2022

Perceptions of School Counselors and Teachers Regarding the Communities in Schools Model

Amy M. Gates
Walden University

Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Amy M. Gates

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. William Benet, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Morris Bidjerano, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. James Frampton, University Reviewer,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

Perceptions of School Counselors and Teachers Regarding the Communities in Schools

Model

by

Amy M. Gates

MA, University of Connecticut, 1995

BS, University of Rhode Island, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

Lower graduation rates among Black, Latino, and low-income students negatively impact

individuals, families, and communities. The Communities in Schools (CIS) model was

widely used in urban school districts due to suggested positive outcomes butwas

underrepresented in current independent research. Using Benet's polarities of democracy

as the theoretical framework, this qualitative case study allowed for the collection and

analysis of perceptions of educators within the Atlanta Public Schools (APS). The results

of this study suggested social change implications related to increasing manpower in

urban high schools and the development and use of comprehensive student support

services to reach more at-risk students. Increased funding through grants and foundations

and budgetary policy changes to provide additional funding for targeted interventions

were essential. The underutilization of the CIS model and lack of awareness of services

were evident and required adjustments in the management and implementation of the

model to increase effectiveness. Additionally, the ineffective management of the polarity

pair of human rights and communal obligations negatively impacted the ability of schools

to create healthy and just communities and further analysis indicated ineffective

management of other polarity pairs. The results of this study suggested that the Atlanta

Board of Education may want to consider reviewing and modifying district and school

policies related to improving graduation rates through the development of stronger

school-community partnerships and the funding to support these initiatives which would

lead to positive social change.

Perceptions of School Counselors and Teachers Regarding the Communities in Schools

Model

by

Amy M. Gates

MA, University of Connecticut, 1995

BS, University of Rhode Island, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2022

Dedication

My academic pursuits, including this work, are dedicated to my family, most especially my parents, Edward and Joan Kaminsky and Ronald Gates. When I began this academic pursuit, I had hoped my parents would all be here to witness me become Dr. Amy Gates, but unfortunately, we have lost two. So, Dad and Ed, I hope you are watching and that I have made you proud.

Secondly, this work would absolutely not have been completed without Dr. Bill Benet for multiple reasons. Dr. Benet provided the theoretical framework for this study through his development of the polarities of democracy theory and the work he is doing to create a more just society. His input, support, expertise, and positive outlook has made it possible for me to complete this process and without his support I likely would have never made it to this stage.

And finally, to my husband Steven Stroud who arrived on the scene somewhere in the middle of this very long and often challenging journey, but who nonetheless has supported me in every way and contributed to my success. He allowed me space and time to complete my research and even more importantly, provided me with encouragement and understanding at every step. I gained family when I met him and to all the Strouds, thank you! for your love and support.

Table of Contents

i

iii

iv

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The issues of improving high school graduation rates and decreasing dropout

rates, especially in urban districts throughout the United States, have been the subject of

innumerable research studies, leading to the development and implementation of various

intervention programs. Although school districts have invested millions of dollars in such

interventions, these challenges remain.

This issue of high dropout rates among urban high school students is a problem

not only for individual students and their families but also for the communities where

they live. Communities with higher numbers of adults without a high school diploma are

negatively impacted by lower rates of property ownership, poor health, high rates of

incarceration, lower tax payments, and a higher rate of dependence on the government for

assistance (Sum, 2009). The statistics discussed in the following pages illustrate why the

issue of dropout prevention and student retention, two interchangeable terms, are not an

issue only impacting public school districts, but also local communities and beyond. For

clarification, although dropout prevention and student retention can be used as

interchangeable terms, graduation rate and dropout rate cannot be and are explained in

more detail in the definitions section. The importance of discovering and implementing

solutions to this issue through programming and policy changes cannot be understated, it

is an issue that impacts every community in the United States.

Background

The high school dropout rate in urban districts across the United States is alarmingly high, falling well below the nationwide goal of a 90% on-time graduation rate by 2020 and negatively impacting communities small and large (America's Promise Alliance, 2019). In 2010, America's Promise Alliance, which brings together national nonprofits, businesses, community and civic leaders, educators, citizens, and young people, launched the Grad Nation campaign. This campaign established the goal of a 90% on-time high school graduation rate, nationwide, by 2020 with no individual high school's graduation rate falling below 80% (America's Promise Alliance, 2019). America's Promise Alliance established this goal as a way of ensuring success for all young people, especially for those students in populations that were traditionally heavily impacted by graduation rates well below 90%. This group believed that it was the responsibility of all sectors; nonprofit, business, government, and education to promote the success of all young people. The campaign continues to be led by America's Promise Alliance in collaboration with Civic Enterprises, the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, and the Alliance for Excellent Education. Together, these organizations publish an annual report, Building a Grad Nation, providing information regarding the progress made and continued challenges facing communities in achieving the 90% on-time graduation goal.

The largest obstacle in achieving this nationwide goal is in increasing low graduation rates in urban districts and improving subgroup graduation rates. As an example, the disparity of graduation rates nationally, between low-income groups and

moderate-/high-income groups are considerable: the graduation rates for low-income students range from 58% to 85% compared to the national average of 80%, for all students (Balfanz et al., 2014, p. 3). There are disparities by race as well, with graduation rates of 76% for Hispanic students and 68% for Black students, compared to 85% for White students (Balfanz et al., 2014, p. 4). These graduation rates fall well below the 90% graduation rate goal.

For the purposes of this study, an examination of the public high school graduation rates nationally, rates in other urban districts and geographic areas of the country, and the rates in the state of Georgia and the City of Atlanta, are presented. Exploring other urban districts and geographical areas helps to illustrate the challenges and trends experienced in urban public high school districts across the United States. However, this research study focuses on Atlanta Public Schools (APS) in Atlanta, Georgia only, as a representative sample of other, similarly challenged urban school districts. A Georgia Department of Education press release indicated that Georgia's statewide public high school graduation rate had increased for the third consecutive year, rising from 72.8% in 2013 to 72.5% in 2014 (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). However, in APS, which has a high concentration of low-income, Hispanic, and African American students, the high school graduation rate in 2014 was 59.1% (Balfanz et al., 2014). This was an increase from 58.6% in 2013 and 50.9% in 2012, according to data from the Georgia Department of Education (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). According to the report titled: Building a Grad Nation, 2018 Annual Report, Georgia

ranked the fourth highest in proportion of Black nongraduates, 44.2% (Atwell et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, Atlanta is not unique. The issues facing school districts in the Northeastern United States are similar. In the Boston Public Schools (BPS) in 2013, the 4-year graduation rate for White students was 75%; Asian students, 83.7%; Hispanic students, 59.8%; and African American students, 63.6% – with low-income students graduating at a rate of 64.7% (Boston Public Schools, 2013).

However, in January 2015, then Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh and the superintendent of the BPS, John McDonough, announced that the graduation rates in their Public Schools had:

> hit a historic milestone with newly released data showing the district's graduation rate at the highest level in recorded history; data released by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) shows the 2014 four-year graduation rate for BPS stands at 66.7 percent up from 65.9 percent in 2013, continuing an upward trend since 2006 when that figure was just over 59 percent. (Boston Public Schools, 2015, para. 1).

It is also important to note that these improvements were realized after intensive strategies and programs were implemented over the previous 7-years by BPS. As the superintendent stated:

> Since focusing on this key population of both recent dropouts and those most at-risk of dropping out, in a strategic and focused way 7-years ago, Boston has now collectively cut its drop-out rate in more than half – and in

doing so has created programs that have become national models of
success. (Boston Public Schools, 2015, para. 9)

Although these improvements have been significant, data from the 2015-
2016 school year shows that while the overall graduation rate in Massachusetts is
87.5%, and 91.9% for White students, for Black students it falls well below at
only 78.9%, as it also does with Hispanic students at 72.7% (Atwell et al., 2018).
This data highlights a continued and significant disparity among the races, despite
modest gains.

Another state in the northeast that is facing significant issues related to dropout
rates is Connecticut. Connecticut, the fourth wealthiest state in the nation with the third
lowest poverty level, still has among the largest achievement gaps in the nation when it
comes to which students graduate high school in four years (Chang & Rabe Thomas,
2014, para. 1). Connecticut also suffers from both racial and socioeconomic achievement
gaps, with a 4-year graduation rate of 94.0% for students from middle- to high-income
families and a 70.0% graduation rate for students from low-income families, only
Minnesota has a greater disparity between these two populations (Balfanz et al, 2014).
Regarding race, the data in Connecticut are similar to Atlanta and Boston. In 2014 in
Connecticut, White students graduated at a rate of 90.0%, Hispanic students less than
70.0%, and African American students at a rate of 73.0%; 17 percentage points lower
than their White counterparts (Chang & Rabe Thomas, 2014).

Moreover, graduation rates for urban districts are similar on the west coast of the
United States. For example, in the city of Los Angeles, California, the graduation rate in

2013-2014 was 67 percent, up from 58 percent a year ago (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2014, para. 3). When graduation rates are analyzed according to race, the following data emerges: Asian students performed the best with 4-year graduation rates of 88.0%, Latino students' 4-year graduation rate was 70.0%; White students graduated at a rate of 75.0%; biracial students were the most likely to drop out, with a 4-year graduation rate of only 22.0%; and with regard to African-American students, the second largest racial group, "only two-thirds graduated in four years, putting that group in sixth place among eight racial categories identified" (Romo, 2015, para. 10).

The statistics nationally regarding graduation rates is reflective of the challenges and trends of the districts, cities, and states discussed previously. Since 2001, the high school graduation rate across the nation rose from 71.7% to 81.0% in 2012, with a gain of eight percentage points occurring from 2006 to 2012 (Balfanz et al., 2014). Balfanz (2014) also explained that "if this average rate of improvement of 1.3 percentage points per year is maintained during the next eight years, the nation will reach its 90.0% graduation rate goal by 2020" (p. 3). Unfortunately, the national graduation rate for low-income students in most large urban areas (which typically have high concentrations of students classified as low-income) continues to be in the range of 50.0% to 60.0% (Balfanz et al., 2014). Some states are making progress, but the gap between the graduation rates for students identified as low-income, when compared to the graduation rates of their non-low-income peers, ranged from a high of 24 percentage points to a low of 2 percentage points (Atwell et al., 2018). Most disturbing is that although 34 states lessened the gap, 16 states experienced the gap between low-income and non-low-income

students' graduation rates increase (Atwell et al., 2018). Despite progress, there is still a disparity in graduation rates based on race in the United States. Most recent data show that, nationally, Black students graduate at a rate 11.9% lower than White students and Hispanic students 9.0% lower than White students (Atwell et al., 2018). If the national goal of a 90.0% graduation rate nationwide is to be achieved, significant gains will need to be made in the graduation rates of low-income, Hispanic, African American, and biracial students across the United States.

As previously stated, high numbers of high school dropouts have a significant economic, social, civic, and fiscal impact on the communities where they live (Sum, 2009). The critical social and financial consequences of dropping out of high school include the following highly positively correlated factors; declining marriage rates, increasing out-of-wedlock childbearing, lower rates of property ownership, chronic health conditions, less civic engagement and volunteering, poor health, higher rates of incarceration in jails and prisons, lower tax payments at all levels of government, increased dependency on the government for cash and in-kind transfers, higher long-term rates for marijuana use and cigarette smoking, and a major net fiscal burden as compared to peers with a high school diploma or higher level of education (Amin et al., 2016; Morgan & Rackin, 2010; Reingle Gonzales et al., 2016; Sum, 2009). In addition, as Sum (2009) showed, for the years 2004 – 2007, the average unemployment rate for 16- to 24-year-old high school dropouts in Connecticut was 31.2%, while those with a bachelor's degree or higher faced a 7.2% unemployment rate over the same period. Of those high school dropouts that are employed, 69.0% are trapped in low-status jobs with little to no

mobility or potential for improvement (Kim, 2013). Further, based on the same period in

Connecticut, the mean expected number of years that a female high school dropout would

spend living in poverty was 15.0 years, while a female with a bachelor's degree would

average only 2.0 years, and a female with a master's degree or higher would average 1.7

years (Sum, 2009).

      In another study, Campbell (2015) compared siblings nationally to understand if

the economic challenges that dropouts faced were attributed primarily to the fact that they

had dropped out, or if their socioeconomic status prior to dropping out was a stronger

factor. Campbell found that dropping out had a greater impact on economic success and

that "observed differences in economic hardship are not merely the result of early life

social and economic contexts" (2015, p. 116). Amin et al. (2016) illustrated the influence

on arrests for students without a high school diploma. White males without a high school

diploma are 13.9% more likely to be arrested than White males with a diploma; black

males without a diploma are 21.4% more likely than White males with a diploma to be

arrested (Amin, et al., 2016). Further, these data are not significantly improved by the

attainment of a General Education Development (GED) education status. Based on these

data, the conclusion can be drawn that the fiscal impact of high school dropouts on

individuals, families, and communities is considerable over the long term and the need

for an effective and sustainable dropout prevention model is critical for the strength and

health of communities across the United States.

Problem Statement

Educators and policy makers must identify a reliable and sustainable intervention model that effectively reduces high school dropout rates, especially for low-income and minority students, if there is any chance to achieve the national standard of 90.0% on-time graduation rate, established by America's Promise in 2010. The CIS model may be one of the models that can have a significant positive impact on dropout rates, but additional research is needed to determine its potential effectiveness. Although the CIS publications suggest significant positive outcomes associated with the model, there is a gap in the literature with regards to independent studies examining its effectiveness. Further, no previous studies have explored the perceptions of veteran educators with experience working in high schools using the CIS model. Educators' perceptions are important in educational research, though are often overlooked and based on the literature, underrepresented in the research on this topic. Researchers have not previously conducted studies seeking the perceptions of informed educators on the CIS model even though their perceptions could be critical in creating a comprehensive picture of the model's effectiveness. While graduation data are important, it is also vital to understand the lived experiences of those educators working in urban high schools using the CIS model. The importance of their perceptions should not be overlooked and analyzing their perceptions through the polarities of democracy lens could yield critical information on the culture of an urban high school using the CIS model. Additionally, although APS has a long history of utilizing this model, there are no studies that examine the implementation of the model within their high schools. And lastly, there are no studies to

indicate that any researchers have utilized the polarities of democracy theory, as a theoretical framework, in analyzing results of a study involving the CIS model or studies completed within urban high schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze the perceptions of veteran educators (teachers, counselors, and administrators), experienced with the CIS model in an urban high school. In particular, their perceptions on its effectiveness in the area of increasing graduation rates. There is a distinct gap in the literature regarding the lived experiences of these key stakeholders and further, no study examines these perceptions through lens of the polarities of democracy theory. These stakeholders have the potential to provide a unique perspective, one not previously explored, but one that could be critically important to determining the positive or negative impacts of the CIS model on students. The goal of this study was to record and analyze the perceptions of veteran educators, highlighting the identified strengths and weaknesses of the CIS model, from their perspective, and its potential impact on graduation rates. The results of this study supported an increased understanding of the model and its strengths and weaknesses as perceived by these stakeholders and analyzed through the lens of the polarities of democracy theory. Results of this study could potentially lead to social change by impacting adjustments in public education policy at the district and local levels.

Research Question

The primary research question for this study is the following: What do administrators, school counselors, and teachers of a CIS model high school in Atlanta,

Georgia, perceive as the model's strengths and weaknesses and its positive or negative impact on students? By asking this question, I gathered the unique perspectives of veteran educators within the selected high school, leading to a better understanding about the model's effectiveness, impacting public policy and, specifically, educational policy within APS.

Theoretical Framework

For my study, I utilized the polarities of democracy as the theoretical framework for this research. This theory, developed by Benet (2006, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), provides a framework for positive social change and for planning, implementing, and assessing attempts at social change and their relative success. Although democracy has often been viewed as the means to achieving positive social change (among many other important things), the development of a unifying theory of democracy to guide social change did not exist prior to Benet's work. The foundation of this framework is that a unifying theory of democracy is necessary to guide social change efforts, especially regarding the threats facing the world and its inhabitants, such as climate change, escalating poverty, economic disparity, and global militarization (Benet, 2006). Benet (2006) used Johnson's (1992/1996) polarity management concepts as the conceptual framework for the theory. Johnson stated that when polarities exist, each element has both positive and negative aspects. The polarities of democracy theory include 10 values that are presented in five polarity pairs: freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation (Benet, n.d.). Consistent with Johnson, Benet stated that for social change efforts to be

successful, the positive aspect of each value must be maximized while the negative aspects should be minimized to the greatest extent possible. In utilizing this unifying theory of democracy, citizens can better develop and implement social change efforts, and, as Benet (2013) stated, "it offers hope that we can address the threats to our human survival and that we can build healthy, sustainable, and just communities" (p. 36). Studying a public school through the lens of the polarities of democracy theory provides a unique opportunity to apply these principles to a smaller community, that of a school, and determine how the management of positive and negative aspects of a specific pair can lead to the creation of a healthy, sustainable, and just community. By leveraging the polarity pairs, maximizing the positive aspects, and minimizing the negative aspects, a school community has the potential to manage social issues and organizational challenges better.

Nature of the Study

This study provided a framework to gather the unique perspectives of veteran educators experienced with the CIS model in Atlanta, an urban school district. Most of the information pertaining to the CIS model is related to specific data points (i.e., truancy, discipline, and graduation rates) received from secondary sources, rather than the perceptions of experienced educators who are working within the model and who may have potentially significant insights into the model's strengths and weaknesses as it relates to student retention in high school. Through this qualitative lens, data were collected and recorded concerning the perspectives of the strengths and weaknesses of the model and its perceived impact on students as shared by critical stakeholders

(administrators, school counselors, and teachers) working at an Atlanta, Georgia, public high school. Unlike previous studies, this study allowed this researcher to complete an in-depth exploration of staff perspectives of the CIS model as it relates to students who have not found success in a typical urban high school. Stakeholders were selected based on their position within the school and certification; administrator, school counselor, or teacher, and their length of service at the school, narrowing the population to veteran educators experienced in both urban high schools and the CIS model. In-depth, semistructured interviews were used to gather data, as well as a planned review of relevant documents from the intended site, West End Academy - Performance Learning Center (WEA-PLC) in Atlanta, Georgia. WEA-PLC is a school that has integrated the CIS model into its school framework. The data gathered during this study were analyzed and interpreted through the lens of the polarities of democracy theory (Benet, 2006, 2012, 2013). WEA-PLC is open to all APS 11th and 12th grade students who have not found success in a traditional high school and have voluntarily chosen to enroll in this more specialized school. The perceptions of the key stakeholders, those who work directly with students, are especially important when considering programming for those students who have not been successful in the traditional urban high school.

Definitions

There are several terms utilized throughout this study that are essential to understanding the research and the literature. To avoid confusion or misunderstanding, definitions are provided for clarity.

Communities in schools model (CIS): The CIS model was established to address

many of the challenges regarding graduation rates and student engagement facing schools

and school districts. The model addresses this issue by providing students with integrated

support services to reduce the likelihood of them dropping out of high school. Support

services are widely available to all students and individual case management to those

who are at greatest risk of dropping out (Parise et al., 2017). This term is used to both

identify the general implantation model, communities in schools, and identify the

organization, Communities in Schools-Atlanta throughout this study.

Dropout prevention: This term applies to any program or strategy with a purpose

to encourage students to remain in school, at either the high school or higher education

level; undergraduate and graduate programs. This study focuses on dropout prevention at

the high school level. "Student retention" and "dropout prevention" programs and

strategies may be used interchangeably.

Dropout rate: Dropout rate refers to the number of students who exited school as

compared to the enrollment rate for that school year (Balfanz et al., 2014). This term is

not synonymous with graduation rate and is not used interchangeably.

Event dropout rate: This term refers to the percentage of 15 to 24-year-old

individuals from grades 10 to 12 who leave school in an identified school year without

having obtained a high school diploma or an alternative credential (McFarland et al.,

2016; Stark et al, 2015). This term is explained in more detail in Chapter 2.

Fall-Out theories: Fall-out theories focus on the factors of student disengagement

not caused by the school, such as inadequate progress in academics, poor study habits,

negative attitudes toward school, lack of parental interest or support, and general

dissatisfaction in school (Doll, et al., 2013; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Sahin et al.,

2016).

 Graduation rate: As defined by the National Center for Education Statistics, the

graduation rate is the percentage of first-time ninth graders in public high schools who

graduate with a regular diploma within 4 years.

 Integrated student support (ISS): This is a school-based model that seeks to

improve the academic success of students by ensuring that they have access to programs

and services that address both their academic and nonacademic needs. Researchers have

suggested that nonacademic factors can influence the academic success of students,

schools provide both traditional services, such as tutoring; and more untraditional ones,

such as connecting students to mental and physical healthcare services. Additionally,

schools can also help families access counseling, financial literacy support, employment

assistance, English language instruction, and food and medical resources (Anderson

Moore & Emig, 2014).

 Pull-Out theories: These theories focus on the external factors that affect students

in high school and that may cause them to leave high school prior to graduation, such as

marriage, childbirth or parenting, family needs, employment, financial obligations, and

illness (Doll et al., 2013; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Hawkins et al., 2013; Meeker

et al., 2008; Sahin et al., 2016).

 Push-Out theories: These theories encompass factors that researchers believe

have caused students to be pushed-out of school, typically understood to be adverse

situations within the school community negatively impacting students' desire and willingness to remain in school through graduation, causing them to drop out of high school (Doll et al., 2013). These could be policies related to discipline or attendance or consequences for negative behavior enforced by the school

Status dropout rate: Status dropout rate refers to the percentage of individuals 16 to 24 years old who are not currently enrolled in school and have not received a high school diploma (McFarland et al., 2016; Stark et al, 2015). This term is explained in more detail in Chapter 2.

Student retention: There are a variety of definitions that refer to retention of students in educational settings. Fowler and Luna (2009) described student retention as the occurrence whereby students remain in the educational environment until successful completion. There are multiple other terms that are used in the literature interchangeably with the term 'student retention,' including: retention rate, persistence rate, graduation rate, completion rate, attrition rate, drop-out rate, stop-out rate, withdrawal rate, and nonpersistence rate, all measured by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Assumptions

There are four primary philosophical assumptions that drive qualitative research; ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology (Creswell, 2018). Ontology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the study of the individual in society. The assumption, for the purpose of this study is that ontology, which is at the core of the philosophical assumptions driving the research, acknowledges the existence of multiple realities experienced by each participant. The polarities of democracy theory assumes that

there are truths and realities, but they are perceived differently by different individuals. In qualitative studies, the researcher subscribes to this belief and through their studies, such as this one, allows individuals to share their perspectives on their realities that may, or may not, align with others' realities. Through this type of exploration, researchers design a study that is concerned with recording and reporting on the multiple realities of the participants or subjects (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Epistemology focuses on how reality is made known and how we learn and acquire knowledge. In qualitative studies, we learn through listening to participants' perspectives, their different voices and how they experience and perceive the same phenomenon as compared to other individuals. The axiological assumption refers to the fact that qualitative researchers subscribe to the belief that they, as researchers, are adding value, or outcomes, to the field. In addition, it is understood that qualitative researchers acknowledge their own values and biases as they relate to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Methodology, as a philosophical assumption, is what moves the researcher from the abstract to the concrete through the process of qualitative research. Every step taken through the qualitative research process is reflective of the underlying philosophical assumptions of ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

The critical assumption made for this study was that the CIS model is being implemented with fidelity at WEA-PLC in Atlanta, Georgia. It was assumed that the staff of the Communities in Schools -Atlanta and the Atlanta Public Schools, are effectively providing services to students and that no institutional barriers prevent this model from being implemented, as designed. Further, Communities in Schools - Atlanta was formed

in 1972 to serve the community as a dropout prevention program, establishing a long

history of programming in Atlanta (Communities in Schools-Atlanta, 2019). Therefore,

the CIS model should not be considered a new or pilot program. It is assumed that

participants in the study shared openly and honestly, and all responses can be trusted with

credibility.

Scope and Delimitations

This study as intended had a specific scope and identifiable boundaries. The scope

included one public high school in Atlanta, Georgia, that is part of the Atlanta Public

School District that utilizes the CIS model. The focus of the study concerned the

perceptions of veteran educators who work within an APS high school, particularly their

perceptions regarding the strengths, weaknesses, and impact of the CIS model.

The intended delimitations listed below are applicable to this study:

1. Only one high school in the Atlanta Public School District will be included in
   this study.
2. Only veteran educators experienced in urban high schools and the CIS model
   employed by APS will be included in this study.
3. All participants will contribute on a voluntary and anonymous basis.

Limitations

The intent of this study was to focus on one high school in the APS system that

used the CIS model. Therefore, even though understanding the experiences and

perceptions of these stakeholders at a CIS model high school will yield valuable

information, it may be difficult to apply this information to other APS high schools across the district, state, or nation. If the results of this study indicate that the CIS model has significant positive outcomes, as perceived by the identified key stakeholders, further studies should be completed on a broader scale. Additionally, if the perceptions of these veteran educators skew more negatively towards the CIS model, additional studies would also be warranted to further explore the results. Another limitation is the fact that students who attend the school, and their parents and guardians, are not included in this study. Perceptions of both students and their parents regarding the CIS model may also be an area worthy of further study.

<div align="center">**Significance**</div>

As presented in Chapter 2, substantial research has been conducted on the causes and implications of students dropping out of high school and on potential interventions to solve the problem. This is especially evident in large urban districts like Atlanta, Georgia, but is not unique to Atlanta. Large urban districts continue to struggle with low graduation rates as compared to their suburban counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In 2010, the average freshman graduation rate for large city schools was 68.5%, while large suburban schools had an average freshman graduation rate of 81.2% (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Moreover, despite the research that illustrates the significant costs that high school dropouts impose on communities, no universally accepted intervention model or program has been identified as having significant success despite extensive research within the field (Sum, 2009). Rather, numerous interventions have been tried in schools across the nation, reviewed in Chapter

2, with only varied and often limited success. Therefore, no single intervention program or model has been broadly adopted or utilized throughout public schools in the United States.

Communities in schools is one intervention model being utilized throughout the Atlanta metropolitan area through a partnership with the nonprofit organization Communities in Schools - Atlanta and the Atlanta Public Schools. However, no independent research has been conducted within APS, at a CIS school, that allowed one to gather and examine the perceptions of experienced educators regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the model and how they believe it may positively or negatively impact retention rates. The results may assist in determining whether the CIS model has broader implications for other large urban high schools as well as implications for the development of local educational policy that addresses low graduation rates in urban school districts, such as APS.

Summary

The social issues and impacts associated with high school dropouts are noteworthy. The impacts and social issues are especially concerning in the Black, Hispanic, and low-income communities, as graduation rates for these groups continue to be considerably lower than for their White, non-low-income peers. This is evident in large cities across the nation, including Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles, and others. Although increases in graduation rates have been realized in many cities, and with the mentioned racial and socioeconomic groups, there remain districts struggling with graduation rates below 75.0%, placing a critical strain on community and government

resources. Further, even though this problem has been identified and researched for many

years, there is no universally accepted model used by large urban districts to improve

graduation rates. Chapter 2 will provide an overview of the research associated with the

many different intervention models that have been implemented with varying degrees of

success. The literature will also provide additional in-depth information about the CIS

model being used in many urban school districts across the nation which are similar to

APS. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will provide detailed information on this research study, the

results, and the analysis of those results, including implications for both social change

and public policy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Although high school graduation rates are generally rising across the nation, most states have not reached the 90.0% graduation rate goal established by America's Promise Alliance in 2010. Further, many districts continue to see different demographic groups; African American, Hispanic, and low-income, graduate at rates much lower than their White, non-low-income peers (Balfanz et al., 2014). The Communities in School (CIS) organization is a national organization that promotes the CIS model and was established to address this problem, by providing and connecting students with integrated support services to increase the chances of them graduating high school (Parise et al., 2017). CIS provides services widely available to all, while providing individual case management to those who are at greatest risk of dropping out (Parise et al., 2017).

While the literature on this model and its effectiveness is increasing, independent studies regarding the potential effectiveness of this specific intervention remain limited. Moreover, the impact of the CIS model as it relates to public policy and policy development has not been explored, nor has the perspective of veteran educators working within this model (Corrin et al., 2015; Figlio, 2015). This research gap will be addressed to identify whether this model can be effective at reducing the number of dropouts and improving high school graduation rates. With experienced educators being the ones most familiar with the crisis-level problem of high school dropouts, their perceptions on the influence of the CIS model on at-risk students are desired and timely. The goal of this chapter is to present a review of the related literature, which is necessary to highlight how

timely the topic is, emphasize the gap in the research that needs to be addressed, and situate the current study within the wider literature. This chapter presents findings from studies on the factors that lead to students dropping out of high school, community schools as a general model, and other specific interventions for the dropout problem. Findings are also presented from studies on the relationship between interventions and policy making.

