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by

Laura A. Perry

May 2013

SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP:
CREATING A CULTURE THAT IMPACTS STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND
CHOICES FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

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Approved by Doctoral Thesis Committee:

Dr. Steven Busch, Chairperson

Dr. Angus J. MacNeil, Committee Member

Dr. Rayyan Amine, Committee Member

Dr. Mark Henry, Committee Member

Dr. Robert H. McPherson, Dean
College of Education

May 2013

Dedication

It is an honor to dedicate this doctoral thesis to my high school English teacher, mentor, and friend, Cindy Jacobson. This beautiful, loving soul saw potential in me and sacrificed generously to support me through my difficult high school years. Cindy's encouragement boosted my self-confidence, challenged me to do more than I believed possible, and provided hope for my future. Her actions helped me understand that my life mattered and I had something special to share with the world. Cindy's passion for learning and selfless devotion to her students inspired me to dedicate my life to helping other struggling students grasp success in their own lives.

Thank you, Cindy, for believing in me, making me feel special, and bestowing strength and willpower in me to continuously strive to fulfill my dreams. I attribute my educational achievements and successful career to you! You were the wind beneath my wings in high school, and I am eternally grateful to you for lifting me up to see beyond my own limitations.

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Abstract

According to the Texas Education Agency (2011b), researchers in the 20th century failed to adequately address the needs of college enrollment data related to minority and low-income students. Additionally, research studies have shown that students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education (Beegle, 2007; Conley, 2010; Delbanco, 2012; Haberman, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). This quantitative research study is significant because it specifically focused on the postsecondary education and career awareness needs of minority and low-income students. This study analyzed the impact of postsecondary awareness initiatives of a large, diverse, suburban school district in the state of Texas. The sample included three Title I secondary campuses participating in a multi-year grant initiative designed to increase the college-focused culture and heighten awareness of the necessity and attainability of postsecondary education. A control group consisting of three additional Title I secondary campuses with similar demographics was established. Student surveys, Advanced Placement (AP) and dual credit enrollment reports, College Board AP score reports, and National Student Clearinghouse tracker reports were compared between the groups. Descriptive statistical analysis and Pearson chi-square procedures revealed statistically significant differences between the study and control campuses. The results of this study contribute to existing salient research related to the important role principals and other educational leaders have in developing campus cultures which encourage and support students in their preparation for postsecondary educational and career pursuits.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Brief Review

The public school system has a great impact on the quality of life for American citizens; however, research has shown that the workforce of the 21st century requires knowledge and skills beyond a high school diploma (Delbanco, 2012; Haycock, 2011; Holzer, 2011; Martinez & Klopott, 2005a; Murray, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative for secondary public schools to prepare students for enrollment and successful completion of postsecondary educational opportunities in order to better prepare them for work and careers beyond high school. Exposing students to the facts about the necessity of postsecondary education and training for successful career pursuits in the 21st century is a crucial responsibility of public school leaders, especially secondary school principals (Beegle, 2007; Conley, 2010; Davis, Darling-Hammond, Haberman, 2010; LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Muhammad, 2009). School leaders should work to develop a culture where secondary students learn about, plan for, and strive to reach the essential knowledge and skills which will help them successfully apply and enroll in postsecondary education or training programs. Exposure to the workforce of the 21st century, the labor needs of the future, and the advantages that postsecondary education will afford them in their career pursuits will help secondary students, both middle school and high school, understand the importance of continuing their education beyond high school (ACT, 2008b). Researchers have professed that a college-focused culture is even more critical in schools with high numbers of minority and low-income youth because statistics suggest that these students are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education

and less likely to be college ready than their more advantaged peers (Beegle, 2007; Conley, 2010; Delbanco, 2012; Haberman, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Researcher William Elliott (2012) emphasized the argument that education plays a crucial role in employability and economic success for America's youth. Elliott (2012) asked the pertinent question, "How do we achieve greater access to college and higher college completion rates for more of America's children?" (p. 1). Education, as per Elliott (2012), has been the foundation for upholding the "American Dream" (p. 1). Elliott (2012) highlighted, "Education in America has been called the 'great equalizer' evoking the widespread belief that disparities among groups of people can be narrowed through effort in school and the pursuit of higher education" (p. 1). In addition, Elliott (2012) concluded:

