emphasized that students may come to class without pencils, paper, and incomplete homework, but once the basic needs were met that the students from the low socio-economic backgrounds could function and perform as well as other

students. The staff in the school worked to develop trusting relationships with students.

Interview #8B.

Interview #8B stated that needs students' needs must be met first. The interviewee also shared the same sentiment of others and stated, "It is hard and difficult for a student to concentrate on learning without those basic needs being met. Teachers have to realize that and help that process along the way." It was the sentiments of the interviewee that students in their school could perform as any other students when provided opportunities that were structured.

Interview #10B.

Interview #10B evaluated poverty and low socio-economic conditions by emphasizing that poverty of students is secondary to the support systems at home. During the interview, interviewee #10B expressed it this way, "Most impoverished students perform low not because of financial setbacks but because of a lack of fundamental encouragement system lacking at home." The interviewee also believed that in many low income families the fundamental qualities that affect classroom performance are inconsistent or lacking: fundamental family values, support systems to encourage the value of education, physiological needs, regimented sleep and nutritional habits, and reinforcement of school day lessons.

A major part of this question focused on socio-economic conditions and living in poverty. From the interviews conducted, each had their own opinion as it related to students living in low socio-economic situations and coming to school. As

reflected in majority of the interviews, there was a need for a responsibility placed on the school to provide additional support to these students to help them matriculate throughout schools by ensuring that they were able to connect socially and emotionally to different environments. Once again, the majority of teachers and administrators interviewed stated that these students, just as others, could thrive and survive in school once their basic needs were met. The things that help the students to adapt and function well in these environments were structure, consistency, and empathy for the students' situations.

Interview Question 2

Describe some specific activities, techniques or methods utilized in your school that you believe will help your students to succeed in a global world.

Over the last past decade in the Alabama public schools, there has been a major push to have students college and or career ready once they finish their K-12 education. Throughout the interview process, this was a major area that was reiterated over and over again. When interviewed, school principals and teachers overwhelmingly mentioned critical thinking skills and real world application.

The schools in this study utilize the Alabama Course of Study for all subject areas to ensure that lessons and curriculum are aligned with meeting the standards to have students college and career ready upon completion of their K-12 education. In preparation, this starts in elementary grades with the development of critical thinking skills. The research results show that teachers spend time on a daily basis to build

critical thinking skills within the knowledge base of the students. They all respectively worked in this area to ensure that students understood the importance of critical thinking skills to be prepared to succeed in a global world. Some schools mentioned teaching and testing with open ended response questions to stimulate thinking and conversation within the students. As pointed out by one administrator, students need to know how to think to answer the why behind a question. As the administrator further stated, "It is not enough just to answer the question correctly. However, it is important to know all the elements of the questions and why it is what it is." This is a major principle in critical thinking that requires students know depth of knowledge.

In Alabama, there has been a major push to have teachers to provide rigor through depth of knowledge questioning to get students talking more and involved with interactive lessons. Some of those strategies involve peer groups and other small groups within the classroom setting. With these elements in place within the classroom environment, students are able to collaborate with each other and report their findings not only to their specific groups but to the entire class. As a result, this builds their confidence and debate skills. Moreover, students are able to see the horizontal and vertical relationship of the various concepts that they are studying. Teachers mentioned providing essay prompts and utilizing questioning techniques when teaching that are embedded with depth of knowledge questions from level one to level four. In analyzing the depth of knowledge concepts, level one is basically recalling information, and level two requires students to apply some skill and

concepts to answer questions. Level three questioning focuses on strategic thinking. Level four moves forward to extend their thinking through being creative, analyzing, and proving their arguments. The depth of knowledge concept is a research based strategy that is used in schools by teachers to get students thinking beyond their rote remembering and recalling factual information.

As interviewee #3B recalled and stated, "This requires planning on the part of teachers and administration. Lessons must have a purpose so that students can identify and connect with real world application. Students must be able to touch it and see it so that they can relate to it, and this makes it real to them so that they can identify." As interviews continued, this was a major element in working with students who were African- American and from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Schools went the extra mile to provide resources and opportunities that students otherwise would have not been afforded the opportunity to see.

Strategically, these schools provided extra-curricular trips to connect lessons to the real world to help these students become globally prepared. In interview #9B, administration and teachers brought in working professionals and other career professionals during career day to foster a culture of future career goals for students. The administrator stated, "This allows students to see what can be accomplished with a solid education and preparation."

The schools involved in this study also used practical application in their curriculum to connect to the real world. This was more evident in the middle school grades than the earlier elementary grades. In school #14A, students actually did live

simulation classes to prepare them for the real world through a series of scenarios. As the interviews continued, here are some of the highlights from the interviewees.

Interviewee #1A.

The interviewee shared highlights from the strategic successes of their school involving the many programs that were in place to prepare the students to succeed in a global world. Many of the programs provided positive behavioral systems to encourage students to move forward academically while providing goal setting opportunities for the students. In this school, they provided several activities to help students to succeed in a global world such as: academic pep rallies, Lego Robotics, gender specific programs, and an introduction fine arts program. The academic pep rallies are events that are held at the end of every grading period. Other highlights mentioned during the interview acknowledged honor roll, perfect attendance, and good behavior students. There were celebrations held throughout the school year that focused on these accomplishments along with recognition for outstanding teachers and parents who volunteered support to the school. Additional programs included, Lego Robotics that allowed students to gain extra support in the engineering and science field. Through this program, students were encouraged to be future engineers while improving their classroom behavior and academic expectations. The interviewee stated that the school partnered with a local community college that helped with the sponsorship.

There were additional insights mentioned and notated during the interview relating to gender specific programs at the school. The school utilized G.E.M.S.-

Girls Embracing Math Skills and/or Science Program. This program was geared toward female students to help them improve in math. With the program, as progressions were made, the girls earned a different gemstone on the success chart as they improved in math. The interviewee made additional references to a program that they had for the boys as well. The program was entitled the Boy's Reading Fort. Through the basis of this program, boys were encouraged to become better readers. The interviewee stated directly that, "The boys earn military rank as they improve their reading scores. These programs were based on research that boys do not have a strong interest in reading as girls do not have a strong interest in math."

The interviewee referenced that the school also encouraged creativity in students through their afterschool fine arts program. This program took place in the evenings afterschool. The only requirements for students was that they maintained good behavior. Through this program, the school offered art, creative writing, drama, and choir. The program was showcased at various events in the community and surrounding areas, and it was facilitated by volunteer support from teachers and other local support.

Interview Question 3

Describe strategies that you have utilized to help students improve ARMT scores in reading and math.

a. What types of reading and math initiatives have you used to address the learning deficits of these students? Which ones were most effective and why?

b. What strategies were being utilized that you believe helped the students who are succeeding in reading and math? Why do you believe they were helpful?

Schools in this study all utilized strategies to help students to navigate and be successful on the ARMT Assessment. Although there was some variation in initiatives used by the different schools, all had a common purpose and those themes arose during the research and interviews. Some of the major things that were discussed in the interviews included: specific curriculum alignment, uninterrupted and protected instructional time, computer based programs, small group intervention, tier group instruction, and specific resources. Schools incorporated these elements to help prepare students for the ARMT.

When interviewed, administrators and teachers shared a common theme in following the Alabama mandated curriculum and course of study. Within the curriculum, individual schools tailored and utilized different programs to meet the needs of the individual students, and the individual school communities made data driven decisions to ensure that students were successful. The commonalities were numerous across the board including: Alabama Reading and Math Initiatives, grade level and departmentalization planning, RTI- Response to Intervention, small group intervention involving tier instruction, goal setting, integration across the curriculum, and goal setting to name a few.

All schools followed the Alabama Course of Study to meet their curriculum alignment and targeted needs. At the elementary level, schools ensured that they

followed the protected time frame for reading and math blocks. These blocks of time in the elementary schools were devised according to the standards for the state. Schools devoted 90 minutes to uninterrupted reading blocks. Also, at the elementary level, these blocks of time were done first. Several administrators and teachers alluded to the reasoning that students tend to comprehend better in the morning than after lunch because attention spans are better in the morning hours. In the middle school settings, this was not always the case because scheduling tended to be different. These students were being prepared to adapt to the high school setting. Therefore, the scheduling of their classes varied due to the time that they were scheduled. During the interviews, question three was addressed in the following ways.

During interview #5A, the administrator made reference to staffing needs verses the ability to accommodate all the student population at a certain time. Based on state allocation of resources and the school budget, it is possible for schools in Alabama to lose teaching units depending on state allocation and student enrollment. We have to make adjustments in scheduling on a year by year bases. The goal becomes then to make sure that every student has their core classes.

In the reading block, time was allotted for whole group instruction, small group instruction incorporating tier groups and intervention, and peer to peer collaboration. Schools also followed their adopted reading series, and within the adopted reading series, there were small group lessons and leveled texts to accommodate students who were missing some of the foundational elements.

Interviewee #4B recalled and stated, “Close reading techniques have been successful in helping with comprehension. Students were able to read a section chunking the text and then they wrote in their own words what the passage was saying to them.”

In preparation for the ARMT and in the involving the use of data making decisions.

Interview #7B.

The interviewee spoke about the use of standardized testing practices within the school. The interviewee pulled data from previous ARMT based practice such as Renaissance Star Math and Reading reports, and Stride Academy. Those reports were then utilized to individualize instruction to create lessons to help in the areas of math and reading. The interviewee referenced the use of differentiated instruction with support systems from the reading coach working with small groups to build reading comprehension and other foundational skills. There was also a math intervention teacher to help those students who were struggling specifically in math. From a direct classroom perspective, the interviewee stated, “I use a variety of techniques in my classroom to prepare my students; partner reading, drill and practice, question and answer sessions, exit slips, timed tests, computer based programs, formative and summative assessments.”

Schools also used additional resources based on instruction to stimulate the interest of the students that they serve which incorporate real life scenarios. Interviewee #4B stated, this past year our system initiated a new math program called

"If I Had a Hammer." Here is what the interviewee had to say directly concerning the program.

Interview #4B.

> The program is a "hands on" approach to teaching fractions. Perry Wilson was always a slow reader in school. Come to find out he had dyslexia, but he didn't know it. This caused him to have low self-esteem and he thought he couldn't succeed in college. He was working in a carpenter's shop and found out he was very good at what he calls "street math." Street math is his word for using math in the real world. He has created a program using technology and wooden blocks to teach fractions. This program is called the "Big Inch." This program is effective because it combines technology and "hands on." The students can use the visuals to help them understand.

Interviewee #8B believed strongly that reinforcement of skills was important along with STAR Reading, volunteer tutors, utilization of IXL, and novel studies. This is what the interviewee said about these programs and areas of support.

Interview #8B.

> I believe the novel studies have been instrumental in helping students to improve their comprehension and critical thinking skills. We also provide and institute math nights. Lessons are conducted by teachers. These are nights that are designed and incorporated in conjunction with PTO. I truly believe that these nights are impactful. Some parents have the desire to help their children but are unable to because they do not understand the math

themselves. I think IXL is a wonderful program that is utilized to help children to improve their math skills. The children at our school enjoy working on IXL, and have access to working on this program at home as well.

Interview #1A.

The interviewee stated that the school focused on gender specific programs to help with reading and math deficits. During the interview, it was notated that the school also offered tutoring, and it was stated that gender specific programs were most effective because of the intentional intervention used and the length of time that the students were engaged. This process was started at the beginning of the year and benchmarks were made throughout various points during the year to monitor progress and growth. Tutoring was later utilized at the mid-year point. This process involved all faculty and staff, and strategies were developed to meet individual student needs.

Interview #6B.

In interview #6B, the interviewee stated that the school worked extensively on writing across the curriculum. Within their writing, they utilized a shared format that include (RISC) Restate, Include, Details, Support Details, and Conclude. They used this formula to teach successful writing. Mention was made of their school using comprehension strategies to help students to develop critical thinking skills and to further develop reading comprehension. The interviewee stated, "We allow students to turn and talk with others. Writing their responses to questions. They have to make comparisons and justifications for math and reading. Graphic organizers are also utilized."

Interview #2A.

Interview #2A stated that scientific based research materials were used and that there were specific time blocks for reading and math. During this time, reading was uninterrupted, and the school focused heavily on standards based instruction. Progress monitoring was used to track students. "Every classroom had centers going with various tier instruction. Fluency and comprehension were a constant." Reference was made to accountability and supports such systems such as exit slips, journals, word walls, and vocabulary being used. In individual classrooms, students were grouped according to ability based on how they scored on previous assessments scores.

Interview #5A.

Interview #5A elaborated on the use of incorporated technology to help with the successes and gains in reading and math. Because they were a Title I school, IXL, a computer based program that assists with reading math was purchased. This program excited parents because it was a resource they could use at home. IXL play a vital role in improving STAR scores along with Read 180 and other school wide researched based and scripted programs for math. .

