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COLLEGE READINESS VARIABLES FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN
HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

by

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DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The University of Houston-Clear Lake
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements
For the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in Educational Leadership

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE

AUGUST, 2022

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to Phoenix Zane Thompson. Phoenix, never stop learning.
Love you forever! Grammie K

Acknowledgements

God is good. I love Him so much! Mom, I know you are looking down from Heaven enjoying this with me. I miss you every day.

I am forever grateful for the support and consistent encouragement of my son, Tristan Thompson, who has always inspired me to take chances and reach for every opportunity in life. To my other family members, you were also the reason I persevered through it all because I wanted to make you proud and begin a generation of future doctors in our extended family. Thank you all for the dissertation practices and critique sessions. Committee members, your commitment to me was also invaluable.

When I took my first class with Dr. Willis, I knew she would be a part of my journey. With her assistance, the dream team was formed. Dr. Jana Willis, Dr. Timothy Richardson, Dr. Lisa Jones, and Dr. Michelle Peters, I will be forever grateful and humbled that you agreed to be on my team. You all were a Godsend. At times, you had to inform me more than once through your corrective feedback and I appreciate your patience. Again, I will never be able to thank you enough. There is no way possible I could have gotten through this endeavor without your extensive knowledge and support.

ABSTRACT

COLLEGE READINESS VARIABLES FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN,
HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

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University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2022

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This sequential mixed methods study examined the variables of attendance, discipline, school feeder patterns, economically disadvantaged, and extracurricular activity participation on the college readiness of African American (AA) high school seniors. The data were analyzed to determine if there was a relationship between the five variables and college readiness of the seniors. A purposeful sample of AA high school seniors from a large diverse school district in Texas was utilized for the study. The data concerning AA high school seniors consisted of archived Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data, survey of college ready AA high school seniors, and semi-structured interviews of college ready AA high school seniors. Descriptive analysis of Pearson's moment correlation was used to analyze quantitative PEIMS data and Qualtrics survey data. The seniors' perceptions of the five variables were analyzed using a thematic coding process. Triangulation of the archived PEIMS data, survey, and semi-structured

interviews helped the researcher gain a comprehensive perspective of the AA high school seniors' mindsets towards the variables to become college ready. Findings indicated that even though AA high school seniors were consistently behind academically compared to their Hispanic and White peers and faced discrimination and racial bias both in and out of the school, some AA high school seniors persevered and maintained a college ready mindset. Most of the college ready AA high school seniors commented that doing the right thing at all times was instilled in them by their parents (particularly mothers) and making goals and plans early in their school years aided their drive to be college ready.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

African American (AA) seniors consistently struggle to graduate college ready compared to other ethnicities in Texas (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2021b). The College Board (CB) define college readiness as the level of academic preparation a high school senior must attain in entry-level general education coursework while pursuing a college degree program without remediation (CB, 2018). The Texas College and Career Readiness Standards highlight that this level of preparation ultimately begins in the PreK classrooms, suggesting the need for teachers to ensure all students, in every grade, reach the intended academic goals required by the state of Texas, because the more a student can successfully accomplish multiple standards, the more likely the senior will be college ready (CB, 2018).

The goal of the 79th Texas Legislature, Section 28.008 of the Texas Education Code, is to increase college ready seniors. The state of Texas derived a set of intellectual skills that students must achieve to be successful post high school. Vertical teams were designed to develop College and Career Readiness Standards (CB, 2018). The standards specify what students must know and be able to do in order to succeed in entry-level coursework post high school (CB, 2018). Teachers rely on Texas Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to guide curriculum and teach students what they should know and what they should be able to do by the end of each academic year for all core subjects (TEA, 2022d). Members of the Texas Legislature are mostly concerned about students having intellectual skills. The foundational skills are to help the students choose a college major. If the student does not want to attend college, the student can still be successful as a skilled employee because they are able to read, communicate well, perform complex

calculations accurately, have a strong knowledge of science, knowledge of American culture, and be able to think critically (CB, 2018).

Once the TEKS were developed, legislative authority was given to the State Board of Education to adopt the TEKS (TEA, 2022d). AA students are still underperforming in the classrooms according to the TEA 3rd – 11th grade accountability assessments known as State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)/End of Course (EOC). The accountability assessments include reading, writing, math, science, and social studies (TEA, 2011; TEA, 2021b). According to the STAAR interpretive guide, Texas high school seniors must pass five EOC assessments prior to high school graduation: English Language Arts (ELA) I, ELA II, Biology, Algebra I, and United States History (TEA, 2020b).

Another form of assessment, the Texas Success Initiative (TSIA), was created approximately 10 years ago and enacted by the Texas State Legislature to be used to determine if a senior was ready for college-level courses; college readiness is determined based on reading, writing, and math assessments (TEA, 2021a). The TEA created four possible ways a senior could graduate college ready. These pathways are dual credit (DC), advanced placement (AP), Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA2), and/or associate degree attainment (Morales-Vale & Morgan, 2019).

The TEA postsecondary readiness glossary further explains the college readiness tracks (TEA, 2020a). To be considered college ready via DC, a senior may complete and earn at least three credit hours in ELA or mathematics, or at least nine credit hours in any other subject; a senior may receive both high school and college credit for the successful completion of the required course(s). To be considered college ready via AP, a senior must score at least a three or more on any subject area AP assessment. To be considered college ready under TSIA2, a senior must meet the minimum score of 350 for

mathematics, 351 for reading, a 5 on the comprehensive writing section or a 4 on the essay, and 340 for multiple choice questions on the reading assessment. Finally, the fourth standard can be met if a senior earns an associate degree while in high school (TEA, 2020a). According to the Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR), even with multiple ways for seniors to demonstrate college readiness, TEA (2021b) reported high school AA students' assessment results are still consistently lower each year when compared to other ethnicities. Some researchers state the reason that many AA high school students are academically underachieving is based on discrimination in school, where administrators and teachers may have lower expectations because of bias and negative school climate and culture (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Boston & Warren, 2017; Liou et al., 2015).

The lower expectations where teachers treat AA students negatively may also lead AA high school students to feelings of low self-worth, affecting their academic performance (Boston & Warren, 2017). Feelings of low self-worth may be diminished by schools incorporating Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into their schools' culture and climate (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). SEL is a process by which people manage emotions, set goals, show empathy for others, maintain positive relationships, and make conscientious decisions (CASEL, 2020). SEL is viewed as a wheel that encompasses the community, families and caregivers, schools, and classrooms (CASEL, 2020). Lack of SEL may lead to negative perceptions from teachers in the classroom and affect AA high school seniors' academic performance and futures. When AA high school seniors face these negative perceptions, they still have the ability to achieve a growth mindset and thrive when faced with daily challenges.

A growth mindset is a belief that a person's character can develop and change; therefore, teachers should instill this type of mindset in their students to help the students'

academic performance (Markman, 2022). Markman (2022) shared the difference between growth and fixed mindsets. A fixed mindset is taking everything at face value and accepting it because a person's character cannot change. A growth mindset opens people up to success and shapes how they look at the world, which eventually shapes their own world (Markman, 2022). AA students must ignore all negativity and transform their thought processes through the power of their own minds and make it work for them instead of against them. Markman (2022) shared that educators should use a growth mindset in the classroom. Examples of a growth mindset are for teachers to present challenges as opportunities, provide constructive criticism, encourage perseverance, reflect that learning is a process which involves failure, and show students they should have goals and a purpose (Markman, 2022). AA students should have a growth mindset because of the potential negativity and lack of encouragement they may encounter. Wang et al. (2022) emphasized that endorsing either positive or negative racial stereotypes was associated with lower cognitive interactions as well as fixed mindsets, leading to lower academic scores.

Andrews and Gutwein (2017) found that many teachers view minority students as substandard, with some teachers setting lower academic standards for AA students compared to White students (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Liou et al., 2015); this view of AA academic standards may hold true even if school staff felt they were pursuing equity (Liou et al., 2015). AA students may also be aware they are treated differently than their peers (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017). Because students perceive teachers as being racially biased, this may affect AA students academically (Thompson & Gregory, 2010).

Because of human nature, while all people do not react the same or feel the same, not all AA students feel discrimination or unfair treatment. Taylor (2022) described this as the unconscious and conscious mind engaging in battle daily; thus, teachers who are

racially biased may not be aware due to how they were raised as children and the negative biases may become learned behavior. Logan et al. (2018) stated that AA students suffer academically because school staff may view them from a deficit perspective. White teachers usually have limited multicultural experiences and may not be capable of creating and implementing curriculum that addresses AA students' culture (Logan et al., 2018). Professional development may be required to assist teachers in learning and building relationships with AA students to learn their culture, communities, and families to guide classroom climates, curriculum development, and instructional strategies to create successful culturally relevant curriculum (Logan et al., 2018). Additionally, some teachers may not understand the unique requirements of AA students and need to be better prepared to assist AA students academically (Boston & Warren, 2017).

Teachers must relate to their AA students if the students are to feel a sense of belonging and, in turn, increase their academic achievements (Boston & Warren, 2017). Many students, especially AA students, must feel that they belong in order to be successful in school (Boston & Warren, 2017). A sense of belonging, referred to as centrality, is described as how an individual feels about oneself; this is crucial to AA students' success (Boston & Warren, 2017). AA students require a positive relationship with teachers, leadership, and staff because some AA students bring their perceptions of low self-worth into the school environment (Boston & Warren, 2017). Low self-worth is also considered a mindset and Ackerman (2018) contended that mindful behavior is guided by a person's goals and values. The mindset is strategic, deliberate and intentional, and careful and thoughtful; therefore, consideration regarding consequences of the students' behavior should be responsive and not reactive (Ackerman, 2018). A

responsive mindset is important as AA seniors face daily challenges to be college ready post high school.

While AA high school seniors may encounter various difficulties in their academic journeys, some AA high school seniors were college ready. In their 2019 study, Comeaux et al. explained how family members played an important function in AA students' decisions to attend college. Mothers in particular played an important part in all economically diverse neighborhoods because mothers understood the importance of their children attending college (Comeaux et al., 2019). However, in their study, the seniors were also self-motivated and decided to be the spark and become an example to lead their family forward (Comeaux et al., 2019). This may be the reason why in spite of the challenges related to teacher bias, the number of college ready AA seniors is beginning to increase.

The TEA (2021b) report indicated an increase in AA high school seniors' college readiness in the five most recent years. In 2015, 16% of AA high school seniors were college ready. In 2016, 21.6% of AA high school seniors were deemed college ready; this grew to 23.5% in 2017. AA college ready high school seniors increased to 27.4% in 2018 (TEA, 2021b). The 2019-2020 TAPR report indicated that the number of AA high school college ready seniors increased by 8.6% to 36% graduating college ready (TEA, 2021b). This study will explore variables outside of academics that may contribute to AA high school seniors' academic success. The variables the researcher will consider are attendance records, discipline records, economically disadvantaged status, engagement in extracurricular activities, school feeder patterns, and the choices the AA high school seniors consistently make regarding these variables.

Maiorano et al. (2021) explained how choices, norms, and values measure empowerment. There are three domains addressing empowerment: (a) decision-making

defined as making a choice; (b) the values people have for reasons to value the specific choice; and (c) the social norm that determines the role of the ability to make strategic choices (Maiorano et al., 2021). The following sections highlight the research problem, significance of the study, research purpose, research questions, and definitions of key terms.

Research Problem

The United States Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS) highlighted the importance of college readiness (BLS, 2016). Students who do not pursue a college degree are more likely to have low paying employment making a meager living (BLS, 2016). The BLS reported this type of senior will have a bleak future and will most likely be categorized as the working poor. The working poor are workers who do not attain additional education post high school (BLS, 2016). This is why it is imperative AA high school seniors graduate college ready. If a senior decides to not attend college, it should not be the fault of the school system. The BLS (2016) reported the necessity of having a bachelor's degree, highlighting that 1.5% of students with a bachelor's degree or higher would have a better chance of being successful in the future. In 2016, the overall unemployment rate for the general population of the United States was 3.9%, whereas for AAs it was 6.5% (BLS, 2016). This statistic was almost double, which mean AA high school seniors who are not college ready will have almost a 50% chance of being poor compared to other ethnicities. This study shows the AA high school seniors' reasons, other than discrimination, for not being college ready. One reason may be choices the seniors make outside of academics.

Academic achievement is a major contributor to college readiness; nonetheless, there may be other variables to consider which may explain why there are a growing number of AA high school seniors who are college ready upon graduation. One variable

associated with college readiness is the economic background of the senior. TEA (2008) defined economically disadvantaged as a student who is eligible for either free or reduced meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program. If a student is labeled economically disadvantaged, it is usually perceived as the student not having a chance to develop into an academically successful student; however, researchers have shown AA students can thrive in poverty-stricken communities (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017).

Another variable that impacts college readiness is attendance. To receive credit or a final grade for a class in Texas schools, the student's attendance must be at least 90 percent of the days a class was offered (Texas Education Code - EDUC §25.092) and while some districts use truancy and absenteeism interchangeably, they are different (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). Weathers et al. (2021) defined truancy as an unexcused absence while absenteeism was considered not attending school at all. This study will view absenteeism as an unexcused absence. School completion and attendance are benchmarks for students to develop successfully; therefore, students who attend school regularly are more likely to be college ready (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020).

Another variable that may influence AA high school seniors' college readiness are behavior infractions. School-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) is a systemic approach for improving students' academics and behaviors (Wienen et al., 2018). Behavior problems can negatively affect the academic performance of students over time (Kremer et al., 2016). At school, students have various classroom experiences that are influenced by student behavior. In a study by Kremer et al. (2016), self-discipline was a better predictor of a child's academic performance than an IQ test.

In addition to student behavior, involvement in extracurricular activities is another variable associated with AA high school seniors' college readiness. According to the

Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Chapter 76, an extracurricular activity is an activity sponsored by the University Interscholastic League (UIL); the activity may or may not relate to an area of the curriculum to include athletics and fine arts (UIL, 2022).

While participation in extracurricular activities could have positive academic benefits for AA high school seniors, thus increasing their levels of college readiness, school feeder patterns may also serve as a variable of college readiness. My Texas Public Schools (2017b) defined school feeder patterns as paths, which students follow as they progress each year through their education, where the most common pattern is elementary schools feed to middle schools, and middle schools feed to high schools. For this study, the school feeder pattern is elementary, middle, intermediate, and then high school.

Temkin et al. (2015) stated transitions often create challenges from discordance of previous academic expectations and new academic expectations. They found single-school transitions often stress the students due to institutional discontinuities, which may affect their grades (Temkin et al., 2015). As students transition to new buildings, the transfer could disrupt friendships and connectedness, especially if the student is zoned to a different school than their friends (Temkin et al., 2015). DeBonis (2014) revealed that feeder patterns are likely to limit friendships, but they also stop competition to best-performing schools. The competition occurs when parents want their children to attend a particular school when they are not zoned in the school's attendance area, so they have to apply for admission.

Brown (2012) shared an example of a contentious feeder pattern in a district located in Washington, District of Columbia. The chancellor proposed a school-closure plan, which caused a divisive fight with parents and activists. Brown (2012) explained how feeder patterns could pit communities against each other, and the reasons centered

around class and race. Economically disadvantaged students usually attend low performing schools while the upper class students tend to attend high performing schools.

Significance of the Study

Even though many AA high school seniors are not college ready, there are successful AA high school seniors who graduate high school college ready. These seniors may have done something different from the majority of AA high school seniors. The researcher will determine if the variables detailed in the prior section set apart the AA high school seniors who are college ready and the AA high school seniors who are not college ready. Research has shown that AA students struggle with academics, but there may be variables outside of academics which prevent AA seniors from being college ready (Kremer et al., 2016; Nolte, 2015; Schiller, 1999; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). The results of this study will help inform schools about variables which may support academic success.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to examine possible variables contributing to the college readiness of graduating AA high school seniors. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. To what extent do Cohort 2021 and Cohort 2022 high school AA seniors differ in attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns?
2. To what extent do AA high school seniors perceive attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns as influencing college readiness?

3. How does attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns impact college ready AA seniors

Definitions of Key Terms

American College Test (ACT): Standardized test used for college admission in the United States (TEA, 2008).

College Readiness: The level of high school preparation a student must attain to enroll and be successful, without remediation, in entry-level general education coursework for credit in pursuit of a baccalaureate or associate degree program (TEA, 2008).

College Readiness Standards: A graduate meeting the Texas Success Initiative Criteria: Passing score on TSI assessment in ELA and mathematics, passing score on SAT/ACT, college credit (dual course) in ELA or mathematics, attained an associate degree, or met a criterion score of 3 or more on an AP subject area (TEA, 2008).

Criterion: Passing range for the Scholastic Aptitude Test for a student to attend a particular college or university (Princeton Review, 2019).

English Language Learners: Refers to students who are not yet proficient in English but are in the process of developing their skills (TEA, 2008).

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT): Standardized test widely used for college admissions in the United States (Princeton Review, 2019).

Social Emotional Learning (SEL): A process by which people manage emotions, set goals, show empathy for others, maintain positive relationships, and make conscientious decisions (CASEL, 2020).

State Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR): Primary and secondary school assessment in particular subjects and particular grades in Texas (TEA, 2008).

Texas Education Agency (TEA): The Texas Education Agency is the state agency that oversees primary and secondary public education. It is headed by the Commissioner of Education (TEA, 2022c).

Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA): Division of the Texas Success Initiative enacted by the Texas State Legislature to determine student readiness (TEA, 2008).

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the meaning of college readiness according to the College Board and implications of AA high school seniors not being college ready. Next, the researcher provided an overview of current research regarding reasons why many AA seniors may not be college ready, and finally, the researcher shifted to consider possible variables related to why some AA high school seniors may be college ready. The results from this study may demonstrate how variables were possibly the deciding reason(s) whether or not an AA high school senior will struggle to be college ready aside from academics. The next chapter provides further discussion concerning college readiness and possible variables for AA seniors who attained college readiness and a review of the literature.

CHAPTER II:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to examine possible variables contributing to the college readiness of graduating AA high school seniors. Research indicates AA students are labelled as the race denied of their amended rights, poverty stricken, and illiterate (Cagle, 2017). In this chapter, variables contributing to the challenges of educating AA students will be discussed, including No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA), which are intended to address gaps and help contextualize student education (U. S. Department of Education [DOE], 2022). There are still significant gaps in the literature regarding variables that may affect AA students' academic performance.

Examples of the struggles of AA seniors in society as a whole carry over into the classrooms and will be provided by describing the culture of AA students including Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and family and community requisites. Many AA seniors are faced with discrimination and racial bias on a consistent basis. This type of negative experience may be detrimental to AA seniors as they pursue their educations whereby educational factors are highlighted and include teacher and leadership obligations. Effective studies and programs to enable educators to better understand the AA seniors and effectively teach them will be shared. Finally, variables which may affect college readiness for the AA seniors will be presented. The variables are economically disadvantaged, discipline, attendance, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns. The success of most AA seniors may be dependent upon how the AA seniors address the variables. To reiterate, the struggles of AA students regarding discrimination and racial bias occur when society mislabels the AA race negatively (Cagle, 2017).

The accountability policies concerning academic gaps are NCLB, which was a federal law intended to improve students' academic performance, and the ESSA, which was created to provide additional support and to hold school accountable for students' academic progress (DOE, 2022). NCLB was created during the Bush administration with a two-fold goal of closing the academic achievement gap between minority and advantaged students and making the American education system more internationally competitive. NCLB placed the academic responsibility of every student's academic progress upon the states. Even though the onerous is on the states to close academic gaps of minorities, the federal government wanted the states to concentrate mainly on English-language learners, special education students, and poor and minority students. If the states were unsuccessful, they could lose federal Title I funds that were designed for establishing programs for students in schools that they would not be able to afford without the additional funding. The DOE created a summary of NCLB and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) showing how NCLB was a reauthorization of the ESEA of 1965 (McGuinn, 2016).

During President Obama's second term, ESSA was passed (DOE, 2022). The goal of ESSA is to hold schools accountable for how students achieve academically. The act also reauthorized the ESEA to address the schools' commitments to equal opportunities for all students. Because NCLB highlighted where students required additional academic support, ESSA was created to address the additional support needed. ESSA focuses on all students regardless of income, race, zip code, income, background, or home language. NCLB required updating due to the stringent school requirements. Therefore, in 2010, the Obama administration asked Congress to focus on clearer goals to prepare all students for college readiness. In 2015, the new ESSA was enacted into law and a few provisions are as follows: advanced equity for disadvantaged students, teachers are required to teach all

students high academic standards, vital academic information must be provided for all through statewide assessments to measure the student's progress, support evidence-based interventions, increase high-quality preschool, and maintain accountability and positive change for the lowest-performing schools (DOE, 2022). NAEP (2022) data still shows a persistent gap in student achievement despite policies that are intended to reduce them. The lack of student achievement also shows the gaps persist because of variables outside of schools' control.

Culture of African American Students

The decision-making process to close the achievement gaps begins with the variables that require individual choices of the AA students and is self-managed by the AA students to make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). A goal of TEA is for schools to build a positive culture and climate and support the academic success of students through social and emotional learning (SEL) practices, building their skills and assisting them in responsible decision-making (TEA, 2022a). Research shows most students would excel when they have a sense of belonging and when they are supported (Allbright et al., 2019). As of 2019, only eight states incorporated SEL strategies in their schools' policies (Allbright et al., 2019). This study will show the importance of SEL strategies and offer suggestions on how to approach teaching AA students.