The belief that an ordinary citizen can turn the American Dream into reality through effort and ability is embedded in the history and culture of America. Higher education has been and continues to be viewed as a key ingredient for making the American Dream a reality. (p. 9)

Researchers Monica Martinez and Shayna Klopott (2005a) also highlighted this sentiment and professed that the public school system is one of the few institutions which impacts the quality of life for American citizens. Martinez and Klopott (2005a) also explained, "Technological and scientific advances of the 21st century demand that high school graduates be both competent in high-level skills and prepared to attain postsecondary education" (p. 59). Author Esther Shein (2012) disclosed that the Bureau of Labor Statistics projected more than 20 million new and innovative careers will be added in America between the decade 2010 and 2020. Shein continued (2012) by

expressing the urgency for high schools to begin training students, especially those who are targeted as possible dropouts, in fields such as medical, teaching, and technology while still in high school. Shein (2012) believed high schools should partner with “local colleges in initiatives that let students earn up to two years of college credit before they graduate” (p. 39). Linda Murray (2011), author and educator, agreed with Martinez and Klopott (2005a) and articulated, “There is nothing more urgent in America’s public schools than giving students from all backgrounds an education that prepares them for college and careers” (p. xviii). Additionally, Murray (2011) divulged that between 2011 and 2021, the majority of jobs in America will demand education or training beyond a high school diploma and “the bottom line is that we need to prepare all high school graduates for some kind of postsecondary education or training so that no matter what path they choose, they have real options for success” (p. 4). In the foreword to Murray’s book *Diploma Matters*, Kati Haycock (2011), educational advocate and researcher, declared that the knowledge and skills required for the 21st century are the same skills necessary for success in postsecondary education. Furthermore, she espoused, “Almost all of our young people will need some postsecondary education to secure work that pays a family-supporting wage” (Haycock, 2011, p. x).

David Conley (2010), professor of educational policy and leadership at the University of Oregon, supported Haycock’s (2011) proclamation and transmitted hope for the American public school system by asserting his belief in the possibility of establishing high school programs which prepare all students for various postsecondary education and career opportunities. Conley (2010) also stressed that high schools must incorporate high-level, rigorous, and relevant academic work with the exploration of

future educational and career pursuits. Conley's (2010) views are supported by the following central recommendation from the *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (2004) report: Secondary schools must "provide resources and time for students to research and investigate college opportunities and career choices" (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], p. 10).

Another important reason why it is so critical to adequately prepare America's youth for a productive future life and career is that the world has increasingly become a global and competitive economy. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012), a recent study concluded that the United States ranked 27th out of 31 countries "in measures of equal opportunity, which predict whether children will have the life chances necessary for them to thrive and mature into contributors to a future that sustains the American Dream" (p. 8). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012) stressed that graduating from high school and completing postsecondary training are fundamental in helping children realize a successful future. Martinez and Klopott (2005b) also purported the importance of preparing youth for their future lives. These researchers declared that public high schools are essential institutions for laying the groundwork for adult participation in the American economy (Martinez & Klopott, 2005b). Additionally, Martinez and Klopott indicated that greater demands have been placed on the public school system to prepare youth for higher education and the workforce.