Interview Question 4

Describe aspects of your school and instructional programs that you believe are making a difference with students who are succeeding academically.

- Physical environment
- Organization of the school day

- Approaches to teaching and learning
- Specific curriculum

Why do you believe that these elements have been effective?

This area of research focus covered a broad perspective. The schools in this study worked untiringly to make sure that the environment at their schools was conducive for learning. Most made reference to their buildings being bright and colorful while providing the space for students to open their minds to learn and focus on school work. They worked constantly to maintain clean and inviting atmospheres throughout their school buildings inside and outside. Maintaining the exterior of the buildings was just as important as maintaining the interior buildings. There was a major focus of importance as to how the schools made a priority of the appearance of their buildings. The schools took great pride in providing perpetual care that was put into detail from flowers being planted, rose gardens, trees, shrubbery, and the maintenance of lawn care. The sight and entrance of the school buildings provided and painted a vivid picture of detail and precision. It gave the impression that someone cares about the schools. As I dialogued with school administrators and teachers, I was able to see their schools and its creativity. Their buildings were colorful and tastefully decorated to create a perfect educational environment.

The organization of the school varied throughout the research findings depending upon the structure of the school. The primary differences that were found between elementary and middle schools concerned the teaching of core subjects. Each school type respectively organized their school days based on curriculum and the

Alabama Course of Study. Typically in the elementary settings, reading and math took place in the mornings before lunch. However, this organizational structure varied for middle schools grade levels.

School culture and climate are also major factors embedded in the instructional programs that are making a difference. Moreover, in these schools, there were systems put into place to keep students from failing by ensuring that they completed assignments. Staff members work together to help students make it, and failure is not an option. Here is what the interviewees had to say when asked about question four.

Interview #10A.

Interview #10A stated that their school climate helps the students be more successful academically. They have a positive behavior program that addresses set expectations and goals along with a reward system for when students meet or exceed the expectation

Interview #3B.

Classrooms are organized in cooperative groups so that children have an opportunity to interact with each other throughout the school day. Children work collaboratively (turning and talking) in order discuss lessons and solve problems. The organization of the school day is structured so that all teachers teach the core academic subjects. I am very proud that the organization of the school day provides for each teacher to have small group instruction in reading and math. The teachers at our school feel that all children can learn.

> Special education students are included in the general education classrooms. Here at our school, the curriculum standards are taught. If we just simply teach students to pass a test, we are setting our students up for failure. If students are taught the standards, they will do well on the assessments.

Interview #7B.

Interview #7B elaborated on their school by emphasizing that is was very clean, well kept, and organized while speaking to the safe and effective environment that it provides. The interviewee went on to say that their school day was very organized with structure that consisted of routines, flexibility, fun, and creativity. During the interview, it was emphasized that creativity and thinking outside of the box ideas were encouraged. Differentiation was a major focus while incorporating a variety of teaching methods and strategies. The school focused on this to meet the students educationally, physically, and emotionally. Parental involvement was also encouraged. The interviewee also stressed that curriculum was researched based and approved. Also, the school followed their district course of study and pacing guides to stay on track throughout the year. Moroever, the interviewee felt that by providing students a clean, safe, and welcoming environment with caring teachers, this helped students to feel cared for. Interview #7B stated, "Students like to know what is expected of them at all times. I also believe in a hands on approach that fosters creativity and expands the imagination that leads to well-rounded students."

Interview #4B.

Interview #4B also emphasized that their school was very clean and clutter free. During the interview, it was stated that, "This type of atmosphere helps the students focus and learn. We also display the students' work. They love to have their work on display." The interviewee felt that consistency was very important in education and that teaching and learning should remain the major focus at school. At this school, they utilized strategies that included: direct instruction, small group intervention, use of technology, help from the school interventionist, parent communication, and hands on learning. The school also focused heavily on the Alabama Math and Science Technology Initiative (AMSTI) as a part of the curriculum. Teachers at the school attend math and science workshops through the year and in the summer. From the workshops, teachers incorporate hands on strategies. In AMSTI science, the students create a science notebook, and they participate in investigations while writing their findings in their science notebook. In AMSTI math, the teachers take what they have learned and unpack the standards by giving examples on how to teach the standards. From this, teachers are able to see the progressions each year.

Interview #6A.

Interview #6A explained that their entire school has been renovated: library, several classrooms, lunchroom, office, and other parts of the building. Reference was made to the grounds on the school campus being manicured. On the grounds of school, there was also a fish pond. The school utilized every space possibly to ensure

that it was educationally functionable. The interviewee stated directly that, "Aides work with specific students. All teachers are required to ensure that students are practicing life strategies, teaching strategically, and administration visits each classroom every day." At the school, students use technological programs such as Classworks and IXL. In addition to using these programs at school, students also are able to access these programs from home.

Interview #3A.

Interview #3A stated that their school culture focused on teaching and learning, high expectation, individualized instruction, problem solving teams, and all stakeholders involved with the school. During the interview, it was stated that the school day is organized for maximum effect on student learning and that the school organization reflects the values and goals of the staff toward student learning. In addition, strong emphasis is also placed on safety, learning, and the master schedule. The master schedule ensures that each subject is valued in the process of teaching and learning. "The way that we are approaching teaching and learning is moving from teacher centered to student centered teaching. We have also moved away from our traditional style of rows to grouping the desks together, and some teachers have tables." The school also utilizes inquiry based learning with a hands on approach.

Interview Question 5

In your school setting, describe parent participation/involvement in the students' education.

In a majority of the school settings, the consensus was that parent involvement could be better. The results show that there are many possible factors that come into the equation when parental participation is researched. Out of the interviews conducted at these schools, the demographics show that many of these parents are single, unemployed, under employed, working multiple jobs or varied shift work. These things are not an excuse. However, they may factor into the equation.

There were also some notable barriers discussed during the interviews concerning parental involvement. Sometimes as it was expressed, often homework may be sent home. In some cases, the parents are unable to help their children because they often lack the understanding. Other times, transportation may be the issue. There may only be one car in the home, and everyone has to use it. Therefore, everyone is pulled in different directions not leaving enough time to make it to all the engagements or activities. In some cases, there may not be transportation at all in the home leaving parents dependent upon outside sources such as cabs, buses, other family members, and friends.

In low socioeconomic environments of these schools, many of the students tended to be transient. Therefore, they moved frequently which made it difficult for the school to keep up with the phone numbers and addresses. This made it hard for the schools to get into contact with the parents. The interviewees responded this way to question five.

Interview #2B.

During interview #2B, the interviewee stated that the school works to ensure that parents are involved in the children education, and that it was disappointing to see that some parents are not as involved as they should be. Also, it was expressed that some of the parents do not come out for parental conferences, and it can appear to be a struggle at times to get them to participate in other activities. The interviewee stated, " It is a sad situation when the teacher, principal, and or parent specialist has to go to a child's home because the teacher has been unsuccessful with trying to get the parent to come to the school to discuss their child's academic progress." Other areas of discussion included attempted to get parents involved in their child's academic by sending home weekly newsletters, weekly folders that contain various work samples, grades on classwork, grades on tests, letters from the teacher and/or principal about activities that are taking place at the school, making sure parents have access to their child's grades in INOW, having a school Facebook Page, have a school websites, and having system wide parent conferences in October and February.

Interview #1A.

We all wish we had more parental involvement in student education. In recognizing parents during our academic pep rally for their school support, we have managed to increase our parent participation slightly. I believe they understand the more they are involved the greater the chances of them being recognized during the pep rally drawing. We would always achieve 100%

during parent conference months in October and February because the expectations and the challenge the students put on their parents.

Interview #6A.

Socioeconomics play a role. We do not have high parental involvement. However, as it relates to me needing something, they will come through. Majority of my parents work in factories on many different shifts. This often times makes it hard for them to participate in PTO meetings. Once again, if I call them personally with needs, they respond. So there is participation, just in a different way. Once the parents see the need, they respond. I use social media such as twitter to get the word out.

There were some schools in the research that had more positive results with their parental participation.

Interview #1B.

Parents were supportive. They came out to the school festivals. They will support you. I will text, call, email, and sent communication home. They turned out for the Christmas production. It could be perceived that they do not care, but when we put on our productions, we have huge turn outs. Some of the parents serve as volunteers. They looked forward to it. All the students get a chance to display their talents. So they felt special. Even the students that may have be behavior problems, they were eager to participate. For the Black History Celebration, they also turned out well. It filled the parents with joy. Communication with parents was very important. We used PLCS and learned

from each other. We built their self- esteem by allowing them to show their gifts and talents.

Interview #8B.

We have a PTO. It is active, and it is a small group. It is not as large as I would like. We also have terrific Thursdays for those parents who cannot come out to PTO meetings. We dispatch the same information given at PTO meetings. We have parent conferences, and some of our parents serve on the advisory committee. They also are responsible in looking at the student handbook and student compact.

Interview #7A.

Interview #7A expressed that faculty and staff work to build relationships with students and families. The interviewee elaborated more by stating that school truly believed in parent-school communication should be open and frequent. The school accomplished this through the use of student planners, the Remind 101 app, school website, school newsletters, emails, school calendar magnet, parent portal for student management program (INow), conferences, open house, family literacy nights, and special events. The school's PTO was active in providing family-school events such as music and art nights, spring family dances, and parent classroom volunteers.

Interview Question 6

What is your school doing specifically to contribute to positive results? Please include the following: teaching strategies, parental involvement, community stakeholders, curriculum, etc.

In review and analysis of the data for positive results in these schools, many of the answers have been earlier reported through questions one to five. During the interviews and reporting, the elements were addressed earlier relating to teaching strategies, parental involvement, and curriculum. The main area that the interviewees addressed when asked this question was the area of the community stakeholders. Community stakeholders are important in these school communities for extra support. As the old adage and proverb states, it takes a village to raise a child. All of the support mechanisms from the community are needed to keep these schools vibrant. The research showed overwhelming results of support from school faculty and from community stakeholders in the schools. These partnerships appear to be important in the lives of students and their education. This is how the interviewees responded to question six.

Interview #2B.

Interview #2B referenced that orientation is offered for new students at their school. Parents nights were held to allow parents the opportunity to visit the school, schedule conferences, see students work, and to watch special programs. The school also used the Response to Intervention (RTI) approach to aid students who were struggling with math or reading skills. The interviewee elaborated specifically by

stating that, “We use differentiated instruction, re-teach, review, and set goals. We work hard with our students, parents, and faculty to meet those goals. We celebrate our student victories.”

Interview #4B.

Our school has a mentor program. This past year I had the greatest mentor ever. He would come to my classroom once a week and help with academics and encouragement. We also have community stakeholders who help with programs and whatever needs we might have.

Interview #1A.

We have implemented student goal setting where the students take ownership of their learning. During parent conference month, the teachers allow the students to provide an update on their progress and phone communications for each student. Surveys are administered to students, parents, and community stakeholders in an effort to identify the need. We then include the survey results in our school improvement plan. We develop a goal and then create strategies to monitor frequently to ensure that progress is being made. These are a few of the additional things we are doing to contribute to get positive results.

Interview #6B.

We have tutoring. Any grade will be willing to stay after and help. People from the community are willing to come in and volunteer their time. The investment of a teacher’s time is a huge strength. Teachers buy into what is

going on in the school. To get volunteers, we send out forms or sometimes we just ask.

Interview #5B.

Interview #5B stated that community stakeholders contribute greatly to the positive results in the school by providing grants and giving volunteer service. Interview #5B elaborated further by stating "The parent and the community are your primary stakeholders. Social services impact our students who need additional social, academic, and behavior services that impede the students' progress in school." The school was also supported by the local business sector, churches, media outlets, community organizations, utility companies, manufacturing facilities, post-secondary education initiatives, and other philanthropic entities.

Conclusion and Themes from the Research

This section concludes chapter four and the purpose of the research. This section is intended to answer why schools are having success with African-American students in grades three through eight and to answer what is working in these schools. Moreover, this section intends to answer what factors contributed to these particular schools in making adequate yearly progress as stated by the Alabama State Department of Education. This section begins with the themes that were found in the research and the embedded codes in each of those major themes. Tables are also given to reference the research.

Themes Table

Table 3 reports the themes and sub-themes resulting from the interviews with the control group of schools and the sample group of schools. The control sample group of schools are numbered one through five, and the randomly selected group of schools are numbers six through ten. There were a total of six major themes identified as a result of the interviews and reflected in the table. Within those major themes that arose in the data are embedded codes that fall within the category of the major themes. For each school interview in the research, there were a total of two possible responses for each embedded code to signify if this was taking place within the local individual school. One school administrator and one teacher were interviewed from each school. Of the six themes that emerged, there were two ideals that were found. In theme one, a needs analysis emerged, and it related to problems that these African-American students faced in their school settings. Themes two through six were positive solutions to the needs of students in the research.