Literature Search Strategy

To complete the literature review, several online databases and search engines were used: Google, Google Scholar, Journal Storage (JSTOR), Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Science Direct, SAGE Journals, PsycNET, Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs, Springer, and Digital Commons at Georgia Southern and Social Science Research Network (SSRN) e-Library. The key search terms that were encoded into the search were: (a) school dropout, (b) dropout rate on high school students, (c) interventions to prevent high school dropout, (d) increasing graduation rates, community schools, (e) public policy and intervention programs, (f) community schools and public policy, (g) democracy studies, (h) communities in schools, and (i) polarities of democracy. All these key search terms were used to find literature related to the problem and to the research question. Most of the studies included were published between 2013 and 2018 to ensure the most relevant and timely information.

Independent research on the effectiveness of the CIS model was limited. To extend the scope of the results and broaden the depth and breadth of the literature review, studies on the factors that lead to students dropping out of high school, community

schools as a general model, and other specific interventions were included. Some

abstracts for conference papers were also included to provide additional knowledge and

information on how various, specific interventions were effective for students. In

addition, documents related to the CIS model were also included to provide details of the

model itself. Additionally, limited studies were identified on public policy development

as it relates to public education, but those few regarding the relationship between

interventions and policy making were included. Moreover, no studies were identified that

utilized the polarities of democracy theory as it relates to public education, but earlier

studies using the polarities of democracy as a theoretical framework were included.

Theoretical Foundation

One theory of democracy, the polarities of democracy, will be used as the

theoretical foundation for this study. Benet (2006, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), the theory's

proponent, believed there should be a unifying definition of democracy to affect positive

social change. Benet (2006) used Johnson's (1996) polarity management concepts as his

conceptual framework for his work on the development of the polarities of democracy

theory. Polarities, according to Johnson, are different sets of opposites, connected with

each other and cannot function without the other. Johnson added that these polarities

usually have ongoing and unsolvable difficulties. Furthermore, he stated that there were

two categories of polarities: polarities of opposite meanings and polarities of doing and

being. According to Johnson, it is important to understand these polarities to have a

unified definition. His polarities management model serves as a conceptual framework

for managing conflict when there are two opposing views, and two key criteria exist in

determining the presence of these polarities. These criteria were based on the following: (a) the presence of positive and negative aspects of each element and (b) each element was not able to function well without the other (Johnson, 1996). When there was a problem that was unsolvable, Johnson stated that this was due to a polarity that needed to be managed. It is important to note that the main objective of polarity management is to maximize the best of these opposite elements while limiting the negative attributes of each (Johnson, 1996).

Benet (2013) identified 10 values that exist within the literature, five pairs, each element with positive and negative aspects. The goal is to effectively manage the polarities so that the negative aspects can be minimized while the positive aspects are maximized. These 10 values are: freedom and authority, diversity and equality, human rights and communal process, justice and due process, participation, and representation (Benet, 2013). With these values positioned in their corresponding polarities, Benet suggested these polarities help to form a unified definition of democracy and as a guide to assess society actions and issues. He added that the polarities of democracy theory serves as a guide in positive social change efforts. If positive aspects of each polarity value can be maximized and the negative aspects minimized, a society can achieve its greater purpose, to create healthy, sustainable, and just communities. In contrast, if societies do not minimize the negative aspects of each polarity pair, there is risk for the society to reach the deeper fear of human oppression. The values also can serve as qualitative and quantitative measurements of how effective social change efforts are within a society or organization.

Figure 1 is a visual representation of the five polarities of democracy pairs and the outcomes achieved when the positive aspects of each value are maximized: greater purpose, healthy, sustainable, and just communities; or when the negative aspects of each value are minimized: deeper fear of oppression, human extinction, and loss of greater purpose.

Figure 1

Polarity Map for five Polarities of Democracy Pairs

Polarity Map®

GPS: Why leverage this polarity?

Values = positive results of focus on the left pole

Values = positive results of focus on the right pole

Greater Purpose:
Healthy, Sustainable, and Just Communities

Freedom
Justice
Diversity
Human Rights
Participation

And

Authority
Due Process
Equality
Communal Obligations
Representation

Fears = negative results of over-focus on the left pole to the neglect of the right pole

Fears = negative results of over-focus on the right pole to the neglect of the left pole

Deeper Fear
Oppression, Human Extinction and Loss of Greater Purpose

Deeper Fear = Loss of GPS

Note. Map structure used by permission of the Polarity Partnerships, LLC. Map content used by permission of the Institute for Polarities of Democracy

There are a limited number of researchers who have used the polarities of democracy theory as their theoretical framework. Tobor (2014) used Benet's (2013a, 2013b) polarities of democracy theory to understand the aspects of Urhobo culture in Nigeria that could prevent a return to the violence of former militants. An ethnographic case study and purposive sampling was used to obtain the participation of 20 former militants. These participants were interviewed and observed for four weeks. These data were analyzed using content analysis to obtain significant themes that may best describe aspects of the Urhobo culture that had helped them to renounce violence. The results revealed some themes that were relevant to both the Urhobo culture and the amnesty program. These themes were: (a) social justice, equality, and fairness; (b) respect for customs and traditions; (c) respect for elders and respect for authority; (d) amnesty program as a good initiative; and (e) lack of development. The findings suggested that aspects of Urhobo culture may have helped in making the amnesty program a successful one in renouncing violence in the long run. The use of the polarities of democracy theory gave this study a broader perspective on how the strengths of the Urhobo culture impact the social and economic aspects of the amnesty program and further, that the emerging themes in the study were found to be consistent with the polarities of democracy theory. Moreover, the different aspects of the model helped in extending the impact of the various features of Urhobo culture in maintaining the effects of the amnesty program. Since community participation and empowerment were some of the concepts that define democracy, the polarities of democracy theory was used to analyze how the strengths of

the Urhobo culture were being utilized to make the amnesty program effective, especially for the former militants who had decided to end violence in their area.

A 2016 article contains studies by Tobor and Shajkovci (2016), where Tobor used the polarities of democracy theory, and Shajkovci used cognitive dissonance theory. The use of both theories helped readers understand the dynamics of how individuals in conflict-driven areas had affected the different aspects of the community. While cognitive dissonance theory focused on the contradictions between the moral beliefs and their engagement in violence, the polarities of democracy theory centered on how to resolve social, economic, political, and environmental concerns. Using the polarities of democracy theory, the researchers demonstrated that the model has helped in understanding the conditions of the individuals who were living in conflict-driven areas. It also provided a framework to understand how a community wanted to resolve these conflicts; thus, the model helped to provide ways to ensure that these conflicts were resolved properly. Eventually, violence was renounced and programs to stop violence were maintained.

A further study that used the theory was Strouble's (2015), who studied the role of racial oppression in influencing social capital in most African American communities. Social capital as defined by Portes (1998) and Bourdieu (1986) and cited in Strouble (2015), relate to the ability to obtain benefits through inclusion in specific social groups or networks. Strouble (2015) found that polarities of democracy could be used as a mitigating factor to help offset racial oppression in predominantly African America neighborhoods. The researcher gathered data from 20 African American residents of two

majority black communities in Florida through interviews and focus groups and accessed documents for supplementary data. Included in the documents accessed were local news reports and voter turnout reports, as well as community health assessments. Benet's theory of polarities of democracy was used to analyze the relationship between racism and social capital. Strouble (2015) argued that social capital in African American communities was hampered by racism but can be mitigated by using the polarities of democracy model. Inductive coding and then pattern matching showed some important themes that emerged from the chosen cases. One of the important themes identified was that perceived racial disparity constrained the bridging and linking of social capital in the chosen communities. Another was that racism can lead to social capital deficiencies as well as create a dysfunctional community culture, limiting the capacity to address and solve collective issues. The researcher, using the polarities of democracy theory, was able to show how racism specifically could affect black communities.

Recently Griffith (2017) also used the polarities of democracy as his theoretical framework. The researcher made use of the model to conduct a case study of two homeless shelters in New Jersey to understand the relationship between fair and just democratic processes and the program Housing First. The researcher examined whether the processes support or undermine Housing First. Data were gathered from New Jersey's annual Point in Time count, which detailed the number of homeless individuals and families in the state as well as the causes and service needs of the homeless. Government reports served as supplementary data to semistructured interviews and focus group interviews conducted with 14 homeless shelter staff workers. The coding and analyses of

the data led to the findings indicating that a lack of available housing, insufficient resources to gain access to hosing, and inadequate knowledge of resources available for housing acquisition and maintenance all led to aggravated homelessness. The results also demonstrated the ability of the polarities of democracy model to determine whether democracy was being served correctly and fairly within the homeless communities.

The polarities of democracy theory is built on and consistent with Dewey (1916/1966) and Butts (1980) who argued that public education is perceived to be one of the most important rights for children, thus relevant for this study, involving public education. In order to resolve the problem of the increasing dropout rate, every individual in the society (i.e., teachers, parents, administrators, and local officials) will be involved in implementing programs, interventions, and policies. The polarities of democracy theory provides a different perspective on how policies may have helped or hindered the full effectiveness of these programs and interventions. Moreover, this theory will be used to analyze the perceptions of administrators, counselors, and teachers regarding the CIS model.

It can be noted that the Rochester, New York City Schools, in 2014, revised their Civic Education Policy to include the use of the polarities of democracy theory as part of its effort to create a high-quality civic education as well as preparing "students to be active and engaged citizens in a democratic and global society" (Rochester City Schools, 2014, para. 1). Further, the district stated its belief in the role of both educational institutions and families to help students develop their foundational civic knowledge, understanding critical values and principles and that "schools are communities where

young people learn to interact, argue, and work together with others, important conditions

for future citizenship" (2014, bullet, 8.). The Rochester City Schools, through the

creation and implementation of a Civic Values and Policy Committee of which Dr. Benet

was a member, identified 22 values critical for its students. Upon revision of the original

policy, these 22 values were integrated into the five polarity pairs with some appearing in

more than one pair, as "either explicit elements of the polarity pairs or implicit

commitments, behaviors, or attitudes necessary for the effective management of the

specified pairs within the model" (2014, para. 8). This is the only instance known of a

public school integrating the polarities of democracy theory into its curriculum or policy

manuals but may be a potential area for further investigation by school districts wishing

to create a stronger, more research based civic education framework for students.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

In this section, the current dropout rates, and graduate rates, with the goal of

highlighting the problem of the low retention rate in high school, the factors that lead to

students dropping out of high school, community schools as a general model, and other

specific interventions for the dropout problem are all reviewed. The review will also

present findings from studies on the relationship between interventions and policy

making.

Current Dropout and Graduation Rates

As the goal of this study is to assess the impact of the CIS model as understood

from the perceptions of administrators, school counselors, and teachers, who work within

this model. It is important first to evaluate the current state of dropout rates and graduation rates across the United States.

Dropout Rates

Current statistics show that dropout rates may have generally decreased across the United States each year but are still a concern in many schools (Stark et al, 2015). Moreover, the U.S. federal government established the goal of a 90.0% graduation rate by the year 2020 for all states, but the current rates nationally are far from reaching this goal (Balfanz et al., 2014). The economic, social, and civic impact on communities with a high percentage of high school dropouts is significant (Carlson, 2014; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Hawkins et al., 2013; Sum, 2009). The social costs include declining marriage rates, a high incidence of out-of-wedlock childbearing, and higher risks of incarceration (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Hawkins et al., 2013). Economic costs of high dropout rates include significant income inadequacy problems of children, lower rates of property ownership, lower tax payments at all levels of government, and increased dependency on government for cash and in-kind transfers (Carlson, 2014). Civic costs include less civic engagement and poor health (Carlson, 2014). Ultimately, dropouts are a major net fiscal burden for the government (Sum, 2009).

According to Balfanz et al. (2014), the dropout rate refers to the number of students who have left school compared to the enrollment rate for that school year. Balfanz et al. added that dropout rates cover various grade levels, either from Grades 7 to 12 or only from Grades 9 to 12. Usually, a high dropout rate is considered to be around 10-15% per state (Balfanz et al., 2014). If the number of graduates from a public high

school is less than 60.0% of the number of enrolled students, the school is considered to be a dropout factory (Balfanz et al., 2014; Carlson, 2014; Stark et al, 2015). There are two types of dropout rates that can be measured. Understanding them is necessary before this research can be undertaken. These two types of dropout rates are important in determining the percentages by which dropout rates either increase or decrease; they are the event dropout rate and status dropout rate (McFarlan et al., 2016; Stark et al., 2015).

Event dropout rates refer to the percentage of 15- to 24-year-old individuals from Grades 10 to 12 who leave school in a specific school year without having a high school diploma or an alternative credential (McFarland et al., 2016; Stark et al, 2015). Event dropout rates increased from 3.4% in 2012 (Stark et al, 2015) to 4.7% in 2013 (McFarland et al., 2016). From this data, it could be observed that dropout rates, although decreasing in general, tend to fluctuate in some points. McFarland et al. added that there were no significant differences in the dropout rates by race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, and region. However, there were significant differences for the event dropout rates in terms of family income, whereby individuals who belong to low-income families had a higher event dropout rate compared to high-income families (McFarland et al., 2016).

Status dropout rates refer to the percentage of individuals aged 16 to 24 years who are not enrolled in school and do not have a high school diploma (McFarland et al., 2016; Stark et al, 2015). It was noted that this rate is higher than the event dropout rate because it included all individuals regardless of age, when and where they last attended school, and even includes those individuals who did not attend any school in the United States (McFarland et al., 2016; Starket al, 2015). Regarding the status dropout rate between

2012 and 2013, there was a slight increase from 6.6% in 2012 (Stark et al, 2015) to 6.8% in 2013, although this increase was not significant (McFarland et al., 2016). However, McFarland et al. (2016) noted that in the state of Georgia the status dropout rate was 8.7% in 2013.

Current Graduation Rates

To highlight the problem of increasingly high dropout rates, the construct of graduates, including current graduate rates, were reviewed. The graduation rate is defined as individuals who have obtained a high school diploma or an alternative credential (Stark et al, 2015; McFarland et al., 2016). Graduation rates were measured in two ways: through the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) and Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) (Balfanz et al., 2014; McFarland et al., 2016; Stark et al, 2015).

The ACGR is the percentage of public high school students who have graduated on time or four years after entering Grade 9 (Balfanz et al., 2014; Stark et al, 2015; McFarland et al., 2016). This rate is different from the status completion rate (Stark et al, 2015; McFarland et al., 2016) in that the latter focuses on 18- to 24-year-old individuals who have obtained a high school diploma or an alternative credential either in a public or private high school or institution, including diplomas from foreign schools and institutions (Balfanz et al., 2014; McFarland et al., 2016). For the school year 2011-2012, the ACGR was at 80.0% (Stark et al, 2015) while in the school year 2012-2013, the ACGR was 81.0% (McFarland et al., 2016). In Georgia, the overall ACGR in the school year 2011-2012 was 70.0% (Balfanz et al., 2014; McFarland et al., 2016; Stark et al, 2015) while in the school year 2012-2013, the ACGR was 72% (McFarland et al., 2016).

Although there was a slight improvement from the previous school year, the overall ACGR in Georgia was lower than the average ACGR in the country.

Regarding the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR), as compared to the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR), it has been observed that the former was less accurate than the latter (Balfanz et al., 2014; McFarland et al., 2016). McFarland et al. (2016) defined AFGR as an approximation of the percentage of public high school students who will graduate in four years after entering ninth grade. In the school year 2012-2013, the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate was at 82.0% (McFarland et al., 2016). McFarland et al. (2016) stated that in Georgia, the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate in the school 2012-2013 was at 70.5%. There has been a focus on improving the graduation rates in Georgia by many different sectors, including local and state government officials, school district personnel, and community-based organizations. In Georgia, much work still needs to be done in regard to the selection and implementation of intervention programs in the state, since the graduation rates continue to be below the national average (McFarland et al., 2016).

Characteristics of Dropout Students

Understanding the dropout rate is not enough as a background for this study. It is also important to understand what existing researchers have found with regards to the characteristics of students who drop out of high school; there were some common features that were noted. The literature reviewed showed that dropout students may be varied, but usually have common demographic characteristics in terms of age, race, and socioeconomic status.

Age

Students who were older than the usual high school age and belonging to low-income families tended to have a higher likelihood of dropping out of school (McFarland et al., 2016; Stark et al, 2015). Stark, Noel and MacFarland built upon a series of National Center for Education Statistics reports regarding high school dropout rates and completion rates from 1988 up to 2012 and assessed the characteristics of the high school dropouts. One of the characteristics that can predict dropping out is age. Those who were older than their peers at a specific high school level were more likely to drop out. This held true for event and status dropouts. This study showed that older students are more likely to drop out than high school students whose grade levels are aligned with their ages.

Race

There are disparities nationally by race as well, documented in many reports concerning the issue with graduation rates. The authors of the Building a Grad Nation report in 2014 illustrated this concern, sharing that although white students graduated nationally at a rate of 85.0%, Hispanic students lagged behind at 76.0% and African American students at only 68.0% (Balfanz et al., 2014). Based on a Georgia Department of Education press release, Georgia's public high school graduation rate increased statewide for the third consecutive year, rising from 71.8% in 2013 to 72.5% in 2014 (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). However, for APS, with a high concentration of low-income, Hispanic, and African American students, the high school graduation rate in 2014 was only 59.1%; an increase from 2013 when it was at 58.6% and even worse in

2012 at 50.9% in 2012 according to the Georgia Department of Education data (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Regarding race/ethnicity, McFarland et al. (2016), in their study of national trends with regard dropouts and their incomes, also found that students who were either Black or Hispanic or American Indian/Alaska Native were more likely to drop out of school.

Quintana and Mahgoub (2016) provided a better understanding of ethnic and racial disparities in education and the problem of high school dropout rates through a psychological lens. The researchers studied the implications of a psychological theory on understanding and addressing these problems. They identified three sources of ethnic and racial disparities, which include social class differences, differential treatment according to ethnic and racial status, and differential responses to educational practices from students belonging to ethnic and racial minorities. The researchers showed that racial and ethnic disparities do not only reflect social class differences. Rather, social class differences maintain the ethnic and racial disparities that students experience. Differential treatment and responses are found to be particularly influential on the learning experiences of students belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups, influencing their decisions to drop out. Educational disparities experienced by students from racial and ethnic minority groups can be addressed psychologically (Quintana & Mahgoub, 2016).

In addition, Fadlon and Tripp (2015) evaluated how skin tone affects high school dropout decisions among African Americans. Commonly, African Americans are disproportionately dropping out compared to their White counterparts. In this study, the researchers showed that not all Black students have the same likelihood of dropping out

and that skin color does play a great role. After controlling for key family background variables, the researchers found that light skinned Black students are less likely to drop out than dark-skinned ones. Interestingly, light-skinned black students were also found to be less likely to drop out compared to White students.

African American students are not the only ones dropping out in greater numbers than their White counterparts nationwide; Latin American students are also dropping out at a higher rate. A report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2015) highlighted a similar racial divide within the City of Atlanta. The authors identified the on-time graduation rates of African and Latino students as 57.0 and 53.0% while White students are graduating at a rate of 84.0% and Asian students as high as 94.0% (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015). In the report the authors stated that "improving the graduation rates for students of color and the city as a whole would give a significant boost to the local economy in the form of more jobs, income and tax revenue" (2015, p. 8). A recent study by McWhirter, Garcia, and Bines (2017) showed why. In their study, the researchers tested two models in which Latino students' school connectedness affected the relationship between barriers and dropping out. Examples of barriers were not that different from the barriers experienced by African American high school students, such as discrimination experiences, lack of social capital, low motivation levels, and many others (McWhirte et al., 2017). Through a moderated mediator analysis conducted on data from 896 Latino high school students, the researchers found that those who experienced barriers were more likely to have thoughts of dropping out of high school. This relationship is mediated by school connectedness. The findings revealed that

discrimination experiences, other barriers, and school connectedness all separately contributed to thoughts of dropping out. However, if Latino students have high levels of school connectedness, the barriers they experience have a lesser impact and do not immediately lead to thoughts of dropping out (McWhirter et al., 2017).

In another study of dropouts among Latino students, Diaz-Strong & and Ybaraa (2016) compared the educational outcomes among Latino immigrants and their White counterparts to determine the roles of age-at-arrival to the United States and immigration status on their decisions to drop out. According to the researchers, past studies seemed to have overlooked the potential roles of these two factors on this specific ethnic minority group's educational experiences. Using data from a sample of 932 individuals that took part in the 2001 Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (LA FANS), the researchers found that immigration status, defined as a) citizen, b) authorized (legal) immigrant or c) unauthorized (illegal) immigrant, had a stronger link to educational outcomes than age-at-arrival to the United States (Diaz-Strong & Ybarra, 2016). The groups classified as authorized or unauthorized immigrants, who are not citizens, are more likely to have lower graduation rates and higher risks of dropping out than those who are classified as citizens (Daysi et al., 2016). Results showed that there were no significant differences in high school completion between early and later childhood arrivals if immigration status and other covariates were taken into consideration. The immigration status of this specific racial group of students, more than age, more significantly impacts their educational outcomes (Daysi et al., 2016).

This section has shown that high school students from racial minority backgrounds are more likely to face barriers to their completion of high school and are more likely to drop out. However, there are factors that can prevent this from happening, such as high motivation levels and school connectedness (Daysi et al., 2016; Quintana & Mahgoub, 2016).

Socioeconomic status

Another common characteristic of students that drop out of high school is their low socioeconomic status. Connecticut, the fourth wealthiest state in the nation with the 3rd lowest poverty level, "still has among the largest achievement gaps in the nation when it comes to which students graduate high school in four years" (Chang & Rabe Thomas, 2014, para. 1). The state suffers from both racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps, with a four-year graduation rate of 94.0% for students from middle- to high-income families and only a 70.0% graduation rate for students from low-income families; only Minnesota has a worse disparity between these two populations (Balfanz, 2014).

The national picture is also reflective of the above districts. Since 2001, the high school graduation rate across the nation has risen from 71.7% to 81.0% in 2012, with the largest gains, eight percentage points, occurring from 2006 to 2012 (Balfanz et al., 2014). Balfanz et al. (2014) go on to explain that "if this average rate of improvement of 1.3 percentage points per year is maintained during the next eight years, the nation will reach its 90 percent graduation rate goal by 2020" (p. 3). Unfortunately, the national graduation rate for low-income students in most large urban areas, with typically high concentrations of students classified as low-income, continues to be in the range of 50-60.0% (Balfanz et

al., 2014). The disparity of graduation rates between low-income groups and moderate-/high-income groups is considerable; the "graduation rates for low-income students range from 58 percent to 85 percent compared to the national average of 80 percent for all students" (Balfanz et al., 2014, p. 3).

The data is also similar in other parts of the nation, including the northeastern United States. In the Boston, Massachusetts, Public School System (BPS) during the school year 2013-2014, 78.0% of students came from low-income families and 57.0% of students were either African American or Hispanic (BPS, 2014). In 2013, the four-year graduation rate for White students was 75.0%, Asian students 83.7%, Hispanic students just 59.8%, and African American students 63.6%, while students classified as low-income graduated at a rate of 64.7% (BPS, 2013). In January 2015, Mayor Martin J. Walsh and the Superintendent of the BPS, John McDonough, announced that the graduation rates in BPS had reached a milestone, as the data showed that the district's graduation rate was at its highest level in recorded history. Based on the data provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the 2014 four-year graduation rate for BPS reached 66.7%, higher than the 65.9% rate posted in 2013. This also continued an upward trend since 2006, when the rate was only 59.0% (BPS, 2015). While there is cause for Boston to celebrate, it must be noted that these improvements were realized only after intensive strategies and programs were implemented seven years prior. According to the Superintendent, by focusing on both populations of both recent dropouts and those most at-risk of dropping out seven years ago, Boston was able to significantly cut its drop-out rate by more than 50.0%. As a result, Boston now has programs

perceived to be national models of success (BPS, 2015). The story of graduation rates for urban districts is much the same on the west coast. In the city of Los Angeles, the graduation rate in the school year 2013-2014 was nine percent higher than a school year ago, having gone from 58.0% to 67.0% (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2014).

Wagner, Newman, and Javitz (2014) found the same impact of socioeconomic status on high school dropout risk, this time on students with disabilities. The researchers considered the extent to which the socioeconomic status of students with disabilities affects their chances of high school completion, enrolment in college, and eventual employment. The researchers also evaluated the individual and family factors that serve as mediators between socioeconomic status and high school outcomes. Data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 were analyzed, which showed that socioeconomic status can significantly affect outcomes. Mediating factors found include disability type and severity, gender, and racial identity (Wagner et al., 2014). In addition, Kearney and Levine (2014) evaluated the role that family income plays on a student's capital. Through their work, Kearney and Levine found that geographical areas with higher levels of income inequality can have overall lower rates of social mobility. Considering this, the researchers hypothesized that greater levels of income inequality could lead low-income students to perceive a high school diploma as unimportant (Kearney & Levine, 2014). The researchers found that regardless of whether students are aware that having high school diplomas and higher degrees can lead to higher wage premiums, low-income students do not feel the need to attain education, instead, they choose to drop out and, in the future, earn less income than those who pursued their

education, or obtained a high school diploma at the very least (Kearney & Levine, 2014).

The researchers concluded that income inequality can perpetuate the economic

disadvantage of youth that already belong to families with low-income, restricting their

upward mobility opportunities (Kearney & Levine, 2014).

Like Wagner et al. (2014), Luginbuhl et al. (2016) found that socioeconomic

status or income levels can lead to the barriers faced by racial minority students and may

potentially contribute to their decision to drop out of high school. Specifically, racial

minority students from poor families were found to be the least likely to have

postsecondary education expectations and did not see the value in finishing high school.

In their study, Luginbuhl et al. (2016) tested two models that can predict school

achievement and postsecondary education among Latino high school students that belong

to families with low-income levels. The researchers compared the fit of two different

models in a sample of 1,196 high school Latino students (Luginbuhl et al., 2016). The

first model was generated using self-determination theory while the second model is an

expanded one that incorporates the latent construct of sociopolitical development as a

predictor. The results showed that the second model was a better fit to the participants

and indicated that among the 607 low-income Latina/o participants, sociopolitical

development, basic psychological need satisfaction, and autonomous motivation can

explain 36.0% of the variance in academic achievement and 78.0% of the variance in

educational outcome expectations. The findings led to the conclusion that sociopolitical

development had both direct and indirect effects on Latino adolescent's educational and

vocational outcomes, or both (Luginbuhl et al., 2016).

Reasons Behind Dropping Out

Apart from the rates and characteristics of students dropping out, there is a need to also understand the factors pushing students to drop out. Past researchers who designed their studies with the goal of identifying and understanding the dropout trends and the reasons students decide to drop out of school have found several common reasons for dropping out among students (Christian, 2015; Dupere, Leventhal, Dion, Crosnoe, Archambault & Janosz, 2015; Hawkins et al., 2013; Meeker, Edmonson & Fisher, 2008; Rashid, Jahan, Islam & Ratna, 2015; Sahin, Arseven & Kilic, 2016; Shahidul, 2013; Tas, Selvitopu, Bora & Demirkaya, 2013). These factors can be categorized into three groups: push-out theories, pull-out theories, and fall-out theories (Doll et al., 2013; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016). These theories generalized the different factors that had affected the decisions of these students to drop out of school.

Push-out theories

Push-out theories, according to Doll et al. (2013), are related to the factors that the researchers believe pushed students out of school, becoming dropouts. Doll et al. (2013) examined data gathered from multiple nationally representative studies spanning more than five decades regarding reasons students decide to leave school. They found the school factors of test results, poor school attendance, discipline and punishments, school policies, disparity between curriculum and student ability level, and lack of resources, particularly in transportation resources, push students to leave (Doll et al., 2013). Additionally, Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) conducted a literature synthesis on the dropout trends, prevention, and intervention initiatives for school-aged children. The

researchers highlighted theoretical and consequential trends of the school dropout problem and stated that a combination of factors push students to leave school. They found that a student with high absenteeism due to school anxiety who also received disciplinary actions due to missed school was more likely to become discouraged and less likely to attend school or return after missing school (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016).

Other researchers (Meeker et al., 2008; Rashid et al.; Sahin et al., 2016; Tas et al., 2013) found more school factors that might have affected the students' decision to drop out of school. In Meeker et al.'s (2008) qualitative study on the students' perspectives of the reasons for dropping out, 228 current and recent students from General Educational Development programs across the state of Texas were surveyed, interviewed, and participated in focus group discussion. According to the students, having what they felt was a dysfunctional school or having conflict with teachers is a strong factor. The lack of support from teachers, teachers' treatment toward students, the teaching methods employed by teachers, and the treatment of their teachers were the factors that the students identified as promoting a dysfunctional school environment and/or causing conflict with teachers (Meeker et al., 2008). Tas et al. (2013) also examined the dropout reasons of vocational high school students by interviewing 19 individuals who had not completed their vocational education program and left school without earning their desired diplomas. They found that aside from absenteeism, repeating a grade level and having a rigorous curriculum might have placed pressure on students to perform well according to the school's standards (Tas et al., 2013). Frequently, students who could not meet the imposed standards believed they had no choice but to drop out (Tas et al., 2013).