Researcher Martin Haberman (2010) stressed the need for transforming American schools to better prepare graduates to utilize basic skills, think and understand the world, and successfully enter the workforce. Haberman (2010) exclaimed that society cannot continue to classify "nonthinking, underdeveloped, unemployable youngsters as 'adults'

or ‘citizens’” (p. 87) solely because they have graduated from high school. Haberman (2010) elaborated by emphasizing that failing to impart the basic skills which will enable high school graduates to think and obtain a job is catastrophic to both the students and to society as a whole. Haberman (2010) argued that education must become “a matter of life and death for society and the individuals themselves” (p. 87). Likewise, Linda Murray (2011) supported Haberman (2010) and acknowledged that society is changing and “the way we educate the next generation must change with it” (p. 130). In an address during the 2009 *Education to Innovate* campaign, President Barack Obama, according to the White House Press Office (2009), highlighted this same argument, and confirmed that America’s future leadership is dependent upon how the public schools educate today’s students. In addition, as quoted by the White House Press Office (2009), President Obama took this declaration a step further and exclaimed that the security of the American society will only be protected by enhancing America’s position as the leader of the world’s scientific and technological discoveries. President Obama’s comments emphasized the importance of promoting math and science education for American students (White House Press Office, 2009).

Middle-class jobs in the 21st century require a deeper understanding and more highly developed skills in all subject areas, including math and science (Conley, 2010; Haberman, 2010; Haycock, 2011; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Murray, 2011, 2012). Today’s jobs and the jobs of the future require higher-level knowledge and skills which can be attained through advanced courses in high school and postsecondary educational opportunities; therefore, it is essential for secondary educators to make learning relevant to the lives of their students by guiding them through self-discovery of career interests

and aptitudes, as well as goal setting and planning (Conley, 2010; Haberman, 2010; Haycock, 2011; Martinez & Klopott, 2005a; Murray, 2011, 2012). In order to accomplish this, school leaders must work to develop a campus culture which supports college and career exploration, promotes college readiness, encourages academic rigor, and stresses the importance of increased achievement for all students (Conley, 2005, 2010; Martinez & Klopott, 2005a). David Conley (2010) supported these declarations about campus culture; however, he also stressed that guidance regarding postsecondary opportunities must begin before students enroll in high school. Conley (2010) contended that students must know before they enter high school whether or not they are interested in pursuing postsecondary education because they will need to carefully choose their coursework beginning with their ninth grade year to be eligible for college entrance.

Even though educational researchers like Conley (2010) strongly expressed that high schools must provide students with and assist students in achieving the standards for college admissions, not all states have addressed this need. Only 31 of the 50 states (62%) in the United States, including Texas, currently have college- and career- readiness standards (Paulson, 2010). Additionally, Texas is the only one of the 31 states that “currently meets the minimum criteria the non-profit education reform organization Achieve deems necessary to measure and provide incentives for college and career readiness” (Robelen, 2010, *para.* 6). Furthermore, according to the College Board (2007), nearly one-half of low- and moderate-income students who qualify academically for enrollment in college do not enroll due to financial constraints. Many of the students classified as *low socioeconomic* by the public school system are living in poverty as defined by the federal guidelines, and poverty presents monumental challenges to these

students and interferes with their ability to succeed in school (United States Department of Education [USDE], 2010). According to the USDE (2010), 18% of children under 18 years of age were living in poverty in 2007. This same report revealed that 34% of African American, 27% of Hispanic, 26% Pacific Islanders, 11% Asian, and 10% White children were living in poverty in 2007 (USDE, 2010).

Poverty in America has been eminent for decades, and numerous researchers have professed that education is the key to decreasing the amount of United States citizens who suffer the effects of poverty (Beegle, 2007; Conley, 2010; Haberman, 2010; Haycock, 2011; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Murray, 2011, 2012). During his State of the Nation address in 1964, President Lyndon Johnson shared, “Many Americans live on the outskirts of hope- some because of poverty, and some because of their color, and all too many because of both” (Beegle, 2007, p. 21). In this same address, President Johnson explained that the American government must “replace despair with opportunity” (Beegle, 2007, p.21). One way to replace despair with opportunity is to stress the importance of a college education to all children, particularly minority and low-income children. Donna Beegle (2007), author and researcher, advocated that a college education is a “pathway for overcoming poverty” (p. 28). Since there is a considerable increase in earning power for citizens with a college education, it is imperative for educators to encourage minority and low-income students to pursue their dreams and to help them replace despair with hope and opportunity. Given America’s current disturbing economic status, it is essential that the American educational system adequately prepare and inform its students of the importance of continuing and obtaining additional education beyond a high school diploma. America’s civic and economic

future is dependent upon the educational system's ability to increase the number of students enrolling in and completing postsecondary educational opportunities (Gates Foundation, 2003).