Social and Emotional Learning

The SEL strategies are designed to improve self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, build relationship skills, and social awareness (CASEL, 2020). SEL is comprised of six strategies; the first and second strategies are promoting and supporting positive school climate and relationships. The third SEL strategy is using elective courses and extracurricular activities to promote relationships and a sense of

belonging. CASEL (2020) outlines the fourth and fifth strategies as classroom practices and curricula, and personnel strategies. The final strategy is measurement and data use. College readiness is being pushed throughout the nation, creating an adverse impact for underrepresented students due to inequitable access to educational resources and limited interventions. Therefore, AA students may benefit from programs addressing SEL pertaining to college readiness. Gee et al. (2021) created a college and career readiness curriculum intervention program called Paths to the Future for All (P2F4A) that addresses the need for students' academic success through the SEL practice.

The P2F4A program entails an approach to college and career development that encompasses social-emotional skills supporting positive paths towards the students' futures by evaluating 9th-12th grade students asking two questions: to what extent does students' content knowledge of college readiness, vocational aspirations, and social-emotional outcomes change prior to and post the P2F4A program, and their personal perspective of how the program influenced their personal growth (Gee et al., 2021). Emergent evidence showed college readiness could positively influence students' outcomes through social-emotional development (Gee et al., 2021). Three interventions were recommended through the P2F4A as it related to enhancing the students' social emotional skills: (a) Making My Future Work, (b) School to Jobs, and (c) Youth Leadership Academy (Gee et al., 2021). The results of the programs suggest that through the intentional promotion and scaffolding of students' college and career readiness knowledge, students could achieve clarity when social-emotional skills are woven throughout their lessons (Gee et al., 2021). Similar findings of Lindstrom et al. (2022), who also studied SEL, identified the need for the SEL strategies for AA students' academic success.

Lindstrom et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study of 84 purposively sampled educators and high school student participants. The purpose of their study was to solicit perspectives on college and career readiness to better understand context and conditions that influenced education trajectories and post high school opportunities for underserved students. Lindstrom et al. (2022) found 50% of state plans analyzed by the College and Career Readiness and Success Center included SEL. One of the most important strategies found was for students to have positive relationships with trusted adults, which is an SEL strategy (Linsdtrom et al., 2022). Another case study on the importance of SEL strategies and AA students' academic success was a SEL study successfully implemented in California districts (Allbright et al., 2019). The researchers explored school district administrators' and teachers' successful implementation of the SEL strategies to grasp further insights of their practices of schools that were and were not attending to the students' social-emotional development (Allbright et al., 2019).

The researchers explored positive schools with similar demographics and limitations of resources compared to peer institutions, which exhibited similar behaviors and strategies but showed improved results (Allbright et al., 2019). This phenomenon was addressed by considering what strategies outlier schools used to enact and support the various conceptions of SEL and what challenges emerged in outlier schools' SEL efforts (Allbright et al., 2019). Allbright et al. (2019) created a survey asking questions phrased into four SEL constructs and four school culture-climate constructs. Students, parents, and staff participated in the survey (Allbright et al., 2019). Allbright et al. (2019) also conducted semi-structured interviews with central office administrators who were responsible for SEL practices at their schools, school leaders, and other adults responsible for SEL practices, and teachers. Principals suggested interviewees to the researchers. Allbright et al. (2019) also gathered documents posted throughout the schools, observed

classes, lunch periods, passing periods, and other events for further clarification of SEL practices during and post school day. Allbright et al. (2019) revealed the summary of the survey data was that the experiences of the staff produced positive insights around the phenomena of human experience, which were anchored in behavior, actions, situations, attitudes, and perspectives of students as well as district staff and community to assist all students, especially AA students. Allbright et al. (2019) determined that the six SEL strategies would be beneficial to schools, districts, and policy leaders if SEL was understood and aligned in curriculum and school activities. Further, the researchers suggested that policy makers explore approaches to measuring SEL and all related constructs to provide support to school level educators (Allbright et al., 2019). Schaefer and Rivera (2016) also shared their findings to better understand the importance of SEL strategies for AA students' academic success even if the AA student was attending an early college high school. Many articles addressed the importance of SEL strategies for AA students in traditional high schools, but even students who do not struggle academically also require SEL strategies for college readiness (Schaefer & Rivera, 2020).

Schaefer and Rivera (2020) interviewed nine post high school graduates about their learning experiences while attending the college ready high school in order to explain what mattered to the students and better understand and possibly address the persistent issues the students faced. The reflective conversations with the nine graduates took place over six weeks. One of the results was self-awareness of the student being a learner and their mode of learning (Schaefer & Rivera, 2020). Another result was the importance of the students developing a relationship with staff, teachers, and administration (Schaefer & Rivera, 2020). The students stated they must feel that they matter. Recommendations from the study included required and regular meetings during the school day with small classes and a caring adult to address the students' social and

emotional well being and to provide educational experiences essential for academic success (Schaefer & Rivera, 2020).

Kramer et al. (2020) also described this type of essential educational experience through a positive youth development (PYD) program including social and emotional development. The PYD principle is a framework with four hypotheses: that every student has capabilities, talents, and strengths to be fostered and cultivated; staff members must identify and cultivate them; students must be prepared and supported by staff; and while students must be academically oriented with roles and responsibilities, staff must customize the students' academic and nonacademic endeavors and contribute to their identity and social-emotional learning (Kramer et al., 2020). The educators' priorities in the district expressed how they communicate with the students, school improvement resources of PYD practices, and student engagement strategies.

The PYD multiple case study served as an insight to improve college readiness among diverse students (Kramer et al., 2020). Many schools were successful in implementing the PYD philosophy by emphasizing and prioritizing academic and nonacademic programs to the community and youths in pursuit of social-emotional development. Their study shared five principles: students need experiences and opportunities to develop academic, social, vocational, and cognitive competences; students need a sense of self-worth, confidence, and efficacy; students require character building to include a sense of wrong/right and respect towards others; and the students must learn to care for others. Since AA students are generally close to their family and community, a community partnership with their children's school for their academic success may be effective towards college readiness. Kramer et al. (2020) described this fifth principle as the need for students to connect to caring family, peers, and

community members while contributing to their healthy development and ultimately, academic success.

Family and Community

While teachers are an important aspect of student success, family and community are also determining variables in a student's education. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2013) shared that students should have a sense of belonging in the classroom and know that the parent is also stressing the importance of an education. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2013) defined parental involvement as parents interacting with schools with their children for the benefit of their children's educational success. The role of parental involvement in youth academics and their psychological functioning through engagement was not yet tested (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). The self-system theory defines this type of parental support as when parents create an environment that supports the youth's experiences to succeed and connect to others and become autonomous learners (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). Their longitudinal study aimed to investigate parental involvement, achievement, academic engagement, and depression (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). The three types of parental involvement for 10th grade students in 10 diverse public high schools were assessed using a pool of 1,056 tenth graders (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). The covariates were student gender, SES, prior academic achievement, problem behaviors, and depression (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). Parental income ranged from \$15,000 to over \$150,000 per year (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). The amount of parental involvement was a precursor to students' academic success in grade school; this may explain why successful AA students who experienced negative teacher relationships were still successful academically (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). To better understand the importance of SEL and the role families and communities play in AA students'

academic success, Malkemes and Waters (2017) studied a small suburban area, Third Ward Bottoms, located in Houston, Texas.

A large section of Third Ward was predominantly indigent AAs who were consistently faced with gangs and generational poverty (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). The residents needed to be encouraged and frequently guided because they lived in the here and now, which meant their future was unknown, and they had limited hope (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Houston is known for devastating storms, but the residents also experienced spirit and mind-altering effects due to generational poverty (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Due to compassion for residents' needs, a non-profit entity named Generation One, Inc. (Gen One) wanted to transform the community (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). The residents consistently saw the lack of revitalization projects or positive visual changes in their community (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). In general, the children and teens were hanging out in the streets during all hours of the night without supervision; this behavior was in contrast to citizens outside of Third Ward Bottoms (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Given this difference in behaviors, the goal of Gen One was to empower the Third Ward Bottoms residents and allow them to participate in transforming their community (Malkemes & Waters, 2017).

Malkemes and Waters (2017) expressed the need for SEL in conjunction with volunteers outside of the community because students and parents were numb and hopeless due to consistent daily tragedy. Volunteers from businesses and churches rallied together to create dozens of teams organized and guided by Gen One to clear lots, remove trash and dilapidated buildings, repair homes, and paint homes (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Even though the residents saw people working in their community, few residents interacted with the teams (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). After the community was cleaned up, Gen One followed up with the community and hosted block parties and still, few

adults attended because the adults were still experiencing a deep sadness and hopelessness, which was highly unexpected due to the external progress made in the visual improvement of their community (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Some of the volunteers were hurt due to the lack of appreciation because they felt they really made a difference, but the lack of engagement and hopelessness was symptoms of generational poverty and misinterpreted for ingratitude (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Also, community members may have looked at the volunteer efforts as being short term to address a long-term issue (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Gen One knew in order to be effective, they must convey their promises was to build the community a better future by presenting a long-term commitment (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Gen One had to maintain communication, provide frequent check-ups, follow-up, and build relationships with the community (Malkemes & Waters, 2017).

The community had over 50 churches that were locked except Sunday mornings (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). The community churches were comprised of the struggling community members; therefore, the churches were a place of worship and nothing else. In a neighborhood with many disengaged parents, students had to care for themselves, and they lacked long-term role models, people who supported them, and mentors (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Many teens had to fend for themselves, became unwed parents, and often experienced jail. Gen One knew a positive mindset of the children was a starting point for an intervention (Malkemes & Waters, 2017).

After buying in to the goal of Gen One and seeing their children flourish, parents began to engage in the children's activities, and the community saw success through the new school founded by Gen One named Generation One Academy (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Gen One knew they must keep the children positively engaged and off the streets; therefore, they implemented a year-round activity schedule for the school and added

additional after school and summer programs and saw a positive impact within three years (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Malkemes and Waters (2017) added that academic gaps were closed, but student behavior did not improve due to the generational poverty mindset. The students were still experiencing anger and negativity (Malkemes & Waters, 2017).

Gen One decided to implement SEL because they knew the children required skill sets for their present and future success (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). They also implemented the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) program, which focused on fight-or-flight responses to offset children living in poverty over generations (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). SEL was most effective, and Gen One implemented the SEL strategies in every program and project, because they found no other program produced such powerful and positive outcomes (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Gen One staff taught the SEL strategies to staff, children, and parents (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Gen One also redesigned the school to include Mommy and Me classes, Young Scholars of Excellence to form community partnerships, and The Nehemiah Center for middle school students (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). Gen One research-based changes were summarized as six factors designed to reduce generational poverty effects and to increase students' academic success: (a) early intervention; (b) SEL embedded throughout Gen One Academy; (c) Positive relationships with parents, SEL-based training, and established partnerships with school-family; (d) supported and nurtured school environments and helped guide parents in home relationships; (e) a school was created and participated in community organizations by providing information on available community resources and improved communication with other services; and (f) provided hope to empower the residents (Malkemes & Waters, 2017). The Malkemes and Waters (2017) study showed the importance of community and parental involvement in a student's life. Without the

services of Gen One, the Third Ward Community may have still been faced with impoverished lives and unsuccessful youths. The adage that action speaks louder than words is a testament to the Third Ward Community. Allowing children to see how community can come together for their good is essential, due to the importance of relationships and community to AA students.

Similar to Malkemes and Waters' (2017) work, Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez's (2017) qualitative study sought to understand what children from impoverished families need to be successful. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2017) shared that if students do not possess these attributes, they were more likely to face further academic difficulties in the future. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2017) referred to the family resilience framework to better understand how families worked together to thrive and survive when they had experienced poverty. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2017) included a purposive sample of 20 AA mothers from urban, low-income communities, focusing on the transition from Head Start to kindergarten in Mariette Myers' Head Start program, located in Lincoln Heights and surrounding communities. Their study focused on mothers because most AA families were headed by females (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017). The researchers introduced the study during a parent meeting and shared their purpose, process, benefits, and expectations (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017).

Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2017) digitally recorded the mothers in interviews conducted by the AA female research assistants. The interview was comprised of questions concerning the mothers' beliefs about transitioning their children to kindergarten, their assessment of their academic readiness, and personal messages to their children about the actual transition (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017). Based on their data, students' academic success was critical during this transition milestone; students from AA family backgrounds were especially at risk for negative cognitive and socio-

emotional outcomes as they transitioned from Head Start type programs to kindergarten (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017). Collaborating with engaged and motivated parents, Head Start could assist families and children prior to kindergarten and continued to serve as a link between families, children, and elementary schools coupled with SEL strategies, leading to the needed supports for student success (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017). Family and community are important in the AA students' lives; however, their families may be more successful if presented with necessary skills to incorporate when interacting with their communities in order to assist their children.

Latunde's (2017) research focused on families; she examined whether providing skills-based training to diverse families in specific settings could lead to increased parent participation in the student's education. Latunde (2017) wanted to expand on the ESSA and intervened with parents to create community partnerships where parents could partner with their children's school to enhance their education. Latunde (2017) expressed that parent involvement was a key in student success. The mixed-methods study was based on whether skills-based trainings coupled with other practices, which were skills-based would have a positive impact if parents were involved in the education of their children (Latunde, 2017). The study was guided by two questions; to what extent did setting impact parental involvement for diverse students, and to what extent could skill-building programs support learning? The study was based on three theories, Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and change theory (Latunde, 2017). These theories were chosen to explain why the home-school connection was vital and to understand how change impacted student success through family engagement (Latunde, 2017).

Prior to the survey, three workshops, based on adult learning theories, provided ideas for practical application and the research setting represented community in

partnerships. These workshops were conducted at eight sites in collaboration with Latino-serving groups, AA-serving organizations, churches, schools, and afterschool programs (Latunde, 2017). The researcher stated that communities of color should consider partnering with education entities when policies, practices, and laws to offset racism and stereotypes were being discussed (Latunde, 2017). The researcher also understood the importance of church to the AA families, because most AA families depended on the church as part of their “village” (Latunde, 2017).

The results showed AA students still scored lower than their White peers in assessments if parents were not actively engaged in their children’s educations (Latunde, 2017). Eighty-four percent of AA families reported church was an important part of their lives while 62% of Latinos and 56% of Whites agreed (Latunde, 2017). Family involvement appeared to have a positive effect on AA students’ educational performance (Latunde, 2017). The results also showed family involvement increased students’ graduation rates and advanced placement course participation, while referrals to special education decreased (Latunde, 2017). Many AA students were closely tied to their family, community, and their church for support, all of which were instrumental in their lives (Allbright et al., 2019). However, family involvement and socioeconomic status were not enough to support their academic success (Washington et al., 2017). The “total” child must be addressed and supported.

Washington et al. (2017) explored how depression and anxiety impacted AA youth more than other ethnicities and they could co-occur, negatively affecting children’s lives. The researchers studied family-level factors, depression, and anxiety among low-income AA children residing in metropolitan or urban areas with female primary caregivers. They offered suggestions to intervene and be a resource for others working with youth and families of AA children (Washington et al., 2017). AA youths could be

overly aggressive, have attention deficits, and decreased academic functioning compared to other ethnicities (Washington et al., 2017). AA students were disproportionately exposed to poverty, negative life events, violence in their community, and discrimination, which were contributing factors to their depression and anxiety (Washington et al., 2017).

The study included a systematic review of methods postulated by other researchers (Washington et al., 2017). The studies were selected using the following criteria: (a) population must be exclusively AA students under 18 years of age, (b) the AA students must have mental health outcomes of depression or anxiety, (c) scholarly studies must be published between 2003-2014, and (d) family-level factors were predictor variables (Washington et al., 2017). The researchers found positive family-level factors were associated with decreased depression and anxiety in all youths; therefore, AA families must instill family interventions that can effectively reduce depression and anxiety symptoms in their children by positive parenting practices, and healthy family environment and functioning (Washington et al., 2017). AA seniors' college readiness is also dependent upon their teachers and administrators.

Educational Factors

Within school districts are district and school administrators and teachers, and each entity is expected to treat students with respect and help grow them to their highest academic potential to be college ready post high school. In some cases, educators helped all students reach their fullest potential, while in others, educational inequities persisted (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). Some AA students stated the schools were selling them a dream, but they were not preparing them for it. Castro (2020) studied an all-Black school in Illinois and offered retrospective analysis for the AA students' college readiness. What the researcher found was policy failure and dysconscious racism (Castro, 2020). The issue at hand was how could an AA senior be military ready, but in most

cases, not college ready? Castro (2020) wanted to shift data from individual students and move towards a greater sociopolitical concept that investigated AA seniors not graduating college ready. The Illinois school in the study offered free remedial courses as part of a college and career readiness statewide legislative initiative, but found the policy a failure because no instructors showed up to teach the classes, even though students registered for the classes and were not provided with any information about the classes. The program was later removed from the school (Castro, 2020). Ignoring academic context forced individual students to become solely responsible for the remedy of decades of undereducation. AA students became a target when people wanted to “help or fix them” while limited attention was given to socio-structural and institutional conditions working in a concerted effort to create an intervention program that most asked for in the beginning (Castro, 2020). Nationally, AA students continue to receive inferior educational opportunities and suffer from inequitable education policies, practices, and programs throughout all levels of education (Castro, 2020). Policymakers who designed college readiness programs should have taken into account the context of AA students’ lives and helped them visualize their educational futures in which they played a critical role (Castro, 2020). Limited access to college-level courses while attending high school has historically been an issue and concern for AA students.

Harrington and Rogalski (2020) stated many high school students are required to take remedial college level courses post high school for community colleges, and 40% of students entering four-year universities are required to take remedial courses when they enter college. Harrington and Rogalski (2020) reported the need to assist students with developing their academic skills prior to graduating high school. A community college in Baltimore County developed an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) for students who were not college ready, by giving them the opportunity to take credit-bearing courses in

math and/or English with added academic support. In the past, students who took developmental education courses did not complete the courses and never enrolled in credit-bearing coursework due to the lack of support (Harrington & Rogalski, 2020). This particular college ready initiative had been highly successful meeting the needs of many students. AA participants had higher grade point averages than their peers who did not participate in the program. The AA students became college ready (Harrington & Rogalski, 2020). This study demonstrated that when AA students are placed in positive environments, they can be academically successful. Feldhoff et al. (2022) shared that unique problems require unique solutions. Today, the unique problem for many AA seniors is still college readiness.

Feldhoff et al. (2022) linked and analyzed school effectiveness and school improvement through two models - Comprehensive Framework of Effective School Improvement and Dynamic Model of Educational Effectiveness. Educational factors implied schools produce uncertainties about if they did the “right” things, if the decisions made were goal-attaining, and how and what they should have decided to be the next steps (Feldhoff et al., 2022). School effectiveness was measured by competencies in the school process variables that positively influenced the students’ cognitive levels measured by achieved results and linked to teachers (Feldhoff et al., 2022). College readiness should be a result of school effectiveness for all students.

Teachers

Ingersoll et al.’s (2021) exploratory study investigated demographic changes relating to elementary and secondary U.S. teaching forces over the past 30 years. The data sources were the National Teacher Principal Survey and the Schools and Staffing Survey, both of which are the largest and the most comprehensive sources of teacher data available in the U.S. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducted the

surveys. Ingersoll et al. (2021) summarized seven trends and changes by exploring two questions; what are the sources and reasons for the trend, and what are the consequences and implications of the trend? The current trends in staffing were larger, older, less experienced, more female, more diverse, consistent in academic ability, and unstable. The results of the study showed that PreK-12 teachers formed one of the largest occupational groups in the nation. However, one-fifth of the schools were privately owned, and many AA students cannot afford to attend those schools (Ingersoll et al., 2021). Students from poverty-level families have dramatically increased, but the number of lower-poverty public schools decreased (Ingersoll et al., 2021). These statistics involve AA students; therefore, there are more AA students with fewer schools, possibly resulting in larger class sizes and fewer high-quality teachers who may not want to work in those conditions.

Another trend is teacher shortages due to older teachers retiring coupled with an increase in student enrollment (Ingersoll et al., 2021). The average age for a teacher was 41 in 1988 and increased to 55 in 2008. Today, the U.S. is experiencing new hires who are young, recent college graduates and White females (Ingersoll et al., 2021). Beginning teachers also have the highest turnover rates. The results of the study, regarding elementary and secondary teachers, showed a higher demand for teachers due to increased enrollments, and that teachers are younger and less experienced, White females, and the teaching profession is unstable (Ingersoll et al., 2021). This is disheartening because it is a “perfect storm” scenario for AA students. Higher enrollment and fewer high-quality teachers usually result in a negative learning scenario. AA students require relationships with their teachers, and this may also affect their college readiness because learning begins in the classrooms with the teachers.

Benson and Owens (2022) stated minority students' academic performance correlates to their sense of inclusion and community in school. Benson and Owens (2022) shared the fixation of preparing students for college readiness was potentially harmful for the students, particularly AA students. Benson and Owens (2022) surveyed schools where unequal access and empowerment within the schools were not an abnormality. The schools were located in racially and economically segregated areas frequented by "failing" schools where a high concentration of AA residents resided (Benson & Owens, 2022). Tracking AA students impacted their educational expectations while giving the appearance of meritocracy (Benson & Owens, 2022). In the classrooms, teachers were encouraged to increase student engagement through dialogue, yet their lack of acknowledgment of the students' sociocultural and historical backgrounds was not adequate (Benson & Owens, 2022). The minority students must feel their teachers authentically care about them and their lives as people not only in the classroom, but outside the classroom as well, in addition to content mastery (Benson & Owens, 2022). A conclusion of their study offered that teachers must be recruited from the upper academic echelons (Benson & Owens, 2022). This may be a solution, but it still does not address the high turnover rate of new teachers. AA students also require stability, teachers they can depend on and who encourage them to excel academically. Salisbury (2020) shared a student recognized different academic expectations between White and AA students during an interview. The AA students stated the teachers did not push AA students like they did the White students (Salisbury, 2020).