Rashid et al. (2015) added that instructional strategies and lack of interaction between teachers and students, aside from having a rigorous curriculum, were some of the factors that had impacted dropout rates. The researchers used both quantitative and qualitative data in this study, wherein for the quantitative part, the researchers gathered students' enrollment data prepared in 2013 by the students support services division and examination division of the BOU. The data was examined for students' enrollment, dropout, and completion trends. Data showed that around 6,471 students enrolled in the DCSA program up to the 2013 academic year (Rashid et al., 2015). Among this student population, 1,687 students successfully earned their diploma in Computer Science from 1998 to 2013. For the qualitative part of the study, 90 students were interviewed. The students in this study believed that by being able to interact with their teachers, they were able to cope with the difficult lessons and they might have felt better when they knew that teachers were approachable and understanding of their learning needs (Rashid et al., 2015). Aside from the other push-out factors that were discussed by other researchers, Sahin et al. (2016) added that the attitude of administrators and teachers regarding absenteeism might have affected the decision of the student to drop out.

Pull-out theories

In addition to push-out factors, there are also pull-out factors affecting students' decisions to drop out. Pull-out theories focused on the external factors that affected students in high school (Doll et al., 2013; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016). These external factors had the potential to impact students' performance in school (Hawkins et al., 2013) and included changes in the person's life such as marriage, childbirth or

parenting, family needs, employment, financial obligations, and illness (Doll et al., 2013; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Hawkins et al., 2013; Meeker et al., 2008; Sahin et al., 2016). In data gathered from multiple nationally representative studies spanning more than five decades regarding reasons students decide to leave school, Doll et al. (2013) noted that these factors significantly disrupted students' performance in school and were attributed to most of the students' decisions to drop out. Students that were dealing with significant problems in their personal lives had difficulties performing well in school; thus, they made the decision to leave in order to focus on the issues in their personal lives. It is important to note that it was not necessarily the case that these students were performing badly in school, but these external challenges and distractions significantly disrupted their focus in school. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2016), with their literature synthesis, added that these students decided to drop out when they believed that attending to those external factors was more important than remaining in school. Students who were engaged in problematic behaviors such as smoking, sexual activity, drug abuse, delinquency, and marijuana use often found these behaviors increased their difficulties in school and so they eventually dropped out (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016). This finding has been emphasized by Hawkins et al. (2013). The researchers analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to follow a nationally representative sample of children from middle school through the end of the high-school years and found that activities outside of school caused these students to lose interest in completing their education, since their focus was on those activities rather than their academic lives. Moreover, as these students lost interest, they obtained lower grades and

had significant difficulty in catching up to the other students, falling further behind. Additionally, Meeker et al. (2008) added that the bad decisions and poor choices of these students were viewed as a reason for dropping out of school.

Fall-out theories

The last of these theories that are attributed to students' decisions to drop out of school are fall-out theories (Doll, et al., 2013; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016). Fall-out theories focus on the factors that neither the student nor the school has control of (Doll et al., 2013). Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) added that these fall-out factors may not have had an immediate impact on the decision to drop out of school; rather, they had been persistent through time, with students eventually deciding to drop out of school.

Fall-out factors include inadequate progress in academics, poor study habits, negative attitudes toward school, lack of parental interest or support, and general dissatisfaction in school (Doll, et al., 2013; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Sahin et al., 2016). Since fall out factors do not materialize overnight and can manifest gradually, the potential for remediation and successful intervention may be higher with this group of students. Students who experience these fall-out factors are found to be those who often struggled with fitting into their peer group at school. They often feel left out and usually suffer feelings of isolation, which makes their school and learning experiences feel negative. As a result, they feel demotivated to learn (Meeker et al., 2008; Tas et al., 2013). In stark contrast to these students, there are also students who drop out because they are very close to their peers. Some peer groups pressure members to drop out of school as a show of commitment and loyalty to them (Meeker et al., 2008). In both

scenarios, students at risk of these fall-out factors are those who cannot achieve stability in their peer relationships. One risk factor is the student frequently moving and changing schools. A student who constantly moves and enters a new school is found to be at-risk of dropping out because he or she often struggles to adjust to a new school culture and new set of classmates (Meeker, et al., 2008). Changes in the curriculum utilized by different schools can aggravate their feelings of instability and desire to just drop out (Meeker et al., 2008).

This section detailed the three key reasons why students decide to drop out. Studies have shown that there are multiple reasons why students will make this decision (Meeker et al., 2008; Tas et al., 2013). However, these factors do not always occur in isolation. Sometimes, push, pull, and fall-out factors can simultaneously exist to trigger students' decisions to drop out. In several studies (Dupere et al., 2015; Tas et al., 2013), it was found that these multiple factors from the different theories can all lead to a student's decision to drop out. Dupere et al. (2015) added that the combination of these factors, along with the precipitating and predisposing factors, significantly impacted students' decisions. When they became overwhelmed with the multiple problems and challenges, they were more likely to decide to drop out (Tas et al., 2013). However, even with all these studies, it remains difficult to determine which factors have the most impact on students. By knowing and understanding these different factors and the interaction between them, school personnel may be more likely to create intervention programs that address these multiple factors and support students more fully.

Interventions Addressing Dropout Rates and Increased Graduation Rates

Interventions have been developed to address why students are continuing to drop out of high school, with the dropout rate increasing in some states (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Following the review of what past researchers have found with regards to the reasons why students drop out, the findings regarding existing interventions and their effectiveness should be reviewed as well. These interventions were designed to cater to the needs of the students with the involvement of parents, school administrators, and the community. In designing these interventions, there were four different areas of focus (1) academic enhancement, (2) mentoring and supportive relationships, (3) psychosocial skill development, and (4) teacher training in child behavior management (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Wilkins & Bost, 2016).

Interventions can also be differentiated between the response of the public and private sectors. According to Blount (2012), who designed a literature review of the research regarding school dropouts, school counselors are especially affected by the issue because they are the ones who must develop the interventions to address this problem. Some of these suggestions for students were identifying students with poor attendance, developing group interventions, and involving parents in supporting those programs. However, McIntyre and Knight (2016) believed that school counselors were not the only individuals who should respond to the needs of the students; rather, involving different individuals outside the immediate school community (i.e., families and other community members) were observed to be more effective in developing these interventions. The informal connections that were established within the community helped in the successful

planning and implementation of the different interventions within it. Furthermore, McIntyre and Knight added that these connections complemented the formal programs and interventions in terms of encouraging the students to participate in them. Furthermore, Irby, Mawhinney and Thomas (2012) noted that the process of planning for the needs of the school entailed the participation of researchers, the community, and stakeholders. They also added that to have a successful program, these different sectors must be involved in the planning and decision-making process. Freeman et al. (2015) also noted that these kinds of interventions produce benefits that could be long-term (Freeman et al., 2015).

Researchers have evaluated intervention programs and their effectiveness after implementation, including the effects of Career academies, the Check and Connect Mentoring Program, Early College High School Program, High School Puente Program, Exito Program Model, Participatory Action for School Improvement, and many more (Bernstein et al., 2014; Hartman, Stotts, Ottley & Miller, 2016; Heppen et al., 2015; Kendall, Kaunda, & Friedson-Rideneur, 2015; Murray & Tietjen, 2014; Quiñones & Kiyama, 2014; Roberts, Vaughn, Fall & Vaughn, 2013; What Works Clearinghouse, 2009, 2015a, 2015b). The specific programs and their effectiveness are presented below:

Career Academies

Career academies was a dropout prevention program which was developed 30 years ago for those individuals who were at-risk of dropping out of high school (What Works Clearinghouse, 2015a). To help these individuals, academic and career-related courses were provided to them, and work experience was acquired through partnerships

with local employees (What Works Clearinghouse, 2015a). Furthermore, this program

had three features: (1) these were small learning communities in which students had

several classes together and teachers did their best in meeting their several needs; (2) the

curriculum were dependent on the career theme relevant to the needs of the community;

and (3) partnerships with local employers, higher institutions, and the community in

terms of providing different forms of support for these students. The results of this

program focused on its effectiveness on staying in school, progressing in school, and

completing school. The findings showed that it has potentially positive effects on

completing school while it has no effect on students staying and progressing in school

(What Works Clearinghouse, 2015a). According to Kemple and Snipes (2000), this

approach is one of the oldest, as well as most widely applied high school reforms in the

United States. In this early study, the researchers conducted a large-scale, multi-site,

random assignment research design to evaluate the effects of career academies on student

outcomes. The findings revealed that these academies can increase both the level of

interpersonal support that students receive and increase their level of participation in

career awareness and work-based learning activities (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). The

researchers also found that the career academies significantly improved high school

outcomes of students highly vulnerable to dropping out and improved their chances of

graduating on time. The findings also showed that career academies can greatly improve

the level of interpersonal support from teachers and peers and, consequently, also reduce

the dropout rates dramatically. However, the findings of this early study revealed that the

academies did not improve standardized mathematics and reading test scores and the

overall effects of these academies cannot be definitively concluded because the types of students who participated in them varied remarkably according to site (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). These findings enabled the researchers to conclude that this reform can be considered as one of the effective means of reducing the high school dropout rate if the personal support of students through involvement with teachers and peers increases (Kemple & Snipes, 2000).

In a more recent study, Kemple and Willner (2008) also evaluated the effects of career academies, but on the labor market participation and educational attainment over the eight years following scheduled high school graduation. Through a randomized controlled trial conducted in nine high schools situated in urban school districts and a total of 2000 students, the results revealed statistically significant, positive effects of this program on the high school graduates' average monthly earnings, average hours worked per week, and average hourly wages over the eight years following scheduled high school graduation. The researchers also clarified that since the quality of the causal evidence presented in their study is high, the findings are also credible and valid, and enough to conclude that the effects are attributed mainly to career academies. The researchers, however, failed to explain why even though the career academies are increasing graduates and improving the lives of high school graduates (Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Kemple & Wilner, 2008) the number of students dropping out remains high and is increasing.

Check and Connect Mentoring Program

The Check and Connect Mentoring Program was an individualized program in which students who were at risk of dropping out of school were paired with a mentor (Heppen et al., 2015). Several studies have been designed to evaluate the program's effects (Heppen et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2013). Heppen et al. added that the mentor matched their needs with available social and academic supports and monitored their progress. The goal of this program was to increase student engagement and school performance and to ensure that the student was able to graduate from high school on time (Heppen et al., 2015). Although this program was designed to address the dropout rates of students with disability, Heppen et al. further added that other districts used this program to help address the needs of the general education students who were at risk of dropping out of school as well. There were two components of this program: (1) the check component which entailed the monitoring of the behaviors that defined school engagement (i.e., attendance, educational development, and behavior), and (2) the connect component which was further divided into two depending on the type of intervention that the student needs: basic and intensive. Basic interventions involved regular problem-solving strategies and conversations about their progress. On the other hand, intensive interventions used various sources (i.e., community services, school and home visits, frequent tutoring) to enable the student to be re-engaged in school (Heppen et al., 2015).

Regarding the effectiveness of this program, Heppen et al. (2015) conducted a study on how the program impacted the school engagement, attendance, and completion

rates for at-risk general education students. The researchers used a sample of 553

consisting of grades eight and nine students who were at risk of dropping out. The

participants were either assigned to the Check and Connect Mentoring Program group or

to the control group. Progress on these students' performance was checked based on their

attendance and grades in the different courses and exams. The results indicated that there

was no significant evidence that the program had been effective in the first two years of

its implementation.

 Roberts et al. (2013) used a modified version of the Check and Connect

Mentoring Program together with a reading intervention to determine the progress of

students at risk of high school dropout in comparison with a control group. The modified

version included the following indicators and services: (1) daily attendance, grades, and

behavior checks, (2) daily check-in, (3) consistent parent contact, and (4) small-group

sessions. This two-year experimental study had 457 participants who were divided into

various groups: (1) reading intervention only, (2) modified Check and Connect

Mentoring Program only, (3) both reading and mentoring program, and (4) control group.

The results indicated a significant improvement in the grades and school engagement of

those students who had received both interventions as compared to the control group.

Reading performance grades also increased for students who had received a reading

intervention (with and without mentoring program) as compared to the control group.

Lastly, school engagement also increased for students who received the modified Check

and Connect Mentoring Program (with and without reading intervention).

Early College High School Model

The early college high school model is another reform designed to increase the number of students graduating from high school and prepare them for college by establishing small, modern high schools with these specific goals (Bernstein et al., 2014). These schools were located on college campuses and catered to students who were in grade nine to 12. They targeted students who belonged to low-income families, were members of a minority group, and were the first in their family to go to college. This model has a program in which students were expected to graduate in four to five years with a high school diploma and two years of college credit that was transferable (Bernstein et al., 2014). This model was tested on a longitudinal study composed of 1,350 students who had completed eleventh grade and had started high school between the years 2005-2008. In addition, data was used from a cross-sectional sample of all 2,825 ninth graders who completed the data from. These students were assigned to either an ECHS school or the control group (Bernstein et al., 2014). The impact of this model was seen in the passing of the required subjects per grade level and in comparing them to the control group and the prepared group (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010; Edmunds et al., 2012; Kaniuka, 2017; Thompson & Onganga, 2011; Saenz & Combs, 2015). The results of these studies revealed minimal differences on the performance between treatment and control groups for English and Social Science subjects. On the other hand, unprepared students' performance in Math came close to the performance of prepared students. The researchers implied that schools could have an impact on students who were at risk of dropping out. The data also suggested that lessening performance gaps can be achieved

through these programs that helped students' transitions from middle school to high school (Berger et al., 2010; Edmunds et al., 2012; Kaniuka, 2017; Thompson & Onganga, 2011; Saenz & Combs, 2015).

Other notable programs included the Exito Program Model, the high school Puente Program, the school dropout prevention pilot, and the participatory action for school improvement, even though minimal research has been devoted to studying their effects. The Exito Program Model refers to a dropout prevention program for ninth and tenth grade Latino students who were at risk of dropping out. Hartmann et al. (2011) stated that this model was launched in the school year 2008-2009 by a community agency, Congreso de Latinos Unidos. This out-of-school time program provided afterschool programming and case management services (Hartman et al., 2011). The results from its two-year implementation demonstrated that those students who were at-risk did not fail subjects such as Math and English. Students who had received one or both services reported better school engagement and better grades (Hartman et al., 2011). On the other hand, the High School Puente Program was a dropout prevention program aimed at helping disadvantaged students to graduate high school and enroll in college (What Works Clearinghouse, 2009). What Works Clearinghouse (2009) stated that this program consisted of the following: (1) English classes for ninth and tenth grade students with a discussion of multicultural literature, (2) academic counseling program for four years, and (3) student leadership and mentoring activities. By focusing on these aspects, the students were able to become more prepared for college. However, few studies were

conducted with regards to the effectiveness of this program (What Works Clearinghouse, 2009).

     Another program is the participatory action for school improvement. This project was developed by Kaunda and Kendall through their experiences in conducting research on the education efforts in Malawi from 2009 and 2012 (Kendall et al., 2015). Kendall et al. (2015) stated that the project aimed to engage the communities in terms of their knowledge, capacity, and existing resources. They also added that funding, decision making, and dialogues between communities and organizations were important for district schools to be improved (Kendall et al., 2015). After identifying the issues in five district schools in Malawi, the program guided these schools to determine the activities necessary to resolve the issues and provide the needs of the school. These activities were infrastructure development, teacher professional development, programs for academic achievement, and the purchase of necessary materials. In two years, Kendall et al. (2015) stated that there were improvements in terms of the following: (1) teacher knowledge, (2) attendance rates for teachers and students, (3) completion, and (4) teachers' satisfaction with their careers.

     The School Dropout Prevention Pilot, according to Murray and Tietjen (2014), was a five-year program which was implemented in different countries such as Cambodia, India, Tajikistan, and Timor-Leste. They piloted and evaluated interventions to reduce dropout rates for primary and secondary schools for these countries. An Early Warning System was utilized in those countries to identify students who were most likely to drop out of school and to provide additional support for those students. In addition,

these were assigned in these countries using the similar stratified school-level random assignment design (Murray & Tietjen, 2014). These interventions were evaluated regarding their improvements on the following criteria: (1) dropout rate, (2) student engagement in school, (3) student behavior and attitude outcomes, (4) teacher behavior and attitude, and (5) overall program impact. A multivariate statistical model was used to analyze data. The results indicate that Early Warning Systems were potential interventions that can help in reducing the dropout rate (Murray & Tietjen, 2014).

Apart from the specific interventions discussed, many researchers focused on school-community partnerships (Case & Traynor, 2016; Casto, 2016; Hands, 2014; Hartman et al., 2016; Ice, Thapa & Cohen, 2015; Minton, 2016; Stefanski, Valli & Jacobson, 2016; Vaillancourt & Amador, 2014/2015) and community schools (Bourshek, 2016; Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016; Green & Gooden, 2014; Heers et al., 2016; McClanahan, Gao, & Sanders, 2013; Mwamba, 2016) since these interventions were the most applied across different settings.

One of the more familiar ways to decrease dropout rates and to improve graduation rates was by developing school-community partnerships. School-community partnerships were perceived as the collaboration between schools and communities in terms of the projects that were implemented (Casto, 2016; Hands, 2014). Hands (2014) further stated that school-community partnerships were developed for the holistic development of the students. The perceptions of various stakeholders and the importance of school-community partnerships have been noted in this section, including the fact that most studies on school-community partnerships used phenomenology as their method of

choice (Casto, 2016; Hands, 2014; Hartman et al., 2016; Stefanski et al., 2016) because it helped them to gain information on how various individuals (i.e., students, parents, community members, teachers, and school administrations) perceived these partnerships. Their perceptions helped in identifying the needs of the schools and in providing solutions for those needs.

School-community partnerships were observed to be important in promoting children's education, families' well-being, and the communities' strength (Casto, 2016; Hands, 2014; Minton, 2016). In line with this, Casto's (2016) study aimed to explore the existing connections between a small rural elementary school and its local community. The conceptualizations of school administrators, teachers, parents, and community members on school-community relationships and the identification of these partnerships were also explored. A case study from a school in a rural area was selected and the participants were selected in a random manner. Semistructured interviews were used to gain the necessary information from 21 participants. The data from the interviews were analyzed and coded. The results stated that the existence of these partnerships was for the creation of various afterschool and summer activities for children, to promote the literacy of children and help in the transition to middle school. In addition, these connections were considered to be local and school district ties with the school.

Hands' (2014) study aimed to examine the roles of the students and their perceptions and involvement in collaborative partnerships, especially on school-community partnerships in education. This qualitative study utilized ten individual interviews (school nurse, administrative assistant, school counselor, two high school

teachers [History and Science], grade four teacher, librarian and three students in grades two, four, and eight) and ten focus group sessions. Aside from the interviews, observations and document analysis were also utilized and analyzed. The results demonstrated that students gave importance to these school-community partnerships, especially on their well-being (Hands, 2014). Moreover, these students wanted to participate in the collaborative activities, and suggest and make their own activities that would fit their needs. Furthermore, these students were aware of the challenges that the school had faced and hoped that they would be resolved. The implication for the implementation of community engagement with students was emphasized since these students wanted to become involved in these partnerships (Hands, 2014).

Moreover, Minton (2016) believed that school-community partnerships were helpful in solving academic problems among ethnic minority students, particularly for black students. Moreover, these partnerships nurtured their educational resiliency, fostered leadership, and developed other skills that would help these students in attaining their goals (Minton, 2016). For these partnerships to be effective, as Minton (2016) noted in his review, the following factors had to be considered: policies, communication, the community, leadership, and evaluation. By considering these factors, school-community partnerships might have a chance of being effective in schools.

Furthermore, school-community partnerships were helpful for students who had experienced difficult situations or who were living in those situations (Hartan et al., 2016; Ice et al., 2015). Hartman et al. (2016) used a case study of a boy who had been removed from his home due to his parents' arrest. This case study was used to determine the

strategies and interventions that were available to cater to his needs. Welfare

organizations, such as the Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian Ad Litem and

Child Advocacy Center were established to help in meeting this boy's needs. To achieve

positive outcomes, community members and partners had to have dialogues with

different stakeholders and use relevant literature to encourage more conversations about

these topics (Hartman et al., 2016). Moreover, the creation of collaborative educator

training opportunities was important for the teachers to be able to handle these

difficulties. Lastly, these rural communities must be treated with the utmost importance

and these strategies must be continuously evaluated (Hartman et al., 2015). Ice et al.

(2015) suggested that engaging the different members of the school community,

including community leaders and members, was important in the success of school

improvement efforts. With that in mind, the aim of Ice et al.'s (2015) study was to better

understand community members' perceptions of school climate and their level of interest

in working with schools. More specifically, they aimed to learn about the process of

administering a survey to community members regarding school-community partnerships

and school climate through a student engagement project, and the effect of this process

on school-community partnerships. This pilot study was developed as a collaboration

between a small, suburban school district in Connecticut and the National School Climate

Center (Ice et al., 2015) The researchers made the Community Scale to assess students'

perception of school climate and school-community partnership. They then asked 120

community members and 20 community agencies to answer this survey either in paper

form or through the online format. Their answers were analyzed manually, and the results

indicated that there were slight improvements in the school district and public schools. Moreover, they were interested in supporting school climate improvement efforts (Ice et al., 2015).

Aside from the involvement of different community members and leaders (Hartan et al., 2016; Ice et al., 2015), the role of families was also important in the success of the school-community partnerships (Stefanski et al., 2016). Stefanski et al. (2016) noted that partnerships between schools and communities were a way to help students, families, and neighborhoods who had struggled. In line with this, the researchers sorted out and reexamined the literature to identify four complex and comprehensive partnership models (Stefanski et al., 2016). Using an inductive grounded theory approach, similarities, and differences in the key dimensions of these partnership models were identified. These partnership models were Family and Interagency Collaboration, Full-Service Schools, Full-Service Community Schools, and the Community Development Model (Stefanski et al., 2016). These models were described and identified according to the tasks and objectives of their partnership. The roles of the family on these four partnership models were varied, from serving the families to empowering them. This review of the literature implied that the role of the families was varied and was not limited to parental involvement and parental engagement (Stefanski et al., 2016).

Researchers have highlighted the roles that teachers play in the success of school-community partnerships (Gross et al., 2015; Keil et al., 2016). Teaching middle school teachers through these partnerships was helpful in ensuring that students do not drop out of school (Case & Traynor, 2016). Moreover, Case and Traynor (2016) stated that

teachers had to continuously train to help these students. By helping these students achieve in school, the students were able to perform much better and these teachers were able to handle difficult situations involving the students.

The body of evidence, however, has revealed some obstacles in developing these partnerships (Casto, 2016; Vaillancourt & Amador, 2015). Some identified obstacles include the organization, time, and resources necessary to maintain these partnerships (Casto, 2016). Vaillancourt and Amador (2014/2015) added that some challenges with the partnerships included building trust, timeliness of information sharing, appropriateness of the people to share that information, and sustainability plans. With these challenges, the quality and the sustainability of these partnerships were important for them to be effective in the long run.

Aside from school-community partnerships, another solution that most schools tended to adhere to was developing community schools. Community schools were defined as schools in which different services were available to these students because it was believed that the educational difficulties of the students were in part due to the policies and social structures and not because of the students (Heers et al., 2014, 2016). Heers et al. (2016) and McClanahan et al. (2013) added that these schools involved parents in these programs, cooperated with other institutions, and offered extracurricular activities for students. Aside from providing school-based services, community schools helped in aligning community partners (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, 2016). Furthermore, McClanahan et al. (2013) stated that community schools were applied using the developmental triangle, in which various programs were included. Although community

schools were one of the more popular solutions, most research was based on reports and not on scientific evidence (Heers et al., 2016). Few studies (Bourshek, 2016; McClanahan et al., 2013; Mwamba, 2016) have tried to study the effectiveness of community schools in providing for the needs of students using quantitative methods.

McClanahan et al. (2013) studied the programs that were included in community schools. These programs mostly included African American students and those in the eighth grade. With the Out of Time and Elev8 (Integrated Services in Schools) programs included in community schools, it was demonstrated that students have become more engaged in participating in school activities and their performances in the different subjects have improved. McClanahan et al. (2013) noted, however, that the programs did not directly impact the school performance of the students. These programs helped engage the students by making them more active in school programs; thus, they had better school performance. Green and Gooden (2014), however, stated that there were some difficulties in establishing these schools. These difficulties were observed to be more of the political and social nature (Green & Gooden, 2014). Considering these difficulties, developing community schools had to be studied and discussed among different stakeholders.

From these studies on community schools, much academic research must be conducted to determine their efficacy in lessening dropout rates (McClanahan et al., 2013), since according to Heers et al. (2014), community schools do not help in reducing student dropout rates. By understanding its efficacy, various individuals (i.e., teachers, school administrators, community members, and organizations) might be able to design

appropriate programs for these schools. The need for case study research might help in terms of understanding how community schools work, especially on the part of the students. Although this study will focus on the CIS model, McClanahan et al. (2013) stated that community schools were developed based on the aforementioned model. The effectiveness of community schools might have helped to understand how the model has impacted various individuals in society.

This section discussed the different interventions and programs that were researched in order to address dropout rates and increase graduation rates. After which, research on school-community partnerships and community schools was discussed. The final part of this section discussed the reasons for the improvement of graduation rates in relation to some interventions.

Factors that Can Improve Graduation Rates

Different interventions and programs had an impact on graduation rates and various reasons were observed based on studies (Quiñones & Kiyama, 2014; Ross, 2016; Wells et al., 2015). These reasons were perceived to be focused on the family, on the collaboration of the different sectors, and the establishment of interventions.

The role of family members in the education of the students was perceived to be important. Quiñones and Kiyama (2014) studied the perception Latino fathers have on education and on school efforts to fulfill this role. Participants were from a larger study that employed mixed methods. Focus group discussions were used and the statements of eight fathers were analyzed. The results showed that fathers believed that education begins at home and gave advice to their children regarding the difficulties they

encountered in school. For them, education was considered to be a family and a community affair (Quiñone & Kiyama, 2014). However, they criticized the home-school-community dynamics because of the lack of communication and the presence of tension and racism. They added that they advocate educational equity for their children. Latino fathers tended to be involved in different school programs and advocate for the welfare of their children (Quiñone & Kiyama, 2014). These findings emphasized the importance of the community and school in giving support to these fathers as they support their children's education (Quiñone & Kiyama, 2014).

Moreover, Ross (2016) studied the extent to which parental involvement has helped in determining the students' completion in high school and the decision to enter college was explored. This study used logistic regression analysis to determine different aspects of parental involvement (e.g., parental advising, parent participation in children's extracurricular activities, and parent-school communication about a child's problems) in high school completion. The results indicated that parents played a big role in students completing high school education since the latter might not drop out of school because of them. In addition, positive dialogues between parents and schools, parental involvement, and expectations help increase the chances that students would graduate from high school (Ross, 2016).

Aside from the role of the family, the cooperation and collaboration of the different sectors of the society (i.e., students themselves, teachers, parents, administrators, and partnerships) helped in the improvement of the students' performance (Balfanz et al., 2014). It was important to note that these collaborations were developed

through time since the different sectors had to note the programs and the interventions that were needed by the students. In addition, the effectiveness of these programs and interventions were evaluated regularly; thus, improvements were made over time (Balfanz et al., 2014).

Wells et al.'s (2015) study showed how this collaboration worked in terms of helping to improve graduation rates. Specifically, they examined how school systems and other local organizations were working to improve high school graduation rates. There were different factors that may have affected the working relationship between school systems and local partners through the network perspective. A case study has been conducted involving two cities who had met the criteria set by the researchers. Local partners answered an online survey and were interviewed to obtain the necessary data. Their interactions and their activities were noted as well, and the data obtained were analyzed through network analysis. The results showed that school systems in both cities have collaborated with various organizations and agencies such as Boys and Girls Club, Big Brothers Big Sisters, CIS, and mayors' offices. Through this study, it was shown that the cooperation of school systems and other local organizations has helped in providing the needs of the children. In addition, their referral system has helped to ensure that the needs of these school systems were met. Lastly, the use of social network analysis has helped in understanding the networks that were established between school systems and other local organizations in these two cities.

Lastly, involvement in student's education early on using interventions had prevented eventual dropout in high school (Walsh et al., 2015). Walsh et al. (2015)

believed that focusing these interventions and programs on the student's elementary years strengthened them by helping them to perform well in school. If these programs and interventions were only focused later in life, it might be too late, especially for students who had difficulty in performing well in school.

The interventions and programs discussed earlier have helped to improve graduation rates, and especially helped to lessen dropout rates. By addressing these areas, the effectiveness of these interventions (Wilkins & Bost, 2016), as well as the quality of curriculum and education offered to schools, helped to lessen dropout rates (Wiggan & Watson, 2016; Wilson & Tanner-Smith, 2013). Yuane, Konold and Cornell (2016) added that, aside from the aforementioned factors, school climate also has an impact on reducing dropout rates. This, in turn, helped the students to graduate high school.