In a report prepared for the Arlington Public Schools, the Hanover Research Council (2009) conveyed, "Economics have estimated that by the year 2020, the United States could face a shortfall of 14 million workers who have the knowledge and skills to compete for middle-income jobs in the current global economy" (p. 2). This same report emphasized that the jobs of the future in the United States will demand postsecondary education or training (Hanover Research Council, 2009). Researcher Harry Holzer (2011) professed, "For those who do not complete any postsecondary education or training program, employment rates for the first several years are quite modest, and their earnings overall will stagnate for the long term" (p. 10). Additionally, Holzer (2011) emphasized the following: (a) all levels of the current workforce require additional education and training beyond a high school diploma, (b) well-paying jobs for the unskilled workforces are diminishing, and (c) current labor and trade fields are hiring candidates who possess strong communication skills and who are able to problem solve and think at higher levels.

As represented in Figure 1, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) supported Holzer's (2011) claims and affirmed that the increase in employment in the United States since 1992 has been amid workers who have attended some college, attained an associate degree, and especially attained a bachelor's degree (2010a). In addition, as per the BLS, the number of college-educated workers has steadily increased while the number of workers with only a high school diploma has remained relatively

steady or declined slightly over the years (2010a). The BLS (2010a) data depicted the following number of employees in America during 1992: 12 million with less than a high school diploma, 35 million with only a high school diploma, 26 million with some college or an associate degree, and 27 million with a bachelor's degree or higher. On the other hand, the BLS (2010a) data depicted the following number of employees in America during 2009: 10 million with less than a high school diploma, 34 million with only a high school diploma, 34 million with some college or an associate degree, and 44 million with a bachelor's degree or higher. Within the 17 year span of these data, there was a 2 million decrease in employees with less than a high school diploma, a 1 million decrease in employees with only a high school diploma, an 8 million increase in employees with some college or an associate degree, and a 17 million increase in employees with a bachelor's degree or higher (BLS, 2010a).