Salisbury (2020) stated the purpose of the qualitative CRT study of racial fortuity was to investigate ways an urban high school operationalized AA students and how the portrayal of that definition served to regulate educational opportunities for AA students. AA students were shown to have an inability to engage with rigorous relevant curricula

and this deficit resulted in limited pedagogically innovativeness from the teachers even though the new didactic instructional approaches of the teachers lacked cultural relevance and innovation (Salisbury, 2020). Two research questions were asked; in what ways is racial fortuity present in the enactment of definitions of success for AA students, especially in relation to accountability pressures, and what are the roles of school leaders in advancing racial fortuity within their schools? A recommendation from the study's author was for more inclusion of AA stakeholders, because accountability structures failed to include the AA students in meaningful ways (Salisbury, 2020). School and student accountability structures may lead to unconscious racism.

Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) focused on unconscious racism and culturally responsive practices in the areas of school practice, which entailed leadership, parent engagement, learning environment, pedagogy, student management, and shared beliefs (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). The study examined a successful school that closed achievement and opportunity gaps for AA students to determine if the reasons for the gap closure was culturally responsible embedded practices throughout the school, whether unintentionally or deliberately (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). Two questions were asked in the study; what culturally responsive practices were used in the schools to close opportunity gaps between White and Black students, and what specific strategies were used? (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). The researchers identified professional development as an area needing improvement because most teachers were White females lacking in cultural awareness of AA students, but the professional development classes must be carried over into the learning environment and pedagogy to improve student experiences (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). Improving student experiences may also include the students being aware of their low academic expectations compared to the White students.

Andrews and Gutwein (2017) examined the implications of low expectations of AA students and how teachers' expectations affected the student-teacher relationships. Andrews and Gutwein's (2017) mixed methods study analyzed data from eight focus groups comprised of students from five middle schools and three high schools. Based on the results of their analysis, the researchers discovered many students' experiences with the expectations of teachers were racialized and classed. Three major themes were evident to understanding how students perceived teacher expectations of their behavior and academic success: (a) students' experiences with differential treatment, (b) students as intellectually inferior, and (c) teachers' constructions of "good" and "respectful" students (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017). The themes Usually, teacher expectations were based on whether the student was a minority or privileged, and most of the research was reported from the teachers' perspectives (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017). However, Andrews and Gutwein (2017) explored middle and high school students' perceptions of teachers' expectations. Students from all races believed teachers had different expectations of them based on their identity characteristics; teacher expectations penalized students of color and poverty-stricken students compared to White students (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017). AA students were aware that their teachers treated them differently and required less of them academically (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017).

As evidenced above, due to the negative views of AA students held by some educators (Andrews and Gutwein, 2017), teachers may require extensive professional development in cultural awareness and sensitivity towards AA students (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Boston & Warren, 2017; Jackson, 2015), yet they are provided limited cultural exposure while pursuing their degree programs (Jackson, 2015). AA culture sensitivity must be taught if teachers are to better understand how to effectively teach AA students (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017). Even AA teachers are not naturally equipped to

teach most AA students, especially new AA teachers, and professional development was just as much required for AA teachers as for teachers from different ethnicities (Jackson, 2015). College faculty must also be taught culture sensitivity of AA students in order to teach prospective early childhood EC-12th grade teachers to possibly offset attendance and behavior variables. Unfortunately, college faculty often had the mindsets that best instructional practices should be effective across all ethnicities, but that was not the case (Jackson, 2015). Therefore, faculty must also utilize professional development to better understand how to effectively teach AA students.

Boston and Warren (2017) addressed inclusiveness, cultural sensitivity, and relationship building for 10th-12th grade AA students in an urban public school located in Southern California. Boston and Warren (2017) conducted a quantitative study using Multidimensional Model of Black Identity-teen and California Health Kids surveys. Three forms of data were used in the research: (a) Is there a relationship between sense of belonging and racial identity among urban AA high school students? (b) Is racial identity related to urban AA high school student according to their grades? and (c) Is sense of belonging related to urban AA high school students according to their grades? Findings indicated teachers played a significant role in promoting a sense of belonging to AA students, pointing to a need for teachers and staff to be trained in cultural inclusiveness, cultural sensitivity, and ways to promote positive teacher relationships (Boston & Warren, 2017). AA students felt more connected, valued, and cared for if they had a positive relationship with their teachers and staff (Boston & Warren, 2017).

Another area of needed professional development for teachers was student tracking (Stanley & Venzant Chambers, 2018). Tracking is a sorting and grouping process based on a student's academic ability (Stanley & Venzant Chambers, 2018). However, teachers often used their own perceptions to measure students' academic

abilities and because many teachers had internal biases, this type of approach had been deemed ineffective (Stanley & Venzant Chambers, 2018). This qualitative study included multiple data sources including individual interviews and focus groups, 100 hours of classroom observations, relevant school documents, and records (Stanley & Venzant Chambers, 2018). All students felt they should be better prepared to take upper-level classes, meaning they would be placed in a higher track (Stanley & Venzant Chambers, 2018). Tracking data must address inequities, suggesting that if AA students comprised 20% of the overall populations studied, then they should comprise at least 20% of the honors classes (Stanley & Venzant Chambers, 2018). While AA students saw value in tracking, the program needed to be revamped because teacher attitudes may be improved once process reforms in individual school leadership were obtained (Stanley & Venzant Chambers, 2018). Culturally responsive areas of school practices should be apparent in leadership, parent engagement, learning environment, pedagogy, student management, and shared beliefs (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). Culturally responsive practices may lead to increased academic performance for AA students (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015).

Leadership

Vassallo (2022) stated finding educational leaders to carry out social and equitable practices in their schools required critical transformation. Enacting equitable schools and social justice is an unparalleled challenge for risk-taking leaders with vision who transmit their values and beliefs into their daily routine of school tasks rather than futuristic management responsibilities (Vassallo, 2022). The qualitative study explored the multifaceted role of the school leader in the struggle to incorporate a focus on multiculturalism for equitability and not just schooling. Multiculturalism includes the reduction of prejudice and discrimination against the oppressed minorities, while working

more towards equity and social justice (Vassallo, 2022). Multiculturalism stresses empathy and the need for participation in a pluricultural society with diversity and tools for leaders, students, and teachers (Vassallo, 2022). The researcher stated the importance of culturally responsive leadership towards equity and empowering students (Vassallo, 2022). This type of leadership was innovative and could reform education by creating collaborative partnerships instead of a dictatorship. Today, leadership roles should look different than in the past.

Wang and Pollock (2021) shared there is a greater accountability for school leadership due to the increasing duties and ever-changing role of shareholder responsibilities. The purpose of their study was to examine the principals' perceptions of their accountability in work, whom should they be accountable to, and why. Principals participated in the 60-question online survey and showed that competing and/or conflicting student expectations from educational authorities, parents, teachers, interest groups, and students posed challenges to the principals' roles. Not only are the principals expected to meet a range of various job responsibilities, but they are also held responsible for the responsibilities (Wang & Pollock, 2021). The response scale to the survey were ranked: (a) students, (b) staff and faculty, (c) parents/community, (d) employer, (e) head of education, (f) themselves/family, and (g) God/church/synagogue/mosque. The top ranking was students, second was themselves/family, third was employer, fourth was parents/community, fifth was staff/faculty, sixth was head of education, and last was God. In the past 30 years, principals have been asked to balance political, bureaucratic, legal, moral, performance-based, professional, and market responsibilities during an average workday (Wang & Pollock, 2021). Since students were ranked first and staff was ranked fifth, it is unclear if they truly have student success and college readiness as their top priority.

Leithwood (2021) analyzed 63 studies to identify types of school leadership practices that were likely to improve equitable school conditions as well as outcomes for traditionally diverse and underserved students. The inequitable treatment of diverse students had been a concern for policy makers and educators for decades. The purpose of the study was to summarize results of empirical research generated by scholars. Leithwood (2021) reviewed evidence about how leadership practices included a framework enacted to improve equity in school as the objective. The research identified that leadership practices contributed to more equitable schools, making valuable additions in terms of adopting a perspective on the practices, policies, and procedures in their schools; and in developing an understanding of the norms, cultures, values, and expectations of the families of the students. (Leithwood, 2021).

Leithwood (2021) explained the definition of leadership as the exercise to influence organizational members and stakeholders towards the identification as well as achievement of the schools' vision and goals. Leadership was reciprocal and not unidirectional, and exercised through relationships between individuals, settings, and groups. When defined in this way, a successful leader made significant ethically defensible and positive contributions to a school's vision, goals, and progress (Leithwood, 2021). In this study, equity was defined as students who required additional educational resources and opportunities to achieve the same results as other students who were not in need. Equity also described inclusion and social justice (Leithwood, 2021). The five domains of leadership were setting directions, building relationships and developing people, designed support practices, improved instructional programs, and secured accountability (Leithwood, 2021). None of the domains addressed equity; therefore, leadership was not expected to assist AA students. Tillman and Scheurich (2013) declared in their handbook that there was a lack of diversity with the U.S. schools

and the lack of equity in student achievement and college readiness because of educational leadership and leadership research.

Tillman and Scheurich (2013) affirmed school leaders must be prepared to successfully lead diverse and equitable schools. Many leadership preparation programs were designed to meet standards created by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration. Tillman and Scheurich (2013) added that expectations were once exceptional but now the curricula and pedagogical frameworks must be revised. Preparation programs must now include professional practices leaders may implement to improve academic achievement for all students (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013). Leaders must be prepared as instructional leaders and leaders for social justice (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013). Additionally, leader preparation courses must teach leaders to administer equitable schools to become schools where diversity of students, community, faculty, ideologies, and cultures are the foundation for all professional practices. Brown et al. (2021) affirmed that school leaders are able to improve the education and equity in student achievement.

Brown et al. (2021) recognized three types of lenses affecting change: (a) social network, (b) semiotic, and (c) heuristic. When considering change agents to influence an organization, school leaders that distributed leadership amongst their subordinates experienced greater success (Brown et al., 2021). However, leadership was more effective when school leaders empowered others and supported regular interaction with teachers and other practitioners to influence attitudes and behaviors (Brown et al., 2021). This type of empowerment to others, especially teachers, may have provided the needed incentive for teachers to understand the importance of their position to assist all students and help change the schools' climate and culture.

School leadership must address negative stereotypes and racial bias towards students (Baptiste, 2019). In order to change a school's climate and culture, leaders may need an adjustment in their leadership style for school, teacher, and student success. Baptiste (2019) stated the most effective leadership style was transformational leadership (Baptiste, 2019). The purpose of the school leadership study was to analyze the impact of various leadership styles as they pertained to teacher satisfaction as well as organizational success (Baptiste, 2019). Baptiste (2019) stated leadership styles were linked to the experiences of the teachers. There were four domains in transformational leadership: (a) charisma, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. Baptiste (2019) added if principals focused on job satisfaction of the teachers, then the teachers would place their focus on the students (Baptiste, 2019). The impact for transformational leadership was teacher job satisfaction, successful school climate, and student success because it was built on relationships (Baptiste, 2019). Hopefully, principals will encourage teachers to be more effective as they teach all students; including AA students. This style also encompassed SEL strategies (Allbright et al., 2019). Once SEL strategies are put into place for district policies and expectations, then the AA student must make personal decisions towards their academic progress, including positive decision making towards specific variables, to graduate college ready.

Variables Which Affect College Readiness

In the following sections, five potential variables, that may point to the reasons many AA seniors graduate college ready, will be examined. The five variables are economically disadvantaged, attendance, behavior, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns. How AA seniors attend to each of the variables is vital to their college readiness. The researcher will provide a definition of each variable according to TEA. Research data will be provided by various researchers to expound on each variable,

explain the importance of the variables, and the pros and cons of how the variables affect college readiness.

Economically Disadvantaged

A variable contributing to AA students' college readiness is the socio-economic status of their families. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs clarified that before an individual could attend to any need, they must have their basic needs satisfied, which are their physiological needs. Therefore, if a student arrives at school hungry, they will probably not be in the mindset to learn. If a student was up all night with a younger sibling because the parent was working multiple jobs, they will probably not be in the mindset to learn. If a child was stressed over what to wear to school the following day, they would probably not be in the mindset to learn (McLeod, 2022). As challenging as these examples may be, AA students can still graduate college ready with the label "economically disadvantaged" (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Students labeled economically disadvantaged should not be discounted, and the underrepresentation of minorities must be understood in a broader scope and practice (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). The purpose of the qualitative study was to analyze effective practices to improve academic success of ethnic minority students and economically disadvantaged students across three different schools (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). The researchers shared that low teacher expectations were associated with underachievement in minority students and the reverse was also true. High teacher expectations resulted in positive student perceptions of school as well as feelings of belonging (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014).

The qualitative study focused on how to support students so they can show evidence of their potential (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). The study's participants were majority AA and a smaller representation of Latino students. The multiple case study was guided by questions of "how?" and "why?" Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) studied three

schools with a purposive sampling of schools which offered Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID). The focus was on how teachers thought, planned, and their classroom practices in relation to how they developed minority and economically disadvantaged students (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) found there was no excuse for ethnic minority students to use the economically disadvantaged label as a reason for not aspiring to enroll in gifted education. Students who aspire to take DC and AP courses are usually preparing themselves academically to continue these upper-level courses towards a college degree post high school (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Szymanski (2021) also provided insight to economically disadvantaged AA students taking AP courses.

Szymanski (2021) affirmed in a qualitative study that students living in poverty could be successful taking AP courses. The school was 59% AA and students lived in high poverty areas. Ten AA students taking AP courses were interviewed. Four themes were derived from the interviews: (a) gifted students took advanced class to decrease boredom and the challenge, (b) internalized messages of being smart, (c) external influences to take advanced classes, and (d) difficulty in balancing rigorous classes and time management for other interests (Szymanski, 2021). Teachers were usually the gatekeepers in determining if a student was recommended for AP courses and they had the ability to differentiate the pedagogy to meet the needs of the students who experienced poverty, and teachers were critical players in the students' success (Szymanski, 2021). Discrimination and racial bias may be factors related to why AA students are not provided the opportunity to take AP courses.

In addition to gifted education programs, other programs exist to support economically disadvantaged students. Morgan et al. (2014) shared one such program was the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR UP).

This program was derived from research conducted by Morgan et al. (2014) to address the insufficiency paradigm of minorities being underrepresented in gifted education. The school under study served a student population that was 95% AA and economically disadvantaged, yet the school consistently outscored other public schools in academic testing due to their high passing rate on the state's standardized tests (Morgan et al., 2014). The staff at the school stated the students had no back-up plans and they had two choices; they could get ahead by using their brains and receiving an education or they could succumb to the perils of their society (Morgan et al., 2014). According to the staff, there were no additional options, and the students chose to learn despite their destitute environment (Morgan et al., 2014). The GEAR UP program forged a successful partnership with economically disadvantaged students and their guardians (Morgan et al., 2014). This partnership led to building academic programs where seventh through twelfth grade students could prepare for college and gain avenues to financial aid for college assistance (Morgan et al., 2014).

Prior to the partnerships, the graduation rate for these students was below 60% and post program, the graduation rate was 95%, with 58% enrolled in a college after graduation (Morgan et al., 2014). The AA seniors stated that GEAR UP made a significant difference in preparing them for college (Morgan et al., 2014). GEAR UP was funded through the United States Department of Education and designed to prepare low-income students to graduate high school college ready (Morgan et al., 2014). The program offered in-school tutoring, community service, college visits, STEM initiatives, college readiness programs, graduation coaches, and parent programs and services to name a few (Morgan et al., 2014). The researchers shared that the key to their program was showing the students that adults actually cared about their futures (Morgan et al., 2014). Henderson and Gill (2016) declared that it really does take a village to raise a

child, stressing the importance of family and community involvement in the AA students' education.

Henderson and Gill (2016) detailed in their quantitative study that ethnic minority youth required a variety of resources in the school, family, and community systems to refute risks. The goal was to turn "at risk" to "at promise" by promoting resilience among economically disadvantaged minority youths (Henderson & Gill, 2016). The socio-ecological systems theory was defined as the flow of resources that influenced the development of the child as they transitioned through life. The metaphor of the village emphasized order and harmony from relationships across systems and individuals (Henderson & Gill, 2016). There was a lack of interdependent systems explaining the educational disparities among youths who were economically disadvantaged and ethnic minorities. However, Henderson and Gill (2016) found when economically disadvantaged AA youth were provided with consistent encouragement from their mentors, while attending school, they showed high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Henderson & Gill, 2016). Significant work to reduce communication and racial barriers, distrust in school and community agencies, were required. While a student's economic status may influence their college readiness, their school attendance may equally play a role.

Attendance

When a student is absent, they are not in the learning environment with access to their education. The more absences, the further behind the student may become and this could potentially result in not being college ready. Burdick-Will et al. (2019) noted that the routes to school taken by the student may explain why the student was late or absent due to not feeling safe walking in their neighborhoods (Burdick-Will et al., 2019). Public transit was the most efficient route to school and therefore, deterred truancy by

preventing students from being exposed to high crime routes (Burdick-Will et al., 2019). Students living in neighborhoods without safe routes to school may have lower levels of attendance, affecting college readiness (Burdick-Will et al., 2019).

Weiler et al. (2019) investigated an intervention based on mentoring student offenders. The purposive sample consisted of adolescents and mentors in a previously published study of a preventive intervention of high-risk youth (Weiler et al., 2019). The youths were referred by the probation department of the Office of the District Attorney, diversion programs, and restorative justice (Weiler et al., 2019). To assess the level of risk of the youths, a survey, which was also used in juvenile justice settings to determine recidivism risks, was conducted for each potential youth (Weiler et al., 2019). Two mentor-reports to match mentor and mentee were a Match Characteristics Questionnaire and youth-report Youth Mentoring Survey (Weiler et al., 2019). The effectiveness of the 12-week program was dependent upon how focused the mentees and mentors were, but the consistent results of the program suggested mentoring had a positive impact on self-efficacy and truancy (Weiler et al., 2019). Providing high-quality mentors to at-risk students may increase their levels of attendance, making it more likely for them to be successful in school and become college ready.

Similar to Weiler et al. (2019), O'Donnell and Kirkner (2014) found high quality programs could deter truancy. The purpose of their quantitative study was to investigate the effects of an out-of-school program on low-income, diverse students' academic achievement and school attendance (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). Students' grades, attendance, and test scores were collected and analyzed from a district located in California. Through the after-school program, the researchers concluded that school attendance would be improved. The findings supported high-quality programs grounded in youth development and technology could positively influence youth and school

attendance (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). When youths attended school on a consistent basis and were positively influenced, they had the capability to be college ready. When students experience consistent truancy, this usually leads to student dropouts.

Districts invested in deterring truancy and absenteeism generally agreed these dissimilar problems were taxing (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). A commentary written by the researchers explained that multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework accentuated aspects that matched with the problems of school attendance (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). School attendance and absenteeism would include integrated models addressing functioning domains, development of approaches for students with challenges, and allowed simultaneous strategies by using a MTSS framework (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). Sample domain clusters included: (a) school refusal/truancy, (b) functional profiles and analysis, (c) high school, (d) levels of impact for attendance and the problems, and (e) low/moderate/high absenteeism severity (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). School attendance was a benchmark that is critical to the development of children; a lack of attendance could disrupt students' academic growth processes (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). Therefore, a future challenge was to identify the best practices and ways that were feasible to tackle the challenge and increased school attendance (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). Once school attendance is improved, the AA student has the opportunity to be college ready.

Behavior

School attendance is important for students' academic growth, yet Texas AA students consistently lead the state in expulsions, suspensions, dropouts, special education, and alternative placements (TEA, 2021b). The Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data shows AA males are suspended or expelled three times more than their White peers (TEA, 2021b). This is not just a problem in Texas. AA

students are disproportionately expelled and suspended, stressing the importance for school leadership to find alternatives to suspensions (Cagle, 2017). Disproportionality regarding school discipline for AA students is a form of discrimination, and these actions deny AA students their amendment rights to an equal education (Cagle, 2017).

Disproportionality not only affects students academically, it also has negative repercussions to student's health, community, and social problems (Cagle, 2017). If a student is not at school, they are more likely to engage in sexual intercourse, fights, use drugs, commit crimes, and perform other inappropriate behavior (Cagle, 2017).

Additionally, suspensions and expulsions do not work as they often promote future misbehavior associated with dropouts, thus making students more likely to become a ward of the state (Cagle, 2017).

Zero tolerance policies could also compound problems; while they were intended for serious infractions such as possession of weapons, they were now applied to a broader range of school infractions (Curran, 2017). AA students were the largest recipients of punitive discipline resulting from the zero-tolerance policy (Curran, 2017). Further, teachers may feel that any office referral should be an automatic student suspension, which could promote the school-to-prison pipeline, yet most referrals were for minor infractions (Curran, 2017). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) stated children should be educated and not incarcerated; once a student is incarcerated, it is difficult for them to reenter the school system (ACLU, 2022). The school environment of AA students can create a culture of fear, dropouts, and continuation of the school-to-prison pipeline, which has impacted a higher proportions of minorities (Curran, 2017). For districts with minority student demographics totaling over 54% of the districts' population, 61% of disciplined AA students were given mandatory expulsion for drugs and assault offenses (Curran, 2017).

Cagle (2017) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine discipline from high school students' and teachers' perspectives by surveying senior students and certified teachers from Gates High School. To explore perceptions of school rules, Cagle (2017) surveyed senior students; results showed that students felt they belonged at their schools, but that rules were not implemented fairly, with most students agreeing the rules were too strict and students were suspended from school for minor offenses. However, the teachers disagreed with the students' opinions stating the rules were not too strict and the students were not suspended for minor offenses (Cagle, 2017). Therefore, data of student suspensions must be analyzed and shared amongst the students and teachers. Also, school rules must be agreed upon by the staff and students. If this does not occur, the school will continue to be in disarray with frustrated staff and unsuccessful students who are not college ready.