Communities in Schools (CIS) Model

The main goal of this study was to explore the impact of the CIS model from the perspective of teachers, counselors, and administrators. A section devoted to this model is therefore relevant. This section will focus on the description of the CIS model and on the few studies and reports about the model itself (Casto, McGrath, Sipple, & Todd, 2016; Corrin et al., 2015; Jang, Valero, Kim, & Cramb, 2015; Miles, 2016; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell & Valentine, 1999). This model will be the focus of this study in terms of its perceptions of administers and staff members of a CIS model high school in Atlanta, Georgia regarding the school's strengths and weaknesses.

The CIS model in Georgia is a part of a national network which helps local schools and organizations by equipping them with materials for growth and sustainability

(CIS-Georgia, 2011, 2015). In addition, it used a scientific model to empower young individuals and their parents to take responsibility for their own lives by giving and coordinating services to the community and at the same time easing the burden of parents (CIS-Georgia, 2011). Moreover, CIS partnered with local school districts and connected the adolescents to the various services in the community to help them prepare for their completion and provide them options for their post-secondary education (CIS, 2015).

The model was described as having six steps (CIS, 2011, 2015). The first step was a needs assessment, in which the CIS coordinators, CIS affiliates, and collaborative partners evaluated the required services of the different schools. The second step was focused on planning, wherein CIS coordinators considered how to provide resources to meet the needs of the students. The third step focused on ensuring integrated student services were in place to cater to their needs. There were three tiers in the provision of these services; the first tier was school-wide services in which basic needs and school risk factors were provided to foster a positive school climate for these students (CIS, 2015). The second tier was focused on targeted programs in which these services were provided to groups of students with similar needs (CIS, 2015). The last tier was comprised of the individualized support that the student need, such as mentoring, mental health counseling, and other services (CIS, 2015).

The fourth step was focused on monitoring and adjusting the services provided (CIS, 2015), and the fifth step involved evaluating the effectiveness of these services on the students (CIS, 2015). The final step involved observing the success of these services on the targeted population (CIS, 2015). These steps were observed to be in a cycle since

these services had to be provided continuously (CIS, 2011, 2015). Moreover, according

to CIS (2015), the model proved to be cost-effective and adaptable to the needs of the

students, especially for those students who came from low-income families.

The CIS model offered different services to assist the different schools in their

needs. Some of these services involved formal training for the staff, technical and data

support and evaluation of the programs that they had offered to the schools (CIS, 2015).

By providing these services, they ensured that these services were effective for the

schools. Other programs involved holding events for these students such as Student

Achievement Month and Dine Out for Kids (Communities in Schools, 2015). These

events help these students to believe in themselves through contests in different

categories (i.e., computer technology, written expression, etc.). The model also

established performance learning centers, also described as non-traditional high schools,

to provide an alternative program for high school students who did not perform well in

traditional schools (CIS, 2015).

Effectiveness of the Communities in Schools Model

Little independent research has been done on the effectiveness of the CIS model

as viewed by the informed educators working within the model. However, a limited

number of studies have focused on the effectiveness of this model in regard to increasing

graduation rates, decreasing discipline issues, improving attendance and other areas. Its

effectiveness in these areas and others was noted to be based mostly on the data that the

proponents obtained through secondary data (i.e., school documents, annual reports).

With this limitation, only a few studies have reported on the model's effectiveness

(Corrin et al., 2015; Jang et al., 2015; Miles, 2016; Scribner et al., 1999). The CIS model focused on the partnerships between organizations to help these students. Jang et al. (2015) conducted a study on the nature of the nonprofit collaborations of CIS in North Texas. This study aimed to understand and categorize these collaborations and simultaneously identify the challenges that collaborations had to manage. The authors used a case study method by analyzing data from a review of 132 collaboration documentations and conducting semistructured interviews with ten CIS North Texas (CISNT) collaborative partner organizations. The results demonstrated that from the analyzed documentations, these partnerships were mostly made with other nonprofit organizations. In addition, these partnerships were mostly for support collaborations and service exchanges. Furthermore, the results from the interviews revealed the challenges of these collaborations, which were as follows: (1) the documentation of the formalized partnership; (2) need for improved communication; (3) accountability issues; and (4) sharing of resources. This study helped to provide an insight into the collaborations that the CIS of North Texas have with nonprofit organizations to help attain their objectives.

However, Scribner et al. (1999) believed that there were some tensions in establishing this model in different schools, especially in the professional communities of middle schools. These professional communities involved the teachers and the school administrators who had provided these services to the students. A two-year qualitative study was established to explore the tensions associated with implementing this model. The results showed that these tensions arose between professional stakeholders and enforcers of the CIS model, and the bureaucracy that may have prevented its

implementation in three middle schools. Furthermore, the results indicated that there were four factors that affected the successful implementation of professional communities. These factors were: organizational history, organizational priorities, principal leadership, and organization of teacher work. By identifying these factors, it was suggested that these tensions had to be addressed to establish professional communities in middle schools. It is also possible that this may represent a link to the polarities of democracy theory.

To better understand how the model works in schools, Corrin et al. (2015) conducted a case management study on the applicability of the CIS model for integrated student support in different schools at the middle and high school level. These support services included the following: (1) academic, (2) attendance, (3) behavior, (4) social or life skills, (5) college and career preparation, (6) basic needs and resources, (7) family-related, and (8) enrichment or motivation services (Corrin et al., 2015). The effectiveness of this student support from its first year of implementation was derived from varied quantitative and qualitative methods. These quantitative methods involved surveys and data collected from the school, while the qualitative method focused on interviews with the school principals, case managed and non-case managed students, and CIS site coordinators and affiliate staff members (Corrin et al., 2015). The results showed that in the first year of implementation, the CIS model itself became an important component for schools, especially in identifying the needs of the students. Furthermore, it provided different levels of services, depending on the severity of the problems of the students and on how immediate those services were needed. Moreover, the model has helped these

students to develop caring relationships with adults. This study was helpful in determining how the model, especially regarding the integrated student support, has helped to provide services for these students in various schools.

Miles (2016) studied administrators' and teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of the CIS model in a Performance Learning Center school in rural Georgia. Performance Learning Centers used the CIS model to utilize community resources to meet the academic and social needs of students. To conduct the study, the perceptions of three individuals (two teachers and one administrator) were obtained using interviews and focus group discussions (Miles, 2016). The results indicated that the model was effective in increasing retention rates because of its flexibility and its available options for the students (Miles, 2016).

From the findings of the four groups of researchers (Corrin et al., 2015; Jang et al., 2015; Miles, 2016; Scribner et al., 1999), it can be concluded that even though there were some tensions in establishing this model, overall, it was effective in helping those students who were at risk of dropping out of school. Moreover, the model gave the administrators, staff members, and teachers a chance to support those students by planning strategies to cater to the needs of these students. The CIS model continued to improve on the strategies that they employed and, on the process, that they developed to provide services faster and to enable better collaborations and partnerships with other organizations (CIS, 2015). Lastly, the CIS model in Georgia was established in the 1970s and it has been used in different schools in Georgia (CIS, 2011, 2015), suggesting a belief

by educators in the model's success. But as previously stated, independent research studies have not been completed to support this viewpoint.

Policy Making in Education

When developing interventions and programs, it is important that these have an impact on policy making in education. Policy making in education is important in ensuring that teachers and school administrators cater to the needs of these students, as directed by local board of education policy or more broadly at the state and federal levels (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Gilat, 2015). Moreover, it is important to note that policy making in education must be proven to benefit the students (Fowler et al., 2014) for policies to be implemented in the schools. Fowler et al. (2014) noted that the policies that were developed for students enrolled in various programs had to consider the effects of these policies on the following: (1) curriculum, (2) research and implementation, (3) assessment and accountability, and (4) personnel development. In considering the effects of these policies, different options had to be given for these students to finish school and for the schools to be able to provide quality services for their students (Fowler et al., 2014).

Difficulties in Policy Implementation

In studying the policies and interventions, it is also important to evaluate the challenges associated with their implementation. Although policies were made in order to help the students, administrators, teachers, and coordinators in implementing programs and interventions, some researchers noted difficulties in the implementation of these policies (Jefferson, 2015; Loring, 2015; Shapira-Lishchinsky & Gilat, 2015). These

difficulties made policy implementation more tedious for school administrators because they were compelled to integrate these policies in their school rules (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Gilat, 2015). These difficulties in policy implementation have impacted the following: (1) the interaction between the schools and parents (Jefferson, 2015); (2) citizenship classes for prospective citizens and the perceptions of individuals regarding educational policies (Loring, 2015); and (3) the actions that teachers have to do when faced with ethical dilemmas (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Gilat, 2015).

Jefferson (2015) believed that implementing these policies and practices contributed to the quality of dialogue between parents and schools. This study employed critical social theory and postcolonial theory to understand the barriers that prevented family and school interactions. In line with this, a qualitative study was conducted using the ethnographic approaches to collection and organization of data. There were 21 communities, five school professionals and seven families in two communities who were interviewed for a year through telephone call records, group interviews and in-person interviews. Data analysis was conducted through coding of the data obtained in different sources. The results showed that the interaction between families and schools was constrained by different barriers. Whenever schools tried to enact policies to involve families, school districts restricted families' access. These barriers involved restriction of school physical space and access to school information. Although families wanted to be involved in their children's education, school districts seemed to stop them from doing so since the schools believed that they could handle children's education much better without families' involvement (Jefferson, 2015).

Aside from the quality of interactions between parents and schools, the perceptions of individuals regarding citizenship education were also affected by the policies that were imposed on them. Loring (2015) investigated available resources and citizenship discourses in Sacramento, California by those who implemented citizenship infrastructures. Moreover, the study analyzed how the framing of educational policies affected future applicants for naturalization and how these resources and discourses differ in different places in Sacramento, California. A qualitative approach, particularly using ethnographic methods, was used to analyze document data and interviews from four different sites. The results demonstrated that aside from the educational policies that were stated by the government, adult schools and community events introduced their own policies. The policies that they introduced might have caused complications for prospective citizens since they must comply with those policies to become naturalized citizens. In turn, introducing educational policies may have affected the understanding and the enactment of individuals in the process of becoming naturalized citizens.

Shapira-Lishchinsky and Gilat (2015) explored the discrepancies between the official educational policies and the teachers' tendencies to act, especially in terms of decision making. There was a total of 60 teachers who answered qualitative questionnaires about ethical issues and these answers were analyzed using a three-step qualitative process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The results showed that discrepancies were evident in these categories: (1) harm to people and property, (2) parental involvement/indifference, and (3) academic process (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Gilat, 2015). These results implied the focus of educational policies should be focused on

empowering the teachers and on promoting their autonomy in dealing with ethical issues. Furthermore, educational policies must help teachers in developing ethical guidelines that may help them in making ethical decisions (Shapira-Lishchinsky & Gilat, 2015).

To solve these difficulties, a suggestion from Casto et al. (2016) was to integrate education policy and community development through theory and practice. The community aware education policy was seen to be possibly implemented in connection with the existing policies and programs. However, this policy must be re-conceptualized with a more in-depth conceptualization of children's needs and a broader interpretation of policy implementation. In re-conceptualizing this type of education policy, the six dimensions of Stone (2012) must be emphasized: (a) material versus symbolic, (b) volatility versus security, (c) quantity versus quality, (d) absolute versus relative, (e) intrinsic versus instrumental, and (f) individual versus relational. By having a more in-depth conceptualization of children's needs, policy makers had to consider the social perspectives of how these individuals (students, parents, and communities) had lived their lives. In addition, linking services with communities helped to determine their needs by preventing risks and increasing protective factors. Moreover, the importance of community interventions was emphasized. This re-conceptualization of the education policy was observed in the education policies from the United States and United Kingdom (Stone, 2012).

Relationship between interventions and policy making

Aside from developing an education policy together with community development, few studies have focused on researching the relationship between

interventions and policy making (Brackmann, 2015; Carlson, 2014; Hollands et al., 2014; Wong, Wing & Martin, 2016). By focusing on this relationship, different stakeholders can help in improving these policies through these interventions. In addition, these relationships were essential in ensuring that schools followed these policies and utilized available interventions to meet the needs of the students (Brackmann, 2015; Carlson, 2014; Hollands et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2016).

Freeman and Simonsen (2015) conducted a review of the studies that focused on policy and practice intervention. In addition, the impact of these interventions on school completion rates and high school dropout were determined. The results showed that most of the research focused on individual or small group interventions, even though various authors have expressed the need to focus their research on identifying numerous risk factors and early interventions. With the included studies, it was noted that few of them reported a positive outcome in lessening dropout rates and increasing graduation rates (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). With this review, it was observed that few studies focused on how interventions impacted policy making, especially in the aspect of education.

With the limited studies, it was important to note that policies and interventions had influenced aspects of education, especially on partnerships (Brackmann, 2015), the effectiveness of the different interventions (Hollands et al., 2014), teacher instruction (Carlson, 2014), and the accountability of the intervention (Wong et al., 2016). By knowing how policies and interventions shaped the curriculum of some schools, it was helpful in planning how to maximize the effectivity of these interventions on making sound policies to improve the quality of education.

Interventions and policies had the tendency to influence the quality of partnerships made between schools and communities. Brackmann's (2015) study aimed to examine the tension between the public and private aspects of community-university partnerships by interpreting the influence of neoliberal policies, specifically the impact of academic capitalism on the design and implementation of these partnerships. In line with this qualitative study, the researchers examined six community-engagement programs at two universities to analyze how neoliberal logics, funding constraints, and public rhetoric affected the design, implementation, costs, and benefits of these activities. The researchers interviewed, either face-to-face or via phone, 33 key stakeholders affiliated with community-university partnerships. Questions were focused on (1) the program's purpose and goals, (2) development of the partnerships, (3) decision-making processes, (4) funding, and (5) costs/benefits for stakeholders. Aside from the interviews, secondary data were obtained through annual reports and partnership marketing materials (Brackmann, 2015). The data obtained from these sources were analyzed. The findings suggested that community engagement scholars and practitioners must be sensitive to the pressures from declining resources, their influences on higher education, and their impact on community partnerships (Brackmann, 2015).

Hollands et al. (2014) noted that education and policy research was focused on the effectiveness of different educational alternatives but omitting the costs associated with it. In line with this, they used a cost-effectiveness analysis to analyze the effectiveness of different youth interventions. This type of analysis was described in detail (Holland et al., 2014). These youth interventions were focused on since they were targeted to reduce

school dropout rate and to increase the high school completion rate (Holland et al., 2014). The researchers calculated the cost-effectiveness ratios of each intervention and compared these ratios among other interventions. Aside from this comparison, these ratios were compared within sites and other programs. The results of these ratios were seen in the differences regarding resource use, target population characteristics, and program implementation (Holland et al., 2014). Furthermore, it was evident from the results that some programs were cost-ineffective in raising the high school graduation rate. These results implied the importance of analyzing cost-effectiveness data in decision making on the type of intervention needed and in policy making (Holland et al., 2014).

Carlson (2014) believed that by having a standard to adhere to, this might have helped in ensuring that interventions had met the standards. Common Core State Standards has policies and standards that had helped students in meeting those standards, thus these students became successful in school and eventually college and career ready (Carlson, 2014). Carlson (2014) added that these policies and standards have helped teachers in making sure that the requirements were met. Policies might have helped in determining the type of interventions that had to be developed to meet the needs of the students.

Wong et al. (2016) studied how schools in the different states responded to the policy changes, especially on the No Child Left Behind campaign. Some accountability policies on this government campaign were evaluated based on how schools had responded to the changes made in the policies for the campaign from 2003 to 2011 (Wong et al., 2016). This pressure may have made some states respond by meeting the

target needed by the government (Wong et al., 2016). In implementing accountability policies, the states had the right to decide on the measures to be used for proficiency, the expected trajectory that schools had to follow, and the exemption rules that were to be introduced. The results indicated that there were schools in different states that tried to meet the requirements due to increased accountability pressures. These policies had helped in determining the interventions that needed to be implemented.

In general, improvements in the level of education were noted based on how schools implement changes in their curriculum and meet students' needs. Many factors had contributed to the success of these interventions in the improvement of graduation rates. Policy changes, together with improvements in academic support, school climate and smooth transition, the implementation of various interventions, and other factors, helped in the improvement of graduation rates (Robertson, Smith & Rinka, 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

Georgia public schools fall short on two measures of school retention, a) dropout rate, and b) graduation rate when compared to national averages. The dropout rate, defined as the percentage of individuals ages 16-24 not enrolled in school and without a diploma or GED compared to the total population of 16–24-year-olds, in Georgia, was observed to be above the national average when the goal would be for this measure to be below the national average (McFarland et al., 2016). While the graduation rate, defined as the percentage of ninth graders that graduate with a diploma within four years of schools in Georgia falls below the national average, where the goal is clearly to increase the graduation rate at or above the national average (McFarland et al., 2016). Aside from

the data regarding the dropout and graduation rates, the reasons for students deciding to drop out from school were also established (Christian, 2015; Dupere et al., 2015; Hawkins et al., 2013; Meeker et al., 2008; Rashid et al., 2015; Sahin et al., 2016; Shahidul, 2013; Tas et al., 2013). With increased understanding and recognition of these reasons, various stakeholders in the community (i.e., families, community members, non-government organizations, and schools) discussed and planned appropriate interventions and programs to meet the needs of the students.

Different interventions and programs have already been implemented by different groups and researched. However, most of the research on these interventions and programs has been focused on the nature of services they offered to students and not on their overall effectiveness in reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates. Moreover, most of these interventions and programs were focused on school-community partnerships (Casto, 2016; Hands, 2014; Hartman et al., 2016; Ice et al., 2015; Stefanski et al., 2016) and community schools (Bourshek, 2016; McClanahan et al., 2013; Mwamba, 2016). These programs were noted to be effective in terms of providing for the needs of the students and offering them different options. Furthermore, school-community partnerships and community schools helped in improving graduation rates of students in various ways. Different reasons were given for the effectiveness of interventions on improving graduation rates: family involvement, collaboration of the different sectors, and the establishment of interventions.

The CIS model has six steps whereby the proponents of the model discussed and planned various interventions to different groups in order to address the different needs of

the students, but a limited number of studies have focused on its overall effectiveness in regard to improving graduation rates (Corrin et al., 2015; Jang et al., 2015; Miles, 2016; Scribner et al., 1999). With this literature gap in mind, the current study is designed with the purpose of providing an understanding of how administrators and staff members perceive the impact of the CIS model on students in one Metro Atlanta high school. By using the case study method, the perceptions of administrators and staff members will be placed within the context of how the CIS model is implemented in one urban high school and how effective it is as perceived by these critical stakeholders.

This study will fill the gap in the lack of independent studies regarding the effectiveness of the CIS model by providing the perspective of key stakeholders, experienced educators, involved in providing for the needs of the students. Additionally, the polarities of democracy theory has not been used prior to evaluate the effectiveness of a dropout prevention program so this study will also fill that gap. By determining the gaps that this study will target, it is perceived that case study is the best method to utilize by allowing the researcher to focus intensely on one Metro Atlanta high school using the CIS model. This method will further help in understanding the perceptions of the participants in this study. The following chapter will discuss in further detail the method used for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide a better understanding of the CIS model as perceived by experienced educators (administrators, school counselors, and teachers) who work within this model in the APS. This research study was intended to investigate what these key stakeholders perceive as the critical strengths and weaknesses of the model as they relate to graduation rates. It also explored how each of these veteran educators think the various components of the model positively or negatively impact student retention and whether they think the model furthers students' potential to graduate. My intent was to complete this study at one high school in Atlanta, GA, West End Academy - Professional Learning Center (WEA-PLC). Most importantly for this study is to understand that APS faces ongoing challenges in how to effectively reduce dropout rates for students; particularly African American, Hispanic, and low-income students, as do urban school districts across the nation. The community impact of low graduation rates is significant across the country. Unfortunately, no universally accepted model for dropout prevention has been identified or broadly implemented across the United States. to address this, though a significant number of interventions have been attempted and studied. APS utilizes the CIS model in partnership with Communities in Schools – Atlanta. The hope is that the perceptions of experienced educators will provide insights into the potential for this model to be used more widely in other APS high schools or other urban districts across the state, or nation.

In Chapter 2, I highlighted current graduation rates, the perceived causes for students to drop out, and the programs that have been utilized to reduce dropout rates. I gave an overview of the characteristics of students who drop out of high school, including traits related to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, on a national, state, and local level, including APS. As with most urban districts across the country, APS, as a district, is challenged by high poverty, low performance, and a disparity in graduation rates across different racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, I provided an in-depth overview on some of the various models and programs that have been implemented throughout the country to improve graduation rates with varying degrees of success. The CIS model was described, including a review of the limited number of independent studies that have evaluated the effectiveness of the model. CIS publications suggest that their model significantly improves graduation rates in schools that utilize it; however, there is a gap in the literature related to independent studies that confirm these outcomes as well as the gap that exists regarding studies involving the perceptions of critical stakeholders, experienced educators such as school administrators, teachers, and school counselors (Communities in Schools – Georgia, 2011, 2015).

Research Design and Rationale

This qualitative research study focused on one central question:

1. What do administrators, school counselors, and teachers of a communities in schools model high school in Atlanta, Georgia perceive as the model's strengths and weaknesses and its positive or negative impact on students?

By asking this question, I hoped to gather the distinct perspectives of key stakeholders working in an APS high school that currently utilizes the CIS model. Further, these stakeholder groups were asked about the model's specific strengths and weaknesses as they view them and the potential impact on students' willingness to remain in school and graduate.

Qualitative Research

I used a qualitative research design for this study. Qualitative research allows a researcher to gather information and data in the natural setting, with little disruption. This also allows the researcher to observe the setting and to understand it from the participants' views (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Several assumptions regarding the qualitative research tradition are applicable to this study. First, qualitative researchers are concerned with how people, in a setting, experience their world and how they derive meaning from their experiences, allowing for a deep level of analysis (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1985). Second, in qualitative research, "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). The researcher adapts to the situation presented while observing and interviewing participants and responds to nonverbal as well as verbal cues during the interview. This element differentiates a qualitative study from a quantitative study, in which the primary instrument for data collection and analysis is not the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, Merriam, 1998). Qualitative field research typically includes observing and collecting data in the natural setting regarding behaviors, actions, and interactions of the study population. Third, qualitative research provides rich and detailed descriptions of the perceptions and actions

of the study population and allows the researcher to identify themes that emerge from the data gathered.

Case Study Design

I utilized a case study design for this research. Yin (1994) described a case study as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). The use of case study research in education is well documented. As Miriam (1998) stated:

Case studies are prevalent in educational research because the

educational processes, problems, and programs can be examined to bring

about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps improve practice.

Case study has proven particularly useful for studying educational

innovations, for evaluating programs, and for informing policy. (p. 41).

Case study also allows a researcher to fully investigate and understand a complex social phenomenon or current situation within its natural context and to gather the perceptions and experiences of participants, proving a "rich and holistic account of a phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). Case studies are particularly useful when the study is focused on contemporary events and does not require control of the various and relevant behaviors unlike an experiment where the researcher can "manipulate behavior directly, precisely, and systematically" (Yin, 2014, p. 12). A case can be defined as a bound unit that is being studied, it must be finite, and it includes communities, small groups, programs, and specific

entities rather than a single individual. In my study, the case was originally intended to be West End Academy - PLC and the participants would be limited to the veteran educators working within that school. The completed study included APS teachers and school counselors working at a high school that utilizes the CIS model. Thus, the case being studied is the CIS model in APS high schools, which provided the opportunity to evaluate the CIS model within the natural context of an urban high school.

Some researchers may be concerned about the generalizability of case study research. However, Yin (2014) explained that generalizing from a study, whether a single experiment or a case can be challenging. Most frequently, generalizability does not typically occur until multiple experimental studies have been completed and yielded the same results under different conditions. Yin suggested that "case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (Yin, 2014, p. 21). Therefore, "in doing case study research, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalizations) and not to extrapolate probabilities (statistical generalizations)" (Yin, 2014, p. 21).

Role of the Researcher

During this case study, I assumed the role of interviewer, conducting all interviews with the participants and had intended to also review documents associated with the formal relationship between Wests End Academy and CIS. These documents may have included contracts or memorandums of understanding between the two entities but changes in the site, discussed in Chapter 4, eliminated this step as the researcher. The

interview process involved developing a rapport with participants, which allowed them to feel comfortable enough to honestly share their experiences and perceptions of the CIS model and its impact on students. This researcher's role was also to be an observer throughout the data collection phase.

A researcher conducting a case study must ask quality questions and must listen to subjects' answers closely, without bias, and with a comprehensive understanding of the background and significance of the study (Yin, 2014). This type of study requires the researcher to be well prepared and adaptable. As interview questions are asked and answered, the researcher must handle each situation efficiently and effectively, "so the newly encountered situations can be seen as opportunities, not threats" (Yin, 2014, p. 73). The researcher must also remain open-minded and consider all evidence collected so as not to taint the analysis of the data. Merriam (1998) outlined several essential characteristics of the researcher in a qualitative study: have a tolerance for ambiguity, be sensitive to the context, and be a good communicator. As Guba and Lincoln (1981) explained, "they [researchers] emphasize, describe, judge, compare, portray, evoke images, and create, for the reader or listener, the sense of having been there" (p. 149). Interviewee responses and researcher observations provided a comprehensive picture of the implementation of the CIS model in APS high schools.

Methodology

For this study, the targeted population was experienced educators; administrators, school counselors, and teachers, who worked at West End Academy - PLC. APS has a rich and deep relationship with CIS - Atlanta, who provides services to 38 APS schools:

elementary through high school. Purposeful sampling was used in the selection of the

research respondents specific to this case study. Purposeful sampling is a type of

nonprobability sampling. It is preferred in a qualitative case study since generalization is

not the primary goal of this type of study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Approval of the

site was received by the Office of Research and Evaluation for School Improvement,

Director of Research and Evaluation of APS, with IRB approval from the Walden

Institutional Review Board prior to data collection.

Site Selection

Currently, there are 13 high schools in APS that utilize the CIS model. It is

impossible to reliably determine which APS high schools have strong, well-designed CIS

programs in place, however the relationship between CIS and APS is long-standing

appears especially strong at West End Academy. West End Academy – PLC appears to

be one of the strongest candidates among the APS high schools as it relates to CIS

implementation. Their mission statement and school framework that demonstrates a

commitment to the CIS model, its values, components, and comprehensive

implementation within their school community. The mission of West End Academy-PLC

in Atlanta is as follows:

> The Mission of the West End Academy Performance Learning Center is to
>
> collaboratively prepare our students for their post-secondary options. We do so by
>
> delivering integrated support services that empower, engage, and inspire,
>
> Students, Parents, Teachers, and the Greater Community (all stakeholders). This
>
> mission aligns with both the Communities in Schools' (CIS) and the Atlanta

Public Schools' (APS) partnership at the West End Academy Performance

Learning Center to galvanize their efforts to connect community resources with

the school to help young people successfully learn, stay in school, and prepare for

life, service, and leadership. (West End Academy/Overview, 2018, para. 2)

This case fits what Patton (1990) explained as the goal behind purposeful sampling;

specifically, selecting cases that have the potential to provide significant and rich

information and data relevant to the research question. West End Academy-PLC is

considered a unique sample, one that was chosen specifically because of its strong

commitment and presentation of the CIS model, the phenomenon being studied. Since the

CIS model is so thoroughly integrated into the school's mission and values, making it

unique when compared to other APS high schools, this site presents an opportunity to

obtain extremely valuable, unique, and meaningful data from the participants. As stated

on the school's website, "Atlanta Public Schools partner with Communities in Schools -

Atlanta to operate the West End Academy Performance Learning Center (WEA-PLC)".

The school was created to serve and address the needs of at-risk eleventh and twelfth

graders with a total of 150 students in the program. Students may come from any APS

high school, but they must apply, complete an interview, and be accepted into the

program. The school provides significant support services in line with the CIS model,

including but not limited to; on-line learning that allows students to move at their own

pace, mentors, and a commitment to career preparation through job training, job

shadowing, service learning, and internships. CIS-Atlanta also supports a scholarship

fund for graduates of the program

Data Collection

For this research study I conducted 12 semistructured interviews aimed at gathering the perceptions of the critical stakeholders, experienced high school educators including administrators, school counselors and teachers. The questions are included in Appendix A: Individual Interview Questions. The interview questions were created based on the literature review, the identification of best practices related to improving graduation rates, and the numerous studies highlighting the reasons behind students dropping out of high school. Additional questions were created using the polarities of democracy theory and how it can be applied to evaluate organizational effectiveness (Benet & Kayser, 2018). The resources available in print and online, such as the Polarity Maps, and the information provided on the Institute for Polarities of Democracy and Polarity Partnership websites, provide specific direction in using this model to determine the effectiveness of organizations. These instruments help organizations determine how they are leveraging the positive and negative aspects of each pole in each of the five pairs and how that relates to the overall health of the organization. One key document utilized in the creation of the interview questions was the Polarities of Democracy – Polarity Map, for the pair of human rights and communal obligations (Benet & Kayser, 2018). This document provides a framework for creating questions specifically related to how organizations leverage the positive and negative aspects of communal obligations and human rights to create healthy and just organizations. For the purpose of this study, the intended organization that was to be examined was West End Academy. Additionally, Dr. Benet serves as committee chair and content expert for this research study, his status

as author of the polarities of democracy theory contributes to the validity and reliability of this data collection instrument.