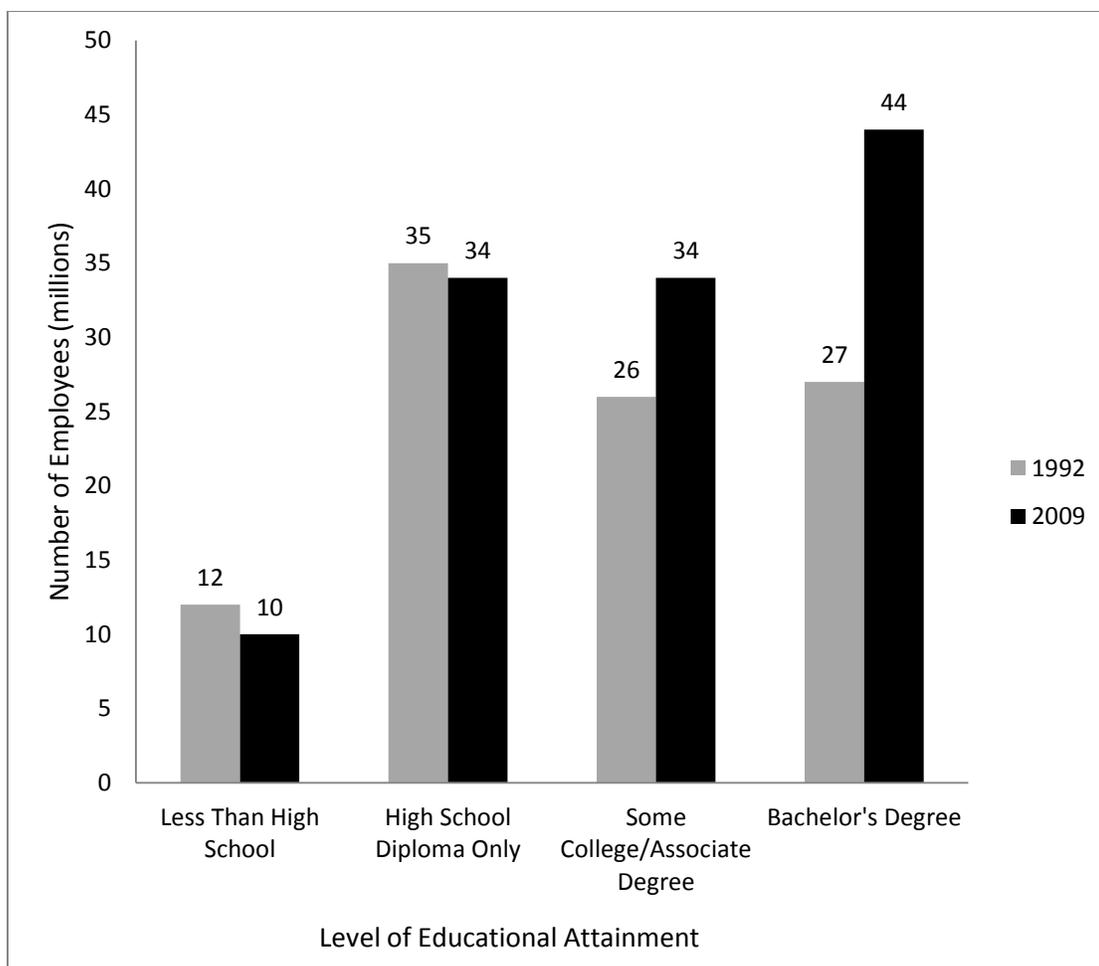


Figure 1. Employment by Level of Educational Attainment for 1992 and 2009. Data retrieved from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010a).

The data from the BLS (2010a) related to earning potential and educational attainments also demonstrated the need for a college education, as presented in Figure 2. The research suggested that the higher the education level, the higher the earning potential (BLS, 2010a). For example, in 2009, the median weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers 25 years and over were as follows: \$454 for workers with less than a high school diploma, \$626 for workers with only a high school diploma, \$726 for workers with some college or an associate degree, and \$1,137 for workers with a bachelor's degree or higher (BLS, 2010a). When examining the data disaggregated by education level, specific to degree type, it is clear that the higher the degree earned, the

higher the median weekly earnings. In 2010, the median weekly earnings by education level were as follows: \$444 for workers with less than a high school diploma, \$626 for workers with only a high school diploma, \$712 for workers with some college and no degree, \$767 for workers with an associate degree, \$1,038 for workers with a bachelor's degree, \$1,272 for workers with a master's degree, \$1,550 for workers with a doctoral degree, and \$1,610 for workers with a professional degree (BLS, 2010a).