The survey results were also compared to results from a focus group of four male administrators, two assistant principals, one administrator from the central office, and one principal where they were asked questions similar to the survey questions (Cagle, 2017). School leaders identified the enforcement and consistency of school rules as a main factor in school suspensions because they felt the student code of conduct mandated actions because suspensions have no value (Cagle, 2017). School suspension data confirms negative implications comparable to drop-out percentages, alternative disciplinary placements, incarceration, and other negative implications to this type of punishment (Cagle, 2017). Administrators, teachers, and students all agreed there was a need for a positive behavior interventions and a support system which would benefit the students and school culture.

Wienen et al. (2018) stated that schools' cultures are targeted by how the students perceived fair and equal treatment by the teachers and compared the teachers' perceptions

of the students' treatment by using a systemic multilevel approach. Wienen et al. (2018) examined student problem behaviors across 23 schools, focusing on variables such as emotional problems, behavioral problems, hyperactivity attention deficit, problems with peers, and prosocial behavior. The longitudinal survey of the schools allowed researchers three years to pilot the school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS), and four follow-up measurements were implemented (Wienen et al., 2018). Teacher perceptions of the students' behavior were assessed by the SDQ-L (Wienen et al., 2018). The assessment tool was developed and described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. For all available scales, with the exception of prosocial behavior, higher scores showed more problem behavior (Wienen et al., 2018). To determine if perceived student behavior changed during SWPBS, a six linear mixed model analysis was used and the scales were total problems, emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity problems, prosocial behavior, and peer problems (Wienen et al., 2018). SWPBS improved students' academic outcomes by targeting the school's social and organizational culture (Wienen et al., 2018).

Problem behaviors had greater long-term effects for AAs (Kremer et al., 2016). Additionally, students with academic concerns may also have had behavior concerns, and students with behavioral concerns may also have had academic concerns (Kremer et al., 2016). Behavioral patterns may be linked to students' academic performance, with the links being time allocation, sleep duration and quality, social ties, and sport activities (Kassarnig et al., 2018). Poor academic performance usually reflected persistent and serious delinquent activity (Kremer et al., 2016). They identified behavior problems with school readiness, college admissions tests, and high school dropouts (Kremer et al., 2016; TEA, 2021b). However, associations between academic performance and behavior problems did not vary by race (Kremer et al., 2016).

Conversely, if a school had a progressive type of school climate that addressed students' decision-making, and programs to assist the students with knowledge about how to promote both healthy and pro-social behavior, discipline would not be an issue (Moolman et al., 2020). The school would have had a positive climate, which would contribute to a positive learning environment for total student success (Moolman et al., 2020). The presence of a positive learning environment might have increased AA students' college readiness as their knowledge of healthy behaviors coupled with a supportive environment could prevent discipline issues (Moolman et al., 2020). While the research discussed above shows how disciplinary issues can impact student learning, changes to the school environment can ameliorate some of those problems, keeping students in school and learning. Participation in extracurricular activities may also have a positive influence on student behavior.

Extracurricular Activities

Participation in extracurricular activities resulted in positive impacts for students (Haghighat & Knifsend, 2018; Neely & Vaquera, 2017; Nolte, 2015). Extracurricular activities included public performances, demonstrations, contests, displays, and club activities. The University Interscholastic League (UIL) offered extracurricular opportunities consisting of athletics, fine arts, and clubs in which students could participate (UIL, 2022).

Bradley and Conway's (2016) research found that school sports and non-sports extracurricular activities had a positive impact on academic achievement. Many schools have a Student Code of Conduct which address eligibility guidelines for student participation. Three of the most common guidelines are discipline, attendance, and academics. These guidelines may lead to AA students' college readiness. Bradley and Conway (2016) conducted quantitative research examining various studies that addressed

extracurricular activities and students' academics. Their study confirmed extracurricular activities for sports and non-sports may have similar benefits. Bradley and Conway (2016) reviewed social activities, team sports, performing arts, school involvement, and academic clubs for 10th graders. The students participating in the different activities showed improved academic performance and displayed an elevation level in school attachment (Bradley & Conway, 2016). Extracurricular activities influence students as young as six years of age. Students who practiced fine arts and other non-sports related were 1.2 times less likely to become dropouts or have discipline problems and athletes were 1.7 times less likely (Bradley & Conway, 2016). Higher-level sports, which represented the school, had a higher frequency of required practices and was shown to promote being conscientious, organized, efficient, and systematic (Bradley & Conway, 2016).

Fredricks and Eccles (2010), through their linear and nonlinear study of extracurricular activities participation of 11th grade students, sought to understand the academic indicators associated with participation. Extracurricular activities had predictive outcomes in young adults including educational attainment, civic engagement, and mental health. Fredricks and Eccles (2010) organized their study in four ways: (a) effects of participation, (b) self-selection into activities, (c) associations between AA and White youths, and (d) whether gender, socioeconomic status, or race moderated the relation between participation and development. Fredricks and Eccles (2010) found participating in fewer activities was beneficial for skill development and would not deplete the youths' energy, academic performance, or time.

Fredricks and Eccles (2010) stated academic adjustment was assessed by educational expectations, grades, and educational status. The findings reflect that AA adolescents were less likely than Whites to use alcohol and drugs and there was no relation

to the total number of activities. AA and high-risk youth dropped out of the study at higher rates than White and low-risk youths. However, AA participation was 67% and White participation was 33%. In this study, the results showed AA students were less likely to use alcohol and drugs and needed to participate in 1-3 activities instead of four or more.

Eisman et al.'s (2018) findings align with Fredricks and Eccles (2010), demonstrating that AA youth formed positive social connections and avoided harmful behavior, such as substance use and violence, through extracurricular activity participation. Eisman et al. (2018) shared that participation in fewer activities during high school compared to middle school was better because high school student participation was more self-directed. Eisman et al. (2018) evaluated AA youths with a grade point average of 3.0, maximum, in Michigan's four main public high schools. The participants were asked to list up to four activities they participated in at their church, school, and community in the past year, and were asked to complete a survey (Eisman et al., 2018). Findings from the study showed participation in organized activities is promising as it can promote youth development and prevent problem behaviors (Eisman et al., 2018). Additionally, when students participate early in their high school careers, it helps support positive youth development through social networks and positive connections with peers and the students did not participate in violent behavior or substance use (Eisman et al., 2018). Nolte (2015) revealed similar findings related to academics and behavior, as they pertain to students participating in extracurricular activities.

Many Texas high school principals believed extracurricular programs had a positive impact on students' academic performance (Nolte, 2015). The quantitative study used descriptive statistics to discover the relationship between variables and found patterns existed with extracurricular activities and students' academics (Nolte, 2015).

Nolte (2015) surveyed high school principals in public schools throughout the state of Texas. The researcher shared students, who were involved in extracurricular activities, especially sports, earned higher grades and educational aspirations, and also demonstrated higher control and self-concept than those who did not participate in extracurricular activities (Nolte, 2015). Extracurricular activities may also reduce student dropout rates (Neely & Vaquera, 2017), and this is important to note as AA students have the highest dropout rate among Texas students (TEA, 2021b).

Another way in which participation in extracurricular activities impacted students positively was through the positive relationships students built in extracurricular activities, allowing them to learn the importance of teamwork and commitment (Nolte, 2015). Through participating in extracurricular activities, the students began to develop connections and relationships with school personnel and in turn, created their own support systems, built self-esteem, and improved their academic performance (Nolte, 2015). These traits not only fostered classroom success, but they also affected the students' future endeavors. When students applied for colleges, the admission officer looked for students who were well-rounded, accomplished, and stood out from the other applicants; extracurricular activities provided that difference (Nolte, 2015). Additionally, a heterogeneous mix of extracurricular activities may contribute to a reduction in dropouts possibly due to the exposure the students received to many diverse groups of their peers, which may lead to forming stronger bonds and large reserves of social capital (Neely & Vaquera, 2017). A mixture of extracurricular activities, not just sports, and fine arts was important but not necessarily just for AA students; AA students benefited more from athletic activities because athletics provided a more structured and team concept to forge social bonds, and prosocial values were intentional (Neely & Vaquera, 2017).

Extracurricular activities promoted skills connected to academic success such as critical thinking, cognitive growth, a positive attitude towards academics and their schools as well as reduced dropouts (Haghighat & Knifsend, 2018). The researchers' longitudinal study focused on the effects or mediators of high school students participating in extracurricular activities and their academic outcomes (Haghighat & Knifsend, 2018). Tenth graders reported on their involvement in 24 activities including 14 interscholastic and 10 school-based (Haghighat & Knifsend, 2018). Two variables were used for the number of activities and intensity of the activity. The students were involved in an average of 2.2 extracurricular activities with fifty-six percent involved in at least one sport (Haghighat & Knifsend, 2018). Twenty-eight percent were involved in arts and 25% in clubs (Haghighat & Knifsend, 2018). Intensity was the length of time the students spent in the extracurricular activities. The average amount of time was 4.2 hours per week, as compared with homework, which averaged 10.6 hours per week (Haghighat & Knifsend, 2018). The researchers' findings were that adolescents and young adults often associate involvement in extracurricular activity as distracting from their academic goals, but they did not consider that the skills acquired through extracurricular activity led to improvement due to time spent on homework (Haghighat & Knifsend, 2018). Participation in extracurricular activities also allowed students to see themselves obtaining college degrees. School leaders must use the opportunity to promote students joining extracurricular programs because of the benefits, even though some districts decided that it was not in the budget due to financial constraints (Haghighat & Knifsend, 2018). However, research supports the importance of extracurricular activities and may illuminate academic benefits throughout adulthood (Haghighat & Knifsend, 2018).

Despite the positive outcomes associated with extracurricular activities, after World War II, national leaders felt schools offered too many activities, leading to the loss

of the importance of traditional academics (Nolte, 2015). In response, Texas passed No Pass/No Play legislation in 1984, which stated all students must pass every course to maintain eligibility (Nolte, 2015). This law, which is still active, required students to concentrate on academics as well as their desired extracurricular activity. Therefore, students involved in extracurricular activities have seen a positive impact on their academics (Nolte, 2015).

School Feeder Patterns

My Texas Public Schools (2017b) define school feeder patterns as paths which students follow as they progress each year through their education, where the most common pattern is elementary schools feed to middle schools, and middle schools feed to high schools. Langenkamp (2009) found that during student transitions, students were often faced with varying disruptions. A common disruption is during the students' middle school integration, where teacher bonding and popularity are important to the students, which could affect their academic achievement. This disruption may also carry over when the students enter high school. Social integration was another factor affecting student's academic performance as they transition throughout the patterns (Langenkamp, 2009). Since AA students rely heavily on relationships, this may be a factor as they transition through the feeder patterns and schools should be aware of the possible disruptions.

Langenkamp's (2009) study extended current research on school transitions by exploring transitions to high school as a pathway in the students' academic performance. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health included students in 7th -12th grades. AA students were predicted to have lower levels of education and predicted to receive lower grades their first year in high school. Findings showed that middle school students were able make new friends transitioning from other middle schools. As it

pertained to middle school teacher bonding, Langenkamp (2009) found the importance of relationships may be due to vertical teaming with the feeder high school. Popularity could not be measured because the students did not all follow the same high school pathway. Benner and Graham (2009) also shared the importance of transitioning from middle school to high school.

Benner and Graham (2009) stated that many students entering high school was a time when the students were still exploring who they were and hoped to become. Academically, high school is also their first exposure to departmentalized curriculum, academic tracking, class rankings, and graduation reminders. Results from studies by Langenkamp (2009) and Benner and Graham (2009) showed AA students were predicted to be the lowest achieving group academically in ninth grade compared to their White peers. AA students experienced a diminished sense of school belonging when they went from being the majority in their neighborhood middle school to being the minority in their high school (Benner & Graham, 2009). Also, similar to Langenkamp (2009), Benner and Graham found AA students experienced a decline in feelings of school belonging (2009).

Neild (2009) stated if a student managed the academic demands of transitioning to high school, they had a high probability of graduating within four years. Neild examines four theories about why ninth grade poses difficulties for some students. The first is that ninth grade coincides with life-course changes, such as reduced parental supervision and increased peer influence. The second is that in moving to a new school, students must break the bonds they have formed with their middle-school teachers and peers. The third is that some students are inadequately prepared for high school. The final theory is that the organization of some high schools is itself a major source of students' difficulty. Each theory, says Neild, suggests a particular type of policy response. The findings of the

study indicated teachers of PreK - 8th grades must prepare students for high school academics, while teaming with their parents in supporting the students because AA students would likely experience a decrease in academics due to not being prepared for the high demand of high school academics. (Benner & Graham, 2009; Langenkamp, 2009; Neild, 2009).

During ninth grade, parents usually grant more autonomy to their children. The reduction of parental influence and the increase in peer influences may result in more risk taking behaviors and decrease in academic performance (Neild, 2009). Transitioning to a new school requires the students to negotiate new friendships and adapt to the new high school (Neild, 2009). Behavior problems, attendance issues, and lower grades were usually the result of the difficulty of finding friends. The third challenge of students being inadequately prepared for high school is derived from the assumption that students who struggled in middle school would probably struggle in ninth grade (Neild, 2009). Also, students with poor math and reading skills found academics difficult or were overwhelmed in ninth grade. High schools' climate is different than middle schools. High school teachers' allegiances were usually to their subject-matter department as students were rushed from one forty-five-minute class to another. The students may have felt alienated, and teachers struggled to keep up with all their students and the students' additional classes (Neild, 2009).

Similar to Neild (2009), Schiller (1999) also found that students' feeder patterns required a transition period for each school in order for students to adapt to the new school and larger school environment. The researcher's study explored the structural aspect of a student transitioning to a new school (Schiller, 1999). At the new school, the students were older and more mature, and some students ended up dropping out while other students flourished academically. This study focused on relationships between the

students' individual characteristics and academic success as a ninth grader. Schiller (1999) found mathematic grades were a strong predictor of students' success in transitioning to other schools in the feeder pattern.

In addition to the difficulties some students may face as they transition between schools, school feeder patterns also involve the neighborhoods where the schools are located. Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) stated that many parents are concerned with where their children receive their education, as evidenced by filing zoning lawsuits and parents' carefully considering where they purchase homes. Personnel at each district, and at schools within the district, were expected to treat the students with respect and help grow them to their highest academic potential to be college ready post high school. Many AA students who resided in certain neighborhood categories were at a disadvantage compared to White students.

To develop community partnerships aimed at supporting improvements in the educational and developmental outcomes for children in certain school feeder patterns, TEA (2022b) created the Community and University Partnerships-Student Success Initiative. This initiative is consistent with the General Appropriations Act, 87th Legislature, which states exemplary schools, which serve struggling neighborhoods, will be awarded grants when a high percentage of students who traditionally do not pass state assessments were successful on the exams (TEA, 2022b). The Commissioner of the Texas Education Agency, Mike Morath, prioritizes awards based on applying schools that demonstrate a commitment to improved student outcomes on specific performance measures. The goal of the partnership is to decrease the number of failing students by leveraging academic, government, and community supports (TEA, 2022b). By encouraging schools within certain feeder patterns to focus on student achievement, previously underserved students may experience more academic success.

Gaps in the Research

On both the national and state levels, no known district has been preparing AA students for academic success through a specific program designed for AA students. But a specific program may not be necessary if AA students could focus on what they can control, which constitutes the discussed variables. Studies concerning the variables need to be explored. Even though there may be gaps, there were some AA students who graduated college ready in spite of struggles beyond their control. Investigating their experiences may help to identify the variables that contributed to their successes.

Summary of Findings

African American students face different challenges, sometimes on a daily basis, compared to other ethnicities (Allbright et al., 2019). Racism, negative stereotypes, unequal school discipline results, and low teacher expectations are a few of the challenges they encounter (Allbright et al., 2019; Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Boston & Warren, 2017; Cagle, 2017; Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017; Latunde, 2017; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015; Washington et al., 2017). The same researchers who address the challenges also provide possible ways to combat the challenges. However, there are also concerns such as how students should be responsible for their own academic careers and make positive decisions regarding college readiness.

Theoretical Framework

The study focuses on Critical Race Theory (CRT) as it relates to AA seniors' struggles outside of the school environment pertaining to discrimination and racial bias. The researcher will focus on how CRT affects the AA students in their academics. Finally, self-defeating behaviors, which the AA students have control over, will be addressed to gauge how they prepare for college readiness.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was introduced through the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Civil rights activists emphasized equitable treatment for all races under the law. Today, CRT in education focuses on how schools should teach students about the country and race relations in past, present, and future tenses. Educators may struggle to teach America's negative race relations as well as the negative history of AA people.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was an example of a novel grade school students were forced to read according to the TEKS and the N-word was used 219 times (Pitts, 2011). One district later changed the verbiage to slave, but the AA students still had to hear slave mentioned 219 times for the state mandated lesson (Pitts, 2011). Many AA students have experienced bias and discrimination in and outside of school.

A study by Dyches and Thomas (2020) explored *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* through a critical race theory and critical Whiteness studies lens. Dyches and Thomas (2020) surveyed twenty-four 11th graders to review their experience when reading the story. Traditionally, the novel has a "White savior" overture or White characters presented as heroic (Dyches & Thomas, 2020). The researcher of this study suggested in today's movies and television shows, very few AA characters are portrayed as Black savior or Black heroic figures (Dyches & Thomas, 2020).

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the teachers had the responsibility to deliver antiracist instruction in three approaches: addressing the N-word, develop the students' morality, and compacting antiracism (Dyches & Thomas, 2020). Many English Language Arts (ELA) teacher education programs did not explain antiracist teaching pedagogies (Dyches & Thomas, 2020). Five principles define CRT: (a) racism and race are endemic in the U.S., (b) marginalized populations' knowledge is valuable, (c) ultimate property is the function of Whiteness, (d) intersectionality informs the people lived experiences, and

it is essential to disrupt oppression by assuming a critical stance (Dyches & Thomas, 2020). This study was conducted by White teachers in an affluent and White area and the majority of students surveyed felt rage about oppression and racism (Dyches & Thomas, 2020).

CRT research of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) was the theoretical framework that undergirded this study. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) wrote that AA students experience structural racism due to poverty and the condition of their schools. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) stated AA students view racism as natural and normal in the U.S., and Whites have benefited from racism since the Civil Rights Movement. Majors (2019) lent support to the research of CRT and college readiness and posited that the parameters of college readiness negatively impact youths of color and low-income youths. Majors (2019) offered that youths of color in public schools receive disproportionately fewer resources and opportunities in schools to be competitive for college as their White peers. Majors (2019) also shared that there were inconsistencies across college readiness standards in the U.S. for schools to guide their practices towards college readiness causing schools to systematically exclude non-White students. Majors (2019) added that most critical race theorists agreed racial exclusion and oppression in education systems existed from the exertion of power to maintain White supremacy. Racial exclusion may have been seen as natural and normal to many AA students because of how they were publicly portrayed.

Fenwick (2016) cited CRT as a way to combat the negative stereotype of Blacks and to challenge the persistent racist notions and negative reports about Black people. Fenwick (2016) added that commentaries in research and media about Blacks and their community are consistently negative, which is a recitation of what is not working. The image of Blacks in research is harmful, dismal, libelous, and outright defamatory

(Fenwick, 2016). Given Steele and Aronson's (2004) study that examined the relationship between AA students and schools' negative climate and culture towards AA students, schools are encouraged to reflect on improving negative stereotypes of race, intelligence, self-defeating behaviors, and vulnerability. For this study, self-defeating behaviors are referred to as variables. Also, CRT recognizes and promotes the importance of ending discrimination and bias towards AA students because many live up to the feared stereotype (Steele & Aronson, 2004).

Rogers-Ard et al. (2019) offered a strategy to confront discrimination by preparing a more diverse workforce. By using CRT for educator orientation and development, Grow Your Own (GYO) programs were formed to recruit culturally rooted teachers of color to teach within underserved school systems (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019). A goal of GYO was reconceptualization to prepare teachers to fully address institutionalized racism in grades K-12, at the collegiate level, and within the community (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019).

Dixson and Anderson (2018) researched CRT by reviewing field notes, interviews, and documents and added to the movement in education by highlighting the expectations of AA students (Dixson & Anderson, 2018). CRT can highlight the quality of education many AA students receive from teachers to address college readiness (Dixson & Anderson, 2018). Another example of AA students using school as an option for positive life outcomes is a study on AA school success (Carter, 2008).

Carter (2008) reminded readers that the counternarrative of AA students' success serves as motivation for other students who might internalize the myth that AA students are intellectually inferior. Carter (2008) investigated the achievement of AA students and how their beliefs and attitudes about school and school behaviors resulted in academic success. Carter's (2008) study focused on students viewing the utility of school as a

needed achievement for upward mobility. CRT was incorporated into the discussion to guide the analysis of the research (Carter, 2008). Connectedness to the AA community and the awareness of racial discrimination is a significant factor in the development of AA students' critical race consciousness (Carter, 2008). Carter (2008) believed when AA students have a sense of self, it creates a positive schema, which encompasses three aspects: (a) seeing themselves as a member of a racial group for connectedness, (b) being aware of limitations and stereotypes or being aware of racism, and (c) developing a perspective of themselves as succeeding as a group member of the AA race. Carter (2008) summarized that students were aware of racism as a norm and it must be deconstructed in their everyday lives, confirming that AA students must make positive choices daily. This theoretical framework should help to predict the role of AA students making positive decisions regarding variables, while the school should develop the AA students academically through positive expectations.