Interviews provide the best opportunity to learn about things that cannot be directly observed, such as interviewees' feelings and perceptions. Semistructured interviews include open-ended questions as well as more specific questions (Merriam, 1998). Open-ended questions provide an opportunity for interviewees to share information and thoughts beyond what would typically be gathered through surveys or structured interviews. The researcher can also be flexible in the interview, adapting to the comments and statements of the interviewee. The wording and order of questions can also be adjusted during the interview which provides the best possible situation to allow interviewees to comfortably and openly share their thoughts (Yin, 2014). Recording the interviews for later transcription allowed this researcher to record notes as the interviews progressed, including observations related to participants' nonverbal behavior or reminders about topics that might require follow-up, as well as being able to be attentive and maintain an active listening posture (Merriam, 1998).

Sampling Procedure

Purposeful sampling was used to select experienced educators; administrators, school counselors and teachers, who interact regularly with students and who have been working within the model for at least two years. By limiting this study to educators with at least two years of experience teaching within a CIS high school, I hoped to ensure participants had had adequate time to appropriately understand and apply the principals of the model as compared to new or inexperienced teachers. Preferably, the sample was

to include, at minimum, the administrators from WEA-PLC and several other veteran educators fitting the criteria. Although there is no specific definition of the ideal sample size for case study research, Patton (1990) suggested that the sample size should be identified "based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study" (p. 186). Further, it is necessary to have a large enough sample size to sufficiently explore and describe the phenomenon being studied. However, having a large sample size poses a risk for repetition, so sample size should be large enough to sufficiently explore the phenomenon and achieve a saturation point without repetition. Since WEA-PLC has a relatively small student population and staff, a larger number of participants might have led to redundancies in the data collected. A small number of participants completing in-depth interviews will provide the complexity and depth of information desired for this case study. It was likely that based on the participant criteria and the small size of the staff, a sample size of less than 10 would achieve saturation. However, the exact sample size was determined while conducting the study, as interviews were completed and analyzed. Further, since the purpose of the research is to gather new information rather than maximizing the amount of information gathered, a smaller number of participants satisfies the goal of this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Additionally, since the aim of the study is narrow, a small sample size is acceptable, whereas a quantitative study with a broader aim would necessitate a larger sample size (Malterud et al., 2016).

Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted individually and were expected to last between 60 and 90 minutes but there was not a cut-off time, allowing participants to share their perceptions fully. The semistructured interviews allowed this researcher to gather information on a variety of topics. First, interviewees were asked to provide basic demographic information, and information on their background and experiences in the educational field (Appendix B). Next, they were asked to describe their perceptions of the CIS model and to assess its perceived impact on students, especially in relation to student retention and/or graduation rates. The stakeholders' perceptions on how school personnel balance the rights of individual students to receive, especially those with more challenging behaviors and learning needs, while working to maintain a productive, healthy culture that allows everyone in the educational community to thrive was explored as well. Data Analysis was intended to include a review of policy and procedural guidelines and documents for WEA-PLC, related to the partnership between WEA-PLC and CIS – Atlanta. These documents may have included a memorandum of understanding, a contract, or other records. Review and analysis of these documents may have enhanced a comprehensive, holistic view of the daily operations of the school.

Once all interviews were transcribed, a thematic content analysis was completed to transform the raw data gathered into a more standardized form by using words or short phrases to identify emerging concepts and ideas (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Once the initial step was completed, classifying, and categorizing of the data occurred next. As the data was classified, a list of codes emerged that were used to group the different perspectives

of the participants into sets. This process of coding and classifying the data was a combination of inductive and deductive analysis, with some codes taken from the body of research on dropouts and from the polarities of democracy literature; a priori codes, while others were emergent codes; those identified within this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002, Saldaña, 2015). Each code has a specific criterion to reliably direct the inclusion or exclusion of data within each code.

Following the disassembling and reassembling of the data into codes or categories, codes were aggregated to create broader themes or families of ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). At this step, it was helpful to create a visual representation of the codes and emerging ideas to begin to group them into the larger themes. Although the initial assumption was that the use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) would not be necessary, NVivo software was in fact utilized during the data analysis process. As Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested, no more than 30 categories should be developed, regardless of the size of the database, with a final list of 5-6 themes most ideal. For the purpose of this study, only the themes directly connected to the research question were included in the final interpretation of the data. Additionally, the strength or confidence of each theme was also considered in the interpretation of the data.

Once the data was delineated into three established themes, it was further analyzed and interpreted through the lens of the polarities of democracy theory. Additionally, this interpretation included a connection of themes to the broader body of research, creating a more global perspective, connecting the results to other cases or studies as applicable. Although it was possible that there would be exceptions to the

codes and themes identified during the analysis of the data which would worthy of further

consideration and exploration and could have produced alternate themes or ideas within

the study, this did not occur. Therefore, no exceptions were noted or explored within the

findings as consideration in the larger context of the interpretation and results. As Yin

(2014) suggested, there are five traits that are essential for quality data interpretation in a

qualitative study: (a) analysis is complete, with a beginning, middle, and end; (b) it is

likely that other researchers would come to the same conclusions; (c) it is an accurate

representation of all of the raw data collected; (d) it will add meaning and value to the

field; and (e) it is credible and respectable when analyzed by others. These traits were

considered throughout the data analysis process to ensure quality and meaningful

interpretation of the data collected.

Trustworthiness

The term trustworthiness refers to whether a study is relevant and worth

considering in the broader context. A study which is trustworthy must have results which

are valid, reliable, and applicable with "careful attention to a study's conceptualization

and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in

which the findings are presented" and are conducted by a qualified researcher using

commonly accepted practices (Merriam, 1998, p. 199). This is especially important in the

field of educational research as results can ultimately impact teachers and other

educational professionals which then positively or negatively impacts students. Educators

must have faith and trust in the research if they are to implement ideas, concepts, and

recommendations resulting from qualitative research studies. As Merriam (1998) points

out, since the goal of qualitative research is to gain understanding of a phenomenon, "the criteria for trusting the study are going to be different than if discovery of a law or testing a hypothesis is the study's objective" (p. 200). The typical criteria for establishing trustworthiness are reliability, objectivity, and internal and external validity. Merriam and Guba and Lincoln (1985) both offer detailed suggestions, discussed below, for how qualitative researchers can ensure trustworthiness of their work and address validity and reliability.

Validity

When addressing internal validity, the question typically asked is do the findings of the research study align with reality? But the issue with this question is that reality can be defined in many ways. Merriam (1998) suggests that "reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research" (p. 202). The problem then is that in a qualitative study concerned with participants' perceptions, reality is shaped by each participant's unique experiences. Guba and Lincoln (1985) address this issue of how a researcher evaluates the participants' views and perceptions of reality in the following way: reality is "a multiple set of mental constructions…made by humans; their constructions are on their minds, and they are, in the main, accessible to the humans who make them" (p. 295). In further examining the concept of reality in a qualitative study such as this, one recognizes that the researcher *is* the data collection instrument, rather than an external data collection instrument (survey), and reality is then accessed directly through interviews of participants putting researchers closer to reality

(Merriam, 1998). When researchers agree to view reality in the way described above and recognize that participants' observations are their constructions of reality, it could be determined that qualitative studies are then very well grounded in reality and thus strong in internal validity.

Reliability

Reliability is understood to be the idea that research findings can be replicated if the same study were performed which, Merriam (1998) points outs "is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static" (p. 205). However, Guba and Lincoln (1985) address the issue of reliability by reframing it to suggest that it is not about whether a qualitative study's results can be replicated but whether the initial results make sense and are consistent with the data that was collected. Further, Firestone (1987) as quoted by Merriam states, "the quantitative study must convince the reader that procedures have been followed faithfully…the qualitative study provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author's conclusions 'makes sense'" (Merriam, 1998, p. 199). Lastly, Merriam (1998) suggests that qualitative studies must be conducted in an ethical manner for the study to be considered valid and reliable.

To further address how the issue of trustworthiness can be addressed in qualitative studies, since the criteria of validity and reliability are not appropriate to naturalistic inquiries, Guba (1981) suggests four alternate terms more applicable to qualitative study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Guba and Lincoln (1995) suggest addressing each of these concepts in the study design to refute concerns that a qualitative inquiry lacks trustworthiness. Qualitative researchers must be concerned with

trustworthiness, perhaps even more so than quantitative researchers, as the burden to prove it may be higher for qualitative studies which is why they provide these alternative methods to establish trustworthiness.

Credibility

One specific strategy suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1985) to establish credibility is "prolonged engagement." Prolonged engagement builds a thorough understanding of the culture of the setting and topic being studied and establishes trust with participants. For my study, I selected a topic with which I have had significant engagement over my 26-year career, working in public schools and nonprofit organizations exclusively. My first interaction and interest with CIS began in 2009 while working in the Hartford, Connecticut public schools, many of which utilized the model. During this time, I became familiar with the culture, its challenges, and many of the initiatives implemented to increase student engagement and graduation rates. (When I began my tenure in Hartford, the graduation rate was only 29.0%.). I shared my relevant experience in urban schools and with the CIS model to interviewees, to establish my credibility with them. Therefore, the participants not only had ample opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas and provide their perspectives on the CIS model through lengthy interviews, but they were done with a credible and trustworthy peer who has a deep understanding of urban school districts and the CIS model. The above strategies address the need of the researcher to have a thorough understanding of the topic and to build trust with participants establishing credibility.

Transferability

Guba and Lincoln (1985) address the issue of transferability and establishing external validity in naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry relates to research that is done with minimal manipulation of variables, where the researcher is conducting their research in the natural setting where the phenomena being studied is occurring. The naturalist is unable to establish external validity, but rather provides the necessary comprehensive descriptions to allow others to consider transferability. Thus, the naturalistic researcher has a responsibility to provide enough information-rich data to others to enable them to make judgments on transferability. Further, purposeful sampling provides knowledge and information with enough depth for researchers to contemplate transferability to other cases (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). I addressed the issue of transferability by focusing on depth versus breadth of information and collecting information-rich data through lengthy interviews with a small number of participants selected using purposeful sampling. As stated, "it is, in summary, *not* the naturalist's task to provide an *index* of transferability; it *is* his or her responsibility to provide the *data base* that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 316).

Dependability

Establishing dependability in a qualitative study refers to if another researcher were to conduct the same study, similar results would be found. One way to establish dependability is to clearly define the methods and procedures utilized in the research, making it more likely that the study could be replicated by another researcher.

Additionally, researchers need to conduct their study as if it was being observed or audited by another researcher, similar to a fiscal audit (Guba & Lincoln 1985; Yin, 2014). For this study, I ensured dependability by clearly outlining my research methods and inviting a peer review of interview transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the belief that a researcher must remain objective throughout their study and deliver unbiased results. Analysis of the data must not be influenced by the researchers' personal opinions or beliefs on the topic. The inquiry audit described above is one way to assure confirmability. Another is to allow participants to review the transcripts of their interviews and/or inviting them to share additional information or insights after the initial interview. Participants may confirm, clarify, or revise responses provided during the interview. Researchers must remain unbiased in allowing participants to do this.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study involve ensuring that subjects participate voluntarily, understand the study, and provide a signed consent form. Appendix C includes the Consent Form that participants were asked to sign prior to their involvement in the study. This helped ensure that participants have a solid understanding of the study, its goals, limits, and other relevant information. It is the researcher's obligation to present accurate and truthful information to the participants and to protect their privacy and confidentiality. The researcher must ensure participants are not at risk for any negative attention or retaliation attributed to their participation in the study or specific responses

they give to interview questions. In order to protect participants, each was identified by number, not by name, nor by position (administrator, teacher, or counselor) they serve within the school. Participants were asked to complete Appendix A: Semistructured Interview Protocol-Pre-Interview Demographic Form, but specific identifying information from that form was not included in the results and discussion of the findings. Rather, trends and patterns among participants with similar demographic information were identified and shared when applicable. It is critical to consider special protections for vulnerable populations, such as children or individuals with disabilities. Prior to beginning my study, Institutional Review Board approval was requested and received and all ethical considerations concerning human subjects was addressed to their satisfaction.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather and analyze the perspectives of experienced educators working within a CIS model high school in an Atlanta, Georgia, urban district faced with abysmal dropout rates. The CIS model may offer promise for students who struggle to remain in school and complete their studies on time. However, this idea has not been explored from the perspectives of veteran educators. This study was intended to fill that gap through in-depth interviews with school administrators, counselors and teachers, and a review of policy and procedural documents related to the implementation of the CIS model.

The use of case study, a qualitative research method, was used for this research as it offers the best opportunity to collect data in a natural setting. For this study, the West End Academy located in Atlanta, Georgia was the intended site. Case study also offers an

opportunity to fully investigate the CIS model in one public high school that has fully implemented the model with students at-risk of dropping out of high school.

As part of this single site case study, I intended to collect and analyze the perspectives of veteran educators (administrators, school counselors, teachers) from WEA-PLC in Atlanta, Georgia, about the CIS model and its positive and negative impacts on students. This site was selected for the in-depth study using purposeful sampling. The information gathered from this study may be beneficial in understanding the effectiveness of the CIS model, particularly with a student population that has not experienced a high level of success in a traditional urban high school setting. If the data supports the effectiveness of the CIS model, further study could be conducted to confirm the findings, potentially impacting educational policy in APS and at the state level. Additional studies could also be completed if the results indicate less success with the CIS model with this population of students, as evidenced by the veteran educators working with them.

The researcher's primary role in this study was as interviewer and analyst of the data. A semistructured interview protocol was created, and specific questions were designed to gain participants' perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the CIS model and how it impacts the students in their program. The interview questions were designed based on the literature review, as well as analysis of the polarities of democracy theory which serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Interviews were be conducted individually and lasted approximately 60-90 minutes.

Specific criteria were used in selecting the participants; all veteran educators with experience working in urban high schools using the CIS model. Steps were taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants of the study and specific identifying information will not be included in the published material. These actions help to ensure participants will not face negative consequences for their contribution to this study. Interviews were audio recorded and transcripts were be reviewed and analyzed which ultimately led to identification of three primary themes, related to high school dropouts, intervention programs, and the CIS model. The information gathered was then analyzed through the lens of the polarities of democracy theory as a framework for creating healthy and just communities. Identified themes were connected to the larger body of research on the topic and may potentially lead to further study in this area and ultimately positive social change and educational policy changes.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gather the perceptions of teachers, school

counselors and administrators on the CIS model and how it may positively or negatively

impact students and their willingness and ability to graduate from high school. Although

limited research about the model currently exists, there were no qualitative studies which

collected the perspectives of this critical stakeholder group. The goal of this study was to

collect and analyze the perceptions of those working most closely with students in a large

urban district that partners with Communities in Schools - Atlanta to provide a variety of

support services to students and families. The research question for this study is what do

administrators, school counselors, and teachers of a CIS model high school in Atlanta,

Georgia perceive as the model's strengths and weaknesses and its positive or negative

impact on students?

In this chapter, I provide information about the setting and demographics of the

participants. Additionally, I provide a detailed description of the data collection and data

analysis processes, including highlighting the themes, codes, and subcodes that arose

through the data analysis process. Further, I include several tables that provide a visual

representation of the data collected and support the discussion of the results and include

any unusual circumstances impacting data collection and analysis.

Setting

The interviews were conducted over the course of four months with teachers and

school counselors from several different Atlanta, Georgia public high schools, all part of

APS school district. The interviews were conducted using Zoom due to the presence of COVID and challenges associated with conducting interviews in-person during the height of the pandemic. Safety issues and participant personal preferences necessitated the change from in-person interviews to virtual interviews with the interviews being conducted by me, stationed in a quiet home office without interference or observation from others and participants in either their home or classroom. Participants were encouraged to share their perspectives over the course of their career without focusing on conditions caused by the pandemic or the implications of extended virtual learning in APS; approximately 18 months. However, it is important to note that participants were likely experiencing a higher than typical level of stress because of the pandemic on them personally, their students, and the educational system. APS had begun virtual learning in March 2020 and remained primarily virtual through August of 2021. Each interview was recorded using Zoom, including video, as well as a separate audio recording device as a backup, to ensure no data was lost. In 9 of 12 cases, participants completed the interview while at home with the remaining three participating from their classrooms during either a free period or after the school day had concluded.

Demographics

The participants of this study were all employees of APS and had been teaching in APS for a minimum of 2 years. Of the 12 participants interviewed for this study, 11 were female and one was male. Two of the participants were school counselors, while the other 10 were all classroom teachers across all core academic subjects; math, social studies,

language arts and science. There were no school administrators included in this research study as none responded to requests for participants.

Data Collection

The original intent of the study was to utilize one site, West End Academy – PLC, a small alternative high school in APS with purposeful sampling being used to recruit participants from this specific site, to participate in this study. However, at the initiation of the data collection phase of this research study in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had just begun, and the school had moved from in-person learning to fully virtual learning. Once learning moved to virtual in mid-March, teachers and administrators were not allowed to return to the building, and all school related business was completed virtually. Due to this change, recruitment needed to be done via electronic means, without the opportunity to distribute flyers to staff at the school or to share details of the study with school personnel during a staff meeting or other gathering, as had originally been planned. To reach potential participants, staff emails were provided to this researcher by the principal's administrative assistant, as the best way to contact potential participants. Multiple emails were sent to potential participants with only one response. This prospective participant did not meet the criteria so was unable to participate in this study. Phone numbers of staff were eventually provided as well and utilized to contact potential participants, but this did not generate any willing participants. Following several months of attempts to recruit participants from West End Academy and conversations with my committee chair and second member, the decision was made to expand the site

to include all high schools within APS that utilize the CIS model. IRB approval was received for this site change and participant recruitment was expanded.

Purposeful sampling was used to identify all teachers, school counselors and administrators at these high schools and recruitment emails were sent which outlined the study and participant criteria. Additionally, snowball sampling was also employed which is a departure from the original recruitment plan but initial limited interest in the study necessitated the change. Ultimately, recruitment yielded 12 participants that included teachers and school counselors only, no administrators responded to recruitment efforts. In contrast to originally planned, this researcher was not able to complete any observations or visits to the school as part of this study due to limitations from COVID-19 and the continued virtual learning environment with teachers and students both working and learning from home.

This study involved collecting participant interviews through a semistructured interview process. The 12 semistructured interviews will serve as the primary data source for analysis. The perceptions of these particular stakeholders were gathered to answer the research question: What do administrators, school counselors, and teachers of a CIS model high school in Atlanta, Georgia, perceive as the model's strengths and weaknesses and its positive or negative impact on students? Based on the extensive literature review, the suggestion is that the CIS model provides critical support to high school students, in large urban districts, in areas such as academics, homelessness, college and career planning, bullying prevention, mental health and others, and should be considered when creating local educational policies, due to its positive impact on graduation rates.

As described above, there were 12 total participants, all Atlanta Public School employees, teaching high school in APS for a minimum of 2 years. Although interviews were initially intended to take place in-person, the COVID pandemic demanded they take place virtually. All interviews were completed using Zoom and recorded through the Zoom platform and stored in the Cloud as well as on a local external hard drive kept in my home office. Additionally, a separate audio device was used to record the interviews as secondary storage which was also stored in my home office. Interviews lasted between 52 and 85 minutes. Transcription was completed using Sonix, an online, automated audio transcription service and then a review of the transcripts was also completed to check for accuracy and to make edits as necessary based on the review.

Data Analysis

Once the transcriptions were complete and checked for accuracy, manual coding was utilized to identify frequent responses or categories of responses. Two themes began to emerge using this manual process and these similar or related responses were identified and highlighted across participants. The two themes that emerged during manual coding were Theme 1; educators face barriers from micro to macro context and Theme 2; the CIS model full of unrealized potential impact. After these initial themes were identified, I determined that the use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), namely NVivo 12, would be necessary to manage the extensive amount of information included in the participant interviews. This use of NVivo 12 to aid in the analysis of data is a departure from what was originally planned for the data analysis. However, based on the depth of information and length of interviews, NVivo 12

proved to be a helpful and necessary tool to efficiently manage the data analysis process. Once interviews were loaded, responses to each question or similar questions were grouped together to begin to identify any additional themes evident across participant responses. Through this process the third theme emerged. I reviewed each question line by line across all participants to identify similarities and differences in responses. After multiple reviews, three key themes began to emerge. As I further analyzed the data, I grouped responses into these three themes. Once these themes were identified, I then further analyzed the data to group information into codes associated with each theme. During this step, I utilized a combination of inductive and deductive analysis, with some codes taken from the body of research, while others were emergent codes; those identified during the data analysis process. Lastly, responses were further broken down into subcodes associated with each code and theme. As part of the analysis of the data, a word frequency query was produced along with a word cloud containing the 50 most used words in participant responses, both included in Appendix C.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, I utilized the strategies and actions described in Chapter 3. First, to build credibility, it was important that participants know I am a former public school teacher and administrator from an urban district. I shared this information with each participant through email communications and periodically, as appropriate, during the interviews. By sharing my experience of 15 years in the public schools and the fact that I often encountered similar struggles as they did, I presented myself as a credible interviewer who could both

understand and relate to their experiences. Additionally, they were able to speak using educational terminology, not needing to spend extensive time explaining certain educational concepts, policies, or practices which facilitated a smoother interview and helped to establish a positive rapport.

Second, I addressed the issue of transferability by conducting interviews that focused on depth of information, rather than breadth. The semistructured interview questions allowed for information rich responses with a smaller number of participants. All interviews allowed participants to both respond to specific open-ended questions, and to share their perspectives freely, with limited prompting. Interviews continued until participants felt they had shared all relevant information, there was no time limit or intent or action to limit responses. As Guba and Lincoln stated, "it is, in summary, *not* the naturalist's task to provide an *index* of transferability; it *is* his or her responsibility to provide the *data base* that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 316). The depth of information received, and the rich data collected allows for others to make judgements on transferability.

Dependability addresses the question of whether another researcher was to conduct a similar study, results would be similar. I have described my research methods in depth so they could be replicated, as well as including any variations from the original proposal. Additionally, I have addressed the potential impact of COVID on teachers' perceptions and how the presence of this might have impacted participant responses. Participants were provided a written transcript of their interview via email to ensure confirmability.

Results

Educators Face Barriers, From Micro- to Macro-Level Contexts

Of the 12 participants, all shared the challenges, both large and small, they face daily. They referenced these barriers and challenges 115 times throughout their interviews. These challenges came from the district, the educational system, funding, and student level challenges. The student level challenges and barriers were predominant in conversations with all participants and related to the structural, environmental, and interpersonal barriers students face, with 49 references to these barriers. Structural socioeconomic barriers were most predominant within this section.

Table 1

Coded Semistructured Interview Results 1

Theme Code *Subcode*	Files	References
T1 educators face barriers from micro to macro contexts	12	115
school level challenges	7	18
administrative-leadership mindset	3	4
lack of teacher skill-knowledge behavioral psych	1	1
managing student-parent expectations	1	2
pressure to pass unready students	2	4
student engagement in learning	1	3
switch to virtual learning	1	1
time management	3	3
students face structural environmental and interpersonal barriers	12	49
educational gaps	5	8
no value in education	5	5
parental support and involvement	6	10
structural socioeconomic barriers	8	17
trauma-mental health needs	6	9

Structural Socioeconomic Barriers

Participant 06 shared, "I know that some of my kids don't get enough to eat" and

further, Participant 02 shared that "homelessness, we get a lot of students that are

homeless, just unstable" and that this population of students "structurally, they have been

marginalized." Participant 06 further expressed her frustration with the lack of support for teen mothers as well as concern for those students whose parents work multiple jobs, with students left to supervise younger siblings. Participant 02 described a Latino student of hers that was required to hold two jobs while also trying to engage in school but experiencing chronic absenteeism as a result. This educator allowed him to make up work, complete assignments within a broader timeline, and not penalize him for lack of attendance, but "eventually it just kind of fizzled out. We didn't hear from him…he ended up being withdrawn from school". Overall attendance was a common concern among educators and was caused by a variety of factors, such as homelessness, work conflicts, instability within the home, lack of motivation, and care of siblings or children.

Educational gaps. Another structural environmental and interpersonal barrier mentioned frequently, was the concern around students' educational gaps. Participant 06 shared "a lot of kids don't have the attention span…it wasn't developed in elementary and middle school" and Participant 10 stated "a lot of students have struggled in their earlier years of education" which makes continued learning at the secondary level much more difficult. And speaking further about the gaps created at the elementary and middle school levels, Participant 12 stated, "some of them have so many gaps as it relates to education that they just don't want to do it anymore" which illustrates the concern that many educators expressed around students being frustrated with the amount of work they may need to do to reach grade level performance in core subjects, thus they often give up and drop out of school.

Table 2

Coded Semistructured Interview Results 2

Theme 　Code 　　*Subcode*	Files	References
T1 educators face barriers from micro to macro contexts	12	115
balancing needs of diverse students	10	17
appropriate goal setting	2	2
collaborative teaching-learning strategies	1	1
drawing on differentiated teaching skills	4	6
drive for personal and professional development	1	1
personally addressing students immediate needs	1	1
providing basic tools	2	4
using a Team approach	2	2
barriers consistent over time	2	2
district challenges	2	3
administrator focus on equity	1	2
state and federal policies	1	1
education system-curriculum as macro challenge	6	13
changes in educational system	1	4
focus on college over vocational skills	3	4
focus on testing rather than mastery	2	2
structural issues with curriculum	3	3
funding-resources as meso and micro challenges	6	13
resources-technology gap	5	9
student teacher ratio	1	1
turnover-educator continuity	2	3

Balancing needs of diverse learners

Ten of the 12 participants also made mention of how difficult it is to balance the needs of diverse students, with 17 references during their interviews. Participant 03 summed it up well when she stated:

You know, it's like school is kind of hard because it does seem like it's sort of designed for the average kid. And you want to make sure that the really, you know, bright kids are not being ignored. But you can't also ignore the kids that are really far behind. And so I think that the challenge lies in that, in making sure that, you know, the kids on each end of the spectrum are getting what they need, right?

Participant 10 shared that it is not just her lower academic level classes that have a diverse set of learners, but that "all these students are on different levels, even in honor [classes]. I have some honor students that are really struggling, while I have others that are ready to write a dissertation and teach at the collegiate level". And as Participant 03 stated, "you have a bunch of kids, and they all have different needs. So…differentiation is something that probably could use some work on at the school-wide level".

Funding and resources as meso- and micro-level challenges

Half of the participants mentioned the lack of resources, funding, technological and other non-academic resources, as a barrier that they face, and which negatively impacts their ability to do their job and students ability to learn. The participants mentioned this challenge 13 different times. Lack of technology, including hardware, software, and connectivity issues were mentioned several times as well as the lack of

non-academic supports such as meals and food supplies for families. As Participant 03 stated:

> I think the government should be helping more than they are, perhaps. And I think…in terms of like food and stuff, I think it's great that APS, I think all of APS, is now like free breakfast and lunch once a day, which is fantastic…but I think a lot of that sort of stuff does come down to money. It feels like a bigger thing. You know, that we as a country should take care of our children. And I think that, you know, all the schools should have enough funds and resources to be able to do that. And I think that that is and will continue to be a struggle. And it shouldn't necessarily be entirely the school's problem to…solve all of these things. And so, I think, yes, more support on many levels is helpful. But really, I think a lot of it does come down to funding, which is unfortunate.

Specific to a lack of technology, Participant 04 shared that:

> It was hard to make students independent…if everybody didn't have the same access to things. So, like you might give an assignment and assume that everybody has what they need to do this assignment wherever they are, but they don't

And Participant 08 shared her frustration that technology is being provided now by the district due to COVID and online learning, but prior that was not always the case.

> Before I would always ask, do you have a computer? Do you have internet, and do you have some type of office suite? That's what I would always ask, because

those are the three things that I needed for class, and I always had a variety of

answers

Although lack of technology is an issue, even with improved access after COVID and

virtual learning, it is a symptom of the broader inequities among schools, neighborhoods,

and families.