Table 4

Themes from Each of the Interviews (#- School)

Themes	**1-Social Developmental Needs**				**2- Specified Curriculum**					**3- Tutoring**				
	Cultural/Environment	Safety	Basic Needs	Supplies	Uninterrupted Math and Reading	Data Meetings/Goals Setting	PLCs	Data Driven Decisions	Research Based Strategies	General Tutoring	Before School	After School	Strategies	Gender Specific Programs
Interviews														
#1 (1A)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
#1 (1B)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
#2 (2A)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
#2 (2B)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
#3 (3A)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
#3 (3B)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
#4 (4A)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
#4 (4B)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
#5 (5A)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X	
#5 (5B)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X	
#6 (6A)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
#6 (6B)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
#7 (7A)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
#7 (7B)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
#8 (8A)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
#8 (8B)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
#9 (9A)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X	
# 9 (9B)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X	
#10 (10A)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X	
#10 (10B)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X	

Themes from Each of the Interviews (# - School)

Codes	**4 –Balance Nutrition**				**5- Volunteer Participation**			**6- Technology**					
	CNP-Balanced Nutrition	Breakfast	After School Snacks	Blessings in Backpacks	Parental Involvement	Community Stakeholders	PTO	Smartboards	Interactive Technology	STAR	IXL	Read 180	
Interviews	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#1(1A)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#1 (1B)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#2 (2A)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#2 (2B)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#3 (3A)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#3 (3B)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#4 (4A)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#4 (4B)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
#5 (5A)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X			X	
#5 (5B)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X				
#6 (6A)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#6 (6B)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#7 (7A)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#7 (7B)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
#8 (8A)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X				
#8 (8B)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X				
#9 (9A)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X				
#9 (9B)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X				
#10 (10A)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X				
#10 (10B)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X				

Once the research was conducted and the interviews were transcribed. The data was coded in NVivo to find the major themes from the research. Data was gathered from each major theme and themes were generated based on the research. Each theme was identified and counted as one of the themes mentioned in each interview conducted.

Table 5

NVivo Software (Coded Themes)

Schools	Interview	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6
School 1	1A	12.19%	24.46%	0.1824	0.1724	0.0936	0.1259
	1B	12.86	0.2446	0.1830	0.1724	0.0936	0.1259
School 2	2A	12.92	24.51	18.24	17.18	9.36	11.72
	2B	12.38	24.38	17.89	17.10	9.28	12.51
School 3	3A	14.14	26.84	10.49	18.81	10.25	13.79
	3B	13.86	26.18	10.23	18.35	10.00	14.32
School 4	4A	14.14	26.69	10.43	18.81	10.16	13.79
	4B	14.14	26.78	10.43	18.81	10.25	13.79
School 5	5A	15.08	24.75	8.43	20.06	10.93	14.70
	5B	15.08	24.75	8.30	20.06	10.93	14.70
School 6	6A	16.04	30.30	8.79	11.27	11.57	15.57
	6B	15.96	30.21	8.85	11.33	11.56	15.56
School 7	7A	15.73	29.78	10.08	11.17	11.40	15.33
	7B	15.79	29.84	10.24	11.07	11.40	15.33
School 8	8A	17.43	33.00	09.67	12.38	12.63	07.65
	8B	17.42	32.99	09.66	12.37	12.63	07.65
School 9	9A	18.22	29.90	10.14	12.94	13.20	08.00
	9B	17.09	28.65	09.75	12.39	12.65	07.66
School 10	10A	17.48	28.63	09.69	12.45	12.67	07.68
	10B	16.67	27.65	09.58	11.72	12.29	07.05

Note. Data represents the percent of times each theme was mentioned during the interviews.
Theme 1 = Socio-Developmental
Theme 2 = Specified Curriculum
Theme 3 = Tutoring
Theme 4 = Nutrition
Theme 5 = Volunteer Participation
Theme 6 = Technology

As data was reviewed and analyzed from the schools and research, there were some consistent themes and codes that were developed in connection with the research. The interviews were interwoven with various themes throughout, and within those themes codes were developed in conjunction with the themes. There were a total of six themes found in conjunction with the research. Embedded in those themes were several codes that were noted.

Theme 1: Socio-Developmental Needs

Social Developmental Needs were those needs that students from low socio-economic backgrounds brought to school with them. Often they were apathetic towards school and academics. Theme one unlike the other themes is about needs and not solutions. These were characteristics that were noted during the research and interviews conducted. These needs were coded in the following manner:

- Cultural/Environmental: This code was used when the interviewee analyzed the students lack of social development and communication skills.
- Safety: This code was used to express students' home environments and living conditions.

- Basic Needs/Supplies: This code was used to address students who had a lack of clothing and amenities, and this code was also used to address students who did not have basic supplies such as paper, pencils, or funds to purchase these supplies.

When interviewed, administrators and teachers overwhelmingly addressed the need for socio-developmental instruction for the children that they were entrusted with. All ten of the schools addressed the issues of needing to deal with basic needs. As indicated in each of the transcripts and interviews, there was a strong emphasis placed on building relationships with all students. Because of limited resources in most of the homes of these students, schools provided additional emotional support to these students by providing basic nutrition and supplies needed for school. One administrator stated that it is hard to get a child to focus on school work while they are still hungry. This was an essential need that had to be met before students could ever be compliant with functioning in a normal school day setting. Embedded within this framework was basic safety needs. This included proper clothing for school. Four out of ten of the schools maintained clothing closets and were provided with outside resources to ensure that the students were properly clothed and given clean apparel to wear to school.

Social skills were also a part of theme. Out of 20 interviews, 18 stated that social skills were a problem for most of the students that they served. Many of these students came to school not knowing how to communicate effectively. As addressed, administrators and teachers stated that they were often loud and boisterous in their

tone and conversations with others. However, all of the interviewees felt when students were taught how to communicate with others that they could adapt to regular settings as other students.

All ten of the schools felt that with the proper nurturing environment these students could adapt to the individual school culture and environments. They simply had to be taught and given an opportunity to succeed. The interviewees stated that these particular students had to have empathy on their behalf to help them to adjust to the academic environment. Faculty and staff had to show concern for the students' situations. Moreover, they felt that the students had to be welcomed and made to feel a part of the school body. Once this happened, they could perform as well as other students who were given the same opportunities.

Theme 2: Specified Curriculum

Specified curriculum were those factors that influenced teaching and learning. Curriculum was the basis of day to day operations of the school day schedule. Curriculum was analyzed by pacing guides, state standards, and courses of study.

- Uninterrupted Math and Reading: This code refers to time that was set aside daily and undisturbed for special focus and attention in the areas of math and reading. There were a total of ninety minutes set aside for reading and sixty minutes of uninterrupted time set aside for math during the daily schedules in elementary grades.
- Data Meetings/Goal Setting: This code refers to emphasis on and meetings set aside to address curriculum needs along with teaching, learning, and growth in

students. Data meetings were held with teachers, and goal setting were meetings that were held with students. Goal setting relates to special emphasis being placed on every student's individual progress.

- PLCs/PD: The PLCs code refers to Professional Learning Communities in which faculty meet regularly to discuss goals of students and the overall achievement among grade levels and other areas of content within the individual schools. Also, this code was used to address professional development for teachers including various seminars and workshops.
- Data Driven Decisions: This code was used to refer to the need in schools to address learning and make decisions based on formative needs analysis and assessments.
- Research Based Strategies: This code was used to discuss specific needs and instructional strategies to get an end result of growth in student performance.

Every school involved in the study followed the Alabama Course of Study for curriculum for each grade level. Out of 20 interviews, every person interviewed agreed that this was extremely important in achieving adequate yearly progress in their schools because every grade level builds on the previous grade. Data meetings were held at every school on a regular basis to monitor student growth and needs. Response to intervention (RTI) was also in place in these schools for students who were struggling in certain areas. Goal setting was done with every student to ensure their success. Students' progress was monitored formatively on a regular basis to prepare for the year's end summative testing. Teachers also

attended PLPs at every school and collaborated among grade levels to get better results from students. Strengths and weaknesses were taken into account to get positive results from students. Teachers were vested with a common interest at stake.

Specified math and reading blocks were a component of success in these schools. At the elementary level, all seven schools maintained uninterrupted math and reading blocks that were held at the beginning of the day so that students could focus more in the mornings than after lunch. Time was embedded in these blocks to allow tiered intervention so that every student could be reached with differentiated instructional support. In the middle school grades, classes were structured differently because of staffing and scheduling constraints. Administrators and teachers stated that it was not always possible to have every student scheduled for reading or math blocks/periods during the morning hours due to staffing limitations. Therefore, some students were required to take math and reading in the afternoons. However, these schools also held data meetings to discuss the progress of their students. Strategies and tutoring was also offered to help with intervention of these students.

Research based strategies were major themes that arose during the conversations and interviews. Once again, all of the schools that had positive results with testing focused heavily on research based strategies and curriculum. Adopted textbooks series were used in alignment with the curriculum to meet the daily needs of students. Administrators stated that they made observations and classroom visits regularly to check the progression of students.

Theme 3: Tutoring

Tutoring was the theme present in schools that provided extra support to students in need of extra tiered support and instruction.

- General Tutoring: This code referred to basic help provided to students during the hours of normal school day operation.
- Before School Tutoring: This code was used when schools provided tutoring before the normal school day hours of operation.
- After School Tutoring: This code was used when schools provided tutoring after the normal school day hours of operation.

Tutoring was a major theme and element in the schools. The schools had different ways that they addressed tutoring and extra help for students. All ten schools provided some form of tutoring services to their students. Tutoring at the elementary and middle schools levels was provided in math and reading. In the sample population of schools, tutoring was done in the afterschool program. Nutrition was provided in the afternoons for the students who attended, and bus transportation services were provided as well to ensure that the students were taken home on a daily basis. The tutoring days were Monday through Thursday. Specific curriculum was developed to help students to improve in the areas of reading and math. Special awareness was taken into account prior to the ARMT testing to review specific skills to further prepare students. Test taking strategies were implemented with resources that were designed specifically for the ARMT in form of COACH Books. These were tutorial books that contained item specs for ARMT testing. Examples were given

along with explanations and different scenarios to answer questions. During tutoring, students were grouped according to their ability levels.

Morning tutoring and intervention was held in two of the sample schools. These programs were designed and specified to be gender specific. Programs were designed to help the boys with reading and the girls with math. The students in these particular schools were given awards for their levels of participation in the various programs and incentives and positive rewards systems.

In the two sample elementary schools, proficiency levels on the ARMT testing were consistent throughout the testing years. School #1 averaged 92.10% proficiency in reading, and school #2 averaged 89.95% proficiency in reading. In math, these schools were also consistent in testing. School #1 averaged 90.00% in math proficiency, and school #2 averaged 88.00% proficiency. Schools at the middle school level provided and offered strategies time. This time was embedded within the daily schedule to work on specific skills that students were having trouble with.

Theme 4: Balanced Nutrition

Balanced nutrition was provided daily by each school's CNP child nutrition programs. Nutritional meals were prepared daily.

- CNP- Balanced Nutrition: This code was used to address balanced meals provided by the Child Nutrition Programs to students on a daily basis.
- Breakfast: This code refers to daily nutritional breakfast at school.
- After School Snacks: This code was used to express snacks during after school tutoring.

- Blessings in a Backpack: This code was used to explain snacks that were given to students on weekends and holidays.

Nutrition arose in all of the school interviews. Every school provided breakfast and nutritional lunches to students through their (CNP) Child Nutrition Programs. Numerous times during interviews, proper nutrition came up as one of the ultimate support mechanisms that had to be in place for a student to learn and pay attention during class. Many of the students were from single parent homes, and sometimes their parents were between jobs as stated in the interviews. Therefore, it was important to place special emphasis on nutrition programs. In the sample population of schools, local churches and community sponsors provided Blessings in a Backpack Meals on the weekends and holidays to these particular students. On Fridays and other special occasions these students were given nutritional snacks and meals to cover them until they got back to school. Administrators and teachers mentioned how grateful the students were to receive these treats knowing that they had something to eat over the weekend and other periods of time. Also, during tutoring sessions, the local district provided additional reprieves for afternoon nutritional snacks while the students were at tutoring.

Theme 5: Volunteer Participation

Volunteer participation themes were notated in schools and coded in the following manner:

- Parental involvement: This code was used to analyze parent participation at the local school level.

- Community Stakeholders: This code was used to address local businesses, civic organizations, and other people who volunteered at the local school on continuous basis.
- PTO: This code referred to the local school's Parent and Teachers Organizations.