Conclusion

The literature review provided an overview of research on specific variables that may explain why AA students are not college ready. The next chapter includes an overview of the research problem, research purpose and questions, research design, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, privacy and ethics consideration, and limitations for this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine possible variables contributing to the college readiness of graduating AA high school seniors. This mixed-methods study included archived district data, along with survey and interview data, from a purposeful sample of AA high school seniors within a large suburban school district located in southeast Texas. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while data obtained from interviews were analyzed using an inductive coding process to look for themes that emerged from the interviewee's responses. This chapter presents an overview of the research problem, operationalization of theoretical constructs, research purpose and questions, research design, population and sampling selection, instrumentation used, data collection procedures, data analysis, privacy and ethical considerations, and the research design limitations of the study.

Overview of Research Problem

Since 1994, AA students are still challenged with meeting accountability standards in TSI, advanced placement, dual credit courses, and associate degree attainment (TEA, 2011; TEA, 2021b). If a senior graduated under one or more of these standards, the TEA stated they would be college ready (CB, 2018). However, research suggests the choices a student made, and their personal values, impacted their achievements academically (Gamage et al., 2021). For this study, the areas where students can make choices that affect their college readiness are the variables considered in this study. The variables are economically disadvantaged, extracurricular activities, attendance, behavior, and school feeder patterns. As advanced academics are comingled with positive variables, the combination may lead to more AA high school seniors graduating college ready.

Operationalization of Theoretical Constructs

This study consisted of the following constructs: (a) discipline, (b) attendance, (c) school feeder patterns, (d) extracurricular activities, and (e) economically disadvantaged. The Texas Education Code defined discipline as when a student did not adhere to the school or campus' code of conduct, which was approved by the campus principal. This construct was measured using the average number of discipline referrals the student was given during their four years of high school. My Texas Public School (2017a) defined attendance as when students attended school during district-defined school days and times until the students' 19th birthday or met completion criteria by a certificate or diploma. This construct was measured using the average number of unexcused absences students had during their four years of high school.

School feeder pattern was defined as a series of schools that a student transitions into according to their attendance zone. For the study, the school feeder patterns of the AA high school senior consisted of their elementary and middle or intermediate schools attended prior to high school. There were 13 possible patterns that fed to the specific high school in this study. Extracurricular activities were measured using activities sponsored by the University Interscholastic League (UIL). The construct was measured by the average number of activities the students participated in per year and if the participation was athletic or fine arts. Economically disadvantaged was defined as a student who was eligible for either free or reduced meals (TEA, 2008). This construct was measured by determining if the student was considered economically disadvantaged or not for any year during high school.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine possible variables contributing to the college readiness of graduating AA high school seniors. The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. To what extent do Cohort 2021 and Cohort 2022 high school AA seniors differ in attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns?
2. To what extent do AA high school seniors perceive attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns as influencing college readiness?
3. How does attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns impact college ready AA seniors?

Research Design

For this study, a sequential mixed-methods research design approach was utilized. The first phase of this study was quantitative, and the second phase was qualitative. Mixed methods studies allow for a more in-depth analysis of the quantitative data by following up with the qualitative methods. For this study, archived TEA data were collected from a purposeful sample of high school AA seniors. Data were also collected using a survey and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic coding process

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of AA seniors in a large urban district located in southeast Texas. The district had 36 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, 10

intermediate schools, six high schools, and 10 specialty high schools. For Cohorts 2021 and 2022, the district had 36 elementary schools, 21 intermediate schools, six high schools, and 10 specialty high schools. The district demographics for the three majority races are AA (7%; n = 3,842), Hispanic (83.4%; n = 44,323), and White (5.5%; n = 2,953). Other sub-group populations were economically disadvantaged (78.8%; n = 45,880), at-risk (58.9%; n = 33,061), and special education (11.4%; n = 5,530) as depicted in Table 3.1. According to Table 3.1, a high percentage of the AA students in the study should have been majority economically disadvantaged and at-risk of not graduating college ready.

Table 3.1

Student Demographic Data for District

Race/Program	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
African American	3,842	7.0
Hispanic	44, 323	83.4
White	2,953	5.5
American Indian	76	0.1
Asian	1,581	3.0
Pacific Islander	44	0.1
Two or More Races	338	0.6
Economically Disadvantaged	45,880	78.8
At-Risk	33,061	58.9
Special Education	5,530	11.4

Cohort 2021 demographics for the three majority races are AA (16.9%; n = 653), Hispanic (65.0%; n = 2,517), and White (6.2%; n = 240). Other sub-group populations were economically disadvantaged (70.6%; n = 2,736), at-risk (45.5%; n = 1,764), and special education (10.0%; n = 388) as depicted in Table 3.2. Cohort 2021 had more than double the percentage of the district's population of AA students. This was also the school year where the district allowed parents to decide if they wanted their child to attend school face-to-face or virtually due to COVID. Also, the school had fewer economically disadvantaged, at-risk, and special education students compared to the district data.

Table 3.2

Student Demographic Data Cohort 2021

Race/Program	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
African American	653	16.9
Hispanic	2,517	65.0
White	240	6.2
American Indian	3	0.1
Asian	404	10.4
Pacific Islander	3	0.1
Two or More Races	53	1.4
Economically Disadvantaged	2,736	70.6
At-Risk	1,764	45.5
Special Education	388	10.0

Cohort 2022 demographics for the three majority races are A (17.3%; n = 671), Hispanic (65.5%; n = 2,548), and White (5.9%; n = 228). Other sub-group populations were economically disadvantaged (64.8%; n = 2,519), at-risk (41.9%; n = 1,629), and special education (9.1%; n = 354) as depicted in Table 3.3. Student attendance was higher in year 2021 than year 2022. There were also fewer economically disadvantaged, at-risk, and special education students attending the school. During the 2022 school year, the students were required to attend school face-to-face for the entire year.

Table 3.3

School Demographic Data Cohort 2022

Ethnicity/Program	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
African American	671	17.3
Hispanic	2,548	65.5
White	228	05.9
American Indian	3	0.1
Asian	390	10.0
Pacific Islander	3	0.1
Two or More Races	45	1.2
Economically Disadvantaged	2,519	64.8
At-Risk	1,629	41.9
Special Education	354	9.1

During the 2022 school year, more AA students attended school compared to the 2021 school year. There were also fewer economically disadvantaged, at-risk, and special education students attending the school of study. During the 2022 school year, the

students were required to attend school face-to-face for the entire school year. A purposeful sample of AA high school seniors in the participating district were solicited to participate in the study.

Participant Selection

A purposeful sample of college ready AA high school seniors in Cohort 2022 was selected to be interviewed for this study. In Cohort 2022, there were 155 AA seniors; 36 were college ready and 119 were not college ready. For the interview, the researcher utilized PEIMS variables and chose students to represent the college ready group. Given that the majority of the students had minimal attendance and behavior concerns, the researcher equally balanced male and female, fine arts and athletics for extracurricular activities, economically disadvantaged and not economically disadvantaged, and school feeder patterns.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative

Prior to data collection, the researcher gained approval from the district's institutional review board (IRB) as well as the University of Houston - Clear Lake's (UHCL) Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS). Upon IRB and CPHS approval, data collected included the PEIMS data for attendance, discipline, school feeder patterns, extracurricular activities, and economically disadvantaged status as well as the results of a multiple-choice survey for AA high school seniors who were college ready (see Appendix A). The principal and researcher met with the students for introductions and to explain the purpose, process, and specifics of the survey. An informed consent form was provided for each identified student regardless of their age and included space for the parent signature. The informed consent explained the survey and was provided to participating students identified in the study. Students under the age of 18 years were

required to have parental consent. The informed consent form included the purpose of the study, that participation was strictly voluntary, and administration procedures. The students were also informed they might be interviewed at a later time to further discuss the survey more in depth (see Appendix B). Students returned their informed consent form to the researcher, who then provided a link to access the survey. The students completed the survey during their homeroom classes. The quantitative data were entered into a research software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), for further analysis.

All data were secured in a password-protected folder on the researcher's computer and in the researcher's office within a locked file cabinet at all times. At the end of the study, the data will be maintained by the researcher for five years as required by CPHS and district guidelines. The researcher will destroy the contents of the file once the deadline expires.

Qualitative

A purposeful sample of AA high school seniors who were college ready were invited to participate in the qualitative portion of the study. The participants were asked to actively engage in a semi-structured interview for approximately 20-30 minutes. The researcher contacted the high school principal of the district by email to explain the purpose of the study, that participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and to inform participants that the timeframe for participating in the semi-structured interview was approximately 20-30 minutes. Students under the age of 18 and their parent were required to sign and return a parent consent/student assent form, which included information on the semi-structured interview process prior to being interviewed (see Appendix B). The participants' identities remained confidential, and if a participant wanted to stop the semi-structured interview, they could discontinue at will and without consequence. For

students at or above 18 years of age, an informed consent was provided through voluntary participation in the semi-structured interview and students had the opportunity to exit the interview at will.

The first series of questions in the semi-structured interview was intended to gather demographic information on the students needed for the research. The next series were open-ended questions regarding the variables under investigation. The final series focused on the AA seniors' past academic perceptions to possibly uncover other variables that affected their college readiness. Interview questions are listed in the Interview Guide and included as Appendix C. All semi-structured interview sessions were audio recorded and transcribed after completion. The research data will be stored in a computer kept in a locked office and the flash drive will be stored in a safe for five years, and after the elapsed time, will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

Quantitative

The data were downloaded into SPSS for further analysis. Question one was answered using descriptive analysis to determine if there was a difference in the college readiness variables for Cohort 2021 and Cohort 2022 between AA high school seniors who were college ready and AA high school seniors who were not college ready and combined for both cohorts. College readiness data were derived from PEIMS to separate college ready AA high school seniors and AA high school seniors who were not college ready according to TEA college ready guidelines. Descriptive analysis for minimum, maximum, mean, median, and standard deviation were conducted for attendance and behavior. Minimum, maximum, and percentages were calculated for economically disadvantaged, athletics participation, and fine arts participation. Finally, the cohorts were combined according to AA high school seniors who were college ready for

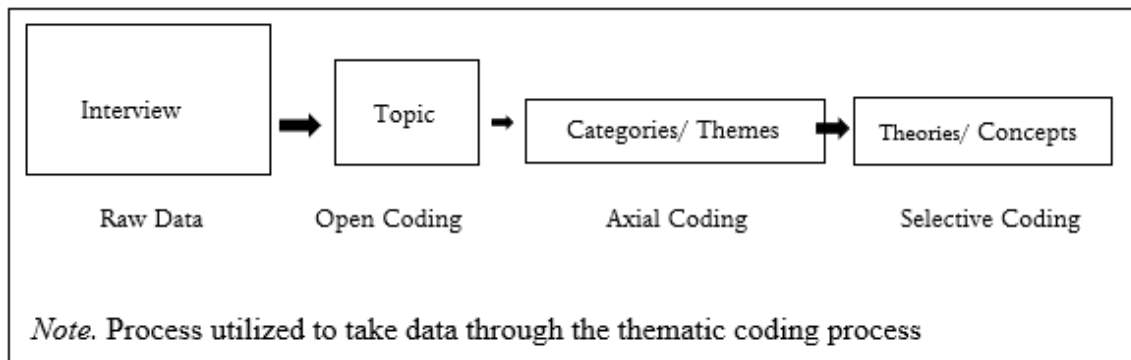
combined cohorts and AA high school seniors who were not college ready for combined cohorts for the variables. Due to the pandemic where Cohort 2021 was provided the choice to either attend school face-to-face or virtually, school feeder patterns were not analyzed. Research question two was analyzed using descriptive statistics for the AA high school seniors' perceptions of college readiness for attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns.

Qualitative

For research question three, the data from the semi-structured interview responses were analyzed using a thematic analysis process as shown in Figure 3.1. The participants provided data about the variables related to college readiness. Participants responded to a semi-structured interview aimed at providing deeper thoughts on behalf of the college ready high school AA seniors. The interview data were analyzed using a constant comparative inductive coding process to create an in-depth understanding of college readiness for AA high school seniors.

Figure 3.1

Thematic Coding Process



Berg (2001) shared that data analysis includes a process of display, data reduction, verifications, and conclusions. Data reduction allows for data to be accessible

and coherent to allow for the extraction of relevant themes and patterns. This process took place through transcription of the semi-structured interviews, organization of the data transcribed into themes, and translation of the data into summaries. The first step of the thematic coding process was for the researcher to become familiar with the answers to the questions (Berg, 2001). The next step of the process was open coding. This step was when the researcher conceptually color coded all responses according to how the participant answered the questions. Once all answers were color coded, the next step was to group the colors to form topics. Once the topics were established, axial coding followed where categories were formed, and themes derived. Once the themes were established, theories and concepts from the information were created. The codes and themes were used to compare the relationship between PEIMS variables and the AA seniors' perceptions of those variables.

Qualitative Validity

Validity was established through triangulation, peer review, peer debriefing, journaling, and member checking. In order to ensure validity, participating seniors' data, obtained from the archived data, surveys, and interviews, were cross-checked and compared. The data collected during the interview sessions were coded, transcribed and subject to member checking by having student participants review the transcripts to ensure their responses were recorded accurately. The questions and results were peer reviewed by experienced educators in order to ensure questions were valid. The peer reviews also served the purpose of obtaining feedback to questions posed to students related to their perceptions regarding college readiness variables. Peer debriefing was another form of validity employed. Experienced educators compared the emerging and final themes obtained from the coding process to ensure results were not the result of

subjective bias. Journaling was also used as a way for the researcher to reflect on their own personal biases so as to not impact the findings.

Privacy and Ethical Considerations

Approvals from the district's IRB and UHCL's CPHS, the participating school, and the participants were obtained prior to the use of any data. The name of the school district and the participants' school are not mentioned in the study. Individual student names and/or identification numbers were not requested in the interview process. An informed consent form was attached to the survey instrument stating the purpose of the study, ensuring participants were aware their participation was voluntary, that they could exit the survey at any time, and their responses and identities would remain anonymous. An informed consent form and interview questions were provided to survey and interview participants, and the data collected were properly secured in a locked cabinet and password protected file. The researcher reminded the district that the information obtained was kept confidential. However, there was no method to prevent further conversation between the students. The data collected were stored on a computer hard drive as well as a flash drive; both the hard drive and the flash drive were password protected. The computer is kept in a locked office and the flash drive will be stored in a safe for five years, and after the elapsed time, all data will be destroyed.

Research Design Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, disciplinary infractions could have impacted how each student perceived college readiness. Second, a student with many infractions may have viewed college readiness differently than a student with no disciplinary infractions. Third, the amount of support students had access to, both culturally and academically, may have impacted the findings. Fourth, if the AA seniors had strong support in these areas, their academic success may have been greater than the

student who did not receive support, distorting their perception of college readiness. Fifth, limitations were other obligations that the AA senior may have had, including employment and watching siblings until parents returned from work. Sixth, AA students who attended school all day may have had a different perception of school than AA students who attended half a day as it pertained to college readiness. Finally, findings from a single campus, which limited the overall study, and AA students in the district compared to the number of AA students in Texas, limited the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this sequential mixed-methods study was to examine possible variables contributing to the college readiness of graduating AA high school seniors. This chapter identified possible variables which set apart AA seniors who were college ready from AA seniors who were not college ready. There was a plethora of data concerning possible reasons why many AA seniors were not college ready, but additional data was needed to provide insight on possible reasons why some AA seniors were college ready while others were not. In Chapter IV, the variables in PEIMS, survey, and semi-structured interviews are analyzed and discussed in further detail

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine possible variables contributing to the college readiness of graduating AA high school seniors. This chapter presents results from the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data. First, an explanation of the participants' demographics of the study will be presented, followed by the data analysis results of the archived data, survey results, and interviews. It concludes with a summary of the findings.

Participant Demographics

Archived PEIMS Data

Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data were collected for AA high school seniors for cohorts 2021 and 2022 as shown in Table 4.1. The data were separated by college readiness. Both cohorts of college ready seniors were majority female (66%; $n = 61$). There were AA seniors in Cohort 2021 who were not classified as college ready and were labeled special education students (21%; $n = 23$). AA seniors participating in the school's Connect Learning platform, who were not classified as college ready, were mainly represented in Cohort 2022 (6%; $n = 7$). Connect Learning is a digital learning program using real-world scenarios. The lowest percentage of AA seniors who were Career and Technical Education ready, but not college ready, were from Cohort 2022 (82%; $n = 97$).

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics of Archived PEIMS Data

Item	2021		2022		Combined	
	CR	Not CR	CR	Not CR	CR	Not CR
Males	37.0 (n = 21)	55.0 (n = 62)	31.0 (n = 11)	56.0 (n = 67)	34.0 (n = 32)	56.0 (n = 129)
Females	63.0 (n = 36)	45.0 (n = 50)	69.0 (n = 25)	44.0 (n = 52)	66.0 (n = 61)	44.0 (n = 102)
Special Ed	2.0 (n = 1)	21.0 (n = 23)	0.0 (n = 0)	15.0 (n = 18)	1.0 (n = 1)	18.0 (n = 41)
Connect Learning	2.0 (n = 1)	2.0 (n = 2)	0.0 (n = 0)	6.0 (n = 7)	1.0 (n = 1)	4.0 (n = 9)
CTE Coherent	95.0 (n = 54)	95.0 (n = 106)	92.0 (n = 33)	82.0 (n = 97)	94.0 (n = 87)	88.0 (n = 203)

Survey

Thirty-five AA parents and their respective children, who were graduating in May 2022, provided parental consent/student assent for completing the survey (100% response rate). The survey took approximately 20 minutes with questions concerning the variables under investigation. Table 4.2 provides demographic data for the AA college ready students. Twenty-four students indicated they were female (69%), while 11 students (31%) indicated they were male. The majority of the AA college ready students indicated they were 17 years old (46%; n = 16). The highest level of household education was a bachelor's degree or higher (71%; n = 25), and their parents/guardians held professional/business positions (28%; n = 13) as shown in Table 4.3. Regarding the students' perceptions of the variables, the Student Code of Conduct was very important (60%; n = 21), attendance was very important (51.4%; n = 21), participation in

extracurricular activities was mostly athletics (42.9%; n = 15), the role of finances in education was somewhat important (51.4%; n = 18), and the role school feeder patterns played in education was somewhat beneficial in preparing seniors for college readiness (51.4%; n = 18) as shown in Table 4.4. A purposeful sample of AA high school seniors in the participating district were solicited to participate in the study.

Table 4.2

Seniors' Personal Information for Survey

Survey Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1. Gender		
Male	11	31.0
Female	24	69.0
2. Age		
Under 17	4	11.0
17	16	46.0
18	12	34.0
Over 18	3	9.0

Table 4.3

Seniors' Household Information for Survey

Survey Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
3. What is the highest level of education in your household?		
Some high school	4	11.4
Some college or trade school	4	11.4
Associates degree	2	5.7
Bachelor's degree or higher	25	71.4
4. What type of job(s) does your parent/guardian have? Choose all that apply		
Professional/Business	13	28.0
Retail	1	2.0
Education	9	20.0
Trade	7	15.0
Medical/Health	6	13.0
Military/Police/Firefighter	4	9.0
Other	6	13.0

Note. For item #4, students selected all that applied.

Table 4.4

Seniors' Perceptions of Variables for Survey

Survey Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
5. How important is it for you to follow the Student Code of Conduct?		
Not at all important	3	8.6
Somewhat important	11	31.4
Very important	21	60.0
6. How important is it for you to attend school every day?		
Not at all important	0	0.0
Somewhat important	17	48.6
Very important	18	51.4
7. Is participating in extracurricular activities important to a "well-rounded" education?		
Not at all important	1	2.9
Somewhat important	13	37.1
Very important	21	60.0
8. What type of extracurricular activity did you participate in during high school?		
None	0	0.0
Clubs	7	20.0
Athletics	15	42.9
Clubs and athletics	5	14.3
Fine Arts	8	22.8
9. What role does money play in a students' education?		
Not at all important because the school pays for everything	0	0.0
Somewhat important because I needed to buy things for school	18	51.4
Very important to have finances for a high school education	17	48.6

Survey Item	Frequency (n)	Percentage %
10. What role did your elementary, middle, and intermediate school play in your education?		
It would not have mattered where I went to school	3	8.6
The schools were somewhat beneficial in preparing me for a good education	18	51.4
The schools were important because they helped prepare me for a good education	14	40.0

Interviews

Ten of the AA students graduating in May 2022 completed a semi-structured interview regarding college ready variables. The semi-structured interview consisted of 10 questions. In an attempt to capture a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between variables and college readiness, the AA students were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the variables shown in Table 4.5. The gender breakdown was 50% male and 50% female. The majority of students were economically disadvantaged (70%; n = 7). The majority of students did not have discipline infractions (70%; n = 7). The majority of students had at least one unexcused absence (100%; n = 10). The majority of students participated in at least one extracurricular activity (60%; n = 6).

Table 4.5

Participant's Demographics of Students Interviewed

Survey Items	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	5	50.0
Female	5	50.0
Economically Disadvantaged		
Is economically disadvantaged	3	30.0
Not economically disadvantaged	7	70.0
Discipline		
Experienced infractions	3	30.0
Did not experience infractions	7	70.0
Attendance		
Had unexcused absences	10	100.0
Did not have unexcused absences	0	0.0
Extracurricular Activities		
Participated in extracurricular activities	6	60.0
Did not participate in extracurricular activities	4	40.0

Research Question One

Research question one, *To what extent do Cohort 2021 and Cohort 2022 high school AA seniors differ in attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns?* Was answered by descriptive analysis (i.e., minimum, maximum, mean, median, and standard deviation) for attendance and behavior. Minimum, maximum, and percentages were calculated for economically disadvantaged, athletics participation, and fine arts participation. School feeder patterns were calculated by creating a chart to determine each college ready AA high seniors'

elementary, middle, and intermediate school feeder pattern attended which led to the high school in the study using PEIMS data.