Table 3

Coded Semistructured Interview Results 3

Theme
  Code
    Subcode
	Files	References

T2 CIS model full of unrealized potential impact	12	90
knowledge of CIS model varied-inconsistent	11	21
ideal CIS interventions	11	41
changing structure and course offerings	2	3
concrete motivation inspiration strategies	2	3
develop integrate vocational opportunities	5	9
hands on- project based learning	5	6
listening to student voices	2	2
lower student teacher ratio	2	2
minimizing loss of classroom time	1	1
shifting from testing to critical thinking and mastery	2	2
team of support staff in schools	3	4
wider range of intervention services	5	9
impact of student focus	10	20
CIS increases rapport and engagement	4	5
culture shift and increased trust	3	6
increased student confidence-increased success	3	3
more paths to engagement and motivation	5	6
possible negatives	6	8
lack of individual support post k-12	1	2
lower test scores	1	1
segregation vs diversity	1	1
teacher burden building social-emotional capacity	2	3

Theme	Files	References
Code		
Subcode		
time constraints	1	1

CIS Model Full of Unrealized Potential Impact

For this section, I assigned four codes that emerged from the interviews with participants. All 12 participants referred to the unrealized impact of the model in 90 separate references. The four codes and 19 subcodes captured the participants' perspective on the ideal interventions, the inconsistency in their understanding of the model, the impact on students when the CIS model is present and any possible negative outcomes of the CIS model.

Knowledge of CIS model varied-inconsistent

More than one participant indicated that they really knew nothing about the services that CIS provides while some had had a previous interaction with them at another school, but not at their current school. As a reminder, CIS has current offices and partnerships with all of the schools represented by these participants. Participant 10 stated, "so I only heard of communities in schools, not here at *Smith* high school…where I did see it in elementary school and maybe I'm overlooking it, but that's where I remember that organization being like, really vocal". Participant 12 explained that "when we first came here, and we were introduced to communities in schools…I hardly ever saw them…And they did not make themselves visible. I guess it's because our kids were out of control". And finally, Participant 04 stated, after learning that her high school did

have a partnership with CIS, "so communities in schools, I guess I didn't know that we were that. So, I don't know anything about it".

In contrast, some participants were familiar with and complimentary of the services CIS provides within their schools. Participant 09 shared her experience with the CIS personnel in her school and the services they provide:

> Our communities in schools, *Ms. Valencia*, she is incredible. Whether it's calling parents and having them come up to the school or going to the food bank and getting food for our parents to be sent home through the students, she is in contact with some of our children's probation officers like she is the liaison for a lot of the stuff that happens out in the community that does affect the school.

Participant 03 shared her perception on which students CIS worked with directly, seeing them work with specific students that were identified as needing assistance, while they were, in theory, available for all students. CIS, in their view, often interacted with students during lunch and had their own suite in one section of the school where students often congregated. Lastly, two participants shared that they felt the CIS representatives needed more resources. One participant's perception was that the CIS counselor spent much of her own money on resources for students. The second believed that having an assistant to manage paperwork and other administrative demands would allow them more time to work directly with students.

Ideal CIS interventions

Eleven of 12 participants made references to the ideal types of interventions 41 times throughout the interviews. The subcodes with the largest number of references

included developing and integrating vocational opportunities, creating more hands-on learning and project based learning opportunities, offering a wider array of intervention services, and having a team of support staff in the schools. Participant 10 shared her view on some critical areas that should be included in high schools:

> I would definitely include some of those technical skills, such as HVAC, nursing, hospitality, all of like housekeeping, childcare. I think those things, you're able to really build the connection in real time between, hey, what you did in ELA, you read about a nurse today, you read about her story…you're able to build those real-world connections…a lot of students are hands on.

Participant 05 shared that schools should have "better training for careers that don't necessarily involve four-year colleges" because there are certification programs that may take only six or eight months and can provide students with a well-paying career. And as Participant 09 stated, "I would probably bring back some mechanical engineering type activities like HVAC, electrical, plumbing…they're necessary and successful".

Another critical intervention that five of 12 participants made reference to was the need for a wider range of intervention services such as counseling and trauma support, substance abuse programming, tutoring, summer school, family therapy, parenting classes, a food pantry for students, GED classes for parents, and even providing safe housing for students in dormitory type residences due to unstable housing or violence in the home. Participant 11 shared that the more we provide supportive services in schools, for substance abuse or trauma, for instance, the more we create a system that will prevent these students from dropping out of school. And further, that schools should be a place

where students feel safe, where they feel part of something, part of a community that supports them.

Impact of student focus

In this section the participants were asked what the impact would be if schools were able to focus more heavily on individual student needs. Participants shared their beliefs that there would slowly be a culture shift within schools and a building of trust on both sides as well as increased student confidence and success. Five participants also referred to the opportunity this would create for a higher level of student engagement and motivation. Participant 01 summarized the impact on students of a more individualized focus on their specific learning needs:

> I wish we could just actually sit down, do an individual academic plan, and
> actually have the classes that the students actually need. You know, to be
> successful in today's world, because the reality is everybody's not going to go to
> college…but if I can focus on this, this student over here that wants to do
> construction, he likes to work with his hands, he has an individual education plan.
> And I can put in place the things that he needs, you know, the basic things that
> he's going to need to graduate…you know, we can spend more time making
> kids…being able to just make him more successful, if we had that.

Several participants shared that addressing individual student needs more fully would better tap into student motivation and interests and we would overall, have healthier students. As Participant 09 summarized, "[the students] would just be able to thrive. I feel that they would be more successful if individual needs could really be met

the way they need to be met". Many participants expressed concerns about the size of the schools and how it makes it challenging for teacher, counselors, and others to focus on individual student needs.

Lack of Student-Centered Focus Hinders Development of Community and of Student Empowerment

Participants were asked this or similar question; what if teachers and schools focused primarily on the individual rights of students more than on the school community as a whole; what would be the potential negative and/or positive outcomes. So, this theme encompasses the idea that when schools focus more on individual student development, the establishment of the concept of community is negatively impacted as is the ability for students to be empowered. In looking at both strengths and weaknesses, the strengths are all related to creating a student-centered learning environment while the weaknesses, viewed holistically, create an environment where students are isolated and/or decisions are made that are not in their best interests. Therefore, the weaknesses or lack of student-centered focus hinders student empowerment and development of community within the school. Additional questions related to how schools, either purposefully or as a byproduct of policies or practices, help to empower students or not, and how they help to create a shared sense of community within their school. There were two codes and 19 subcodes identified through data analysis.

Strengths; creating a shared community

Participants shared how they believed you could create a stronger sense of community by initiating a more student-centered approach. This concept was evident in

11 of 12 participant interviews with 65 references. One of the strongest reactions related to the fact that by being more student-centered, you would create a stronger rapport between students and teachers. Participant 06 shared:

> I think the biggest barrier, the biggest thing is to make yourself relatable. Build the trust. You have to build trust with these students. You know, they have to find, you have to find some connection with them. Trust is very important in building relationships, not only with the students, but with the families.

Participant 06 went on to explain that, as a school counselor, she remains with the same group of students from 9th to 11th grade to "build better relationships with both the student and family". Several participants shared that in addition to building trust with students, it is also important to build relationships that do not involve only academics. As Participant 07 explains, she always asked students, on a scale of one to 10, how they are feeling. She uses this as a gauge to determine which students need additional support, comfort, or just a listening ear to what might be happening outside of school that is negatively impacting their well-being. Several participants shared that they will help students with groceries, with rides, and any other help they might need but are unable to find elsewhere. This also included providing extended timelines for assignments if the teacher knew the student was working late at night or caring for their siblings, for example. These types of relationships would not be possible without teachers taking a deeper interest in students well-being, beyond the classroom. As one Participant stated:

> I try, like if I see their behavior changing, I always try to find out what's going on. What can I do? So that's what I do. It's just I check [when] I see behavioral

change and especially the big ones. Sometimes they're just tired. I ask, "are you

just tired today?" And if they said, "yes", I read their faces. That's what it is.

Again, this sentiment, of knowing your students as more than just academic beings was

prevalent throughout this section.

Schools empowering students

Several participants shared that they tried to get students to take more ownership

over their learning. For Participant 11, he stated:

I say you're one hundred percent responsible for your learning. Like I say, I'm

going to do my job. I'm going to do the best that I possibly can, to give you all of

the information that I have. I want to be, you know, a sponge that's completely

wrung out when this whole thing is over. I want to give you every single thing

that I have. So, I think that creates some direction as well to say, hey, you're

responsible for what you learn in this class. If you want to learn everything that I

have to offer, great. If you want to learn a little bit here, great. But you know,

these are the skills and knowledge…that are going to be extremely beneficial to

you being successful.

Participant 04 acknowledged that allowing students to do independent projects,

researching something that they are interested in, during their 10th grade year helped them

to take more ownership of their learning. In this school, this was part of the International

Baccalaureate (IB) program but that students not in the IB program, also participated in

this project in 10th grade. Similar sentiments were shared by other participants as well,

the desire to allow students more control over their learning.

Several participants also stated that have a variety of clubs and activities that students could become involved in, helped to empower them during the high school years. Again, this provided an opportunity for them to be involved in something that was of interest to them and to grow in their leadership, interpersonal, and organizational skills. This also happened at schools that had strong arts, performing arts, and business programs, again allowing students to take more control of their high school experience.

Weaknesses; hindering empowerment and community building

Nine of the 12 participants shared factors that led to the belief that students were isolated from others, either individually or as a particular group. Behavioral issues and disciplinary action fell into this category, as well as how lower performing students or higher performing students are often isolated as a group due to the similar challenges they face. Regarding race, two participants mentioned concerns with how students of different races are isolated from one another. Students join clubs related to their particular race which can be empowering, but also isolating, as then students often sit together within their races at sporting events or even in the cafeteria at lunch.

Lack of a consistent approach to student accountability was referenced nine times as a factor contributing to students not feeling empowered. This lack of accountability reference behavioral and academic and how teachers have different standards in their classrooms for these two elements as well as how discipline is managed at a school and district level. Participant 03 shared her frustration that there are certain students that get suspended repeatedly without other interventions and that, unsurprisingly, these are the students who often fall behind their peers in academic performance. Further, these issues

continue to mount and so these are the students who often leave high school prior to graduation.

Table 4

Coded Semistructured Interview Results 4

Theme Code *Subcode*	Files	References
T3 Lack of student-centered focus hinders development of community and student empowerment	12	109
strengths-creating shared community	11	65
administrators working to meet needs	1	1
building rapport-teacher involvement	7	20
classroom culture	3	5
community partnerships	3	6
counseling supports	3	5
families in community	1	1
professional learning communities	1	1
school culture and spirit	5	9
school culture shaped by leader example	4	4
schools empowering students	6	10
SEL benefits	1	2
students supporting students	1	1
weaknesses hindering empowerment and community building	12	44
burden on teachers needs to be shared	2	2
factors isolating students	9	12
lack of consistent approach to student accountability	7	9
lack of purposeful plan to build community	4	5
managing mental health needs	1	2
pressure to pass students	5	6
unrealistic expectations of teachers and SEL	3	8

Summary

In this chapter, I shared detailed information about the study, including aspects such as the setting, the structure of the interviews, the demographics of participants and how data collection and analysis were conducted. Additionally, I addressed issues of trustworthiness as it relates to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The largest section of this chapter included the data collected and analyzed through the twelve participant interviews conducted. Four tables were included to provide a visual representation of the data collected and the results were presented as they related to the four themes identified through data analysis. The following chapter includes the interpretation of the findings as they relate to the literature as well as interpreted through the polarities of democracy lens. Additionally, limitations of the study, social change and public policy implications and direction for future research are also included.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to provide a better understanding of the CIS

model as perceived by experienced educators that work within this model in the APS.

This study explored their perceptions of the model, the strengths, and weaknesses, and

the potential positive or negative impact on students, particularly students' willingness

and ability to remain in school and graduate with their peers. For each CIS high school, a

CIS coordinator is assigned to the school to help determine the needs of the school and its

students, then implements those services. The services can be those provided to the entire

school community, a small or large subset of students, or individual students as needed.

The three different types of services provided are known as tiers with Tier 1 being those

short-term or one-time events available to all students, such as career fairs, anti-bullying

programs or college fairs. Tier 2 includes those services provided to small groups of

students who are being challenged by similar issues such as academic difficulties,

smoking or other risk-taking behaviors, and those that would benefit from mentoring or

meal distribution. Lastly, Tier 3 includes individual case management and intensive

support for individual students through one-to-one support, home visits, and referrals to

outside services as well. The CIS model provides a variety of services to students to

support their well-being with the ultimate goal of decreasing chronic absenteeism and

improving graduate rates. In some instances, CIS personnel will support families by

connecting them to community-based organizations that can assist in locating stable

housing, connecting parents to potential job training programs, financial literacy

education, and even English as a second language classes.

Urban high schools continue to struggle with graduation rates, especially as it

relates to African American, Latino, and low-income students. Although graduation rates

have steadily improved since the 1970s, there are currently only 13 states that have met

the 90.0% graduation rate goal established by the Grad Nation campaign which set a goal

of a 90.0% graduation rate across the country by 2020 (Atwell et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, although 13 states have met the 90.0% graduation goal, only four states

have a graduation rate above 85.0% for low-income students (Atwell et al., 2021).

Additionally, overall state graduation rates do not present a clear and complete picture of

graduation rates in urban districts within their states or within subgroups of students.

There are still significant disparities statewide among these subgroups as compared to

their same age peers. In Minnesota, for example, the gap between low-income students

and their counterparts was still 22 percentage points while in Kentucky, the gap was 5.9%

as of 2019 (Atwell et al., 2021). For Georgia, even as the overall graduation rate rose to

82.0% for 2019, there remains a 15.05 percentage gap between non-low-income and low-

income students with the low-income student graduation rate at only 77.2%, well off the

90.0% graduation goal (Atwell et al., 2021). For APS specifically, the graduation rate in

2019 for White students was 96.7%, a new high, while the rate for Black students lagged

significantly behind at only 77.2%, which was a decrease from the rate in 2018 of 78.2%

(Atlanta Public Schools, 2020). Further, schools considered *low-graduation rate high*

schools, those which enroll a minimum of 100 students and have a graduation rate of

67.0% or less, disproportionally impact our low-income, English language learners, students with disabilities, Hispanic students, and Black students. Low-income students account for 44.4% of students in high schools but are 55.7% of students in low-graduation rate high schools, with Georgia having 36 low graduation rate high schools as of 2019 (Atwell et al., 2021). The current research continues to illustrate the need for further evaluation, development and implementation of programs that contribute to improving graduation rates. The intent of this study was to determine the effectiveness of one model as perceived by key stakeholders within APS high schools.

This chapter presents an integration, synthesis, and evaluation of the literature and interview findings as they relate to the research question. Additionally, this chapter will provide information on the public policy and social change implications to consider as well as recommendations for future research. Lastly, I will provide a summary of this dissertation within the conclusion section.

Interpretation of the Findings

The data obtained from the 12 semistructured interviews were analyzed and synthesized against current literature related to causes of students dropping out of high school, critical components of intervention programs to reduce dropouts, the impact of the CIS model, and the polarities of democracy theory. Additionally, the findings were analyzed relative to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings Relative to Causes of Dropping Out

The analysis of the findings of this study revealed that teachers' perspectives were in alignment with the literature related to why students leave school prior to graduation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the reasons for dropping out of school vary, but participants named many of the same reasons cited in the literature including those known as push-out, pull-out and fall-out theories. Each of these theories contribute to a better understanding of why students drop out of high school and potentially what interventions could be used to target these specific causes.

Findings Relative to Pull-out Theories

Pull-out theories are related to external factors that cause students to drop out of high school, including those such as childbirth or parenting, caring for younger siblings and other family obligations, and employment and illness. Participants identified these issues as well, noting specifically that not enough was done to support teen mothers and those caring for their younger siblings. Participants indicated that the schools should provide more support for these students as many of them suggest a desire to remain in school and may be performing well academically yet cannot remain in school due to caretaking or other family responsibilities, which is evident in the literature as well. The perception of participants was that district and school financial challenges were the primary reasons that more comprehensive supports were not provided for these students. Further, participants shared that many families face financial hardships and guardians may be unable to provide for children in the home, necessitating students working to earn money to support themselves in some ways, and their families. This issue was exacerbated by COVID where many students faced significant financial hardships due to theirs or their parents' job loss or decrease in hours. As research studies are completed and reported on the impact of students and families during the COVID-19 pandemic,

similar themes may emerge from the literature.

During the 2020-2021 school year, an estimated 3 million students stopped attending classes at all, many because they entered the workforce, with the most serious impacts of the COVID pandemic disproportionately impacting students from underserved communities, including low-income, Black, and Latino communities (Sawchuk, 2021). And although this study was not focused on the impact of the COVID pandemic on students, participants highlighted the increased challenges students faced during this time, especially as it related to the need to work and earn money. It is important to determine ways to support these students affected by external factors to create the conditions that allow them to remain in school. On-site daycare facilities, work study programs, and even paid internships coordinated by the school or district could alleviate the impact of these external factors and contribute to students being able to remain in high school and complete their studies. These participants highlighted the challenges and frustrations associated with helping students manage these external factors, thus mitigating the risk they pose, which is a common theme in the literature as well.

Findings Relative to Push-out Theories

Push-out theories, evident in the literature and throughout this study, are described in the literature as adverse factors occurring within the school community and negatively impacting students' desire to remain in school. These factors are often related to school- or district-based discipline policies, lack of consistent attendance, or consequences students may face for behavioral infractions. Several participants alluded to the fact that attendance, and course credit tied to attendance, can often cause students to

be subjected to loss of credit due to a high number of excused or unexcused absences. Loss of credit leads students to become frustrated, to potentially disengage and may cause feelings of alienation from their peers. Strict attendance policies such as these, with little room for flexibility or allowance for special circumstances, further push students away from school. Quality programs offering credit recovery are an option and mentioned in both the literature and by participants to alleviate this stress point for students. These programs may allow students to gain credit for a course that was lost due to attendance, without having to retake the entire course.

Creating, managing, and enforcing the consequences of poor behavior continues to be a challenge for urban, public high schools cited by participants in this study and in the literature. Additionally, the effects of the enforcement of these consequences, especially those that remove students from classes or from school, such as in- and out-of-school suspensions, are also of concern. These absences place students further behind their peers, alienate them from the broader school community and stress the limited resources available within the schools. Several participants shared frustration with how behavioral challenges are managed, as well as the manpower required to address student discipline issues, potentially limiting time dedicated to other student support services. But, unlike credit recovery programs for instance, there appear to be few easy solutions to address this concern. Participants recognized the need to have a set of consequences for severe behavioral infractions but were aware that the more often these students experienced consequences requiring removal from class or school through suspensions, the more unlikely they were to complete the course successfully.

Findings Relative to Fall-out Theories

Fall-out theories are those that address student disengagement not caused by the schools. These are often factors such as lack of parent support or interest, negative attitudes towards school, and lack of adequate academic progress. Participants shared multiple instances of students not engaged with school due to a perceived lack of parent interest and support. Participants recognized that this lack of parental interest and support can be real, but also could be a misperception by the educators within the school. Although participants indicated that they often reach out to parents of struggling students multiple times without receiving a response, they did recognize that this could be the result of parents being unable to speak and understand English comfortably, being undocumented, or even having work schedules that do not allow them to fully participate in their child's schooling, which was also consistent with the literature. Participants did agree, however, that in some cultures and neighborhoods there was a lack of importance placed on education, thus students do not receive the encouragement and support they need to remain in school, especially when school is difficult for them and a push by parents or other important adults might make the difference.

Additionally, several participants described students who entered their classes with a lack of academic preparedness, causing them to struggle significantly and to ultimately be unable to keep up in class and successfully complete the coursework which is consistent with the literature. These students can potentially respond to intervention, but it often requires intensive remediation. However, these programs may not exist at their high school and students may be unwilling to participate in intensive remediation

programs due to feelings of inadequacy, peer pressure, or a general lack of interest in school.

It is important to note, however, that many students leave school due to a combination of the above factors. It is often not just one of the above that pushes a student to make the decision to leave school but instead, a complex interplay of push-out, pull-out and fall-out factors observed and shared by participants, as well as throughout the literature. Participants recognize the challenges that students face at home and at school and how those pressures impact their decision to leave school prior to graduation. The perception of teachers and school counselors who participated in this study was that there are many actions that can be taken and programs that could be implemented that would assist students when they face these myriad challenges. The participants perceptions aligned with the literature in their belief that these programs would undoubtedly help at least a percentage of students remain in school, but they repeatedly indicated that the lack of federal, state, and local funding negatively impacts the school's and district's ability to implement much needed intervention programs.

Findings Relative to Intervention Programs

From an intervention standpoint, both the literature and the participants were aligned in identifying the types of programs that could and should be available for students. These include academic support, mentoring and supportive relationships, psychosocial skill development and teacher training in behavior management. Additionally, as the literature review highlighted, these interventions are not limited to what the school and district can provide, rather they could be offered from both the public

and private sector with support coming from community organizations in addition to the school.

Findings Relative to School-Community Partnerships

A review of the literature yielded many studies that considered the impact of school-community partnerships on student engagement and success. The evidence from this study strongly supports these earlier findings. All participants indicated the need for more comprehensive support for students to address issues and challenges not related to academics. A common theme among the literature and the participants was that students need interventions well beyond receiving academic support. As one participant indicated, the nation, as a whole, needs to do more to support our children so it is not left solely to the schools. Participants identified services such as trauma therapy, support in finding stable housing, basic needs such as food and clothing, caregiver support, and assistance with transportation as being critical to keeping students in school and which should be provided by a combination of school and community entities. The research is consistent in that school-community partnerships are a critical element in supporting students and their families. As McIntyre and Knight (2016) suggested, interventions should not be limited to what school counselors can provide to students, but instead, schools must involve people and entities outside of the school community. The evidence from this study strongly suggests this to be true. It is critical however, that these interventions and supports are created and implemented with strong communication and collaboration among the different groups. Community-based services provided in isolation did not have as strong an impact, based on the literature review. One obstacle associated with creating

and maintaining these essential partnerships identified within the literature and aligned with participants' statements, is the availability of the school's and the organization's time and resources necessary to maintain these critical partnerships. Study participants identified the lack of resources, both financial and manpower, as an essential issue negatively impacting the ability to provide support services to students. Even if schools were able to create stronger and more effective school-community partnerships, the issue becomes whether the school and the community organization could sustain the level and quality of services needed to make a substantive difference.

Community schools, not to be confused with the CIS model, is another model described in the literature whose structure and services align with what participants in this study indicated students need. As Heers et al. indicated, the belief was that students' academic struggles were often related to challenges they were facing due to policy and social structures, not because of something internal to the student (2014). So, if schools, with their community partners, could provide support to students, the potential for positive outcomes is strong. Additionally, community schools programming often provides services that support the whole family which again, aligns with the results of this research study. Participants recognize that to improve outcomes for students, it is important to consider the needs and the health of the whole family.

Findings in Relation to Career academies Model

The evidence from this study indicates that this model has many of the components that the educators in this study believe students need to be successful, including smaller learning communities, career related coursework, and partnerships with

local employers that would allow students to obtain work experience. A review of the

literature suggests that these career academies increased the support students received,

due to the smaller size, and with the work-based learning opportunities, students showed

an increased level of participation. These findings clearly align with the type of programs

the participants in this study suggested would be helpful for students. Many high school

students, especially those who struggle academically, do not see the relevance and

applicability in their core academic coursework, but as participants suggested, classes

that could prepare students for a career, such as HVAC, electrical, plumbing and others,

would show students the relevance of their classes and potentially increase participation

and engagement, thus increasing attendance and graduation rates.

Findings in Relation to the Communities in Schools Model

The CIS model was created to help connect students and families with needed

services and to empower them to take responsibility for their lives. The model involves

having a CIS coordinator on site at each CIS school. The coordinator completes a needs

assessment for each school, determines the necessary resources, and then begins to

connect students and families to those resources. Ideally, there is a three-tier system for

supporting schools which includes school-wide supports and services, small group

supports for students with similar needs, and finally, individualized support for students.

The evidence from this study suggests that the CIS model may not be reaching the

broader school community, but instead, mostly providing individualized support to

students identified potentially through teachers or counselors. The evidence further

suggests that the effectiveness of the CIS model may be negatively impacted by limited resources, both financially and manpower.

Eight of the 12 participants in this study had some knowledge of the CIS model, while the remaining four had not heard of it. It is important to note that all 12 participants worked at APS high schools that had CIS programs on site. Three of the eight participants who were familiar with the CIS model, had only limited understanding of the services they provide and one of the eight had familiarity with the program from a previous school, but was not aware that CIS had a presence at their current high school. For those participants that were most familiar with the model, there was some alignment between their perceptions of it and the literature on CIS, but participants did not seem to fully understand the extent of services and supports that CIS can provide, to individual, small, and large groups of students. The participants viewed the CIS program as providing some services that the schools were unable to provide either because of funding or manpower limitations. They were aware that CIS supports students in their academic success but also that they helped students and families, at times, with basic needs such as food and clothing. This ability to provide services that the school could not provide was the major strength of the CIS model. Participants clearly recognized that the services listed above, especially in regard to providing basic needs, were not regularly provided by schools but were necessary to support students. Participants viewed these services as filling a necessary gap in support for students and families that could contribute to students remaining in school, consistent with the literature.

However, there was a strong variance noted between the literature available from CIS on services they provide and the perception of participants. Although the literature is clear that CIS can and does provide services on a school-wide basis, to small groups of students with similar needs, and to support individual students, none of the participants indicated that they were aware of school-wide and small group services being provided. None of the participants in this study indicated any awareness of school-wide support services that CIS was providing. So, although those participants familiar with the CIS model spoke of its positive attributes, it is important to note that their perceptions of what services were provided was limited. It is not known if their schools, in fact, provide only a limited array of services to students or if there is a lack of promotion of the services that are available. This is an unfortunate disparity as participants listed services like trauma therapy, addiction support, and care for teen moms as necessary and extremely valuable for keeping students in school but did not view CIS as a potential provider of these services. The literature is clear, however, that CIS has a wide range of services they can and do provide, including those listed above and can also connect students and families to community-based organizations for additional support as needed. And as stated previously, for each school, the services provided are determined after the completion of a needs assessment and then adjusted as needed after further reviews. The services provided at each school should be individualized for the school community and its needs.

Less than half of the participants who were aware of the model within their school, knew the name(s) of the CIS coordinator working within their school, nor how they, as teachers, would interface with them. The primary assumption from participants

was that referrals for CIS services were initiated by the school counselors and not by teachers. Again, it is difficult to determine if this perception is accurate and aligned with the processes used at their respective schools or if this is a miscommunication between the CIS coordinator and the school staff. Three of the eight participants, familiar with the CIS model, felt that the CIS representatives could be empowered to do more and provide more services to a higher number of students if they had additional personnel and funding. This is an unfortunate weakness identified by participants, either real or imagined, that may limit teachers' confidence and belief in the CIS model at their school. And as indicated by participants during the interviews, they themselves, often provide additional resources to students, beyond academic support, such as food, transportation, and other services, that likely could be provided by the CIS program.

Overall, the evidence from this study, though limited, does strongly suggest that CIS is not achieving its standards relative to these APS high schools. It appears that there are several flaws in their application of the model as outlined in their literature. Limitations on services being provided, lack of educator familiarity with the model, and limited manpower all appear to be challenges and shortcomings CIS may be facing in APS. Further examination is essential to determine if these challenges are widespread within APS and if so, how to either improve the fidelity of delivery of the CIS model, or whether APS should consider alternative models that provide services through strong school-community partnerships. Again, the evidence from this study strongly suggests the need for student support beyond academics, as well as family support, which may be best achieved through strong school-community partnerships. The question that remains

is whether CIS is the most effective organization and model to provide these services within APS.

Findings Relative to the Polarities of Democracy Theory

The theoretical framework for this study was the polarities of democracy theory and the results were further analyzed through this lens. The polarities of democracy theory includes 10 values that are presented in five polarity pairs: freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation (Benet, n.d.). For social change efforts to be successful, the positive aspect of each value must be maximized while the negative aspects should be minimized to the greatest extent possible. If a society can manage the positive and negative aspects of each polarity pair, they are more likely to achieve the greater purpose of human emancipation and building healthy, sustainable, and just communities. But if a society is not successful in managing these polarity pairs, they are at higher risk for creating a community of oppression for some groups or individuals within the community. Schools can and should be viewed as micro societies and the management of these polarity pairs should be considered within this framework to determine if schools are helping to foster the greater purpose of human emancipation for its students.

For this study, the focus was on the pair of human rights and communal obligations within the context of the larger polarities of democracy theory. The intent of using this theoretical framework for this study was, in part, to analyze high schools as a self-contained community and to determine if schools and the educators within them

were creating just and equitable societies. Studying a public school through the lens of the polarities of democracy theory provides a unique opportunity to apply these principles to a smaller community, that of a school, and determine how the effective management of the positive and negative aspects of the pair of human rights and communal obligations may contribute to the creation of a more just and healthy school community.

Participants were asked questions related to how educators and schools ensure the rights of individual students while balancing the needs of the school community as a whole. By leveraging the polarity pairs, maximizing the positive aspects, and minimizing the negative aspects, a school has the potential to ensure the rights of all students while promoting a culture of shared commitments among its members. Within a school community, this pair essentially means that schools are providing what individual students need, while considering the community as a whole, and creating a culture with common goals, fostering independence while also increasing the sense of belonging. The risk of not minimizing the negative aspects of this polarity pair is creating communities that promote conformity while also creating individuals who are selfish and self-interested, potentially fostering greed and/or supremacy.