Within all the framework of each of these schools, there was an underlying theme of outside influences in every school that involved help and assistance on different fronts. All ten schools claimed to value the support of volunteers in their local schools. Moreover, this overarching theme was expressed in all twenty of the interviews. However, they varied in their approaches based on their individual missions and visions. Every school in the study was deemed a Title I school by the Federal Government. Two of the ten schools had a boys mentoring program for troubled inner city youth. Time was allotted on a weekly basis for the mentors to meet with selected boys during lunch and at other various times to teach them basic skills including socializing and coping with the day to day stresses of their lives. Mentors helped the boys with maintaining good behavior, and a part of the program was centered on teaching and giving them experiences that they typically were not afforded by living in the inner city. On a field trip, the boys were provided opportunities to go to a local ranch. They were taught how to fish, and they went horseback riding along with hay riding. A picnic was provided for them. The students were introduced to different types of farm animals and given an opportunity to care for them. The principals of these two schools stated that this was a highlight

for the boys and they stated that they noticed differences in behavior and social learning for these boys.

PTOs were also existent in every school. There were mixed experiences of the different PTOs. Eight of the ten schools expressed that participation could be better, and these schools tried different approaches to getting more participation with their local PTOs such as: parental involvement nights, email communications, mass communication with all cast calls, Facebook, and regular memos. The schools expressed the importance of having parents participate in their children's educational process. However, the schools were not always successful with this process because of different barriers that often affected communication between the school and home. As administrators and teachers were interviewed, they talked about the breakdown in communication which sometimes led to little or no communication between the school and home. Also, they alluded to the different dynamics that were at play. Often when they attempted to make basic communication, phone numbers had been changed or disconnected making it more cumbersome to make basic attempts to get into contact with the parents of students. Often in these cases, students were transient moving from location to location which made it harder to keep up with addresses and phone numbers. Schools made other attempts through use of the social-media in the form of their school Facebook page to send out reminders of important dates such as report cards, parental conferences, and other events at school. Schools also relied on email communication to contact parents. All school cast calls were made to send out mass communication at one time hoping that the word would also be spread this way

to parents. With school cast calls, schools had the ability to communicate and relay messages to parents/guardians through recorded timed automated phone calls to each of the students' homes. Basic memos and letters were also still given. However, many of the interviewees stated that this type of communication sometimes does not ever get to the parents because students forget to give it to their parents until it is too late.

Community stakeholders were also a part of the process in attributing to positive results in the schools. All ten schools commented that community stakeholders played a major role within their local schools from volunteering, providing financial support, to mentoring. This was a major element in schools. Community stakeholders were sometimes local businesses and other organizations who volunteered to help mentor students and sponsor other support down to the individual classroom teachers who needed basic fundamental things for classroom support. Administrators and teachers made mention of the fact that these community stakeholders often came in weekly and made visits to help out with assistance to get special projects across. They also read and helped to provide math services to students with individual needs. As many of the interviewees stated, they were visible to the students and faculty.

Theme 6: Technology

Technology was used in the schools in a myriad of forms to reach students by way of differentiated instruction.

- Smartboards: This code refers the use of digital whiteboards within the classroom environment.
- Interactive Technology: This code was used when technology was infused through textbooks and other digital resources.
- STAR: This code refers to online assessments used by Renaissance Star Math and Reading for progress monitoring.
- IXL: (From "I excel") This code refers to a math and language practice website for grades K-12.

Technology was present in every school involved in the research. Each school used technology differently to get a desired outcome with their students. All ten schools in both groups had access or used smartboard technology with some of their classrooms. This gave teachers access to the current events, podcasts, and interactive lessons where students could learn with assistive technology links that were applied to planned lessons. Moreover, students were able to interact with other students from different locations and schools through the use of technology. Teachers also benefited greatly through the use of clickers which gave them formative assessments and instant feedback on their students. During interactive lessons, teachers used this form of technology to make sure that everyone participated in class. Also, by using clickers, the teachers instantly knew how all of the students answered questions and responded to questions. Feedback was instantaneous, and it helped teachers to adjust instruction and better prepare lessons. Interactive technology was also used with

some textbooks. In some classes students were able to log into their textbook by application online which gave them access to their books at home

STAR was the most prominent reading and math resource that was used at all of the elementary schools. This program is an online assessment program that measures progress in students. This is a program that is used all over the county and was developed by Renaissance Learning. Teachers used this program to formatively assess where their students were in the areas of reading and math. Within the program, there are reports that measure longitudinal data over the course of time. From that framework, teachers performed goal setting strategies with their students to get optimal performance.

IXL (meaning 'I excel') was the second most prominent overall used resource by schools. This program had an adaptive engine. Therefore, as the students progressed in math and language arts their skill levels increased with the program. Administrators and teachers stated that they were impressed with this program because if a student missed a particular problem, the program reviewed with them their mistakes and they were able to make corrections. There were also other programs used by teachers in various schools.

Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion and to summarize the results, questions one through six of the interviews addressed multiple themes. Many of these themes support past research that has been noted in the literature review. All of the schools in the study had African American students within the population of their schools. Most served some

students who came from low socio-economic backgrounds. There are several notable factors in all these schools that were a part of the equation. These schools had high numbers of free and reduced lunch rates. The single parent ratio was high, and most of these parents received funding from governmental agencies to make ends meet on a weekly and monthly basis. Survival and the struggle for these families was real on a day to day basis. Many of these students' families had to decide and prioritize what bills needed to be paid during the month just to eat and to provide the basic essentials for the households. These are unique struggles that not only affected the parents but the students also.

Parental support and engagement was limited in most of the schools in the study with some exceptions. The schools worked tirelessly to incorporate additional programs and follow ups to increase the parental support and engagement. Often this was envisioned through utilizing different techniques to communicate and reach out to the parents by: using social media, other forms technology, calls, emails, and traditional methods such as letters and memos. The students from these backgrounds tended to come to school ill equipped for the school day. Administration and teachers took it upon themselves to have the basic essentials available to their students on a case by case basis so that they could survive and thrive in the educational setting. This often required adjustments and creating a culture and climate that supported creative thinking with a set mission and vision to accomplish success for all students within these environments. Overwhelmingly, the results show that when the

conditions were set in place these students could survive and thrive when empathy and compassion was shown to them.

The schools in this study used varied research based and comprehensive strategies to support their programs with activities, techniques, and methodologies. All of the schools followed the Alabama Curriculum and Course of Study for all subjects involved. In teaching students to survive in a global world, life experiences were taught to connect the standards and lessons to actual living. These robust experiences also connected college and career readiness standards to the lessons that the students were able to receive. Students were given opportunities to be prepared for future careers and endeavors through these processes while being afforded the opportunity to be mentored by career professionals, extra-curricular activities including off site field trips, and career fairs.

In preparation of the ARMT, schools also used varied research-based initiatives to make adequate yearly progress while ensuring that students meet all the goals of their specified curriculum. Reading and math initiatives were utilized to reach these yearly goals. Schools followed pacing guides and the curriculum to ensure that yearly progress goals were met. Specified times and uninterrupted blocks were also incorporated and embedded in the school day to reach goals. Goal setting was done and created to let the students have ownership in the process and their education. Data was also used to help drive the instruction and curriculum goals. Tiered intervention, small group instruction, and differentiated instruction was utilized to reach the individual learner.

The results from the interviews showed that the schools felt that consistency and daily routines were essential for driving instruction and fostering success with these particular students.

The schools' instructional programs were also consistent and built on the curriculum. Throughout the research and study, schools in this study maintained a pleasant and beautiful environment for students. The physical environments were clean and accommodating not only for students but staff members also. Schools maintained the care of the lawn and facilities to create environments that were conducive for learning. The structure of the school day was dependent upon curriculum and core subjects. Each school worked to maximize the potential of the school day in their individual buildings. Tutoring, tier instruction, whole group, and small group lessons were taught in conjunction with daily lessons. At the district and local level, overall consensus showed that professional learning communities (PLCs) were being utilized to ensure that administrators and teachers collaborated with each other to follow pacing guides and to address specific curriculum needs as it relates to data. Data meetings were held to ensure that the curriculum was aligned as needed so that data would continue to drive instructional needs. Also, in these schools, goal setting was done with students to let them know where they were with individual academics in terms of specific grade levels. Technology was also incorporated into the curriculum to help build skills and to assist with instructional lessons. Many of these programs were adaptable and able to adjust to the grade level and instructional level of each student. These technological programs were also used as formative

assessment and predictive assessments which helped the teachers to adjust their instruction based on the needs of the students.

Community stakeholders were also an important element present in the schools. Not only did they provide monetary support, but they also provided support in terms of time and talent. The schools spoke to the importance of these community stakeholders as to how they made a difference in the lives of their schools. Many of the volunteers came in on a daily or weekly basis to provide support around the school and in the classrooms. Some of the things included reading to the students, mentoring, coaching, providing extra-curricular activities, and tutoring. The partnerships between the schools and the community stakeholders helped the schools to stay afloat survive and thrive.

Moreover, the schools in this study had mission and vision statements. These were not only just statements, but they were living and breathing words. It was clear that the schools embraced their visions and missions by the way that students and teachers responded to the culture and climate of the school. These were expected norms, and the ownership could be seen on the part of faculty and students. Clear expectations and goals were given and outlined. The schools worked to ensure that the curriculum was taught, and the schools worked to ensure success for all students.

Chapter V: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to research the positive effects of schools on African-American students in grades three through eight in the state of Alabama. Interviewees included school administrators and teachers from each of the ten schools. Twenty interviewees participated in this study. From each school one administrator and one teacher were interviewed regarding their individual school and student population that they served. All of the interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes. Once the research and interviews were completed, there were a total of six themes emerged that administrators and teachers viewed as having a positive impact on students and student learning. These themes were: Socio-developmental, Specified Curriculum, Tutoring, Balanced Nutrition, Volunteer Participation, and Technology. Each theme was also coded for specific elements that came up in the interviews.

Research Questions

- For schools that are having a positive impact on the education of African-American students, what is working?
- For schools that made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in Alabama under NCLB, what factors attributed to the success of African-American students who took the Alabama Math and Reading Assessment in grades three through eight? If they did not make adequate yearly progress, why not?

- Why are these things working in the schools that have success?

Primary Categories of Questions

- Impact of schools on learning and achievement of African-American students.
- Interaction of parent and social skills of students.
- Questions to identify approaches that are working with students in areas of reading, math students with learning issues, and other general strategies that work.

This study sought to answer the question, "What is working in these schools who consistently maintain positive results in African-American students in the areas of reading and math?" As interviews were conducted and later analyzed for themes, many elements were brought to the forefront.

Discussion

This research was conducted in elementary and middle schools in Alabama public schools. There were a total of ten schools that research was conducted in. Administrators and teachers were interviewed. The districts and schools were very open with their schools and the functionality of the culture and climates within individual school settings, and they welcomed the research and interview process. Majority of the schools were Title I schools with high free and reduced lunch rates. These schools typically served a majority of low income and socially disadvantaged students.

As administrators and teachers were addressed during the interviews, it was evident that the culture and climate in these schools and districts focused on the whole child and their well-being. As so many expressed, teachers and administrators in these settings cared about the student populations in which they served. They had a heart for the children, schools, and the communities. Hiring was an intricate part of the success in these schools. As also expressed, a person has to care to work in these particular school settings because so many times resources are limited on so many different fronts.

There were many commonalities in themes found throughout the research and literature review. Schools that were making a difference in the lives of students shared many of the same ideals. Schools in the study shared common themes in providing structured curriculum, routine schedules, and clearly defined goals. Throughout the literature review and in the research, the results show that schools that are making a difference in the lives of African-American students understand curriculum needs and the alignment of the curriculum. As witnessed, each grade level supported the other in addressing the standards needed at each individual grade level. Communication between teachers was paramount, and the teachers knew what their individual students needed to give them the support that they needed to make it to the next level. Communication occurred not only between teachers and school administration, but it also was relayed to the individual students in the form of goal setting. There was no element of surprise for the students in these schools. They knew what was expected of them because their individual progress was relayed to

them through formative assessments, benchmarks, and other data. In fact, the students in these schools understood and took ownership in the process of their educational achievement goals.

An issue that the schools in this study have to deal with is the impact of the socio-economic reality. The interviews overwhelmingly made note and reference to students not coming to school prepared and not having the proper social skills to connect. They often come to school hungry and lacking basic soft skills and communication skills that students will need to have to survive in a global world. It is strongly recommended that schools continue to utilize every resource available to teach these skills and also incorporate enrichment activities to teach and embed social norms into the students.

So what worked to make a difference for these students? The following are areas mentioned by most of these successful schools to make a difference for their students.

Consistent Routines and Basic Necessities

Schools and districts in the research maintained a consistent daily schedule of routine procedures. The interviewees also expressed this need because they felt that the student populations that they served needed structure and routine environments to be successful. As seen in the research, many of the students came from varied backgrounds with situations that required the local schools to be proactive on the part of the students to help them to be successful.