College readiness and other variables from archived PEIMS were collected from a purposeful sample of high school African American students who graduated in spring of 2021 and 2022. The archived PEIMS data were provided for AA students who graduated in 2021 and 2022, as shown in Table 4.6. The first variable to be analyzed was attendance, which was defined as unexcused absences or days absent from instruction. The average amount of unexcused absences for combined cohorts of college ready AA graduating students was 16 and for not college ready AA students, it was 28, indicating a statistical significance in unexcused absences while confirming attendance is extremely important for college readiness. Note in the table below that attendance is referred to as unexcused absences and ED is economically disadvantaged.

Behavior for college ready AA graduates combined cohorts was 1.8 and not college ready combined cohorts increased to 4.1. Behavior infractions usually removed the students from their learning environments due to suspensions. When students had attendance and behavior infractions, those combined days are days away from the learning environment, which usually mean the students would not be college ready. Most college ready AA seniors experienced 18 days away from the learning environment while not college ready AA seniors experienced 32 days away from the learning environment. Economically disadvantaged for college ready AA graduates in combined cohorts is 53% and 60% for not college ready. Athletic participation for college ready and not college ready AA graduates in combined cohorts was compared. Both groups had similar results each year for college ready (38%) and not college ready (34%). However, athletes experienced teamwork, no-pass-no-play, and dedication, which may all transfer into the classrooms causing them to graduate high school college ready. Participation in fine arts

for college ready and not college ready AA students was compared, and the fine arts participation percentages for college ready and not college ready were equal at 46% showing no statistically significant difference. Therefore, fine arts was not a variable pertaining to college readiness.

Table 4.6

2021, 2022, and Combined Cohort TEA Variables

Variables	2021		2022		Combined	
	CR	Not CR	CR	Not CR	CR	Not CR
1. Attendance						
Minimum	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Maximum	87.0	138.0	54.0	122.0	87.0	114.0
Mean	19.4	25.0	11.4	30.9	16.3	28.2
Median	12.0	14.0	7.0	21.0	9.0	19.0
Std Dev.	20.1	27.9	12.2	28.2	17.8	28.2
2. Behavior						
Minimum	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Maximum	14.0	36.0	20.0	35.0	20.0	36.0
Mean	1.9	4.3	1.4	3.9	1.8	4.1
Median	0.0	2.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	2.0
Std Dev.	3.3	6.4	3.6	6.3	3.4	6.3
3. ED						
Minimum	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Maximum	35.0	74.0	14.0	64.0	49.0	138.0
	(61.0%)	(66.0%)	(39.0%)	(54.0%)	(53.0%)	(60.0%)
Mean	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
Median	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
Std Dev.	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
4. Athletics						
Minimum	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Maximum	26.0	41.0	9.0	37.0	35.0	78.0
	(46.0%)	(36.0%)	(25.0%)	(31.0%)	(38.0%)	(34.0%)
Mean	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
Median	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
Std Dev.	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
5. Fine Arts						
Minimum	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Maximum	32.0	71.0	11.0	34.0	43.0	105.0
	(56%)	(63%)	(31%)	(29%)	(46%)	(46%)
Mean	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
Median	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
Std Dev.	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****

Behavior for college ready AA graduates combined cohorts is 1.8 and not college ready combined cohorts is doubled at 4.1. Behavior infractions usually removed the students from their learning environments due to suspensions. Combined with attendance, college ready AA students experienced 18 days from the learning environment and not college ready AA students experienced 32 days. Economically disadvantaged for college ready AA seniors in combined cohorts was 53% and 60% for not college ready. The percentages show that most AA seniors in both cohorts may have experienced financial difficulties. Even though the school may have paid for the necessities of the learning process, there were expenses which the seniors had to pay out of pocket i.e., field trips, dues for clubs, extracurricular activity fees, and after school programs.

School feeder pattern was another college readiness variable derived from archived data for college ready AA students for Cohort 2022 is shown in Table 4.7. The data indicated that the majority of the college ready AA students attended feeder pattern five. The feeder high school in the study is the largest, but not considered the best academically in the district according to the TAPR reports (TEA, 2021b). The feeder high school is also 64.8% economically disadvantaged, which is lower than 78.8% for the district. Expenditures for the school in the study were \$7,416 per student and ranked fourth out of seven high schools in the district, and the high school ranked 1st in the district spent \$7,921 per student per the TEA PEIMS financial report (TEA, 2022b). There were three school feeder patterns with zero college ready students.

Table 4.7

Cohort 2022 School Feeder Patterns

School Feeder Pattern	CR Students	#CR Students
1. Feeder Pattern 1	X	5
2. Feeder Pattern 2	X	5
3. Feeder Pattern 3	X	2
4. Feeder Pattern 4	X	4
5. Feeder Pattern 5	X	6
6. Feeder Pattern 6	X	1
7. Feeder Pattern 7	X	2
8. Feeder Pattern 8	X	5
9. Feeder Pattern 9		0
10. Feeder Pattern 10	X	1
11. Feeder Pattern 11		0
12. Feeder Pattern 12		0
13. Feeder Pattern 13	X	1
14. Out of District	X	4

Note. All students attend the same high school in the school feeder pattern

Research Question Two

Research question two, *To what extent do AA high school seniors perceive attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns as influencing college readiness?*, was answered by descriptive analysis. Table 4.8 provides specific participating students' perceptions of college readiness regarding the Student Code of Conduct, attendance, and participation in extracurricular activities. The majority of seniors (68%; n = 21) stated following the code of conduct was very important, attending school was very important (74%; n = 23), and participating in extracurricular activities for a "well rounded" education was very important (68%; n = 21).

Table 4.8

*Seniors' Perceptions: Code of Conduct, Attendance, and Extracurricular Activity**Participation*

Survey Items	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Very important
1. How important is it for you to follow the Student Code of Conduct?	9.0 (n = 3)	23.0 (n = 7)	68.0 (n = 21)
2. How important is it for you to attend school every day?	0.0 (n = 0)	26.0 (n = 8)	74.0 (n = 23)
3. Is participating in extracurricular activities important to a "well-rounded" education?	3.0 (n = 1)	29.0 (n = 9)	68.0 (n = 21)

The types of extracurricular activities students participated is shown in Table 4.9. Eleven seniors (36%) indicated they participated in athletics only. Five seniors (16%) indicated they participated in clubs and athletics. Seven seniors (23%) indicated they participated in fine arts. Even though 11 seniors participated in extracurricular activities, only one college ready student received an athletic scholarship, and only one college ready senior received a band scholarship.

Table 4.9

Types of Extracurricular Activity Seniors Participated In

Type of extracurricular activity during High school	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1. Athletics	11	36.0
2. Clubs	6	19.0
3. Athletics and Clubs	5	16.0
4. Fine Arts	7	3.0
5. None	2	6.0

The role money played in their education is shown in Table 4.10. Three seniors (9%) indicated money did not play a role at all because the school paid for everything. Fifteen seniors (47%) indicated money was somewhat important because the senior needed to buy things for school. Fourteen seniors (44%) indicated money was very important to have for a high school education.

Table 4.10

Survey Results of Seniors' Perceptions of Required Finances for College Readiness

Role money plays in a student's education	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1. Not at all important	3	9.0
2. Somewhat important	15	47.0
3. Very important	14	44.0

The role the seniors' elementary, middle, and intermediate schools played in their education is shown in Table 4.11. Seven seniors (23%) indicated that it would not have

mattered where they attended school. Thirteen seniors (42%) indicated the schools were somewhat beneficial in preparing them for a good education. Eleven seniors (35%) indicated the schools were important because they helped prepare them for a good education.

Table 4.11

Seniors' Perceptions: School Feeder Patterns

Role school feeder pattern played in student's education	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
1. Would not have mattered	7	23.0
2. Schools were somewhat beneficial	13	42.0
3. Schools were important	11	35.0

Research Question Three

Research question three, *How does attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns impact college ready AA seniors?* was answered by using a qualitative inductive coding process. In an attempt to capture a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between variables and college readiness, 10 AA high school seniors were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the variables. A constant-comparative analysis approach was used to allow for the development of meaningful categories and themes (Lichtman, 2011). According to Lichtman (2011), grouping the data into codes allows for the emergence of themes. All 10 seniors were college ready and their perspectives on the variables during their high school experiences related to five variables and the analysis identified six major themes common to all students: (a) finances, (b) extracurricular activities, (c)

attendance, (d) discipline, (e) school feeder patterns, and (f) district and/or school improvement.

The theme of finances affecting college readiness explored the relationship of available household finances students received to purchase school related expenses. The theme of extracurricular activities examined whether the student participated, their expectations for participation, and if the student was successful in obtaining a scholarship through participation. The theme of attendance examined reasons the students attended school on a regular basis. The theme of discipline examined the motivation for not having discipline issues at school and the importance of doing the right thing. The theme of school feeder patterns examined the perspectives of elementary, middle, and intermediate schools' effectiveness to preparing students for college readiness. The theme of ways the district/high school could improve students' preparation for college readiness was explored to assist future students.

Seniors' Perceptions of Finances

The theme of finances affecting college readiness explored the relationship of available household finances students received to purchase school related expenses. When discussing finances, two categories emerged: (a) finances played an important role; and (b) finances did not play a role. The theme of finances affecting college readiness explored the relationship of available household finances students received to purchase school related expenses. The theme of finances explores the importance of financing needed for the participants to be college ready. Students in the semi-structured interviews were both economically disadvantaged and not economically disadvantaged. Financing included clubs, activities, internet at home, programs, and AP exam fees.

Finances played an important role. Six out of ten participants referred to finances as a major influence in college readiness variables.

Having money opens up opportunities because when you have money to join clubs and other activities, it opens up all possibilities. As far as academics, if I need organizational items like dividers, notebooks, etc. I can just buy it. I needed a more advanced calculator and was able to get it. (Participant 8)

Participant 3 described having money allowed her to purchase track equipment and travel clothes for sports. She was also able to purchase a personal iPad and not rely on the school-issued device. Participant 5 gave an example that the cost to join choir was \$100.00, so she could not join. The most heartbreaking example was from a student who wanted to study pre-med. She wanted to register for a pre-med program during the summer session of her sophomore year but did not have the money to do it. There were other programs for people to help with the finances by providing partial scholarships, but the better ones were expensive. She was not able to attend either program because of a lack of finances. She currently participates in the orchestra, which offered summer programs, but even with partial scholarships, she could not afford to attend. Participant 10 wanted to attend school trips but could not afford them.

Finances did not play a role. Four out of the ten participants referred to finance as a variable concerning college readiness. Participant 1 stated, “Both of my parents are professionals, one is a phlebotomist and the other in refinery, and I was only interested in early college, and it was free”. Participant 2 did not have financial concerns because the school provided everything he needed. Another participant who was not economically disadvantaged said:

Finances is really important because I do not have to worry about money and getting a job. I can just concentrate on education. For families that do not have money i.e., putting food on the table, etc. is important. Families with money can concentrate only on academics. However, there was nothing I had to spend money

on for my education. However, I heard other students complain about not having money for field trips. (Participant 6)

The cost of AP exams was \$65.00 per exam, but the family of Participant 9 had the finances to pay for the exams. Participant 7, who is economically disadvantaged, would have liked having internet at home. Participant 8 stated: “For students who don’t have money, I have overheard them needing items in certain electives and hear them say that they did not have the money.”

Some participants felt that either having money and being able to participate in activities, or not having money and not being able to participate, affected their college readiness. Regardless of whether participants could afford things or not, the point is that money was needed by 90% of the students. Extracurricular activities also require finances and 90% of the students participated in either sports or fine arts.

Seniors’ Perceptions of Extracurricular Activities Participation

The theme of extracurricular activities related to whether the student participated in extracurricular activities, their expectations for participation, and if the student was successful in obtaining a scholarship through participation. When discussing participation in extracurricular activities, two categories emerged: (a) participation was not needed, and (b) participation was needed. The theme of extracurricular activities explored the importance and advantages of participating in extracurricular activities to be college ready. Participation to enhance academics and the possibility of obtaining a scholarship was discussed.

Participation was not needed. Eight out of 10 participants stated they did not need or want to participate in extracurricular activities. Participant 1 shared that activities got in the way of reaching her academic goals. She played volleyball her freshman year, but due to time management, she had to quit playing because she wanted to focus on her

academic goal. Participant 7 stated, “I did not participate in extracurricular activities because I was in early college and have been taking college courses since ninth grade and did not have time for other activities.”

The other participants plainly stated that they were not interested in extracurricular activities. Another highly skilled athlete shared, “Sports provided motivation, confidence, community service, and I wanted to always be busy. I would have been bored at home sleeping.” Although this participant engaged in sports, she obtained an academic-only scholarship because she wanted to concentrate on academics in college to become a traveling veterinarian. Several of the participants shared they participated in extracurricular activities for fun or something to do. Eight students received full academic scholarships. Only two students participated in extracurricular activities to obtain a college scholarship. One student received a full scholarship to play football, and the other student received a partial scholarship for band. However, the student who received the partial band scholarship also received the remainder of her financial requirements for college through academic scholarships.

Participation was needed. Two participants shared that engaging in extracurricular activities was important to them. Participant 2 was the only student who received a full athletic scholarship. He stated that he played football as a gateway to get into college and he obtained a football scholarship. Participant 5 earned a half scholarship in band and a half scholarship in academics. Participant 5 stated, “I could not afford college, so I had to rely on scholarships. A family member played in the band and said I should give it a try, so I did, and I liked it.”

Many of the participants once participated in extracurricular activities but decided to give them up after considering the time and effort outside of their strenuous academic requirements. Seventy percent of the participants chose to participate in the activities just

for fun instead of a necessity for college readiness. Twenty percent of the participants required a scholarship through their activity to fund their college expenses. Even though many of the seniors did not require activities for financial gain via scholarships, they still participated as if they were in need of scholarships. They attended practice and took their responsibilities seriously as if they were in need of scholarships. This was also the motivation for attending school on a regular basis and not being truant for any reason.

Seniors' Perceptions Regarding Attending School Regularly

The theme of attendance examined reasons the students attended school on a regular basis. When discussing school attendance, three categories emerged: (a) parental advice and expectation, (b) maintain friendships, and (c) gateway to real life. The theme of school attendance explored the importance of attending school on a regular basis in order to graduate college ready. The participants voiced their perceptions of unexcused absences and how they influenced their college readiness.

Parental advice and expectation. Both single parent and two parent households were instrumental in raising their children to respect attendance requirements. Participants 2, 3, and 7 parents required or guided them to attend school regularly. Participant 3 did not want to miss out on academics. Participant 5 stated, "Attendance is very important, but life is not just tailored to school. If my siblings are sick, I must be the parent because my single mom has to go to work." Participant 9 actually liked school and all of her goals were centered around school. School was a privilege, and she did not want to waste it.

Maintain friendships. The participants seemed to enjoy attending school. School was fun and a place where the students could hang out with their friends. Most of the students' friends attended the school in the study. Hanging out with friends was separate from their home life.

Attending school motivated me to achieve my goals in life. I like school because it is fun, and I like hanging out with friends. All of my friends attend school, so it is easier for me to attend school. All of my friends are not on the same academic level as I am. (Participant 4)

Participant 8 stated, “I love my friends and meeting and conversing with them is enjoyable. When I am at home, I have a different life where there is no one to talk to and hangout with.”

Gateway to real life. Participants 1 and 7 did not want to fall behind academically or get dropped from a class. Participant 10 wanted to graduate with an associate degree, so attendance was important. He did not want to hinder his future. Participant 6 did not want to play catch-up if she was absent. Participant 7 stated, “When I think of a reason why I should not go to class, it is not worth it because I do not want to waste my time. I cannot be absent and miss class because college only accepts three absences and I do not want to waste my time.” To sum all three subthemes into one, it was said by one participant:

There are three reasons why I attend school regularly; (a) because I love my friends and school is a separate life than home life; (b) school is a gateway to real life, and (c) I wanted to find out what I was interested in. (Participant 8)

Participant 3 stated, “My parents always taught me the importance of attendance. The consistent training carried over to academics where I did not want to miss classes.”

The general feel from the participants, regarding attendance, was that the seniors actually like attending school. Not one student shared that they were ever tempted to skip a class or stay home because they did not want to attend school that day. Only one student had a difficult home life where the student was needed to occasionally care for siblings; however, the student still completed the assignments for all classes on time.

Because the students enjoyed attending school to learn and having college readiness as their goal, this may also be the reason why they had minimal discipline issues.

Seniors' Perceptions for not Having Discipline Issues

The theme of discipline examined the motivation for students not having discipline issues at school and the importance of doing the right thing. When discussing discipline, three categories emerged: (a) parental motivation and expectation; (b) maintain eligibility for extracurricular activity participation, and (c) creating a positive circle. The theme of school discipline explores the importance of obeying the school's code of conduct on a regular basis and doing the right thing.

Parental motivation and expectation. Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, and 9 were motivated to be college ready by their mom or both parents due to home training. Participant 6 hates being yelled at and told she was doing something wrong. Participant 9 also shared, "Being honest and holding myself to the highest standard was important." Participant 10's parents wanted him to have fun but stay out of trouble. He does the right thing because of long term consequences of doing the wrong thing. Participant 4 added, "Doing the right thing is a mental thing, and everyone grows up differently, and my beliefs align with doing the right thing." Another student shared:

My mother is the reason why I do not have behavior problems. She always told me that she will not let me play sports if I get into trouble. I also knew that I had to play sports and get a scholarship so I could go to college and coach would not let me play if I got into trouble at school. (Participant 2)

Participant 5 stated, "My mom is the only person that tells me to behave, and I want to do what is right so I can go to college and make something of myself."

Maintain eligibility for extracurricular activity participation. Students who participate in extracurricular activities not only represent themselves and their families,

but they also represent the school and district. No pass no play legislation has been in effect since 1984; therefore, the students must pass all subjects if they want to participate in extracurricular activities. However, college readiness is not just about passing. The college ready seniors concentrated on their overall grade point average to be competitive for academic scholarships. The second qualification to participate in extracurricular activities was behavior. If the student was expelled or suspended, they were not allowed to participate in extracurricular activities. College ready seniors must provide letters of recommendations to accompany many college applications and if they had behavior problems, they may not receive a strong recommendation letter.

I learned the hard way from elementary to middle school by getting in trouble a lot. I had a desk in the principal's office until intermediate school. By the summer of 6th grade, I got it together because I was rewarded with going out with friends at home. I joined band in 7th grade and had no discipline issues because I represented the school, and I could not be a part of the band if I had discipline issues. (Participant 1)

Participant 2 could not participate in extracurricular activities if he had behavior problems, and doing the right thing was important because of his conscience.

Creating a positive circle. Participant 7 shared, "Getting in trouble was a waste of my time." Participant 8 commented:

My peers do not encourage bad behavior. The teachers are passionate about my success. I created a positive circle and wanted to do good. Behaving is a way that fits your personal moral grounds and is important to me. For example, bullying; if you witness it, you form your own opinion and decipher is this right or does it fit your moral compass. You act in a way that fits into that. (Participant 8)

Participant 6 felt good about doing the right thing. Participant 3 stated, “I want to always do the right thing because you never know who is watching you, and you get more out of doing the right thing and gain nothing from doing the wrong thing.” Participant 7 stated, “We should treat others how we want to be treated.” All of these comments offer evidence of the participants’ desires to exhibit good behavior and not having discipline issues.

Seniors’ Perceptions of School Feeder Patterns

The theme of school feeder patterns examined the perspectives of elementary, middle, and intermediate schools’ effectiveness to preparing students for college readiness. When discussing school feeder patterns, three categories emerged: (a) did not matter which school they attended, (b) negative impact, and (c) positive impact. The theme of school feeder patterns explored the importance of attending the right school for college readiness. Three out of ten participants transferred into the district from out of state. Half of the participants never thought about attending another school within their feeder pattern because they felt academically prepared for upper level gifted and talented (GT) courses and college readiness. Participant 3 was highly transient during her elementary and middle school years and never wished to attend another school once she moved to the district in ninth grade.

Did not matter which school they attended. Half of the participants replied to the school feeder pattern question, stating that it did not matter which school they attended because they would have been academically successful. One participant was bullied, and the school did not assist him in anyway, yet he was able to pass GT courses. Several participants were highly transient during earlier grades prior to high school and learned coping skills. Participant 4 transferred to current district during 5th grade.

It was a disadvantage coming from a different district and my current high school started in this district is better. I would have exceeded even more if I had started in the current district. I was GT without testing. In middle school, it did not matter which school I attended because I would have been academically successful. I did experience bullying but tried to be the best person I could be and face issues as they came along. I reported issues, but nothing was done about it. (Participant 4)

Participant 7 felt he would have been successful at any school because he has always been in advanced (GT) classes, and he never wanted to attend another school. Participants 4, 9, and 10 would not have changed the past and do not regret their feeder patterns. They were happy with all schools attended. Participant 9 stated, “The schools I attended helped me by bringing out my confidence, but I would have been academically successful at any school.” Participant 6 stated, “I have kept the same people in my life throughout school so the bond would have made it difficult to attend another school.” Participant 9 stated, “No, I never wanted to attend another school. Some classmates wished they would have attended Early College High School, but that school would not have made it better for me. I am college ready.”

Negative impact on college readiness. Four participants felt that the schools in their feeder pattern had a negative impact on their college readiness. The district has a high school for students pursuing an associate degree while attending high school and prospective students must apply to the school. The participants were not aware of the opportunity to attend the school; therefore, not attending the school had a negative impact on several students. Additionally, several students transferred to the district and faced difficulties adjusting to the school’s climate and culture.

Participant 2 was a transfer student from out of state but came to the district with very good grades and behavior in elementary school.