When you consider how to maximize the positive aspects of human rights within a school community, you must consider the idea that human rights include treating individuals with dignity and respect, regardless of defining characteristics such as race, religion, gender, socioeconomic class etc. When support networks are created, individualized learning opportunities maximized, individual student interests embraced, students empowered to be independent, and the unique needs of individual students

considered, the positive aspects of human rights are maximized. However, participants in

this study indicated that although schools provide individualized supports for students, it

is extremely limited and often falls on teachers to provide students with support and

empathy within their classrooms, because school resources are so inadequate. Participants

were able to identify many essential supports and programs that students *should* be

provided to meet their individual needs, but that schools are not able to do this on a large

scale for all students. Participants recognized that although they are the people within the

school most likely to observe or detect serious issues students may be facing, there is

limited action they can take to resolve and support students either within their classroom

or within the school. As participants lamented, lack of funding and manpower within

districts and schools have led to the elimination of essential programs for students such as

vocational technical programs, comprehensive mental health support, programs to

support teen mothers and homeless teens and others, which lead to a belief that the needs

of individual students are not being met consistently. And further, rigid discipline policies

do not afford educators the opportunity to treat students as individuals, nor do they

empower students to be independent and active participants in their own destiny as

students. Suspensions, both in- and out-of-school added to the isolation and

disconnection many students feel within the school and diminishes their ability to achieve

a sense of independence and belonging. These actions may cause students to become

selfish and interested only in themselves, feeling that since the school will not or cannot

care for and protect them, they will need to take care of themselves. Additionally, when

schools are unable to provide the basic needs and supports all students require to be

successful, this may lead to feelings of superiority for the more successful students which research suggests is White, higher income, and higher performing students.

Unfortunately, the negative aspects of human rights were more evident from the data collected than the positive aspects. When asked, participants shared that focusing more on individual student rights would ultimately create stronger school communities. There was evidence that at least one of the schools represented in this study was attempting to create a system, a care team, to address individual student needs and concerns in a just and equitable fashion with the belief that the health of the community, as a whole, was dependent on the health of individual students which aligns with the polarities of democracy theory. This care team included school counselors, administrators, community partners, teachers, and others, who shape comprehensive plans to support students facing significant challenges. By creating and implementing these plans to support individual students, the belief is that the entire school community will be stronger and healthier. This was one example of how schools can maximize the positive elements of human rights.

There was evidence of the presence of both positive and negative aspects of communal obligations in the data. Schools created opportunities to build and support the school community through sports, the arts, student governance, and other student groups which seek to bring students together as a community with shared goals. Participants described how their schools participated in community-based projects and service-learning opportunities and how that helped to foster a stronger sense of community and positive culture. The evidence also suggests that the presence of and strength of school

spirit was indicative of that sense of community and culture of shared values and commitments. Participants described the positive feeling and strong sense of community that existed when not only teachers, but also students attended and supported the sports teams and other school activities such as theatre productions or fundraising activities, i.e., car washes etc., and wore "spirit wear" during the school day and at these activities. The evidence further suggested that it was critical that staff promote and support school activities to encourage students to do the same, again contributing to a shared sense of community. Additionally, building a strong sense of community and a strong culture within the school community was mentioned by participants as a way to support and promote the success of all students and the school. Further, the data supported the idea that the development of school spirit and a strong school identity was important in creating a sense of community. This is evident through the degree to which students attend and support school sports, both home and away games, community service-learning activities, and even the amount of school spirit clothing that teachers saw being worn by students, as mentioned above. The concept that students should see themselves as part of the larger school community is an important positive aspect of communal obligations.
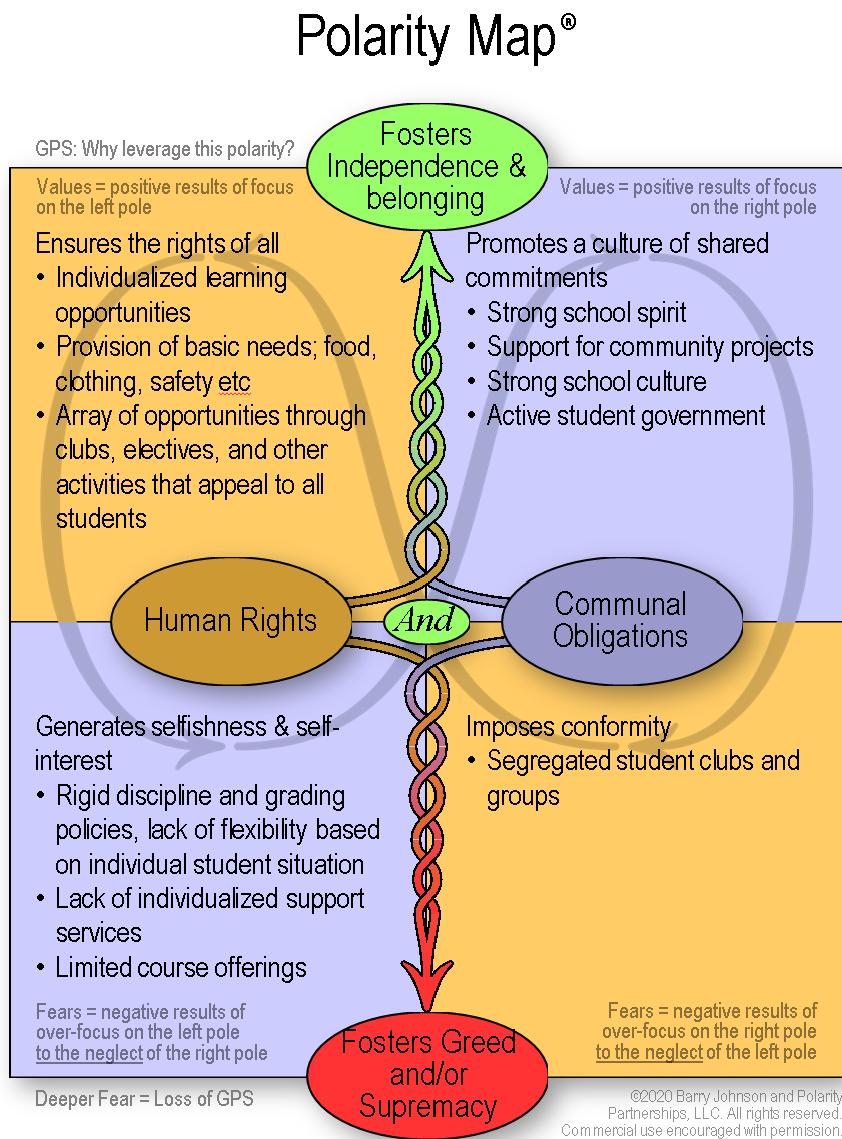
The evidence from this study indicated that schools regularly create and promote groups where students can gather and interact with students of similar interests, or as specific racial or ethnic groups, such as the Latino Club for example, or the Future Business Leaders of America. These groups filled the needs of large groups of students and provided a sense of community with a shared vision and shared goals. However, the

creation of these groups may also lead to potential racial or other divides among students, which is inconsistent with the polarities of democracy theory. Additionally, it may lead to more conformity among students, with students associating almost exclusively with members of their groups, dressing similarly, participating in the same activities, congregating together during school activities, and excluding others not associated with the group. Although these groups provide opportunities for students to have a sense of belonging and shared commitments within this small group, the potential isolation of these groups from one another could prove to be a negative aspect of communal obligations. Additionally, these separate groups may lead to students feeling a sense of supremacy or entitlement and leading to the oppression of others.

As shown in Figure 2, the Institute for the Polarities of Democracy has created a visual representation of the interrelation among the two values of the polarity pairs. Using this visual, I added specific examples from this study to help illustrate some of the positive and negative aspects of the values of human rights and communal obligations that were identified within this study. The figure also illustrates the potential outcome of maximizing the positive aspects of each value, fostering independence, and belonging. While maximizing the negative aspects are shown to potentially foster greed and supremacy.

Figure 2

Polarities of Democracy Map for Human Rights and Communal Obligations

Polarity Map®

GPS: Why leverage this polarity?

Values = positive results of focus on the left pole

Values = positive results of focus on the right pole

Fosters Independence & belonging

Ensures the rights of all
- Individualized learning opportunities
- Provision of basic needs; food, clothing, safety etc
- Array of opportunities through clubs, electives, and other activities that appeal to all students

Promotes a culture of shared commitments
- Strong school spirit
- Support for community projects
- Strong school culture
- Active student government

Human Rights　*And*　**Communal Obligations**

Generates selfishness & self-interest
- Rigid discipline and grading policies, lack of flexibility based on individual student situation
- Lack of individualized support services
- Limited course offerings

Imposes conformity
- Segregated student clubs and groups

Fears = negative results of over-focus on the left pole <u>to the neglect</u> of the right pole

Fears = negative results of over-focus on the right pole <u>to the neglect</u> of the left pole

Deeper Fear = Loss of GPS

Fosters Greed and/or Supremacy

Note. Map structure used by permission of the Polarity Partnerships, LLC. Map content used by permission of the Institute for Polarities of Democracy

Although this study was intended to concentrate on the polarity pair of human

rights and communal obligations, there was evidence within the participants' responses of

positive and negative aspects of the diversity and equality pair and the justice and due process pair. When the positive aspects of the polarity pair of diversity and equality are maximized and the negative aspects minimized, societies may obtain the greater purpose of fostering opportunity and sufficiency. When the negative aspects are maximized, there is risk of fostering disparities and complacency. Within the justice and due process pair, maximizing the positive aspects fosters feelings of fairness and protection while maximizing the negative aspects can lead to retribution and insensitivity. Although there was not enough data to truly evaluate how schools manage these two pairs, since questions were not directed specifically to obtain this information, there was evidence that these two pairs may be critical in evaluating schools as a democratic society. Evaluating schools using these two additional pairs, and possibly the full five pairs is a suggested area for future research.

Impact of COVID

Lastly, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic potentially contributed to the perceptions of participants during this study. The initial intent was that interviews would be conducted in person, but the pandemic necessitated the interviews be conducted utilizing the Zoom platform. It is impossible to determine the impact this may have had on participants, their perceptions, and the establishment of rapport between participant and researcher. At the time of the study, APS had just completed its second school year of online learning and there was an understandable "Zoom fatigue" experienced by educators during this time. This may have also contributed to educators' unwillingness to participate in this study. Although this researcher encouraged participants to respond to

questions based on their perceptions prior to the COVID pandemic's impact, it is difficult to determine if all participants were able to do so. It is a fair assumption that the COVID pandemic may have had some impact on educators' perceptions during this study, but the impact of COVID on the educational system, its students, and its educators is difficult to determine until further research can be completed.

Limitations of the Study

The goal of this qualitative study was to gather the perceptions of school administrators, teachers, and school counselors from APS high schools on the strengths and weakness of the CIS model and its positive or negative impact on graduation rates. The interviews collected from the 12 participants provided a wealth of information, but limitations exist. Of the 12 participants, two were school counselors and the remainder were teachers. There were no school administrators represented within the participant pool. The perceptions of administrators are an important piece that would help researchers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the CIS model and its implementation within the APS schools. Additionally, having only two school counselors participate in this study is another limitation. The disparity in understanding of the CIS model between the teacher participants and the school counselor participants was significant and could use further examination.

The second major limitation is that only eight of the participants were aware of the CIS model and their awareness was limited in several cases. This meant that only a small number of participants were truly able to share perceptions of the model, including its strength and weaknesses, based on a comprehensive understanding of the model. This

limitation could be addressed by altering the sampling procedure to include only those high school educators familiar with the model. However, the finding of only 67.0% familiarity of the model is significant and may lend itself to additional, relevant conclusions.

The third notable limitation is the site of the study. This study included only one urban school district, Atlanta Public Schools in Atlanta, Georgia. Expanded studies in other urban districts across the United States would be helpful in broadening our understanding of the CIS model and its strengths and weaknesses across multiple school districts in a variety of geographic areas.

Lastly, the primary focus on only one of the five polarity pairs of the polarities of democracy theory should be considered a limitation and future studies utilizing this theory to explore schools should focus on all five pairs because all five pairs are interrelated. Management of the positive and negative aspects of the remaining four pairs; participation and representation, freedom and authority, justice and due process, and diversity and equality is essential in determining a school's ability to create healthy and just communities. A full examination of a school through the lens of polarities of democracy, all five polarity pairs, would be extremely valuable research and could potentially contribute to the field. If a large urban school could fully maximize the positive aspects and minimize the negative aspects of all 5 pairs, they have an opportunity to manage the systemic change necessary to create urban high school communities where all students can be successful.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings from this study and the limitations, there are several recommendations for future research. Research which analyzes a school or school district using the polarities of democracy as the theoretical framework, including all five polarity pairs is highly recommended. Although this study focused primarily on the human rights and communal obligations pair, it was evident, as stated previously, that further analysis using the other polarity pairs would have been possible and is recommended.

Additionally, the work that the Institute for Polarities of Democracy is doing, related to creating an assessment tool to be used to evaluate organizations, would be extremely valuable as a research study, if used to assess a public school or school district. A study which utilizes these tools, once completed, could yield extremely valuable information related to whether or not a school is creating a more just society for its members, both students and staff. The literature shows that schools have not been assessed using this type of measure, but an analysis such as this could be a critical complement to other assessment measures, such as achievement and graduation data, as well as attendance and behavioral data. These measures, taken in totality, could be used to create a comprehensive profile of a school, with clear warning signs and action steps to be taken, to increase the possibility that schools could attain the greater purpose of human emancipation for its students within the limitations of a school.

It is also recommended that future research studies include the perceptions of students. This study focused on the perception of teachers and school counselors, but it is important to recognize that the perceptions of students, as it relates to the CIS model,

could be very valuable. Although only a limited number of participants in this study were very familiar with the CIS model, it may be that students are aware of the services provided and consider them valuable to their school and themselves. Additionally, student perceptions related to what services, programs, and resources would contribute to their success in high school could be valuable for schools and districts to know.

Lastly, this case study used APS as its single case, so the results are limited to only this district. Future research that evaluates the CIS model within other urban school districts could shed light on whether the CIS model in APS is flawed in its implementation, or whether the lack of awareness of its services is typical of its implementation across the country. As mentioned previously, CIS promotes a three-tiered approach to supporting its schools, but there was no awareness by any participants of two of those essential tiers. However, if other districts and schools are successfully implementing these additional services, whole school and small group elements that support more students, it could potentially suggest that the model in its intended design, does work.

Implications

The goal of this research was to collect and analyze the perspectives of urban educators as they relate to the CIS model and its potential impact on students, specifically as it relates to graduation rates. The data collected from the participants suggest both social change and public policy implications at the individual school and district level. There are challenges with both social change efforts within schools and policy changes in

education, thus making large systemic changes a continual challenge for school boards and districts throughout the nation.

Social Change Implications

From a social change perspective, the data supports the idea that lack of manpower and funding in schools directly decreases the support provided to individual students which limits the success of students, including their ability and willingness to remain in school and graduate with their peers. And as outlined in previous chapters, raising graduation rates led to better long-term outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. Schools and districts should continually review the funding structure and budget allotments discussed below, as well as aggressively exploring funding opportunities available through private foundations or other grant making organizations. It is uncommon for schools to fund positions whose individual responsibility it is to seek outside funding to support in-school programming. However, this may be a significant missed opportunity. Giving USA 2021: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2020, was released in June 2021 and showed that philanthropic giving by individuals, bequests, foundations, and corporations totaled an estimated $471.44 billion to U.S. charities in 2020 and more importantly, giving to education increased 9% to $71.34 billion (Giving USA, 2020). This increase was attributed to many factors, including an increase in giving to support racial justice initiatives which often translates to support for urban youth and urban education. Schools could potentially capitalize on this positive philanthropic movement to fund programs that promote student success and help students to remain in school.

Secondly, all participants in this study who were aware of the CIS model within their school, praised the services and supports the organization provides to students. However, not all participants were aware of the CIS model even though their high school had these services, which is unfortunate. And those that were aware had a very limited understanding of what services were provided. No participants knew of school-wide programming CIS provided or even small group services that may have been provided. The evidence suggests that, at least at the high schools represented in this study, the CIS model may not be realizing its full potential, thus students may be missing out on valuable services and supports. It seems critical that APS, in conjunction with CIS, must evaluate the range of services they provide in each of their schools, potentially add more services across the three tiers, and must also more strongly promote the services available to students. Collaboration between teachers, those closest to the students, and the CIS coordinator, may help to bring about a greater awareness of the needs of students and services provided, thus ultimately having a greater impact on students. Additionally, potential funding, as discussed above, could assist in expanding the CIS programs within each high school.

Additionally, the evidence suggests that more can and should be done to build a culture of shared commitments within schools. Although there was evidence to suggest that small groups of students with similar demographics or interests were developed and led to shared values and goals, there was only limited evidence to suggest this was done on a broader scale, with the full school community actively supporting a culture of shared values, commitments, and beliefs. Further evaluation of school culture and an

examination of how small groups of students can work collaboratively with one another to build connections among more students, would be valuable.

Lastly, as suggested earlier, the idea of using the polarities of democracy theory as a way to evaluate and more fully understand how schools function, could be critical in determining the overall health of the school community, including the health of its individual students. This could be a valuable exercise in determining if schools are fostering a sense of belonging among all students and contributing to the development of a healthy, sustainable, and just community within the school inclusive of both students and staff. Information from a comprehensive assessment could support targeted activities to teach schools how to more effectively manage the positive aspects of the five polarity pairs, while minimizing the negative aspects, thus enhancing the basic principles of democracy.

Public Policy Implications

The results of this study align with the literature which recognizes the need to provide additional services to individual students while there continues to be limited studies on policy development in public education. However, it is critical for districts like APS to create specific, targeted policies that support high schools with the lowest graduation rates. For 2019, APS had a traditional high school with a 100% graduation rate and another at only 58.3% (Atlanta Public Schools, 2021). This data point suggests the need for APS and other districts with similar profiles to create policies that utilize a weighted funding formula which provides more funding to the lowest performing schools. Although districts often treat schools similarly from a budgeting lens, it is clear

from this data that different schools likely need different programming support specific to

their student population, thus different and potentially creative funding is essential. This

disparity in graduation rates among two high schools in the same city is unacceptable,

continues to negatively impact whole communities, and should be viewed and considered

through a policy change lens at the district level.

In addition, policies created by the local boards of education and implemented by

the schools must be directed at the needs of students, which may mean an increased focus

on intervention policies. Based on this study and others, policies may not necessarily

outline the specific intervention program schools should use, however, there should be

clear policies that require schools to implement comprehensive, student-centered policies

laser focused on improving graduation rates. As the Building a Grad Nation report

suggests, policies aimed at the use of early warning systems, an idea familiar to many but

implemented only rarely, can be effective in increasing graduation rates (Atwell et al.,

2021). We know the key predictors that lead to students dropping out of high school and

these early warning systems, used in Chicago and West Virginia, have been instrumental

in identifying and supporting students with low attendance, behavior challenges, and poor

academic performance leading to substantial increases in graduation rates (Atwell et al.,

2021). With the success seen in other urban districts, this tangible and proven

intervention tool should be considered as APS and its board of education considers new

policies to support the schools.

School districts should closely evaluate its policies as they relate to discipline and

attendance. The participants in this study indicated that students are often absent due to

family challenges outside their control, such as homelessness, lack of transportation, providing care to younger siblings, and having to take on additional responsibilities within the family due to the absence of caregivers. The consequence for repeated absences is often loss of credit, even for students whose work is receiving passing grades. These strict policies do not consider the specific situation a student might be facing, instead they apply a blanket consequence. Once students lose credit for courses due to attendance, it can be extremely difficult to catch up and this loss of credit can cause students to feel hopeless and become disengaged with school, as suggested by the literature and the findings of this study. Allowing online submission of work or other accommodations could potentially avoid students, willing and able to complete the work satisfactorily, to lose credit for courses. Additionally, behavioral policies that include frequent in- and out-of-school suspensions, without consideration for contributing causes, can also cause students to disengage from school and to feel more isolated from their peers and the school community. Policies such as these, and others, apply consequences for actions while ignoring the root causes of the behaviors. Schools should consider a review of their policies and potentially a redesign to include more support for students exhibiting challenging behaviors, including repeated absences. Early warning systems, mentioned previously, could connect students to available school- or community-based services to help manage the causes of these behaviors, treating the root cause instead of only the symptoms.

Lastly, the literature review and results from this study strongly suggest the need for schools to have consistent and effective relationships with community-based

organizations who can support students and families with needs outside the purview of the school district. The services provided by community-based organizations are essential in meeting the needs of students beyond the academic support provided within the school. By supporting the whole student, school districts can minimize some of the negative impacts of those external factors, that often cause students to leave high school prior to graduation. School districts can take a proactive approach to supporting students by creating policies that require schools to establish and maintain relationships with community-based service providers and track the number of students involved with community support services. Policies could require the establishment of collaborative groups that include school or district personnel and representatives from critical community groups, civic groups, business partners, and governmental offices that support housing, youth development, workforce development, food insecurity, counseling, and other services within their communities, that meet regularly to discuss the overall needs of the school community as well as individual student needs. School-wide, small group, and individual student support opportunities could be discussed and implemented by this collaborative group, providing essential, comprehensive services to schools.

Conclusion

As many school districts continue to struggle with low graduation rates, even while overall state-wide graduation rates are rising, more needs to be done to support our most vulnerable students who deserve the opportunity of economic mobility and choice filled lives. Without a high school diploma, many adults struggle to become successful, contributing members of society who have the opportunity to own homes, send their

children to good schools, participate in local civic and community activities, and generally contribute to the health and strength of their community. African American, Hispanic, and low-income students are particularly vulnerable as adults without a high school diploma and continue to lag behind their same-age White and non-low-income peers in graduation rates. The fight to raise graduation rates needs to continue, with a focus on our most challenging schools and districts.

The perceptions of teachers in APS align with the literature in recognizing the need for more targeted interventions, those that fully support our urban schools and the most vulnerable students. Further, these supports go beyond academic tutoring or other school-based services. What students really require, are services that provide them with the support they need to effectively manage external factors negatively impacting their ability and willingness to stay in school. Community-based organizations are essential in providing the type of comprehensive care that students and families need, but it currently does not appear, based on this study, that these services are being consistently provided to students within APS at a level that is having the necessary impact. Communities in Schools – Atlanta is one potential service provider within APS, but its reach and effectiveness appear to be limited and further examination is needed to determine how to increase the positive impact it has on students and ultimately, its future role within APS.

Participants in this study recognize the opportunity and benefit that supporting individual students has on the school community as a whole. They understand that by meeting the needs of individual students and building a strong sense of community among all students, the school will be more successful, as will the individual students.

These beliefs algin with the theoretical framework for this study and leads to questions about the potential use of the polarities of democracy theory in evaluating schools. With the ultimate goal of achieving the higher purpose of human emancipation and creating healthy, sustainable, and just communities, the application of polarities of democracy within schools holds great promise and should be explored further.

References

Allensworth, E. (2015). Dropout prevention: A previously intractable problem addressed through systems for monitoring and supporting students. In *Prevention science in school settings* (pp. 353-370). Springer.

America's Promise Alliance (2019). *Our Work.* Retrieved from https://www.americaspromise.org/.

Amin, V., Flores, C. A., Flores-Lagunes, A., & Parisian, D. J. (2016). The effect of degree attainment on arrests: Evidence from a randomized social experiment. *Economics of Education Review,54*, 259-273. doi: 10.1016/j.econedurev.2016.02.006.

Anderson Moore, K. & Emig, C., (2014). *Integrated student supports: A summary of the evidence base for policymakers* (Vol. 2014-05, pp. 1-8). Bethesda, MD: Child Trends. https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-05ISSWhitePaper3.pdf.

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2015). *Changing the odds – the race for results in Atlanta.* Atlanta, GA.

Atlanta Public Schools, 2020. *APS Reaches All-Time Graduation Rate High of 80.3 Percent*. [online] Available at: <https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&ModuleInstanceID=94452&ViewID=7b97f7ed-8e5e-4120-848f-a8b4987d588f&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=91490&PageID=65023> [Accessed 27 March 2022].

Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative
research. *Qualitative Research*, *1*(3), 385–
405. https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410100100307

Atwell, M., Balfanz, R., DiPaoli, J. L., & Bridgeland, J. (2018). *Building a Grad Nation:
Progress and challenge in raising high school graduation rates. Annual update
2018*(pp. 1-84, Rep.). Baltimore, MD: Civic Enterprises Everyone Graduates
Center at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University.
https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED585524.pdf.

Atwell, M. N., Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J. M., Byrnes, V., & Manspile, E. (2021, October
6). *Building A Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Raising High School
Graduation Rates*. Retrieved from
https://gradnation.americaspromise.org/report/2021-building-grad-nation-report

Axelroth, R. (2009). *The community schools approach: Raising graduation and college
going rates— Community high school case studies.* Washington, DC: Coalition
for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership.

Babinski, L. M., Corra, A. J., & Gifford, E. J. (2016). Evaluation of a public awareness
campaign to prevent high school dropout. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 37*(4),
361-375. doi: 10.1007/s10935-016-0438-3

Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J., Fox, J., DePaoli, J., Ingram, E., & Maushard, M. (2014).
*Building a grad nation: Progress and challenge in ending the high school dropout
epidemic* (Rep.). Retrieved from
http://gradnation.org/sites/default/files/17548_BGN_Report_FinalFULL_5.2.14.p

df.

Balu, R., Zhu, P., Doolittle, F., Schiller, E., Jenkins, J. & Gersten, R. (2015). Evaluation
of response to intervention practices for elementary school reading. *Institute of
Education Sciences.* Retrieved from
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20164000/pdf/20164000.pdf.

Barrat, V. & Berliner, B. (2016). Characteristics and education outcomes of Utah high-
school dropouts who re-enrolled. *Institute of Education Sciences.* Retrieved from
http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED570170.pdf.

Benet, W. (2006). *The polarity management model of workplace democracy* (Doctoral
dissertation, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of
Toronto, Canada). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text
database, UMI Publishing. (Order No. NR15724).

Benet, W. (2012). *The polarities of democracy: A theoretical framework for building a
healthy, sustainable, and just communities.* Retrieved from
http://socialeconomics.org/Papers/Benet6A.pdf.

Benet, W. J. (2013a, July). *The case for public education: A question of survival.* Paper
presented at the Fourth Annual Conference in Political Economy, International
Initiative of Promotion of Political Economy, the Institute for Social Studies,
Erasmus University, The Hague, the Netherlands, July 9-13, 2013. Retrieved from
http://iippe.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/IIPPE-2013-Paper-WJ-Benet.pdf.

Benet, W. J. (2013b). Managing the polarities of democracy: A theoretical framework for
positive social change. *Journal of Social Change 5*(1), 26-39. doi:

http://dx.doi.org/10.5590/JOSC.2013.http://dx.doi.org/10.5590/JOSC.2013.05.1.0
305.1.03

Benet, W. J., Keyser, W. C., & Rackl, S. E. (2022). *A set of basic maps for the polarities of democracy theory*. Institute for the Polarities of Democracy.

Berger, A., Adelman, N., & Cole, S. (2010). The early college high school initiative: An overview of five evaluation years. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *85*(3), 333-347.

Bernstein, L., Edmunds, J. & Fesler, L. (2014). Closing the performance gap: The impact of Early College High School Model on unprepared students. *Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness Spring 2014 Conference Abstract*. 1-4. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED562689.pdf.

Blount, T. (2012). Dropout prevention: Recommendations for school counselors. *North Carolina State University Dissertation.* 1-33. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ981196.pdf.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). Greenwood Press.

Boston Public Schools. (2015). BPS graduation rate hits all-time high, dropout rate at all time low [Press Release]. Retrieved from http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/site/Default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=4&PageID=1&ViewID=047e6be3-6d87-4130-8424-d8e4e9ed6c2a&FlexDataID=6667.

Boston Public Schools, BPS Communications Office. (2014). Boston Public Schools at a glance 2014. Retrieved from

http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib07/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/
238/BPS%20at%20a%20Glance%2014-0502.pdf.

Boston Public Schools, Office of Data and Accountability (2013). 4-Year graduation rate
by cohort group. Retrieved from
http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib07/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/
238/Cohort%202013%204-Y%20Graduation%20Rate%20Report_FINAL.pdf.

Bourshek, A. (2016). Degree of practice of the concept of community school from the
perspective of discovery school teachers in Amman. *Journal of Education and
Practice, 7*(27). 26-33. Retrieved from
http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1115976.pdf.

Brackmann, S. (2015). Community engagement in a neoliberal paradigm. *Journal of
Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 19*(4). 115-146. Retrieved from
http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1086112.pdf.

Butts, R. F. (1980). *The revival of civic learning*. Phi Delta Kappa Educational
Foundation.