The schools ensured that the students had the proper nutrition and a balanced diet while at school. Others went further to provide blessings in a backpack. These were extra accommodations provided in the form of food products that were distributed on Fridays to students to carry home to have something to eat over the weekend. By providing nutrition, many of these students in these settings were able to function better in the classroom environment. Schools in the research also ensured that local agencies were involved whenever necessary to provide additional resources such as clothing and other hygiene needs to help students maintain their dignity and to keep their self-respect elevated. The culture and climate in these school settings supported academics and the needs of each student from a holistic approach because they knew that you could not have one without the other successfully. Moreover, there were support mechanisms in place on nearly every front to get positive results and to help the students to become global prepared citizens. The schools also provided character lessons to their students to help them to understand the importance of survival in the world.

Curriculum Tied to Data on Student Progress

In Alabama, there has been a major push to have teachers to provide rigor through depth of knowledge questioning to get students talking more and involved with interactive lessons. Some of those strategies involve peer groups and other small groups within the classroom setting.

Data driven decisions were also made. In these schools, data was at the forefront of the decision making process. In several of the schools, data boards were

readily available so that all could see the progressions being made by teachers, individual classes, and the overall progression of the school as it related to their local districts and state level indicators. Wherever the problem areas existed in the academics, various instructional approaches were put into place to address these deficits in the form of tiered instruction, differentiated instruction, and small group instructional practices. It was evident that data was addressed constantly and re-evaluated as a moving target, and it did not catch anyone by surprise.

These schools and districts used formative assessments regularly to ensure that the standards being taught were understood by students and reflected in their individual tests scores. Adequate yearly progress goals were met by assessing benchmarks and goals multiple times during the academic school year. In the final analysis, the schools' hard work could be seen on the state's ARMT summative assessments for the academic school year. Schools and teachers that utilize multiple streams of data are better able to service their students. Past research indicates that this has not always been the case (Barnett, 2011).

Clear Mission and Vision

For the schools that were making a positive difference in the education of African-American students, there was a clear and defined school mission and vision. It was apparent that these were not just fancy words. In fact, the mission and vision statements truly correlated to the values of the schools. Teachers, students, parents, and community stakeholders understood the critical importance of the why behind these statements and where they were going. That was clearly defined. Workshops

and professional development were held regularly to ensure that the faculty was trained on the latest research based strategies. Administrators and teachers shared and acknowledged that they received support from their local districts. With this support, the schools were able to keep their goals and other targets clearly defined. The schools knew what their district's expectations were, and there were no secrets as to what they needed to do to meet those goals. From the district level, goals were prioritized according to adequate yearly progress. Therefore, the districts knew what areas that improvements were needed in.

Strong Emphasis on Mathematics

In the schools researched, a strong emphasis was placed on math across the curriculum. From an instructional approach, the teachers helped to facilitate the students' learning through frequency and repeated practice. Research in the literature from (Berry) indicated that fluency and competency in the area of math helped students to succeed (Berry, 2008). There were set routines that were followed on a daily basis in the classroom setting which allowed teachers to evaluate their students' performance from a formative approach on a regular basis. Embedded in the daily lessons were opportunities for students to explain, model, and use their ideas in correlation to math lessons. Moreover, there were classroom interactions between teachers and students ranging from teacher to student and student to student. In math blocks, students received uninterrupted math instruction of 60 minutes daily in the elementary settings. In the middle school time varied depending upon specified blocks of time in the daily school schedule.

Strong Emphasis on Reading

In the schools researched, a strong emphasis was placed on reading across the curriculum. Comprehension was a major element that was embedded in the development of reading in the schools. In the elementary schools, an uninterrupted 90 minute block of time was allotted each school day to focus solely on reading. During this time frame, each student received some whole group instruction where the teacher focused the weekly reading lessons on whole group to get those major elements of discussion across to the students. Each of the students also received small group level instruction from a tiered level perspective to be more inclusive of their individual student needs. Students were grouped according to their current ability levels. Teachers used formative assessments to track each student's performance and mastery or non-mastery of focus skills during the weekly lessons.

In middle school grades, students were typically on class schedule with equal blocks of time throughout the day and more emphasis on reading placed throughout the day in various classes. On the middle school level, students worked more independently when it came to reading. However, there were classes with intervention built into them.

Teacher Collaboration and Professional Development

The collaboration among teachers was excellent in the schools. Professional learning took place on a regular basis. Teachers collaborated in teams often meeting for grade level meetings and in other vertical teams. The curriculum and standards were discussed to meet the data goals collectively and on an individual basis to ensure

the success of the students. Also, the schools followed and stayed abreast of the latest trends in research as it related to data driven results. During these meetings, data was discussed in detail to aid in goal setting with the students. In the literature review, a case study was noted at Roosevelt Middle School in Oakland, California where the achievement gap was closing between African-American and Asian students (Symonds, 2004). At the school, data was utilized to constantly improve and drive decision making. Professional development also took place beyond the local schools. Teachers attended district level training and were given opportunities to attend other workshops as they were made available to them.

Strategies for Learning and Application of Learning

Math and reading strategies were also in place to help ensure positive results. Top priority was given to these areas of academics by following the Alabama Curriculum Standards. During these strategic blocks, the teachers not only taught in whole group formats but in small and tiered groups also. The needs of the individual learner were important to move the data and results forward. Whenever the need arose to make adjustments in teaching and the curriculum, adjustments were made to ensure that the standards were taught. Formative assessments, exit slips, journals, graphic organizers, and inquiry based techniques were used to help the students to think critically and to apply knowledge of what they learned through practical application. Teachers used depth of knowledge questions and techniques to help students to dig deeper into the whys behind a particular answer to a question.

Balanced Nutrition

Nutrition was also a major focal point for schools in the study. Schools in the study had high free and reduced lunch rates. Schools used opportunities to ensure that students were fed properly with balanced meals and other supplements. Several of the interviewees stressed that it was hard to teach a child when they were hungry because they could not focus on academics. Schools stressed the importance of this throughout the research, and they were creative in their approaches to make sure that the students they served were able to eat well while at school and even over the weekend. As the day began for many schools, students were directed straight to the lunchroom for breakfast daily to give them an opportunity to be served a nutritional balanced breakfast. Many of students got themselves up every morning along with other siblings without receiving properly nutritional meals to jumpstart their day. In many instances, some students were tardy for school and breakfast had already been served. In some of these cases, provisions were made to ensure that these particular students were fed also.

Students were encouraged to eat lunch every day. In schools that had afterschool tutoring sessions, the CNP departments provided nutritional snacks to hold the children over for their evening meals. Moreover, some schools partnered with local church and civic organizations to provide blessings in a backpack to students over the holidays and weekends to ensure that they had some substance while away from school.

Technology

Technology played an important role in the success of these schools. Technology was incorporated in lessons, small groups, tier groups, and other programs during the school day. All of the schools used technology to connect their students to the real world. In the classrooms, teachers used smartboards. These particular boards allow teachers and students to write on them with digital markers. In some classrooms, they used other versions that are called Promethean Boards. During lessons in class, students also used tablets and chrome books to take notes. These were touch enabled computers screens, and they allowed students to guide online investigation and studies. Many of the textbooks that were used in class had digital components allowing students to assess interactive technology in conjunction with built in lessons such as vocabulary words that linked teaching with real world scenarios.

As in the literature review and the research, technology was used by teachers on a daily basis to reach every student. Many of the adopted textbook series for math and reading series had online resources for teachers and students. In fact, students could access their books at home to get a one to one response. There were also animated models built into these series that provided real life scenarios for students to keep their interest. This was another way to prepare students for the real world because they were actually able to see and envision these lessons from a real world perspective. Teachers in these schools also had the capabilities of the use of technology integrated into their daily lessons through the use of smartboard

technology, chrome books, and digital tools. Moreover, the teachers had the access to instant feedback in the form of formative assessments, and their students knew immediately what their results were. As research shows, technology is a powerful tool that connects students to the world instantly. In the 21st century, technology can be used to link students to public and private organizations that can provide students with help and support (Christen, 2009).

Parental Involvement and Community Stakeholders

It was evident in the research and literature review and noted where parental involvement was a concern in schools. This looked different depending upon the perspective of those being questioned. Some of the school administrators and teachers interviewed in the research felt that parental involvement was limited in schools due to parents often being not employed or underemployed. With parents in high poverty concentration areas, those interviewed stressed that it was difficult for many of them to come to functions at school during the day or even during evening hours because of their work schedules. This also varies depending upon the types of communities in which the schools were located.

During many of the interviews, it was stressed that it could be difficult to connect with some parents because their phone numbers changed often. This was not the case in all circumstances. As those being interviewed stressed that there were parents who communicated with the schools in every possible way and kept communication lines open.

However, these schools also overwhelmingly stated that parent involvement was crucial for keeping students focused on learning. Even though many schools had difficulty reaching some parents, efforts were made constantly to connect with parents by all means necessary. In the modern age in which we live, school personnel used every resource at their disposal to reach parents/guardians. Telephone communication was still implored. Schools also used every form of technology available to reach parents/guardians to communicate the need for parents to be involved in the education of their children and to connect the home and school in the purposes of educating every student successfully. Local twitter accounts, text messaging, Remind 101, school Facebook, and schools used their local school all cast to get messages out to parents. In these schools, administrators and teachers used every possible means of communication to keep lines of communication open between the home and school. As one administrator alluded, some parents were not able to attend certain functions at usual school times because of the hours that they worked. Some parents had multiple jobs just to make ends meet for their families. However, they could be counted to help in other areas for support when they were not working or between their different shifts of working.

Schools incorporated different programs in connection with their local PTO to stimulate interaction between the home and school. To involve the whole family unit, counselors and other school teams incorporated programs such as: parent involvement nights, grandparents' day, donuts with dad or mom, field trips, and clean up days.

These were a myriad of opportunities for connection not only with the home but local community stakeholders.

Parental support was limited in most instances in the research, and this also correlated with the literature review. There were many co-existing factors that contributed to this. Many of the parents were single with limited education themselves. Often, they were unemployed or underemployed leaving them to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Basic needs were sometimes a problem. The schools once again stepped up and provided resources and other support to assist in the process. As documented in the research, this was not an easy task for the schools and districts. As research from the literature suggests, the pattern of actual involvement from parents falls short of school expectation (Cassanova, 1996: Fine, 1993; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Fuller & Olsen, 1998). However, schools used creative ideas to keep the parents informed by communicating through multiple streams from the traditional to non-traditional means. Even through all these levels of communication, sometimes some of the schools were still limited in their success with parents. The schools showed resolve and concern by continuing their efforts and involving other community stakeholders.

Community stakeholders played a major role in the success of these schools by providing time, talent, and resources to ensure that the mission and vision in these schools were carried out. The stakeholders were involved sometimes on a daily basis by being at the schools to volunteer and serve wherever they were needed. Their presence was valued from the school administrators, teachers, and students. Positive

mentoring programs were in place to give support to struggling students. Many of these community stakeholders were local professionals who also provided workshops to the local schools, and they provided resources to support the students. They were visible not only in the schools but throughout the community to spread the vision of the schools.

Summary

There are several components that have an effect on African-American students in grades three through eight in receiving an education in Alabama's public schools. The major question in this research focused on what is working in these schools. The research suggests that positive schools indeed have a clearly defined mission and vision and that it takes a team effort to be successful. Many of the schools in this research had limited capital and other resources. However, there was no element of surprise when it came down to connecting to the students and the families serviced by those schools. People who cared ultimately made the difference in these schools. They were connected with the school culture and climate, and they maintained a strong work ethic to accomplish those goals by any means necessary. The faculty and staff believed in the students, and as a result of that belief system, the students were able to excel despite the odds. With that belief system, the students had something to believe in and to focus on. Although, the schools had challenges, they faced those challenges with a can do attitude. That attitude permeated the climate within the schools.

Implications

As indicated in research, many students start school without knowing the fundamentals of reading. Many of the students have not attended Pre-K programs to jump start their education. The earlier that a child learns to read will be reflected in the early elementary grades. The problems in the research showed some implications due to students starting grade school without the basic foundational elements for school. More districts in the state of Alabama are moving towards Pre-K programs to aid with this problem.

Throughout the research, there were noticeable concerns for sometimes a lack of concern or awareness from parents concerning their children's education. There were several factors noted by administrators and teachers during interviews. Often this was seen as a systemic pattern based on socioeconomic conditions, educational level, and employment status. Many of the schools provided additional support and resources to help and assist with these problems. As a continual effort on the part of schools, it will be necessary to continue with resolve in making necessary accommodations to ensure that communication between the home and schools remain a major priority. It will be necessary for schools to continue to advocate for the students; to be their voice. As fore stated, parental involvement was a concern for principals and teachers. In most of the schools, parental involvement was present but limited. In poor socio-economic conditions, as research shows, this is a major factor for schools. Parental involvement is important in the lives of children. Moreover, parental involvement in schools and the children's education has advantages (Jeynes,

2005). The administrators and teachers cited several possible reasons or rationales as to why parents may not participate in the education of their children. In many of these cases, parents are working multiple jobs to make ends meet. Underemployment can be an issue for parents due to their work schedule not coinciding with afternoon activities at the children. Therefore, many of them miss out on these activities because being obligated to their responsibility of work. One administrator during the interviews stated that the parents in his school show support in different ways by donating or showing up at times when he called them specifically for a certain task that the school needed help with.