I had issues due to new people and had to adjust to a different culture. My mother's support got me through it. The worst consequence was three days In-School Suspension (ISS). In intermediate school, I played sports, so behavior improved due to eligibility. (Participant 2)

Participant 3 echoed some of the same issues.

I was GT in elementary and made good grades. Fifth grade, I moved out of state. Sixth - ninth grades, there were family concerns and I moved around a lot in other districts. Issues always raised when schools tried to get equivalent classes (verification issues) to match what I was taking and had taken in the past, so I lost credits. I also had issues with being able to adjust to different things and learning new teacher styles was a pro and a con. The pros to being transit was meeting people and negative issues should motivate a person and not make excuses. Tenth grade I moved to current school. (Participant 3)

Participant 5 visited the early college high school and felt badly when the students told her about different classes they were taking, as her current school did not offer them.

Participant 8 also wished he could have attended Early College High School to graduate with an associate degree. Based on the participant's comments, it appeared that her high school did not offer certain classes which were offered at an early college high school; being able to take those classes might have helped her feel better prepared for college."

Positive impact on college readiness. Six students shared their school feeder patterns had a positive impact towards their college readiness. Several students stated the schools assisted them and they would not have chosen another pattern.

I was zoned to another high school which had a bad reputation for academics and behavior, so I submitted a transfer to my current high school. It was a great decision. I knew about the other high school because I had bad behaviors in

elementary school until I became connected with my counselor and formed a bond the 2nd semester of 1st grade after throwing a chair at a student. I was getting behind, so the counselor taught me Monday – Thursday. During 2nd grade, I partnered with a teacher and became an A student. In middle school, it would not have mattered where I attended school because I would have been successful. I took Pre-AP courses in intermediate. (Participant 1)

Participant 5 shared another positive statement:

Teachers in elementary school had a huge impact. The district helped me to be the most due to diversity where the AA teachers took me under their wings, and I am so grateful. The White teachers were more of a group effort and not individualized like the Black teachers. Middle school was not an impact because I was GT. In intermediate school, I took Pre-AP courses. (Participant 5)

Participant 6 shared that she had a hearing disability, so the work was harder for her to keep up with in elementary. She said, “Middle school teachers speak louder than elementary school teachers so that helped me.” No one in particular helped her and she was not GT, though in intermediate school, she took an advanced math class and some of her teachers encouraged her to take advanced courses in high school. She kept the same friends in her life throughout school so the bond would have made it difficult to attend another school. Another participant explained the positive experiences she had in her schools:

I would not have been successful if it had not been for my schools. Learning is half you and half your environment. All three schools helped me. I did take GT exams and was GT. Once I passed, I gained confidence to be the best academically. The classes were a good fit for me. They were not challenging but a good fit due to exposure. (Participant 8)

Many of the college ready seniors attended the district from PreK through 12th grade. During the semi-structured interviews, there were areas where the seniors struggled or the school and/or district could have better prepared them, because even though they are college ready, many of their friends and classmates are not.

Seniors' Perceptions of how the District/School Could Improve

The theme of ways the district/high school could improve students' preparation for college readiness was explored to assist future students. Since no district or school is perfect in every aspect, discussing students' perceptions of how their district/school could improve could be beneficial to AA students who are not graduating in 2022. When discussing improvements, three categories emerged: (a) no changes are needed, (b) make AVID classes mandatory, and (c) the district and schools must have information sessions for college ready topics and make changes. Eight out of 10 participants shared that the district could improve.

No changes. One participant felt prepared for college by the school and the district. Participant 1 shared she did all that she could do. She will graduate high school with enough dual and AP credits to be a sophomore in college, and all of the classes were free and paid for by the district. Participant 6 stated, "Both of my parents are professionals with college degrees, so all questions were asked to my parents. Also, my English teacher taught me about college entrance." Participant 6 knew about the college experience from parents and received specific college entrance information from the English teacher. Parents and a teacher prepared this participant for college.

Make AVID classes mandatory. Participant 2 was unaware of finances, so he felt the school could have better prepared him to learn more about them. Financial information includes budgets and banking, and both may assist him during the college experience. Participant 7 stated, "Early College High School prepared me for college, and

I feel everyone should have at least a few AVID classes because they were beneficial to me. I learned how to apply academics to the real world.”

District must have information sessions. Many participants felt the school and district prepared them academically, but they were unaware of the specifics of college readiness. The school has a college room, called College Now, with a staff of four, where students are able to obtain college ready specific information. The college information offered includes dual credit, college advising, test prep, Community College enrollment, college applications/acceptance, fee waivers, scholarships, college enrollment, Khan Academy, and college field trips. However, most of the participants were not aware of the wealth of information they could have received from the college room as they only focused on academics while in high school. One participant stated:

My concern was being ready for college. It is how I was raised. At home, it was college, college, college, but I did not know how to prepare myself for college outside of academics and the school did not teach me. (Participant 4)

Participant 10 shared that the school should give students confidence because, “It doesn’t matter where you start, because you can finish.” Participant 8 shared, “The district must sell kids more on Early College High School to provide exposure to all possibilities.” Participant 9 shared, “The school should provide scholarship opportunities and being prepared by having colleges visit the school. The school’s college room helped me be successful.”

The school needs to have more conversations because some of us will be 1st generation college students, and I did not know what questions to ask to be college ready. I was just smart, and it worked out because I talked to teachers to get information. (Participant 5)

Participant 3 had a general suggestion sharing that the school should offer more help (academically) to all students. “Tutoring one-on-one [should be] more consistent and [the] teacher does not make excuses why they are not tutoring that day.”

Summary of Findings

Qualitative analysis was used to address the last research question. The qualitative data consisted of interview data from ten college ready AA high school seniors who completed a semi-structured interview with the researcher. The qualitative data showed college ready AA high school seniors’ perceptions of college readiness variables. The students considered their choices related to the variables as major influences in their high school careers when it comes to college readiness. They also felt their choices encouraged them to do their best and will continue to help them to be successful. Academics was also a major influencer. Therefore, course selection was a key to being college ready.

The seniors recognized that all students have the opportunity to make positive choices as they pertain to being college ready. Getting good grades and taking advanced courses is important; however, they felt that making good choices regarding the variables was equally important. Most participants received motivation from their parents, but others were motivated from within due to an inner drive to be successful. The participants never gave excuses because they knew where they wanted to go, who they wanted to become, and kept the end goal in mind.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data collected from surveys, archived PEIMS data, and semi-structured interviews. This study examined specific variables, which affected the AA high school seniors and their perceptions of their high school experiences related to college readiness. The student data presented in

this study provides evidence that students' perspectives of their attitudes toward the variables, their personal expectations and interactions, school wide support, and parental engagement vary, but most concentrated on the end goal for every decision, which was academics. Only two students were concerned about UIL scholarships while the majority were only interested in academic scholarships. Data from the student semi-structured interviews supported the conclusion that students are concerned about their academic goals post-secondary school and are willing to do whatever is necessary to complete those goals.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine possible variables contributing to the college readiness of graduating AA high school seniors. Steele and Aronson (2004) encouraged school staff to reflect on students' self-defeating behaviors; these types of self-defeating behaviors included the five variables chosen for this study. College readiness of AA seniors has been well documented in research literature, and other variables affecting college readiness for AA seniors were presented and further analyzed in this study. The variables investigated were economically disadvantaged, attendance, behavior, extracurricular activity participation, and school feeder patterns. To quantify AA seniors' college ready status and statistics regarding the variables, PEIMS data and a survey were utilized. Next, to explore perceptions of AA seniors who were college ready, the researcher conducted individual interviews of AA college ready seniors in Cohort 2022. School feeder patterns were analyzed for Cohort 2022.

In this study, the data showed that many college ready AA high school seniors took advantage of advanced courses to prepare them for college readiness because they had a growth mindset to foresee the importance of them, which aligns with the findings from (Markman, 2022). It is vital that AA seniors take the initiative to look past discrimination and bias and focus on their future. This may be a challenge at times, as found in Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) research which demonstrated that many AA students view racism as natural and normal, and discrimination and unequitable treatment for AA people has been around since the 1950's. AA seniors must press through the discrimination and racism and keep a growth mindset to be college ready.

In addition to taking courses to prepare them for college, AA high school seniors must first examine the choices presented to them on a daily basis. The decisions the AA

seniors make regarding school variables will also impact their college readiness. The college ready AA high school seniors had growth mindsets to make good decisions because as the seniors experienced negativity or needed encouragement, a fixed mindset could have led to lower academic scores. Markman (2022) also found that a growth mindset was an important contributing factor to students' academic success and college readiness. Dyches and Thomas' (2020) study provided hope to the AA seniors showing there are White teachers and students who are against racism and felt enraged when they were presented with evidence of AAs being oppressed. One of the five principles of CRT is that oppression must be disrupted by assuming a critical stance (Dyches & Thomas, 2020). Building on the recommendations of Dyches and Thomas (2020), AA students and community members must ensure that all AA seniors are college ready by insisting that districts' climates and culture are conducive to the academic success of all AA seniors.

Maiorano et al. (2021) results show the benefits of making positive choices related to the variables and looking past the negativity of life empowers students, as shown both in the results from this study. Graduating from high school and being college ready would provide educational and financial benefits to students, as they would not require remedial classes. In this study, two of the 10 interviewees graduated high school with associate degrees, and one student will graduate high school with enough credits to be a sophomore in college, which will possibly save them financially while they pursue their bachelor's degrees. The findings of this study indicated families and communities were also instrumental and contributed to the college readiness of the AA seniors by helping them to make positive choices on a daily basis; this was also demonstrated in Gen One (Malkemes & Waters, 2017).

This chapter presented the summary, implications, and recommendations for future research on this topic. Quantitative data were comprised from two sources of

information - PEIMS data and a survey. PEIMS data were utilized to show AA seniors who were and were not college ready in Cohorts 2021 and 2022. PEIMS data also revealed AA seniors' economically disadvantaged status, attendance, behavior infractions, extracurricular activity participation, and school feeder pattern. School feeder patterns were only used for Cohort 2022. Thirty-four percent (n = 57) of AA seniors in Cohort 2021 were college ready while 23% (n = 36) of AA seniors in Cohort 2022 were college ready. Sixty-six percent (n = 112) of AA seniors in Cohort 2021 were not college ready while 77% (n = 119) of AA high school seniors in Cohort 2022 were not college ready. As a brief summary, the data showed that more females were college ready for both cohort years compared to males, and that AA seniors were more likely to be college ready when provided with options as to how they would access their classes, allowing them to choose either face-to-face or virtual instruction. PEIMS data showed males as suspended or expelled more than their peers which affects college readiness.

The survey was conducted via Qualtrics during the second semester of the school year for Cohort 2022 AA college ready seniors and consisted of 10 questions covering all variables. Thirty-five of the 36 college ready AA high school seniors participated in the survey; one of the seniors became homebound due to illness. Thirty-one percent (n = 11) of the participants were male and females accounted for the remaining 69% (n = 24) of the participants. The majority of the seniors' parents had a bachelor's degree or higher (71%; n = 25) and the majority of the seniors were 17-18 years of age (80%; n = 28). Regarding the seniors' perceptions of the variables, the Student Code of Conduct was very important (60%; n = 21), attendance was very important (51.4%; n = 21), the most common extracurricular activity was athletics (42.9%; n = 15), the role of finances in education was somewhat important (51.4%; n = 18), and the role school feeder patterns played in education were somewhat beneficial in preparing seniors for college (51.4%; n

= 18). In their study, Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) shared student expectations were associated with underachievement in minority students and the reverse is also true.

Interviews were conducted with 10 of the 36 college ready AA seniors in Cohort 2022. The researcher purposefully selected 10 AA college ready seniors in order to collect data related to all of the included variables. The participants were each asked 10 questions to provide data for the qualitative portion of the study with each session lasting approximately 20 - 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted in a vacant classroom at the high school, or in an office at the local university. The sample was evenly split between male (50%; n = 5) and female participants (50%; n = 5).

Summary

The research questions addressed the effectiveness of variables pertaining to the college readiness of AA high school seniors. The success of the college ready seniors was dependent upon the variables (attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged, extracurricular activity participation, and school feeder pattern) and the daily decisions made by the college ready AA high school seniors. The extent of the variables affecting college readiness in each research question are examined.

Research Question One

Research question one asked: *To what extent do Cohort 2021 and Cohort 2022 high school AA seniors differ in attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns?* The quantitative analysis showed significant differences between AA seniors in Cohort 2021 and Cohort 2022 for some variables. For Cohort 2021, descriptive statistics showed 61% of college ready AA seniors were economically disadvantaged, compared to 66% of those who were not college ready. For this variable, there was not a statistically significant difference between being college ready or not college ready. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2017)

found similar results, showing that AA seniors can academically thrive even if they come from poverty-stricken communities, and that seniors being labelled as economically disadvantaged should not be a factor in college readiness. No longer can students, parents, districts, or communities use the lack of finances as an excuse for a student not having the capacity to learn. Dixson and Anderson (2018) stated the CRT movement in education should be recharged by highlighting the expectations of AA students. This researcher believes it is time for AA students to expect more and recharge themselves as it pertains to college readiness. School districts now offer PreK at no expense to the parent and students can begin to learn in a classroom setting as early as age four. In contrast, Majors (2019) stated that youths of color and economically disadvantaged youths are less likely to be college ready. These students often receive fewer resources, which impacts their chances of being college ready. Attendance and behavior were other variables relating to college readiness of AA seniors.

Additionally, some schools exclude non-White students due to behavior concerns, which leads to a lack of access to instruction, and decreases their ability to be college ready. Carter (2008) stated that if students do not feel like they belong in their schools, whether it's due to racism or being seen as intellectually inferior, they may just skip classes; the results from this study showed that AA seniors who were not college ready had more issues with behavior than those who were college ready, which might have affected their college readiness if they were unable to attend class. When a student is consistently expelled or suspended, they become further behind academically due to lack of attendance.

For Cohort 2021, descriptive statistics showed a statistically significant difference in the number of unexcused absences between college ready and not college ready AA seniors, with not college ready AA high school seniors having more unexcused absences

than those who were college ready. Behavior showed a similar statistically significant difference; AA seniors who were not college ready had more than double the number of behavior infractions than the college ready AA seniors. Findings related to attendance and behavior from this study aligned with prior research from Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2013), who shared seniors must be present to learn, as academics begins in the classroom. Therefore, students who lack access to educational opportunities because they are excluded from the classroom due to behavioral issues, or because they choose not to attend, are less apt to be college ready. Many AA students view racism as normal and exclusion from the learning environment may affect college readiness (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Additional to racism, AA students also have financial issues regarding college readiness.

For Cohort 2022, descriptive statistics showed the majority of economically disadvantaged seniors were not college ready. Descriptive statistics also showed an extreme difference in attendance for Cohort 2022, with unexcused absences for not college ready AA seniors more than double those of college ready AA seniors. Seniors from Cohort 2022 were required to attend school face-to-face for the entire school year after being allowed to choose their mode of learning the previous year; this requirement may have affected their attendance rates. These results agree with Henderson and Gill (2016), who stated that the ethnic minority students, who were economically disadvantaged, experienced an educational disparity.

Regarding behavior, the college ready AA seniors' group (1.4) scored a lower mean than not college ready group (3.9) while both had extreme differences in standard deviations (3.6 and 6.3 respectively) which was a statistically significant difference between the groups for Cohort 2022. Unexcused absences and times when behavior leads to a student being out of the classroom are days when the senior is not in the learning

environment, which may explain why seniors with higher numbers of absences and behavior infractions were not as prepared for college. Curran (2017) shared AA students received punitive discipline for most infractions compared to their peers; therefore, if AA students continually receive harsh penalties for most infractions, they will not be college ready.

Regarding extracurricular activities for the combined cohorts, descriptive statistics showed that college ready seniors participated in more athletics compared with those who were not college ready, who participated more in fine arts. Fenwick (2016) shared AA students are often portrayed through negative stereotypes. Many times, AA students are portrayed through negative stereotypes by utilizing athletics as the major importance of attending school. Nolte (2015) expressed that seniors' participation in extracurricular activities had positive effects on their academic performance. However, there is a time commitment for each activity and the more activities a senior participates in, the more time the senior spends outside of academics. Concerning extracurricular activities for Cohort 2022, descriptive statistics showed nine college ready AA seniors participated in athletics while 37 who participated in athletics were not college ready. Many AA seniors who were not college ready and participated in athletics were football players. Football players were required to participate in the sport as a yearly commitment and not just seasonal as with other sports at the school. Therefore, playing football was a major commitment, and this may have impacted the seniors' ability to focus on academics. Fine arts participation did not show a statistically significant difference between college ready and not college ready AA seniors; therefore, it was not seen to have an effect on college readiness.

When considering school feeder patterns for Cohort 2022, descriptive analysis showed a difference in the patterns. Out of a possibility of 13 potential patterns that lead

to the high school in the study, 31% ($n = 4$) of the college ready seniors attended schools that followed four feeding patterns. Over 50% of the other school patterns produced 0-1 college ready seniors. School feeder patterns were a strong predictor of college readiness. Prior research conducted by DeBonis (2014) found that parents would apply to particular schools if their students were not zoned to them, illustrating that parents understood the importance of their children being enrolled in schools that would help them be academically successful. A participant in the semi-structured interview also shared that she applied to attend the high school in the study because she was zoned to another school that was inferior to her academic goals.

Looking at the combined cohorts allowed for an overall examination of the variables impact on AA high school seniors' college readiness. The combined cohorts of college ready AA seniors showed the economically disadvantaged variable did not have a statistically significant difference. When examining the combined cohorts of college ready AA seniors, descriptive statistics showed attendance and behavior as being statistically significant, likely because students need to be present in their classes to learn the content which contributes to their college readiness. Descriptive statistics showed no statistically significant difference between college ready and not college ready AA seniors' participation in extracurricular activities such as athletics or fine arts. The findings of the TEA data for the combined cohorts showed behavior, attendance, and school feeder patterns were the strongest predictor variables of AA seniors' college readiness success. The variable concerning participation in fine arts extracurricular activity was the least associated with AA students' college readiness success. Nolte (2015) found there was an academic benefit for students participating in extracurricular activities; however, there was no statistically significant difference regarding

extracurricular activity participation and college readiness between college ready and not college ready AA seniors in the current study.

Research Question Two

Research question two asked: *To what extent do AA high school seniors perceive attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns as influencing college readiness?* Students placed a high level of importance on having finances, with 91% of participants feeling this was somewhat or very important to their perceptions of their college readiness. This relates to students' economically disadvantaged status and aligns with the findings of Morgan et al. (2014) regarding the GEAR UP program addressing financial avenues students could access for college readiness. In the current study, even though the school paid for most of the students' education-related expenses, finances were necessary to purchase items or pay fees, and to pay for trips and programs outside of their general education; participants felt participation in these activities would better prepare them for college. However, the majority of interviewed college ready AA seniors did not find being labeled economically disadvantaged to be a detriment towards their perceptions of their college readiness.

Data showed all participants regarded attendance as somewhat or very important to their college readiness. Even though college ready participants concluded that attendance was important, data showed seniors who were not college ready had extensive absences. Weiler et al. (2019) shared that some high-risk students require mentors, additional support, training, and supervision to deter unexcused absences and negative behaviors. Additionally, the majority of participants (91%) believed their behavior, or following the code of conduct, was important, but surprisingly, three seniors stated following the code of conduct was not at all important to their college readiness. The findings showed the majority of the seniors' perceptions concurred with Kremer et al.'s

results (2016), which demonstrated that positive behavior affects academics and is paramount to college readiness.

Sixty-eight percent of participants felt extracurricular activities had a positive effect on their college readiness, stating it was very important to experience a “well-rounded” education through participation in these activities. These findings concurred with Haghghat and Knifsend (2018) who found that the majority of the AA seniors participating in extracurricular activities, they see themselves obtaining college degrees. Most of the AA seniors stated that they participated in athletics or fine arts as their extracurricular activities instead of clubs.

Data on school feeder patterns showed that 75% of participants felt the schools attended were somewhat beneficial or important to their college readiness, aligning with Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) who found that many parents consider where they live because they want their children to attend the best academic schools, so they are better positioned for future success, including college readiness. Transitions to new schools often stress students due to institutional discontinuities and can also disrupt friendships as well as academics (Temkin et al., 2015). The surveys and interviews results were similar as they pertained to school feeder patterns, showing that AA seniors felt the schools they attended were important towards their college readiness (Temkin et al., 2015). Attendance, behavior, and school feeder patterns were the most important variables for college readiness, according to the participants.

Research Question Three

Research question three asked: *How does attendance, behavior, economically disadvantaged status, extracurricular activities, and school feeder patterns impact college ready AA seniors?* Research question three was analyzed by using an inductive coding process from the seniors’ replies for each of the 10 questions. Responses were

organized into six major themes: finances, extracurricular activities, attendance, discipline, school feeder patterns, and district and/or school improvement.

Seniors' responses to the interview questions pertaining to finances were consistent with the survey and TEA data, with the majority of interviewed participants agreeing that finances played an important role in their college readiness. Participants felt that money was needed for clubs, after school programs, summer programs, and extracurricular activities. Some of the seniors also reported hearing classmates stating they could not participate in activities due to lack of finances. Some participants stated that finances did not play a role because the school paid for everything they needed, and one participant stated both their parents were professionals, so finances were not a concern. Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) found that students who are economically disadvantaged should not be discounted as related to academics, and the results from this study also show the importance AA seniors place on finances as they pertain to their college readiness.