Campbell, C. (2015). The socioeconomic consequences of dropping out of high school:
Evidence from an analysis of siblings. *Social Science Research,51*, 108-118.
doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.12.011.

Carlson, C. (2014). Dropout factories and the vaccination approach: The impact of the
dropout rate on the economy and the need for effective literacy instruction.
SRATE Journal, 23(2). 1-7. Retrieved from
http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1044755.pdf.

Case, A. & Traynor, J. (2016). Early field experience innovations to increase positive

impact on K-12 students. *AILACTE Journal, 13*. 1-21. Retrieved from

http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1130327.pdf.

Casto, H. (2016). Just one more thing I have to do: School-community partnerships.

School Community Journal, 26(1). 139-162. Retrieved from

http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1104400.pdf.

Casto, H., McGrath, B., Sipple, J. & Todd, L. (2016). Community aware education policy

enhancing individual and community vitality. *Education Policy Analysis*

Archives, 24(50). 1-30. doi: 10.14507/epaa.v24.2148.

Chang, A., & Rabe Thomas, J. (2014). *Federal report: CT has among largest*

achievement gaps in graduation rates (Rep.). Hartford, CT: The CT Mirror.

Christian, M. (2015). School location, school section and students' gender as predictors

to secondary school dropout rate in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Journal of Education*

and Practice, 6(28). 113-118. Retrieved from

http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1081234.pdf.

Communities in Schools – Atlanta (2019). *About Us.* Retrieved from

https://www.cisatlanta.org/.

Communities in Schools – Georgia (2011). *Communities in Schools of Georgia: A history*

of accomplishments. Retrieved from http://www.cisga.org/cisgawpress/wp-

content/uploads/2011/12/CISGA-history-document.pdf.

Communities in Schools – Georgia (2015). *Building a strong talent pipeline:*

Communities in Schools Georgia 2014-2015 Annual Report. Retrieved from

http://www.cisga.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2014-2015-CISGA-
ANNREPORT-final.pdf.

Corrin, W., Parise, L., Cerna, O., Haider, Z., & Somers, M. (2015). Case management for
students at risk of dropping out: Implementation and interim impact findings from
the Communities in Schools evaluation. doi: 10.2139/ssrn.2609366.

Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. (2018) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing
among five approaches*. 4th Edition, SAGE Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks.

Dewey, J. (1916/1966). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of
education.* New York: The Free Press.

Diaz-Strong, D. X., & Ybarra, M. A. (2016). Disparities in high school completion
among Latinos: The role of the age-at-arrival and immigration status. *Children
and Youth Services Review*, *71*, 282-289.

Doll, J., Eslami, Z. & Walters, L. (2013). Understanding why students drop out of high
school, according to their own reports: Are they pushed or pulled, or do they fall
out? A comparative analysis of seven nationally representative studies. *SAGE
Open*. 1-15. doi: 10.1177/2158244013503834.

Dupere, V., Leventhal, T., Dion, E., Crosnoe, R., Archambault, I. & Janosz, M. (2015).
Stressors and turning points in high school and dropout: A stress process, life
course framework. *Review of Educational Research, 85*(4). 591-629. doi:
10.3102/0034654314559845.

Ecker-Lyster, M. & Niileksela, C. (2016). Keeping students on track to graduate: A
synthesis of school dropout trends, prevention and intervention initiatives. *The

Journal of At-Risk Issues, 19(2). 24-31. Retrieved from

http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1117591.pdf.

Edmunds, J. A., Bernstein, L., Unlu, F., Glennie, E., Willse, J., Smith, A., & Arshavsky,

N. (2012). Expanding the start of the college pipeline: Ninth-grade findings from

an experimental study of the impact of the early college high school

model. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, *5*(2), 136-159.

Fadlon, Y., & Tripp, S. (2015). The gray area: high school dropout likelihood among skin

tone levels of black males. *Econometrics Letters*, *2*(2), 1-11.

Fehrer, K. & Leos-Urbel, J. (2016). "We're one team": Examining community school

implementation strategies in Oakland. *Education Sciences, 6*(26). 1-24.

doi: 10.3390/educsci6030026.

Figlio, D. (2015). Experimental evidence of the effects of the Communities in Schools of

Chicago partnership program on student achievement. *Evanston, IL:*

Northwestern University and the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Fowler, C., Test, D., Cease-Cook, J., Toms, O., Bartholomew, A. & Scroggins, L. (2014).

Policy implications of high school reform on college and career readiness of

youth with disabilities. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 25*(1). 19-29. doi:

10.1177/1044207313518072.

Fowler, M., & Luna, G. (2009). High school and college partnerships: Credit-based

transition programs. *American Secondary Education*, 38(1), 62-76. doi:

1898877321.

Freeman, J., & Simonsen, B. (2015). Examining the impact of policy and practice

interventions on high school dropout and school completion rates: A systematic

review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 85*(2). 205-248. doi:

10.3102/0034654314554431.

Freeman, J., Simonsen, B., McCoach, B., Sugai, G., Lombardi, A. & Homer, R. (2015).

An analysis of the relationship between implementation of school-wide positive

behavior interventions and supports in high school dropout rates. *The High School*

Journal, 98(4). 290-315. doi: 10.1353/hsj.2015.0009.

Georgia Department of Education. (2014, October 30). *Georgia's high school graduation*

rate increases again [Press Release]. Retrieved from

https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-

Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid

=242#targetText=October%2030%2C%202014%20%E2%80%93%20Georgia's

%20public,5.1%20percentage%20points%20since%202011.

Giving USA. *Giving USA 2020: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2019*, a

publication of Giving USA Foundation, 2020, researched and written by the

Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Available online

at www.givingusa.org

Green, T. & Gooden, M. (2014). Transforming out-of-school challenges into

opportunities: Community schools reform in the Midwest. *Urban Review, 49*(8).

930-954. doi: 10.1177/0042085914557643.

Griffith, J. L. (2017). *Perceptions of homeless shelter staff workers on chronic homeless*

individuals (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University, School of Public Policy

and Administration). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global Full

 Text database, UMI Publishing. (Order No. 10285279).

Gross, J. M., Haines, S. J., Hill, C., Francis, G. L., Blue-Banning, M., & Turnbull, A. P.

 (2015). Strong school-community partnerships in inclusive schools are "part of

 the fabric of the school....we count on them". *School Community Journal*, *25*(2),

 9.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). *Effective evaluation: Improving the usefulness of*

 evaluation results through responsive and naturalistic approaches. San Francisco,

 CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hands, C. (2014). Youth perspectives on community collaboration in education: Are

 students innovative developers, active participants or passive observers of

 collaborative activities? *School Community Journal, 24*(1). 69-97. Retrieved from

 http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1032242.pdf.

Hartman, S., Stotts, J., Ottley, J. & Miller, R. (2016). School-community partnerships in

 rural settings: Facilitating positive outcomes for young children who experience

 maltreatment. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. 1-8. doi: 10.1007/s10643-016-

 0796-8.

Hartmann, T., Good, D. & Edmunds, K. (2011). Exito: Keeping high-risk youth on track

 to graduation through out-of-school time supports. *Afterschool Matters.* 20-29.

 Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ980182.pdf.

Hawkins, R., Jaccard, J. & Needle, E. (2013). Non-academic factors associated with

 dropping out of school: Adolescent problem behaviors. *Journal of the Society for*

Social Work and Research, 4(2). 58-75. doi: 10.5243/jsswr.2013.

Haydarov, R., Moxley, V., & Anderson, D. (2013). Counting chickens before they are hatched: An examination of student retention, graduation, attrition, and dropout measurement validity in an online master's environment. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *14*(4), 429–449.

Heers, M., van Klaveren, C., Groot, W. & van den Brink, H. (2014). The impact of community schools on student dropout in pre-vocational education. *Economics of Education Review, 41*. 105-119. doi: 10.1016/j.econedurev.2014.05.003.

Heers, M., van Klaveren, C., Groot, W. & van den Brink, H. (2016). Community schools: what we know and what we need to know. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(4). 1016-1051. doi: 10.3102/0034654315627365.

Heppen, J., O'Cummings, M., Poland, L., Zeiser, K. & Mills, N. (2015). Implementation and impact of the Check & Connect Monitoring Program. *Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness.* 1-5. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED562323.pdf.

Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education Magazine. Community schools seek to improve high school achievement and college readiness. (2015, September 3). Retrieved from http://www.hispanicoutlook.com/marilyn-gilroy/2015/9/3/community-schools-seek-to-improve-high-schoolachievement-and-college-to-improve-high-schoolachievement-and-college-readiness.

Hollands, F., Bowden, A., Belfield, C., Levin, H., Cheng, H., Shand, R., Pan, Y. & Hanisch-Cerda, B. (2014). Cost-effectiveness analysis in practice: Interventions to

improve high school completion. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,*
36(3). 307-326. doi: 10.3102/0162373713511850.

Hunt, M. H., Meyers, J., Davies, G., Meyers, B., Grogg, K. R., & Neel, J. (2002). A
comprehensive needs assessment to facilitate prevention of school dropout and
violence. *Psychology in the Schools*, *39*(4), 399-416.

Ice, M., Thapa, A. & Cohen, J. (2015). Recognizing community voice and a youth-led
school-community partnership in the school climate improvement process. *School*
Community Journal, 25(1). 9-28. Retrieved from
http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1066254.pdf.

Irby, D., Mawhinney, L. & Thomas, K. (2013). Re-examining participatory research in
dropout prevention planning in urban communities. *Educational Action Research,*
21(2). 267-283. doi: 10.1080/09650792.2013.789732.

Jang, H., Valero, J., Kim, J. & Cramb, C. (2015). Understanding nonprofit collaborations:
A case study of Communities in Schools of North Texas and its partner
organizations. *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs, 1*(2). 100-117. doi:
10.20899/jpna.1.2.100-117.

Jefferson, A. (2015). Examining barriers to equity: School policies and practices
prohibiting interactions of families and schools. *The Urban Review, 47*(1). 67-83.
doi: 10.1007/s11256-014-0284-7.

Johnson, B. (1996). *Polarity management: Identifying and managing unsolvable*
problems. Amherst, MA: HRD Press, Inc (originally published in 1992).

Kaniuka, T. (2017). Early college high school achievement outcomes in North Carolina:

End of grade and ACT performance. *International Journal*, *6*(4), 91-107.

Kearney, M. S., & Levine, P. B. (2014). *Income inequality, social mobility, and the decision to drop out of high school* (No. w20195). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Keil, M. J., Rupley, W. H., Nichols, J. A., Nichols, W. D., Paige, D., & Rasinski, T. V. (2016). Teachers' perceptions of engagement and effectiveness of school community partnerships: NASA's online STEM professional development. *Journal of Studies in Education*, *6*(2), 1-23.

Kemple, J. J., Snipes, J. C., & Manpower Demonstration Research Corp., N. Y. N. (2000). *Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Engagement and Performance in High School*.

Kemple, J. J., & Willner, C. J. (2008). Career academies: Long-term impacts on labor market outcomes and educational attainment, and transitions to adulthood. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

Kendall, N., Kaunda, Z. & Friedson-Rideneur, S. (2015). Community participation in international development education quality improvement efforts: Current paradoxes and opportunities. *Educational Assessment Evaluation and Access, 27*. 65-83. doi: 10.1007/s11092-015-9210-0.

Kim, K. (2013). Career trajectory in high school dropouts. *The Social Science Journal, 50(3),* 306-312. doi: 10.1016/j.soscij.2013.03.005.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Loring, A. (2015). A grounded approach to citizenship education: Local interplays

between government institutions, adult schools, and community events in

Sacramento, California. *Journal of Social Science Education, 14*(3). 54-65. doi:

10.2390/jsse-v14-i3-1392.

Los Angeles Unified School District. (2014). *Graduation rates in L.A. Unified improve*

by race [Press Release].

Luginbuhl, P. J., McWhirter, E. H., & McWhirter, B. T. (2016). Sociopolitical

development, autonomous motivation, and education outcomes: Implications for

low-income Latina/o adolescents. *Journal of Latina/o Psychology*, *4*(1), 43.

Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative

interview studies. *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1753-1760.

doi:10.1177/1049732315617444.

McClanahan, W., Gao, J. & Sanders, F. (2013). Out-of-school time in Elev8 community

schools: A first look at participation and its unique contribution to students'

experiences in school. 1-50. Retrieved from

http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED553132.pdf.

McFarland, J., Stark, P. & Cui, J. (2016). *Trends in high school dropout and completion*

rates in the United States: 2013 (NCES 2016-117). U.S. Department of

Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved

from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch.

McIntyre, J. & Knight, R. (2016). Revealing the community within: Valuing the role of

local community structures within evidence-based school intervention

programmes. *The Urban Review, 48*. 647-667. doi: 10.1007/s11256-016-0372-y.

McWhirter, E. H., Garcia, E. A., & Bines, D. (2017). Discrimination and other education barriers, school connectedness, and thoughts of dropping out among Latina/o students. *Journal of Career Development*, 0894845317696807.

Meeker, S., Edmonson, S. & Fisher, A. (2008). The voices of high school dropouts: Implications for research and practice. *The International Journal on School Disaffection.* 40-52.Trentham Books. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ871305.pdf.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, R. (2016). Perceptions of the effectiveness of Communities in Schools model at one rural Georgia performance learning center. *Electronic Theses & Dissertations*. 1493. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/1493.

Minton, S. (2016). Evidence-informed recommendations to promote black student engagement. *California State University, Northridge Papers*. 1-39. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1124056.pdf.

Morgan, S., & Rackin, H. (2010). The correspondence between fertility intentions and behavior in the United States. *Population and Development Review,36*(1), 91-118. doi: 10.1111/j.1728-4457.2010.00319.x.

Murray, N. & Tietjen, K. (2014). School Dropout Prevention Pilot – First follow up impacts. *Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness Spring 2014*

Conference Abstract. 1-4. Retrieved from

http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED562835.pdf.

Mwamba, M. (2016). Provision and management of special education in community

schools: A case of Donata, Malaikha and Shalom community schools in Zambia.

International Journal of Special Education, 31(1). 97-103. Retrieved from

http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1099979.pdf.

National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S.

Department of Education. (n.d.). The integrated postsecondary education data

system (IPEDS) [Glossary]. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/.

Parise, L. M., Corrin, W., Granito, K., Haider, Z., Somers, M., & Cerna, O. (2017). *Two*

years of case management: Final findings from the Communities in Schools

random assignment evaluation. (pp. 1-150, Rep.). MDRC.

https://www.mdrc.org/publication/two-years-case-management

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods. Thousand Oaks,

Calif: Sage Publications.

Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern

sociology. *Knowledge and Social Capital,24*, 1-24, 43-67. doi: 10.1016/b978-0-

7506-7222-1.50006-4.

Quinones, S. & Kiyama, J. (2014). Contra la corriente (Against the current): The role of

Latino fathers in family-school engagement. *School Community Journal, 24*(1).

149-176. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1032261.pdf.

Quintana, S. M., & Mahgoub, L. (2016). Ethnic and racial disparities in education:

Psychology's role in understanding and reducing disparities. *Theory Into Practice*, *55*(2), 94-103. doi: 10.1080/00405841.2016.1148985.

Rashid, M., Jahan, M., Islam, M. & Ratna, M. (2015). Student enrollment and dropout: An evaluation study of DCSA program at Bangladesh Open University. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 16*(4). 18-32. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1082204.pdf.

Reingle Gonzalez, J. M., Salas-Wright, C. P., Connell, N. M., Jetelina, K. K., Clipper, S. J., & Businelle, M. S. (2016). The long-term effects of school dropout and GED attainment on substance use disorders. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence,158*, 60-66. doi: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2015.11.002.

Resnick, M. D., Bearman, P. S., Blum, R. W., Bauman, K. E., Harris, K. M., Jones, J., & Udry, J. R. (1997). Protecting adolescents from harm: findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *Jama*, *278*(10), 823-832.

Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Fall, A. & Vaughn, M. (2013). Preventing school dropout with secondary students: The implementation of an individualized reading intervention and dropout prevention intervention. *Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness Spring 2013 Conference Abstract.* 1-4. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED564085.pdf.

Robertson, J., Smith, R. & Rinka, J. (2016). How did successful high schools improve their graduation rates? *Journal of At-Risk Issues,19*(1).10-18. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1104424.pdf.

Romo, V. (2015). *LA Unified graduation rates rise for a fourth straight year*. LA School Report. Retrieved from http://laschoolreport.com/la-unified-graduation-rates-rise-for-a-fourth-straight-year/.

Ross, T. (2016). The differential effects of parental involvement on high school completion and postsecondary attendance. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 24*(30). 1-38. doi: 10.14507/epaa.v24.2030.

Sáenz, K. P., & Combs, J. P. (2015). Experiences, perceived challenges, and support systems of early college high school students. *Administrative Issues Journal: Education, Practice, and Research*, *5*(1), 105-117.

Sahin, S., Arseven, Z. & Kilic, A. (2016). Causes of student absenteeism and school dropouts. *International Journal of Instruction, 9*(1). 195-210. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1086967.pdf.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Sawchuk, S. (2021 July 15). An Action Plan for Confronting Chronic Absenteeism This Fall. Education Week.

Schargel, F. P., & Smink, J. (2014). *Strategies to help solve our school dropout problem*. Routledge.

Scribner, J., Cockrell, K., Cockrell, D. & Valentine, J. (1999). Creating professional Communities in Schools through organizational learning: An evaluation of a school improvement process. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 35*(1). 130-160. doi: 10.1177/0013161X99351007.

Shahidul, S. (2013). Household decision-making process: It's effect on school dropout behavior for girls in the secondary school level in Bangladesh. *International Education Studies, 6*(1). 132-141. doi: 10.5539/ies.v6n1p132.

Shapira-Lishchinsky, O., & Gilat, I. (2015). Official policies and teachers' tendency to act: Exploring the discrepancies in teachers' perceptions. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 23*(82). 1-20. doi: 10.14507/epaa.v23.1996.

Stark, P., Noel, A. & McFarland, J. (2015). *Trends in high school dropout and completion rates in the United States: 1972–2012* (NCES 2015-015). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch.

Stefanski, A., Valli, L. & Jacobson, R. (2016). Beyond involvement and engagement: The role of the family in school-community partnerships. *School Community Journal, 26*(2). 135-160. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1124001.pdf.

Stone, D (2012) *Policy paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making.* 3rd Edition, Norton & Company.

Strouble, B. W., Jr. (2015). *Racism vs. social capital: A case study of two majority black communities* (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University, School of Public Policy and Administration). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global Full Text database, UMI Publishing. (Order No. 3717562)

Sulkowski, M., Demaray, M., & Lazarus, P. (2012). Connecting students to schools to support their emotional well-being and academic success. *The Newspaper of the National Association of School Psychologists*, *40*(7), 1, 20-22.

Sum, A. (2009). *The fiscal consequences of dropping out of school and failing to complete years of post-secondary schooling in Connecticut.* Boston, MA: Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University.

Tas, A., Selvitopu, A., Bora, V. & Demirkaya, Y. (2013). Reasons for dropout for vocational high school students. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 13*(3). 1561-1565. doi: 10.12738/estp.2013.3.1398.

Thompson, C., & Ongaga, K. (2011). "Flying the plane while we build it": A case study of an early college high school. *The High School Journal*, *94*(2), 43-57.

Tobor, J. (2014). Urhobo culture and the amnesty program in Niger Delta, Nigeria: An ethnographic case study. *Walden University Dissertations*. 1-207. Retrieved from http://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1127&context=disse rtations.

Tobor, J. & Shajkovci, A. (2016). Collective and individual disengagement from violence: Cognitive dissonance theory and polarities of democracy model underpinnings. *International Journal of Academic Research and Reflection, 4*(2). 57-64. Retrieved from http://www.idpublications.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Full-Paper-COLLECTIVE-AND-INDIVIDUAL-DISENGAGEMENT-FROM-VIOLENCE.pdf.

U.S. Department of Education, (2013). *National Center for Education Statistics, common*

core of data, local education agency universe survey dropout and completion

restricted-use data file: School year 2009-10 (version 2a) (NCES 2011-314).

Vaillancourt, K. & Amador, A. (2014/2015). School-community alliances enhance

mental health services. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 96*(4). 57-62. Retrieved from

http://www.jstor.org/stable/24376541.

Wagner, M. M., Newman, L. A., & Javitz, H. S. (2014). The influence of family

socioeconomic status on the post high school outcomes of youth with disabilities.

Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals, 37(1), 5-17. doi:

10.1177/2165143414523980.

Walsh, M., Lee-St. John, T., Raczek, A. & Foley, C. (2015). The long-term impact of

systematic student support in elementary school: Reducing high school dropout.

Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness Spring 2015 Conference

Abstract. B1-B9. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED562544.pdf.

Wells, R., Gifford, E., Bai, Y. & Corra, A. (2015). A network perspective on dropout

prevention in two cities. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 51*(1). 27-57. doi:

10.1177/0013161X13511110.

West End Academy – Performance Learning Academy (2002-2018). West End

Academy – Performance Learning Academy/Overview. Retrieved July 20, 2018,

from https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/westend.

What Works Clearinghouse (2009). High school Puente program. *WWC Intervention*

Report. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED506043.pdf.

What Works Clearinghouse (2015a). Career academies. *WWC intervention report.*

Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED559721.pdf.

What Works Clearinghouse (2015b). SuccessMaker®. *WWC Intervention Report.* Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED561238.pdf.

Wiggan, G. & Watson, M. (2016). Teaching the whole child: The importance of culturally responsiveness, community engagement, and character development in high achieving African American students. *The Urban Review, 48*. 766-798. doi: 10.1007/s11256-016-0377-6.

Wilkins, J. & Bost, L. (2016). Dropout prevention in middle and high schools: From research to practice. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 51*(5). 267-275. doi: 10.1177/1053451215606697.

Wilson, S. & Tanner-Smith, E. (2013). Dropout prevention and intervention programs for improving school completion among school-aged children and youth: A systematic review. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research, 4*(4). 357-372. doi: 10.5243/jsswr.2013.22.

Wong, V., Wing, C. & Martin, D. (2016). Do schools respond to pressure? Evidence from NCLB implementation details. *Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness Spring 2016 Conference Abstract.* 1-14. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED566978.pdf.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Yuane, J., Konold, T. & Cornell, D. (2016). Authoritative school climate and high school dropout rates. *School Psychology Quarterly, 31*(2). 289-303. doi: 10.1037/spq0000139.

Appendix A: Individual Interview Questions

1.	Describe your reasons for becoming a teacher.

2.	What are the biggest challenges you face as a teacher in the present day?

    a.	Have those challenges changed over time?

    b.	If you taught in a suburban district previously, how are those challenges different than those faced in urban districts?

3.	What do you believe is the single most challenging aspect facing urban school districts today?

4.	In what ways does West End Academy empower students to take independent action? Describe why you think this is the case.

5.	In what ways does West End Academy's staff and/or structure discourage students from taking independent action?

6.	In what ways does West End Academy create a shared sense of community among students and among students, teachers, administrators and school counselors? Please provide examples as to how this is evident in practice.

7.	In what ways does West End Academy isolate students from one another and/or from teachers, administrators, and school counselors?

8.	How do you balance the needs of each individual student with the needs of the school community and student body as a whole?

9.	What if teachers and schools focused primarily on the individual rights of students more than on the school community as a whole;

      a.   what would be the potential negative outcomes?

      b.   what would be the potential positive outcomes?

10.   What do you perceive as the top 3 reasons for students leaving high school prior to graduation?

11.   How do you think students can best be supported to remain in high school and obtain their diploma?

12.   If you could create any type of dropout prevention program, what essential elements would you include?

13.   Describe how West End Academy does or does not include some of these elements?

14.   Describe the components of the Communities in Schools model that make it unique.

15.   What do you believe to be the positive aspects of the CIS model?

16.   What do you believe to be the negative aspects of the CIS model?

17.   What are the critical elements of the CIS model that have the greatest positive impact on students?

Appendix B: Semistructured Interview Protocol

Pre-Interview Demographic Form

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Race Ethnicity:

Date & Time of Interview:

City of Residency:

Colleges and Universities Attended:

Degrees Held:

Years Teaching Total:

Years Teaching at High School Level:

Years Teaching in Atlanta:

Years at West End Academy – PLC:

Current Teaching Certifications:

Appendix C: Word Frequency Query Results and Word Cloud for Participant Responses

Word Frequency Query Results

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
know	4	1602	3.99
think	5	848	2.11
school	6	733	1.82
right	5	480	1.19
students	8	470	1.17
kids	4	456	1.13
kind	4	440	1.09
things	6	324	0.81
going	5	294	0.73
well	4	253	0.63
mean	4	241	0.60
schools	7	240	0.60
want	4	225	0.56
feel	4	197	0.49
need	4	190	0.47
good	4	176	0.44
high	4	171	0.43
teachers	8	167	0.42
community	9	158	0.39
time	4	158	0.39
year	4	157	0.39
student	7	154	0.38
something	9	153	0.38
people	6	151	0.38
work	4	142	0.35
years	5	140	0.35
even	4	138	0.34
different	9	137	0.34
little	6	132	0.33

teacher	7	130	0.32
thing	5	127	0.32
take	4	121	0.30
able	4	119	0.30
actually	8	119	0.30
needs	5	117	0.29
stuff	5	114	0.28
class	5	112	0.28
give	4	110	0.27
much	4	110	0.27
sort	4	110	0.27
sure	4	110	0.27
help	4	109	0.27
back	4	106	0.26
make	4	106	0.26
always	6	103	0.26
anything	8	103	0.26
education	9	100	0.25
also	4	97	0.24
whole	5	96	0.24
maybe	5	95	0.24

Word Cloud
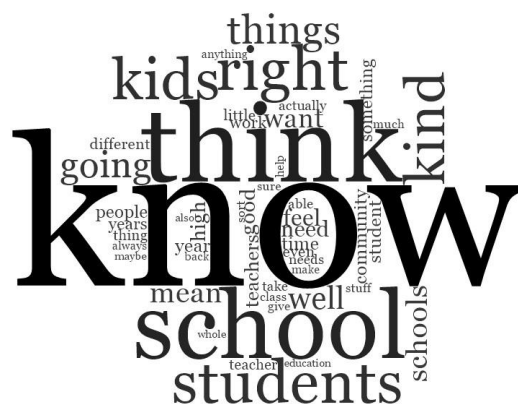
Appendix D: Permission Letter

INSTITUTE FOR POLARITIES OF DEMOCRACY

August 25, 2022

Dr. Amy Gates-Stroud
National Director - Partnerships & Brand Development 3DEschools
3565 Piedmont Rd NE, Building 1, Suite 460
Atlanta, GA 30305

Home address:
201 Old Orchard Lane
Roswell, GA 30075

Re: **Permission for use of Polarities of Democracy graphics in your PhD. Dissertation**

Dear Dr. Gates-Stroud:

The Institute for Polarities of Democracy seeks to protect the intellectual knowledge of the Polarities of Democracy theory as described below:

- **Purpose:** Ensure proper acknowledgement of the source of the Polarities of Democracy© Map contents developed by Dr. William J. Benet & the Institute for Polarities of Democracy.
  - o It is sufficient when sharing content to include the following sentence in a legible format on the Polarity Map® (either in the Polarity Map® graphic or bottom of a page where the Polarity Map® is portrayed):

  The Polarities of Democracy© Map content is used with permission of the Institute for Polarities of Democracy.

In addition, Polarity Partnerships, LLC, a strategic partner of the Institute, has licensed the Institute for Polarities of Democracy to use the Polarity Map®, principles, the Polarity Assessment™, the 5-Step S.M.A.L.L.™ process and miscellaneous tools and resources commercially. We realize the term "licensing" means different things to different people and seek to clarify what "licensing" means to Polarity Partnerships. The

guidelines and underlying purpose associated with our licensing model are described below:

- **Purpose:** Ensure proper acknowledgement of the source of the Polarity Map®, principles and associated processes and resources developed by Barry Johnson & Polarity Partnerships, LLC.
  - o It is sufficient when sharing content to include the following sentence in a legible format on the Polarity Map® (either in the Polarity Map® graphic or bottom of a page where the Polarity Map® is portrayed):

    Polarity Map® is a registered trademark of Barry Johnson & Polarity Partnerships, LLC. Commercial use encouraged with permission.

- **Purpose:** Protect the integrity of the Polarity Map® in its most current form.
  - o Your Polarity Map® should include all key elements of the Polarity Map® including the quadrants, infinity loop, poles, use of the word AND between the poles, synergy arrows, *GPS, DF,* prompts in the Map, and when reprinted in color, maintain the original colors in the Polarity Map®. We encourage you to include the Action Steps and Early Warnings field when appropriate as they are an integral part of the Polarity Map® and 5-Step S.M.A.L.L.™ Process.

For the purposes of your dissertation, you may use the Polarities of Democracy© Maps and the *Polarity Maps*® with the following statement:

> ***Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships, LLC and the Institute for the Polarities of Democracy.***

Sincerely,

Nicole B. Hayes

Nicole B. Hayes, PhD.
President, Board of Directors