Recommendations

If I were to design a school in the 21st century to address the needs of African-American students who were at an economic disadvantage and from communities with low socio-economic conditions, I would consider several things based on the literature that I have reviewed and research conducted in this study. First and foremost, I would begin with a clear vision and mission that would speak specifically to the culture and climate of the students that the school would serve. From a personnel perspective, I would hire those who had a desire to teach in that particular setting. Personnel matters in schools, and the faculty and staff would have to embrace the vision and mission so that that purpose of the school could go forth. Curriculum would be aligned with state standards, and teachers would know what was required for each of the standards and was needed to meet those standards successfully. From a leadership perspective, I would require that we begin by focusing on where our

students are academically to ensure that they were on grade level. Best practices would also be implored to stay current and researched based. Data driven decisions would be made on the regular to engage students. I would do all that I could to get to know the community, students, and parents. With that, I would support them in every way possible because people have to know that you care and believe in your vision. I would then ensure that the school had parental involvement and community by inviting the community in and making it a community/neighborhood school. Pride would be at the top of list things to develop within the student body to give them ownership in the process. Proper measures would be taken to ensure that the school was safe and civil while being conscious of the needs of students in the school environment. Moreover, I would research and collaborate with others to current with trends in education. Technology would be used at every giving opportunity to connect students to the real world and other virtual opportunities.

Unique features of the school would include things such as ensuring that students had a rich experience of understanding their culture and other global perspectives to be well rounded and well versed. By providing these experiences, students would have an opportunity to experiences school connectedness. These things would be done in hopes of increasing academic engagement.

There are several things that the research shows in this study. In schools with a high percentage of African-American students and high levels of poverty, the schools that were researched focused heavily on their mission and vision with the purpose of reaching their students. In these schools, they built relationships by first

connecting with the students and ensuring that they felt safe by ensuring that their basic needs were at least identified and met when they came to school. In the interviews conducted, this was a major focal point from school leaders and other faculty members. They knew and understood the home life and circumstances surrounding the life of each student that they served. School leaders and faculty members showed compassion through empathy. By doing this, these school leaders and faculty members felt that they were able to connect better with students because they knew their life circumstances and situations.

In these schools, once again as echoed throughout the research and literature review, specified curriculum alignment and detailed instruction was evident in daily schedules, teacher planning, and effective use of the instructional day. Schools in the research focused and synergized their efforts on making sure that curriculum was at the forefront of what was taking place daily within the walls of the schools. These schools understood pacing guides for instruction and how to connect to provide additional support to those students who were not on grade level by using formative assessments and goal setting to involve students in the process of their education. Students were provided constant support daily in the classroom setting.

There are some major specific themes and specific areas that I would focus more on in detail in designing future schools that serve economically disadvantaged African-American students. In this study, correlations can be found in the literature review and in the study.

A model of schools that shares many of the same similarities that were found in both groups of schools in the study is the network of KIPP schools. The KIPP school model shared many of the same similarities that were found in the both groups of schools involved in the study. KIPP schools were public funded as were the schools in the study. There was no tuition needed for entering KIPP schools. Schools involved in the study were also tuition free. KIPP schools also served a large population of African-American students, and the overwhelming majority of schools in the study serviced a high number of African-American students.

In the research, KIPP schools were a model along with several others that were identified as successful school models. Many correlations can be noted in relation to the study and KIPP schools. Just as in KIPP schools, the schools in this study had high concentrations of African-American students. Demographics were similar in many instances to the schools researched in the study in both the control group and sample population of schools. In KIPP schools, there were systems in place to ensure that students were college and career ready once students left these schools.

As it relates to the literature review, KIPP schools invested in their students by helping them to develop the knowledge that they need to be successful academically and socially to survive in the world. Also, KIPP worked to develop skills, character, and strengths to help students survive in a globally competitive world and market (Newstead et al., 2008).

In comparison of schools in Alabama and KIPP schools, there were multiple commonalities in themes within the research that were found. The table below

identifies many of the similarities between Alabama researched schools and KIPP schools.

Table 6

Commonalities in Alabama Researched Schools and KIPP Schools

Commonalities in Themes Found	**Alabama Research: What we found**	**KIPP Schools: Their focus and priorities**
Consistent Routines and Basic Necessities	Schools and districts in the research maintained a consistent daily schedule of routine procedures.	Schools shared a common approach based on the uniqueness of each schools related to the culture and climate
Curriculum Tied to Data on Student Progress	Teachers provided rigor through depth of knowledge questioning, formative and summative assessments-Data driven decisions are made to drive results	Focused on curriculum and used state level assessments to drive their instructional model and curriculum mapping for schools
Clear Mission and Vision	Clear direction defined that correlated to their core values	Clear direction defined that correlated to their core values
Strong Emphasis on Mathematics	Facilitated learning through Fluency and Competency	Facilitated learning through Fluency and Competency
Strong Emphasis on Reading	Facilitated learning through Fluency and Competency – uninterrupted reading blocks	Facilitated learning through Fluency and Competency with dedicated time specific to reading

Table 6

Commonalities in Alabama Researched Schools and KIPP

Commonalities in Themes Found	**Alabama Research: What we found**	**KIPP Schools: Their focus and priorities**
Teacher Collaboration and Professional Development	Schools provided their teachers with opportunities in the form of professional learning communities at the local school and district levels	Made a full effort to guarantee that their teachers understood the core values that they believed in by encouraging on the job training, collaborative support in the form of coaching, and professional learning communities
Strategies for Learning in Application of Learning	Opportunities were provided for state of the art researched based teaching strategies	Top priority to improve the art of teaching at every available opportunity through professional development for teachers
Balanced Nutrition	Schools provided extra resources for food on weekends-Balanced nutritional meals at breakfast, lunch, and during tutoring	Schools maintained daily balanced meals and provided additional resources as needed
Technology	Incorporated in daily lessons through: textbooks, interactive lessons, and 1;1 initiatives	Incorporated blended learning and students get personalized lessons that are connected with drills and feedback
Parental Involvement and Community Stakeholders	Communicated with parents through various methods and involved them in school activities	Maintained open lines of communication while providing opportunities to connect with the school

In making recommendations and designing schools for the future who serve students with the same or similar backgrounds, it is important to continue to invest

strongly in teachers, their personal growth, and professional learning along with professional development. Moreover, from research, it is strongly recommended that teachers are allowed to communicate in professional learning communities to be able to share with other teachers who are in similar teaching situations so that they are able to grow to be able to better serve the students.

In review of past research and schools in the study, it is strongly recommended that the design of schools in the future that serve African-American students should work to ensure that curriculum is connected with the state standards. In designing curriculum by this method, it ensures that students are being taught state standards in conjunction with daily teaching and implementation practices. By doing this, schools will be able to make school based level decision making that will drive instructional practices and help with measurable results. Moreover, it is recommended that schools use their time strategically to safeguard and be accountable for time spent in classes throughout the school day. From a school administrative standpoint, it is also recommended that local school administrators are able to have autonomy in helping to design curriculum specifically for their individual schools.

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Appendix 1A

School #1 (Reading)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	20.00	48.00	32.00	90.00
2011-2012	<1	15.38	73.08	11.54	92.31
2012-2013	<1	15.59	42.11	42.11	92.02
Average	**<1**	**16.99**	**54.40**	**28.55**	**91.44**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	7.69	46.15	46.15	96.15
2011-2012	<1	19.23	42.31	38.46	90.39
2012-2013	<1	23.81	57.14	19.05	88.10
Average	**<1**	**16.91**	**48.53**	**34.55**	**91.55**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	<1	56.00	44.00	100.00
2011-2012	<1	19.23	50.00	30.77	90.39
2012-2013	<1	20.83	41.67	37.50	89.59
Average	**<1**	**13.69**	**49.22**	**37.42**	**93.32**

Appendix 1B

School #1 (Math)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	24.00	32.00	44.00	88.00
2011-2012	<1	19.23	26.92	53.85	90.36
2012-2013	<1	21.05	15.79	63.16	89.48
Average	**<1**	**21.42**	**24.90**	**43.67**	**88.27**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	5.88	17.65	44.12	32.35	85.29
2011-2012	3.85	7.69	46.15	42.31	92.31
2012-2013	<1	33.33	47.62	19.05	83.34
Average	**7.16**	**19.56**	**45.96**	**31.24**	**86.98**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	12.00	48.00	40.00	94.00
2011-2012	<1	7.69	57.69	34.62	96.16
2012-2013	<1	29.83	45.83	33.33	94.08
Average	**<1**	**16.50**	**50.51**	**35.98**	**94.75**

Appendix 1C

School #1 (Demographics)

3rd Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Percent Tested**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	92.31	93.31	92.37	96.15
2011-2012	96.15	96.15	100.00	100.00
2012-2013	89.47	89.47	100.00	100.00
Total	**92.64**	**92.97**	**97.46**	**98.72**
4th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	94.12	94.13	97.14	100.00
2011-2012	96.15	96.15	100.00	100.00
2012-2013	91.30	91.30	100.00	91.30
Total	**93.86**	**93.86**	**99.05**	**97.10**
5th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	92.00	92.00	100.00	100.00
2011-2012	84.62	92.31	100.00	100.00
2012-2013	96.00	96.00	100.00	96.00
Total	**90.87**	**93.44**	**100.00**	**98.67**

Appendix 2A

Schools #2 (Reading)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	4.55	72.73	22.73	97.74
2011-2012	<1	17.65	52.94	29.41	91.18
2012-2013	<1	13.64	50.00	36.36	93.18
Average	**<1**	**11.95**	**58.56**	**29.5**	**94.03**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	27.27	63.64	9.09	86.37
2011-2012	<1	13.64	63.64	22.73	93.19
2012-2013	<1	53.33	13.33	33.33	73.33
Average	**<1**	**22.32**	**46.87**	**21.72**	**84.30**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	24.44	60.61	15.15	87.88
2011-2012	<1	13.04	65.22	21.74	93.48
2012-2013	<1	13.64	45.45	40.91	93.18
Average	**<1**	**29.57**	**57.09**	**25.93**	**91.51**

Appendix 2B

School #2 (Math)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	18.18	40.91	40.91	90.91
2011-2012	<1	17.65	41.18	41.18	91.19
2012-2013	<1	13.64	27.27	54.55	88.92
Average	**<1**	**16.49**	**36.45**	**45.55**	**90.34**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	36.36	50.00	13.64	81.82
2011-2012	<1	31.82	45.45	22.73	84.09
2012-2013	6.67	46.67	33.33	13.33	70.00
Average	**4.34**	**38.28**	**42.93**	**16.57**	**78.64**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	3.03	48.48	48.48	98.48
2011-2012	<1	8.70	47.83	43.48	95.66
2012-2013	<1	18.18	40.91	40.91	90.91
Average	**<1**	**9.97**	**45.74**	**44.29**	**95.02**

Appendix 2C

School #2 (Demographics)

3rd Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Percent Tested**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	95.83	95.83	91.67	91.67
2011-2012	100.00	100.00	100.00	80.95
2012-2013	92.31	92.31	91.67	84.62
Total	**96.05**	**96.05**	**94.45**	**85.75**
4th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	95.45	95.45	88.00	100.00
2011-2012	95.65	95.65	95.65	100.00
2012-2013	94.74	100.00	88.24	95.65
Total	**95.28**	**97.03**	**89.63**	**98.55**
5th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	97.06	97.60	94.29	97.06
2011-2012	95.83	95.83	88.46	95.83
2012-2013	96.43	96.43	91.67	78.57
Total	**96.44**	**96.62**	**91.47**	**90.49**

Appendix 3A

School #3 (Reading)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	27.27	40.91	31.82	86.37
2011-2012	<1	4.00	64.00	32.00	98.00
2012-2013	<1	5.56	33.33	61.11	97.22
Average	**<1**	**12.27**	**46.08**	**41.64**	**93.86**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	16.67	33.33	50.00	91.67
2011-2012	<1	16.67	33.33	50.00	91.67
2012-2013	<1	5.56	61.11	33.33	97.22
Average	**<1**	**12.97**	**42.59**	**44.44**	**93.52**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	7.41	51.85	40.74	96.30
2011-2012	<1	<1	50.00	50.00	100.00
2012-2013	<1	13.64	40.91	45.45	93.18
Average	**<1**	**7.35**	**47.59**	**45.40**	**96.49**