The majority of interviewed participants shared they participated in extracurricular activities for fun and that it was not needed to enhance their college readiness. Fredricks and Eccles (2010) stated participating in extracurricular activities had predictive outcomes in young adults towards their mental health. Mental health is included in SEL. Eisman et al. (2018) also demonstrated that participation in extracurricular activities helped students form positive social connections which is an SEL strategy and important to the AA students' culture. Several participants stated they participated in extracurricular activities in intermediate school but decided not to participate in high school because they wanted to concentrate solely on academics. Only two seniors needed to participate in extracurricular activities throughout their high school

years because they needed scholarships to fund college; one required an athletic scholarship and the other required a band scholarship to be able to attend college.

When discussing attendance, the AA high school seniors stated they attended school on a regular basis because of parental advice or expectations, to maintain friendships, or because it was the gateway to real life. When many of the seniors thought about their goals for the future and decided to take advanced courses, they knew the expectation was to attend school on a regular basis due to course requirements. Professors in dual credit classes did not accept more than three absences, or they would be dropped from the course; being enrolled in dual credit classes and becoming familiar with college expectations likely also contributed to students' college readiness. The researcher found that the seniors liked attending school and felt that it contributed to their college readiness.

Seniors' positive perceptions of the importance of school attendance may be a reason why the participants did not have behavior concerns. O'Donnell and Kirkner (2014) shared that high quality educational programs could deter truancy. Additionally, parental motivation and expectations, eligibility requirements to participate in extracurricular activities, enrollment in dual credit courses, and creating a positive social circle encouraged seniors to attend school on a regular basis. More than 50% of the participants shared they were motivated by parent(s) due to home training to always do the right thing. Dixson and Anderson (2018) highlighted that a movement in education is necessary for AA students to understand their expectations. The movement is for schools, families, and the community to be better prepare AA students for college readiness. AA students are not expected to be college ready which then reinforces the lack of resources needed to help them prepare for college (Majors, 2019).

Overall, participants felt that their behavior was an important contributor to their college readiness. For some, their behavior was influenced by their participation in extracurricular activities. Castro (2020) called for policymakers to assist AA students to help them visualize their future because the AA students play a critical role in their future. The participants' perception of having appropriate behavior is similar to Cagle's (2017) results showing that when schools help students to solve conflicts, care about others, and to understand how others think and feel, the student can then begin to control their own behavior. Once the student can control their behavior, the student will begin to make positive choices. These positive choices and mindset would transfer to any school the student attends.

Participants' perceptions of the role of school feeder patterns on their college readiness varied, and three categories related to the theme of school feeder patterns emerged: Did not matter, negative impact, and positive impact. Half of the seniors had a growth mindset and felt that it did not matter which school they attended because they would have been academically successful no matter which schools they attended. Neild (2009) shared if students can learn to adapt to the varying expectations at different schools, they will graduate on time.

The district where the particular high school is located has a career high school for seniors pursuing a bachelor's degree concurrently with their high school education. Some seniors were not aware of this school and once they were aware, it was too late to apply. Therefore, some participants considered not attending the career high school as a negative impact, as they missed out on the opportunity to take college courses. This finding was similar to Mayfield and Garrison-Wade's (2015) research which showed the importance of students attending high quality schools. Another way that feeder patterns can have a negative impact is when a student moves frequently, as was the case with a

participant who shared that they were highly transient and each school they attended had different academic criteria; therefore, when the senior enrolled at the school where the study was taking place, credits did not transfer, which impacted their college readiness. This is also an example of how schools are not aligned across other schools in the district.

An example of how the school one attends can have a positive impact was when a participant was introduced to an AA teacher who mentored her on a one-to-one basis. Weiler et al. (2019) shared AA students require mentoring. Another participant was encouraged by her teachers to take advanced courses. Finally, a participant shared that if it had not been for the schools he attended, he would not have been successful, and would not be college ready. The results showed particular feeder patterns led to greater levels of college readiness. Additionally, these results stress the importance of the TEA building partnerships with the schools for underserved students to be able to experience academic success (TEA, 2022b).

Across all data sources, the most important variables related to college readiness were attendance, discipline, and school feeder patterns. Overall, the AA seniors expressed positive perceptions regarding these three variables influencing their college readiness. Kearney & Graczyk (2020) stated school attendance was crucial to children's development while the lack of attendance affects students' academics. Other researchers also found that students' academic learning is predicated on attendance; those who attend school regularly tend to perform better academically (Burdick-Will et al., 2019; Weathers et al., 2021; Weiler et al., 2019). AA seniors may experience challenges, but they also created avenues to combat the challenges and take their own academic careers into their own hands by making positive decisions towards college readiness (Allbright et al., 2019; Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Boston & Warren, 2017; Cagle, 2017; Jarrett & Coba-

Rodriguez, 2017; Latunde, 2017; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015; Washington et al., 2017).

Results from this study also showed that school feeder patterns can also influence a student's academic performance and college readiness, stressing the importance of which school a student attends. Many parents are concerned with where their children receive their educations (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). Schiller (1999) reinforced the importance of school feeder patterns, showing that, depending on the schools they attended, some older students dropped out while others flourished to become college ready.

Implications

The findings have important implications for higher education administrators, school districts, administrators, teachers, parents and community, and high school seniors. The results of the analysis of TEA data, surveys, and interviews indicated important implications for AA high school seniors' college readiness if the variables investigated in this study were not considered in their education. These variables are too important to wait for the AA students' senior years and must be addressed in the elementary school years to ensure they are college ready.

Implications for Higher Education Administrators

The greatest implication for higher education administrators is not addressing the students' culture. Future leaders and teachers must be taught how to address students' culture and integrate it into their schools' climate and culture. However, a teacher cannot teach what they do not understand. Therefore, professional development to help educators better understand how to respect students' cultural backgrounds, and integrate them into the existing school culture, is required. Grow Your Own (GYO) is another great concept where administration and staff reflect the student population in regard to

race, ethnicity, and gender (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019). A school cannot only tell a student that they can be a leader - the student needs to see someone that looks like them in a leadership role (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019).

Partnering with high AA student population schools for students to take developmental courses and then credit-bearing courses would be a positive initiative, similar to the approach taken by the school in Harrington and Rogalski's (2020) college readiness study to assist struggling AA students who are destined to take remedial college level courses. Students must take developmental courses first because they are not college ready, but once the AA students see they can be successful with the academic and SEL support of the university and high school, it should give them hope that they can graduate college.

Implications for School Districts

Districts must intentionally focus on the variables considered in this study to create a positive culture and climate by assisting AA students in better exploring and understanding all available options for them beyond their high school years. The latest ESSA accountability policies should be implemented to prevent public schools from failing simply to get vouchers adopted. The researcher believes in giving parents a school of choice so students will not be forced to attend low-performing schools. School districts must also allow for barriers such as transportation. Districts must also not wait for their local education service center to create their own program specifically for the success of AA seniors. The relationship between AA seniors and their failure to graduate college ready has been thoroughly researched stating these students are destined to fail as an adult (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Boston & Warren, 2017; Liou et al, 2016, Wang et al., 2022). School districts must not let this happen and need to create supportive systems to ensure AA students are college ready.

Since the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, laws have been created to supposedly assist all students academically. Created in 1965, during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was intended to address the war on poverty and provide equal access to quality education for all students (McGuinn, 2016). Next, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was implemented under the leadership of President Bush to hold districts and schools accountable by implementing punitive measures for unsuccessful districts and schools (McGuinn, 2016). After NCLB, President Obama reauthorized the ESEA as ESSA (McGuinn, 2016). Finally, ESSA was updated in 2015 under the leadership of President Obama for equal opportunity for all students to expand their educational opportunities and advance student outcomes. Even with all the national legislature and attention created to assist all students academically, Texas AA students still lag behind every other ethnicity since 1994, according to TAPR annual reports (TEA, 2021b).

Dyches and Thomas (2020) defined a principle of CRT as endemic racism. With all of the laws in place that should create equitable access to quality educations for all students, it is inconceivable that AA students still lag behind all races academically. The study revealed a need for school districts to review more than just academics to understand why AA seniors are consistently behind. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) reported the physical condition of the AA schools were the issue. Steele and Aronson (2004) found that AA students lag behind other students due to self-defeating behaviors. Whether the issue of AA students not being college ready is due to racism, schools that are in poor condition, or self-defeating behaviors, the school districts must address all the variables and mindsets of the AA students so that they are better prepared for college. The program must include the variables, importance of making positive decisions, growth mindsets, and specific information of what it takes to be college ready.

School districts' strategic planning sessions must include strategies for AA students to better understand the importance of attending all classes on a regular basis and following the Student Code of Conduct. This information may better be received from teachers and administrators who resemble the AA students' race. Rogers-Ard et al. (2019) posited that using CRT to inform professional development may help in confronting discrimination. If the AA students can see teachers and administrators who resemble their race, this may be encouragement to them that they can succeed. Strategies regarding ways administration and teachers may positively impact AA students as they transition through elementary, middle, and intermediate schools must also be discussed and implemented; these strategies must be in place at all school levels to meet the specific needs of the AA students and should address the importance of making growth mindset decisions as they pertain to their overall education and their future.

Some participants in this study mentioned the need for the district to provide information sessions regarding finances, including how to manage money, banking, and daily living on their own. Some also wanted information about college readiness as several college ready participants were first generation high school graduates and were unaware of questions to ask regarding how to become college ready outside of academics. If seniors do not know what resources the district or school has available for them, or what questions they needed to ask and to whom to ask them, they would continue to be left behind as they would be less prepared for college. Not all seniors had professional and degreed parents, so they may not have had the social capital needed to navigate the transition to college. It is therefore incumbent on administrators to both create programs to help these students be prepared for their futures, and to clearly communicate what resources are available to assist students.

Implications for Grade School Administrators

It is extremely important to implement a successful program designed for AA students during PreK before students have fallen behind academically or have felt as if they do not belong in their own schools. Grade school administrators should implement programs to assist the specific SEL needs of the AA students (CASEL, 2020). Weiler et al. (2019) suggested mentoring programs to increase attendance and academics while Wienen et al. (2018) suggested making changes to a school's culture to better meet students' SEL needs. Kassarnig et al. (2018) suggested administrators should look at the total child, including factors such as delinquent activity, sleep duration, quality of sleep, and social ties, and not just their academic performance. In order to assess the student on the level recommended by the researchers cited above, administrators must know their students well.

Administrators should practice servant leadership and get to know the students and address their needs, not because of what they heard, but because of what they experienced while interacting with the students. SEL states that AA students thrive in positive relationships (CASEL, 2020), and administrators must help the AA students develop growth mindsets for success through the creation of authentic and positive relationships with them. Once the administrators adopt this approach, the school's climate and culture will follow, creating a community of support in which AA students can thrive.

In addition to addressing a school's climate and culture, the students must see their race in a teacher and leadership capacity. Administration and teachers should reflect the student population and the district should recruit with a purpose of diversifying their schools so that students can see themselves in their teachers and administrators. They may also grow their own (GYO) leaders. It would be difficult to tell an AA student they

can become a leader when they do not see AA leaders who resemble them at the school or district office (Rogers-Ard et al., 2019). All of the above factors, as well as the variables investigated in this study, must be discussed with all constituents in the district and integrated into the schools' strategic plans, leading to student success and college readiness.

Implications for Teachers

Results from this study point to the need for relationships between the AA students and teachers to be positive and caring. Teachers must attend professional development classes to ensure sensitivity towards the students' culture. Concerning academics, teachers must select curricula that portrays AAs positively. For example, stories similar to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* should be reconsidered, and efforts should be made to include a type of curriculum which is not so abrasive. The school climate and culture must reflect equality, patience, and love towards AA students. Positive AA stereotypes of race and intelligence must be shown and implemented daily in communication, academics, and social emotional learning (Fenwick, 2016). Once the negative stereotypes of AA students are addressed and diminished, the AA students must be supported to combat other the variables discussed in this study.

Cagle (2017) suggested teachers should use a positive behavior support system to benefit students. This system should replace the current system, where many teachers address behavior problems by sending the student to the office instead of building a relationship with the student to determine why the student is struggling. Student engagement is the key to learning. This study showed that college ready seniors wanted to learn, making it easier for teachers to teach. While some of the students who were not college ready may not have the desire to learn, it is incumbent upon the teachers to find ways to encourage those students to become excited about learning. If not, the not college

ready students will interfere with the learning of students who want to learn and be college ready, and in this scenario, no one wins. This connects back Morgan et al.'s study (2014) which showed that some AA students have truancy and behavior issues and may need mentoring, through programs such as GEAR UP, to overcome these challenges.

Implications for Parents and Community

This study showed that when parents and communities team with the schools, the children are successful. Therefore, the opposite should also be true. Many times, when the parents and community are absent in the students' lives, the students fail. In the survey and interviews, the students shared that parental guidance was key to their behavior and attendance. Malkemes and Waters (2017) gave an example of a community in Houston with their Gen One project; this project was only successful when the parents and community became invested in their children's lives. CASEL (2020) also shared the necessity of community, revealing that the importance of family and community in a child's life starts with SEL in the center of community, families, caregivers, school, and classrooms.

The parent-community partnership must also address different career choices for the students, as showing the students that they have choices regarding their future may encourage them to take their academics and decisions regarding the studied variables more seriously. Many AA students, especially males, rely on athletics as a career and consequently, do not take their classes seriously and they become ineligible due to No Pass No Play. If they cannot play sports, they give up on their academics, affecting their ability to be college ready, and they will be prone to working meager jobs and obtaining the working poor label (BLS, 2016). Extracurricular activities participation was an important variable for a "well rounded" education, but students should learn about the

importance of hard work, academics, teamwork, and other transferable skills to other employment options instead of placing all of their hope for their future in sports.

Implications for Students

Students must be cognizant of the fact that they may face discrimination and racial bias, but they must adhere to making sound decisions on a daily basis to make the right decisions as they pertain to how they approach the variables considered in this study and their education. Steele and Aronson (2004) explored the negative effect schools have on AA students and encourage schools to assist in growing students' intelligence and helping to address their vulnerability and self-defeating behaviors. Taking specific classes is important to student success, but so are growth mindsets instead of fixed mindsets as they pertain to daily living (Markman, 2022).

Some schools may struggle with implementing SEL strategies to assist the teachers and leadership (CASEL, 2020), while other schools may struggle providing professional development courses to assist teachers and leadership in better serving AA students, but the students have the final say in what they learn. The AA students must take responsibility for the actions and variables they can change. One way they can do this is to ask more questions and advocate for themselves. AA students must not look at the here and now but also to the future. Questions should derive from what they do not know or understand, and could be related to academics, or they could be more general in regard to ensuring all of their needs are met. If someone at home is not able to answer their questions, people within the school, other family members, or community members can support the student. There is an abundance of negative information concerning AA students, and it is time that AA students show that they can achieve academically and that the negative stereotypes are grounded in racism rather than reality.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are a number of recommendations for future research based on the results from this study. This study showed attendance, behavior, and school feeder patterns were essential variables related to AA high school seniors' college readiness. Further research is needed to understand the importance of AA students making daily growth mindset choices related to these variables, coupled with the importance of taking specific academic courses to lead them to college readiness. Second, districts must explore future research on strategies aimed at assisting teachers in producing culturally relevant lesson plans that meet the AA students' needs and insist that each AA student will be college ready under their leadership.

Third, a study is needed to further examine student choices beginning in elementary school. Often times, a few bad decisions eventually turn into bad habits for AA students, especially regarding attendance and behavior. As a current high school behavior teacher, the researcher has seen students, especially AA students, placed in a behavior support services class as early as PreK, and graduate high school as a behavior support services student. Further research could illuminate not only the reasons why this happens, but also create solutions to prevent it from happening.

Conclusion

A student's livelihood is predicated on their academic success as a high school student, as this affects their ability to earn a bachelor's degree and professional employment (BLS, 2016). In order for a student to not be labeled as working poor, they must have at least a bachelor's degree in today's world (BLS, 2016). College readiness is a buzzword used today where the definition changes on a regular basis. It started as college ready, then college and career ready, then college, career and military ready. While legislation created to assist all students academically has been around and updated

for approximately 60 years, many AA students are still struggling. However, this study showed that there were some AA seniors who understood the importance of making growth mindset decisions related to their everyday school and societal concerns and graduate college ready.

These college ready AA seniors took the initiative to learn as much as they could in upper-level academics and made positive choices as they pertained to the college readiness variables. It is time to not continue to rely on excuses of discrimination and racial bias to the AA students' detriment. It is time for the AA students to take charge of their destinies.

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APPENDIX A:

SURVEY QUESTIONS

You are being asked to complete an on-line survey of 10 multiple-choice questions concerning your background and your high school experience as it relates to college readiness. You may also be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview, at a later date, to answer additional questions about your high school experiences. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your answers will remain completely confidential, and your participation is voluntary.

1. What is your gender?

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) Other _____

2. What is your age?

- a) Under 17
- b) 17
- c) 18
- d) Over 18

3. What is the highest level of education your parent/guardian has?

- a) Some high school
- b) Some college/trade school
- c) Associates degree
- d) Bachelor's degree or higher

4. What type of job(s) does your parent/guardian have? Choose all that apply.

- a) Professional/Business
- b) Trade (e.g., plumber, electrical, construction, maintenance, automotive, etc.)
- c) Medical/Healthcare (e.g., doctor, nurse, therapist, etc.)
- d) Military/Police/Firefighter
- e) Custodian/Landscape
- f) Education
- g) Retail
- h) Lawyer
- i) Other _____

5. How important is it to you to follow the Student Code of Conduct?

- a) Not important
- b) Somewhat important
- c) Very important

6. How important is it to you to attend school every day school is required?
- a) Not important
 - b) Somewhat important
 - c) Very important
7. Is participating in extracurricular activities important to a “well-rounded” school education?
- a) Not important
 - b) Somewhat important
 - c) Very important
8. What type of extracurricular activity did you participate in high school?
- a) None
 - b) Clubs
 - c) Athletics
 - d) Clubs and Athletics
 - f) Fine Arts
9. How important is family finances for a student to get an excellent education?
- a) Not at all important because the school pays for everything
 - b) Somewhat important because I needed to buy things for school
 - c) Very important to have finances for high school education
10. What role did your elementary, middle, and intermediate school play in your successful education?
- a) It would not have mattered where I went to school
 - b) The schools were somewhat beneficial in preparing me for a good education
 - c) The schools were important because they helped prepare me for a good education

APPENDIX B:
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are being asked to complete an on-line survey of 10 multiple-choice questions concerning your background and your high school experience as it relates to college readiness. You may also be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview, at a later date, to answer additional questions about your high school experiences. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your answers will remain completely confidential, and your participation is voluntary.

Title: Variables for college readiness of African American high school seniors.

Student Investigator(s): Kathy Kay Goodwin

Faculty Sponsor: Jana Willis, Ph.D.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this sequential mixed-methods study is to examine possible variables contributing to the college readiness of graduating AA high school seniors.

PROCEDURES

You are being asked to complete an on-line survey of 10 questions about your background and perceptions of your high school experience as it relates to college readiness. You might be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview to answer additional questions about your high school experience related to college readiness.

EXPECTED DURATION

The survey will take place via Qualtrics which is a computer program. There will be 10 multiple choice questions which should take approximately 15 minutes. There are 10 interview questions which should take approximately 20 minutes per student. Time will be allotted at the end of the semi-structured interview for open dialogue about perceptions that might not have been covered in the posed questions.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this project.

BENEFITS TO THE SUBJECT

There is no direct benefit received from your participation in this study, but your participation will help the investigator(s) better understand the importance of discipline, attendance, participation in extracurricular activities, economically disadvantaged, and school feeder patterns as it pertains to college readiness.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your information. The data collected from the study will be used for educational and publication purposes, however, you will not be identified by name or identification number. Once the study is complete, all information will be destroyed.

FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

There is no financial compensation to be offered for participation in the study.

INVESTIGATOR'S RIGHT TO WITHDRAW PARTICIPANT

The investigator has the right to withdraw you from this study at any time.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

The investigator has offered to answer all your questions. If you have additional questions during the course of this study about the research or any related problem, you may contact the Student Researcher, Kathy Kay Goodwin, at 713-740-0370 or by email at goodwink8517@uhcl.edu. The Faculty Sponsor Dr. Jana Willis may be contacted at phone number 281-283-3568 or by email at willis@uhcl.edu.

SIGNATURES:

Your signature below acknowledges your voluntary participation in this research project. Such participation does not release the investigator(s), institution(s), sponsor(s) or granting agency(ies) from their professional and ethical responsibility to you. By signing the form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

The purpose of this study, procedures to be followed, and explanation of risks or benefits have been explained to you. You have been allowed to ask questions and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You have been told who to contact if you have additional questions. You have read this consent form and voluntarily agree to participate as a subject in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time by contacting the Principal Investigator or Student Researcher/Faculty Sponsor. You will be given a copy of the consent form you have signed.

Student's printed Name: _____

Signature of Student: _____

Student's Parent printed Name: _____

Signature of Student's Parent: _____

Date: _____

Using language that is understandable and appropriate, I have discussed this project and the items listed above with the subject.

Printed Name and Title:_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:_____

Date:_____

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE (UHCL) COMMITTEE FOR PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS HAS REVIEWED AND APPROVED THIS PROJECT. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UHCL COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (281-283-3015). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT UHCL ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. (FEDERALWIDE ASSURANCE # FWA00004068)

APPENDIX C:
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How did family finances effect your education?
2. What was your expectation for participating in extracurricular activities?
3. Did the activity(ies) motivate you to achieve academically?
4. Did the activity(ies) help you with acceptance into a college/university?
5. What motivated you to attend school regularly?
6. What motivated you to not have discipline issues?
7. How important is it to you to do the right thing as much as you can?
8. How did your elementary, middle, and/or intermediate school play a role in your successful education?
9. Explain the times you wished you had attended another school in your feeder pattern?
10. What do you think your district/school could have done better to prepare you for college?