Appendix 3B

School #3 (Math)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	22.73	36.36	27.27	13.64	75.00
2011-2012	<1	48.00	44.00	8.00	76.00
2012-2013	5.56	27.78	50.00	16.67	80.21
Average	**9.76**	**37.38**	**40.42**	**12.77**	**77.07**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	15.38	38.46	46.15	92.30
2011-2012	<1	29.17	16.67	54.17	85.43
2012-2013	<1	44.44	44.44	11.11	77.77
Average	**<1**	**43.48**	**33.19**	**37.14**	**85.17**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	11.11	37.04	51.85	94.44
2011-2012	<1	22.22	22.22	55.56	88.89
2012-2013	<1	18.18	31.82	50.00	90.91
Average	**<1**	**16.17**	**30.36**	**52.47**	**91.41**

Appendix 3C

School #3 (Demographics)

3rd Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Percent Tested**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	62.86	71.43	100.00	62.50
2011-2012	72.50	80.00	100.00	62.86
2012-2013	75.00	97.50	100.00	75.00
Total	**70.12**	**82.98**	**100.00**	**66.69**
4th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	74.19	74.19	100.00	83.87
2011-2012	69.70	72.73	100.00	72.23
2012-2013	80.65	83.87	100.00	58.06
Total	**74.85**	**76.93**	**100.00**	**71.39**
5th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	69.70	78.79	100.00	81.82
2011-2012	85.71	85.71	100.00	85.71
2012-2013	63.33	70.00	100.00	73.33
Total	**72.91**	**78.17**	**100.00**	**80.29**

Appendix 4A

School #4 (Reading)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	2.27	18.18	45.45	34.09	88.63
2011-2012	<1	24.32	51.35	24.32	97.83
2012-2013	5.71	31.43	40.00	22.86	78.58
Average	**2.99**	**24.64**	**58.93**	**27.09**	**88.35**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	2.44	14.63	56.10	26.83	90.25
2011-2012	<1	32.43	32.43	35.14	83.79
2012-2013	2.86	31.43	45.71	20.00	81.43
Average	**2.1**	**26.16**	**44.75**	**27.22**	**85.16**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	2.44	14.63	36.59	46.65	90.66
2011-2012	<1	19.44	47.22	33.33	90.27
2012-2013	<1	10.53	47.37	42.11	94.75
Average	**2.62**	**14.77**	**43.73**	**29.70**	**91.89**

Appendix 4B

School #4 (Math)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	8.89	17.78	22.22	51.11	82.22
2011-2012	16.22	27.03	18.92	37.84	70.28
2012-2013	11.43	34.29	22.86	31.43	71.44
Average	**12.18**	**26.37**	**21.33**	**39.99**	**74.64**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	2.44	31.71	36.59	29.27	81.72
2011-2012	<1	54.05	24.32	21.62	72.97
2012-2013	5.71	40.00	28.57	25.71	74.28
Average	**3.05**	**31.92**	**29.83**	**24.53**	**76.32**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	9.76	24.39	65.85	95.12
2011-2012	<1	16.67	30.56	52.78	91.68
2012-2013	<1	5.56	38.89	47.37	89.04
Average	**<1**	**10.66**	**30.28**	**54.33**	**90.94**

Appendix 4C

School #4 (Demographics)

3rd Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Percent Tested**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	95.45	97.73	97.78	100.00
2011-2012	97.44	97.44	100.00	94.87
2012-2013	91.89	97.30	100.00	94.59
Total	**94.93**	**97.49**	**99.26**	**95.49**
4th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	86.05	86.05	100.00	95.35
2011-2012	97.44	97.44	100.00	94.87
2012-2013	97.30	97.30	100.00	94.59
Total	**93.60**	**93.60**	**100.00**	**97.59**
5th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	97.56	97.56	100.00	100.00
2011-2012	89.19	89.19	100.00	97.30
2012-2013	94.87	94.87	100.00	97.44
Total	**93.87**	**93.87**	**100.00**	**98.25**

Appendix 5A

School #5 (Reading) (Middle School)

6th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	5.00	25.00	70.00	97.50
2011-2012	<1	9.09	21.21	69.70	95.46
2012-2013	2.86	14.29	20.00	62.86	90.01
Average	**1.62**	**9.46**	**22.07**	**67.52**	**94.32**
7th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	16.33	48.98	34.69	91.83
2011-2012	<1	8.89	26.67	64.44	95.56
2012-2013	<1	2.78	38.89	58.33	98.61
Average	**<1**	**9.33**	**38.18**	**52.49**	**95.33**
8th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	16.22	62.16	21.62	91.89
2011-2012	<1	24.44	53.33	22.22	87.66
2012-2013	<1	11.11	46.67	42.22	94.44
Average	**<1**	**17.26**	**54.05**	**28.69**	**91.33**

Appendix 5B

School #5 (Math) Middle School

6th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	40.00	55.00	5.00	80.00
2011-2012	<1	30.30	48.48	21.21	84.84
2012-2013	<1	20.00	54.29	25.71	90.00
Average	**<1**	**30.1**	**52.59**	**17.31**	**84.95**
7th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	19.23	69.23	11.54	90.39
2011-2012	<1	25.86	55.17	18.97	87.07
2012-2013	<1	27.91	44.19	27.91	86.06
Average	**<1**	**24.33**	**56.19**	**19.47**	**87.84**
8th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	18.92	67.57	13.51	90.54
2011-2012	<1	36.96	50.00	13.04	81.52
2012-2013	<1	24.44	66.67	8.89	87.77
Average	**<1**	**26.77**	**61.41**	**11.81**	**86.61**

Appendix 5C

School #5 (Middle School)

6th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Percent Tested**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	66.36	75.70	100.00	37.38
2011-2012	68.37	78.57	100.00	33.67
2012-2013	61.46	71.88	100.00	36.46
Total	**65.40**	**75.38**	**100.00**	**35.84**
7th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	56.91	68.29	100.00	39.84
2011-2012	67.54	76.32	100.00	39.47
2012-2013	68.04	78.35	100.00	37.11
Total	**64.16**	**74.32**	**100.00**	**38.81**
8th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	57.94	67.29	100.00	34.58
2011-2012	56.03	68.97	97.83	38.79
2012-2013	64.10	68.38	97.83	38.46
Total	**59.36**	**68.21**	**98.55**	**37.61**

Appendix 6A

School #6 (Reading)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	11.76	47.06	41.18	94.12
2011-2012	<1	6.67	46.67	46.67	96.68
2012-2013	<1	8.33	41.67	50.00	95.84
Average	**<1**	**8.92**	**45.13**	**45.95**	**95.54**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	9.52	42.86	47.62	95.24
2011-2012	<1	25.00	43.75	31.25	87.50
2012-2013	<1	7.69	46.15	46.15	96.15
Average	**<1**	**14.07**	**44.25**	**41.67**	**92.96**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	<1	60.00	40.00	100.00
2011-2012	<1	5.00	25.00	70.00	97.50
2012-2013	<1	8.33	50.00	41.67	95.84
Average	**<1**	**4.78**	**45.00**	**50.56**	**97.78**

Appendix 6B

School #6 (Math)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	11.76	5.88	29.41	52.94	85.29
2011-2012	6.67	6.67	53.33	33.33	90.00
2012-2013	<1	8.33	25.00	66.67	95.84
Average	**6.48**	**6.96**	**35.91**	**50.98**	**90.38**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	4.76	4.76	52.38	38.10	92.86
2011-2012	6.25	18.75	31.25	43.75	84.38
2012-2013	7.69	<1	46.15	46.15	92.30
Average	**6.23**	**8.17**	**43.26**	**42.67**	**89.85**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	<1	60.00	40.00	100.00
2011-2012	<1	5.00	25.00	70.00	97.50
2012-2013	<1	8.33	50.00	41.67	95.85
Average	**<1**	**4.78**	**45.00**	**50.56**	**97.78**

Appendix 6C

School #6 (Demographics)

3rd Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Percent Tested**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	62.16	68.34	100.00	6.76
2011-2012	58.93	65.18	100.00	6.70
2012-2013	59.34	63.90	100.00	4.98
Total	**60.14**	**65.81**	**100.00**	**6.15**
4th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	55.93	63.98	100.00	8.90
2011-2012	58.37	66.15	100.00	6.23
2012-2013	57.33	66.15	100.00	5.60
Total	**57.21**	**65.33**	**100.00**	**6.91**
5th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	60.63	67.42	90.91	4.52
2011-2012	55.51	63.44	100.00	8.70
2012-2013	57.79	65.98	100.00	4.92
Total	**57.98**	**65.61**	**96.97**	**6.05**

Appendix 7A

School #7 (Reading)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	37.93	44.83	17.24	81.04
2011-2012	2.50	20.00	50.00	27.50	87.50
2012-2013	<1	20.37	53.70	25.93	89.82
Average	**1.5**	**26.10**	**49.51**	**23.56**	**86.12**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	4.35	21.74	39.13	34.78	84.78
2011-2012	<1	8.16	55.10	36.73	95.91
2012-2013	<1	16.67	33.33	50.00	91.33
Average	**2.12**	**15.52**	**42.52**	**40.50**	**90.67**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	21.88	34.38	43.75	89.07
2011-2012	<1	14.89	44.68	40.43	92.55
2012-2013	<1	5.77	40.38	53.85	97.12
Average	**<1**	**14.18**	**39.81**	**46.01**	**93.91**

Appendix 7A

School #7 (Math)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	7.14	17.86	21.43	53.57	83.93
2011-2012	7.50	27.50	37.50	27.50	78.75
2012-2013	1.89	26.42	49.06	22.64	84.91
Average	**5.51**	**23.93**	**36.00**	**34.57**	**82.53**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	4.35	30.43	21.74	43.48	80.43
2011-2012	2.04	32.65	38.78	26.53	81.63
2012-2013	2.38	38.10	33.33	26.19	78.57
Average	**2.92**	**33.73**	**31.28**	**32.07**	**80.21**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	21.88	34.38	43.75	89.07
2011-2012	<1	14.89	44.68	40.43	92.56
2012-2013	<1	5.77	40.38	53.85	97.12
Average	**<1**	**14.18**	**39.81**	**46.01**	**92.92**

Appendix 7C

School #7 (Demographics

3rd Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Percent Tested**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	67.44	79.07	100.00	67.44
2011-2012	90.57	93.75	100.00	75.47
2012-2013	87.50	93.75	100.00	84.38
Total	**81.84**	**88.86**	**100.00**	**75.76**
4th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	77.14	85.71	100.00	65.71
2011-2012	75.00	87.50	100.00	76.56
2012-2013	87.04	94.44	97.67	77.78
Total	**79.73**	**89.22**	**99.22**	**72.35**
5th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	75.47	86.79	100.00	60.38
2011-2012	86.44	91.53	100.00	79.66
2012-2013	83.08	86.15	100.00	80.00
Total	**81.66**	**88.16**	**100.00**	**73.35**

Appendix 8A

School #8 (Reading)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	26.09	34.78	39.13	86.96
2011-2012	<1	10.53	31.58	57.89	94.74
2012-2013	<1	16.67	33.33	50.00	91.33
Average	**<1**	**17.76**	**33.23**	**49.01**	**91.01**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	11.11	38.89	50.00	94.45
2011-2012	<1	14.81	51.85	33.33	92.59
2012-2013	<1	13.64	54.55	31.82	93.19
Average	**<1**	**13.19**	**48.43**	**38.38**	**93.41**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	11.11	50.00	38.89	94.44
2011-2012	<1	21.05	31.58	47.37	89.48
2012-2013	<1	8.70	32.61	58.70	95.66
Average	**<1**	**13.62**	**38.06**	**48.32**	**93.19**

Appendix 8B

School #8 (Math)

3rd Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	8.70	34.78	26.09	30.43	73.91
2011-2012	5.26	21.05	36.84	36.84	84.21
2012-2013	<1	41.67	25.00	33.33	79.17
Average	**4.99**	**97.50**	**29.31**	**33.53**	**79.10**
4th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	27.78	27.78	44.44	86.11
2011-2012	<1	22.22	51.85	25.93	88.89
2012-2013	4.55	45.45	31.82	18.18	72.73
Average	**2.18**	**31.82**	**37.15**	**29.52**	**82.58**
5th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	11.11	50.50	38.89	94.45
2011-2012	<1	21.05	31.58	47.37	78.95
2012-2013	<1	4.76	42.86	52.38	97.62
Average	**<1**	**12.31**	**41.65**	**46.21**	**90.34**

Appendix 8C

School #8 (Demographics)

3rd Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Percent Tested**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	75.86	81.61	100.00	26.44
2011-2012	71.08	80.72	100.00	22.89
2012-2013	77.38	82.14	100.00	14.29
Total	**74.77**	**81.49**	**100.00**	**21.21**
4th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	71.95	80.49	100.00	26.95
2011-2012	74.47	84.04	100.00	28.72
2012-2013	63.22	78.16	100.00	25.29
Total	**69.88**	**80.90**	**100.00**	**26.89**
5th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	58.82	71.76	100.00	21.18
2011-2012	80.90	84.27	100.00	21.59
2012-2013	74.74	83.16	100.00	21.88
Total	**71.49**	**79.73**	**100.00**	**28.84**

Appendix 9A

School #9 (Reading)

6th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	7.69	34.62	57.69	96.16
2011-2012	<1	12.07	27.59	60.34	93.97
2012-2013	<1	9.30	16.28	74.42	95.35
Average	**<1**	**9.69**	**26.16**	**64.15**	**95.16**
7th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	37.84	32.43	28.83	80.18
2011-2012	1.85	34.26	37.96	25.93	81.02
2012-2013	<1	28.70	38.89	31.48	84.72
Average	**1.28**	**33.60**	**36.43**	**28.75**	**81.97**
8th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	2.78	37.04	45.37	14.81	77.7
2011-2012	1.92	44.23	42.31	11.54	75.97
2012-2013	2.97	38.61	42.57	15.85	77.72
Average	**2.56**	**39.96**	**43.42**	**14.07**	**77.13**

Appendix 9B

School # 9 Math

6th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	19.23	69.23	11.54	90.39
2011-2012	<1	25.86	55.17	18.97	87.07
2012-2013	<1	27.91	44.49	27.91	86.06
Average	**<1**	**24.33**	**56.30**	**19.47**	**87.84**
7th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	58.18	30.91	10.91	70.91
2011-2012	<1	56.07	35.51	8.41	71.96
2012-2013	<1	56.48	33.33	10.19	71.76
Average	**<1**	**56.91**	**33.25**	**9.84**	**71.54**
8th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	41.67	48.15	10.19	79.18
2011-2012	<1	47.57	40.78	11.65	76.22
2012-2013	<1	53.47	38.61	7.92	73.27
Average	**<1**	**47.57**	**42.51**	**9.92**	**76.22**

Appendix 9C

School #9 (Demographics)

6th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Percent Tested**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	69.70	84.85	100.00	78.79
2011-2012	83.54	94.94	100.00	73.42
2012-2013	79.63	92.59	100.00	79.63
Total	**77.63**	**90.79**	**100.00**	**77.28**
7th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	79.75	87.12	98.23	68.10
2011-2012	77.48	86.75	99.08	71.52
2012-2013	78.61	82.89	97.30	57.75
Total	**78.61**	**85.59**	**98.20**	**65.79**
8th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	72.25	78.03	98.18	62.43
2011-2012	81.01	89.24	97.20	65.82
2012-2013	78.42	85.61	96.19	72.66
Total	**77.23**	**84.29**	**97.19**	**66.97**

Appendix 10A

School #10 (Reading)

6th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	11.54	48.08	40.38	94.23
2011-2012	<1	16.13	22.58	61.29	91.94
2012-2013	<1	18.42	23.68	57.89	90.78
Average	**<1**	**15.36**	**31.45**	**53.19**	**92.31**
7th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	2.88	22.86	37.14	37.14	85.71
2011-2012	1.89	15.09	35.85	47.17	90.57
2012-2013	<1	20.34	25.42	51.24	89.93
Average	**1.92**	**19.43**	**32.80**	**45.18**	**88.74**
8th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	25.00	43.75	31.25	87.50
2011-2012	2.56	20.51	46.15	30.77	87.18
2012-2013	<1	25.00	36.54	38.46	87.60
Average	**1.52**	**23.50**	**42.15**	**33.49**	**87.43**

Appendix 10B

School #10 (Math)

6th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	32.69	44.23	23.08	83.65
2011-2012	<1	35.48	48.39	16.13	82.26
2012-2013	<1	23.68	63.16	13.16	88.16
Average	**<1**	**30.62**	**51.93**	**17.46**	**84.69**
7th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level VI**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	40.00	45.71	14.29	80.00
2011-2012	<1	19.23	46.15	34.62	90.39
2012-2013	<1	20.34	52.54	27.12	89.93
Average	**<1**	**26.52**	**48.13**	**25.34**	**86.77**
8th Grade	**Level I**	**Level II**	**Level III**	**Level IV**	**Proficient**
2010-2011	<1	29.17	50.00	20.83	85.39
2011-2012	<1	30.77	48.72	20.51	84.62
2012-2013	<1	28.85	48.08	23.08	85.59
Average	**<1**	**29.60**	**48.93**	**21.47**	**85.20**

Appendix 10C

School #10 (Demographics)

6th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Percent Tested**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	51.91	57.25	100.00	39.69
2011-2012	57.41	61.73	100.00	38.27
2012-2013	49.21	50.79	100.00	30.16
Total	**52.84**	**56.59**	**100.00**	**36.04**
7th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	46.16	52.88	97.22	33.65
2011-2012	56.06	59.85	98.15	40.15
2012-2013	55.03	62.42	96.72	39.60
Total	**52.42**	**58.38**	**97.36**	**37.80**
8th Grade	**Free Lunch**	**Poverty**	**Attendance**	**A-A Population**
2010-2011	43.38	49.28	96.00	34.78
2011-2012	44.90	53.06	97.50	39.80
2012-2013	52.99	56.72	98.11	38.81
Total	**47.09**	**53.02**	**97.20**	**37.80**

Appendix 11A

Dissertation Coding Report

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Balanced Nutrition	20	11.07 %	459	11.07 %	3.45 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	11.17 %	459	11.17 %	3.48 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	11.27 %	453	11.27 %	3.46 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	11.33 %	453	11.33 %	3.48 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	11.72 %	420	11.72 %	3.39 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	12.37 %	416	12.37 %	3.48 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	12.38 %	416	12.38 %	3.48 %

Balanced Nutrition	20	12.39 %	413	12.39 %	3.48 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Balanced Nutrition	20	12.45 %	413	12.45 %	3.52 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	12.94 %	396	12.94 %	3.48 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	17.10 %	563	17.10 %	6.49 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	17.18 %	563	17.18 %	6.52 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	17.24 %	563	17.24 %	6.54 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	17.24 %	563	17.24 %	6.54 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	18.35 %	524	18.35 %	6.52 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	18.81 %	512	18.81 %	6.52 %

Balanced Nutrition	20	18.81 %	512	18.81 %	6.52 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Balanced Nutrition	20	18.81 %	512	18.81 %	6.52 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	20.06 %	478	20.06 %	6.52 %
Balanced Nutrition	20	20.06 %	478	20.06 %	6.52 %
Social Developmental	20	12.19 %	563	12.19 %	4.74 %
Social Developmental	20	12.38 %	563	12.38 %	4.81 %
Social Developmental	20	12.86 %	563	12.86 %	5.00 %
Social Developmental	20	12.92 %	563	12.92 %	5.03 %

Social Developmental	20	13.86 %	524	13.86 %	5.05 %
Social Developmental	20	14.14 %	512	14.14 %	5.03 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Social Developmental	20	14.14 %	512	14.14 %	5.03 %
Social Developmental	20	14.14 %	512	14.14 %	5.03 %
Social Developmental	20	15.08 %	478	15.08 %	5.03 %
Social Developmental	20	15.08 %	478	15.08 %	5.03 %
Social Developmental	20	15.73 %	459	15.73 %	5.03 %
Social Developmental	20	15.79 %	459	15.79 %	5.05 %

Social Developmental	20	15.96 %	453	15.96 %	5.03 %
Social Developmental	20	16.04 %	453	16.04 %	5.05 %
Social Developmental	20	16.67 %	420	16.67 %	4.94 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Social Developmental	20	17.09 %	413	17.09 %	4.92 %
Social Developmental	20	17.42 %	416	17.42 %	5.03 %
Social Developmental	20	17.43 %	416	17.43 %	5.03 %
Social Developmental	20	17.48 %	413	17.48 %	5.07 %
Social Developmental	20	18.22 %	396	18.22 %	5.03 %

Specified Curriculum	20	24.38 %	563	24.38 %	5.18 %
Specified Curriculum	20	24.46 %	563	24.46 %	5.20 %
Specified Curriculum	20	24.46 %	563	24.46 %	5.20 %
Specified Curriculum	20	24.51 %	563	24.51 %	5.21 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Specified Curriculum	20	24.75 %	478	24.75 %	4.51 %
Specified Curriculum	20	24.75 %	478	24.75 %	4.51 %
Specified Curriculum	20	26.18 %	524	26.18 %	5.21 %
Specified Curriculum	20	26.69 %	512	26.69 %	5.18 %

Specified Curriculum	20	26.78 %	512	26.78 %	5.20 %
Specified Curriculum	20	26.84 %	512	26.84 %	5.21 %
Specified Curriculum	20	27.65 %	420	27.65 %	4.48 %
Specified Curriculum	20	28.63 %	413	28.63 %	4.54 %
Specified Curriculum	20	28.65 %	413	28.65 %	4.51 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Specified Curriculum	20	29.78 %	459	29.78 %	5.20 %
Specified Curriculum	20	29.84 %	459	29.84 %	5.21 %
Specified Curriculum	20	29.90 %	396	29.90 %	4.51 %

Specified Curriculum	20	30.21 %	453	30.21 %	5.20 %
Specified Curriculum	20	30.30 %	453	30.30 %	5.21 %
Specified Curriculum	20	32.99 %	416	32.99 %	5.20 %
Specified Curriculum	20	33.00 %	416	33.00 %	5.20 %
Technology	20	7.05 %	420	7.05 %	2.55 %
Technology	20	7.65 %	416	7.65 %	2.70 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Technology	20	7.65 %	416	7.65 %	2.70 %
Technology	20	7.66 %	413	7.66 %	2.70 %

Technology	20	7.68 %	413	7.68 %	2.72 %
Technology	20	8.00 %	396	8.00 %	2.70 %
Technology	20	11.72 %	563	11.72 %	5.58 %
Technology	20	12.51 %	563	12.51 %	5.95 %
Technology	20	12.59 %	563	12.59 %	5.99 %
Technology	20	12.59 %	563	12.59 %	5.99 %
Technology	20	13.79 %	512	13.79 %	5.99 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percent Code
Technology	20	13.79 %	512	13.79 %	5.99 %
Technology	20	13.79 %	512	13.79 %	5.99 %
Technology	20	14.32 %	524	0.87 %	0.38 %
Technology	20	14.32 %	524	13.45 %	5.99 %
Technology	20	14.70 %	478	14.70 %	5.99 %
Technology	20	14.70 %	478	14.70 %	5.99 %
Technology	20	15.33 %	459	15.33 %	5.99 %
Technology	20	15.33 %	459	15.33 %	5.99 %

Technology	20	15.56 %	453	15.56 %	5.99 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Technology	20	15.57 %	453	15.57 %	5.99 %
Tutoring	20	8.30 %	478	8.30 %	3.56 %
Tutoring	20	8.43 %	478	8.43 %	3.62 %
Tutoring	20	8.79 %	453	8.79 %	3.56 %
Tutoring	20	8.85 %	453	8.85 %	3.59 %
Tutoring	20	9.58 %	420	9.58 %	3.66 %
Tutoring	20	9.66 %	416	9.66 %	3.59 %
Tutoring	20	9.67 %	416	9.67 %	3.59 %

Tutoring	20	9.69 %	413	9.69 %	3.62 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Tutoring	20	9.75 %	413	9.75 %	3.62 %
Tutoring	20	10.08 %	459	10.08 %	4.15 %
Tutoring	20	10.14 %	396	10.14 %	3.60 %
Tutoring	20	10.23 %	524	10.23 %	4.80 %
Tutoring	20	10.24 %	459	10.24 %	4.21 %
Tutoring	20	10.43 %	512	10.43 %	4.77 %
Tutoring	20	10.43 %	512	10.43 %	4.77 %

Tutoring	20	10.49 %	512	10.49 %	4.80 %
Tutoring	20	17.89 %	563	17.89 %	8.96 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Tutoring	20	18.24 %	563	18.24 %	9.14 %
Tutoring	20	18.24 %	563	18.24 %	9.14 %
Tutoring	20	18.30 %	563	18.30 %	9.17 %
Volunteer Participation	20	9.28 %	563	9.28 %	4.95 %
Volunteer Participation	20	9.36 %	563	9.36 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	9.36 %	563	9.36 %	5.00 %

Volunteer Participation	20	9.36 %	563	9.36 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	10.00 %	524	10.00 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	10.16 %	512	10.16 %	4.95 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Volunteer Participation	20	10.25 %	512	10.25 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	10.25 %	512	10.25 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	10.93 %	478	10.93 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	10.93 %	478	10.93 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	11.40 %	459	11.40 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	11.40 %	459	11.40 %	5.00 %

Volunteer Participation	20	11.56 %	453	11.56 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	11.57 %	453	11.57 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	12.29 %	420	12.29 %	5.00 %

Name	Number Of Files Coded	Coverage	Words	Percent Coverage Of File	Percen Code
Volunteer Participation	20	12.63 %	416	12.63 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	12.63 %	416	12.63 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	12.65 %	413	12.65 %	5.00 %
Volunteer Participation	20	12.67 %	413	12.67 %	5.04 %
Volunteer Participation	20	13.20 %	396	13.20 %	5.00 %