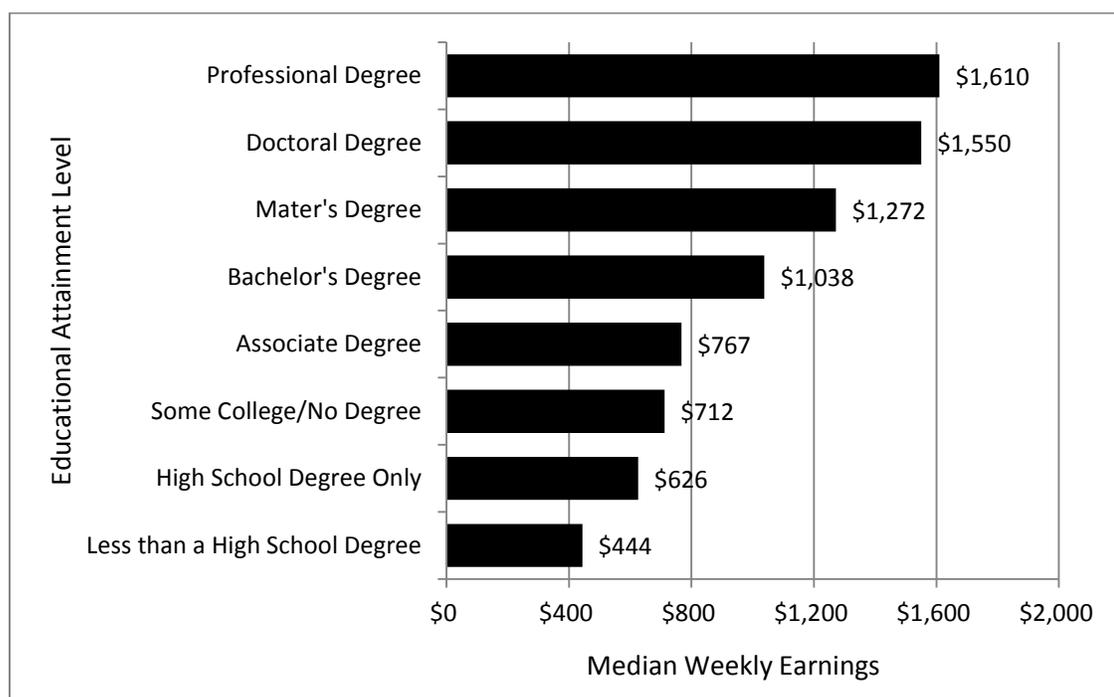


Figure 2. Median Weekly Earnings by Educational Attainment Level in 2010. Data retrieved from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010a).

In addition to financial worries, however, low-income students face added challenges, such as low expectations and the lack of dependable information regarding college entrance requirements, the college application process, financial assistance availability, and the value of a college education (College Board, 2011). These challenges are also concerns for many minority students who may be the first in their family to pursue postsecondary education. In order to combat these concerns, school

leaders must strive to create a school culture which will make postsecondary education a primary focus for all students and will provide the necessary guidance to assist students in preparing for the next steps toward a successful future. Minority, low-income, and first-generation students will benefit greatly from a campus culture which promotes college and career readiness, articulates the importance of students challenging themselves to take rigorous course work, encourages students to increase their educational anticipations, provides all students with the skills and knowledge to support them in successfully pursuing postsecondary education, and stresses the significance of increased student achievement for all students.

School leaders, especially campus principals, are responsible for the creation of this influential college- and career-focused culture. As per researchers Davis et al. (2005), “Successful school leaders influence student achievement in several important ways, both through their influence on other people or features of their organizations, and through their influence on school processes” (p. 6). Principals are responsible for developing teachers and staff members, establishing and communicating the direction the school will take based on data analysis and goals setting, and creating a school culture which will lead to student achievement (Davis et al., 2005). One of the fundamental recommendations from *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* was for principals to “provide leadership in the high school community by building and maintaining a vision, direction, and focus for student learning” (NASSP, 2004, p. 17). All of these are primary responsibilities school leaders must accept and strive to fulfill if they intend to improve student achievement and increase the students’ postsecondary educational aspirations.

Strong leadership focused on student achievement is essential in every school, but it is particularly significant in schools with high numbers of minority and low-income students. According to Max Weber's Social Class Framework, developed in the mid-20th century, education makes a tremendous difference in people's lives; however, people from poverty are less likely to obtain it (Beegle, 2007). Even though low-income students urgently need postsecondary training to acquire a well-paying job, only 7% obtain a bachelor's degree by the age of 26 (Beegle, 2007). Over the past four decades, college attendance rates for White, non-Hispanic youth have increased substantially; however, historically underrepresented minority groups, such as African Americans and Hispanics, have not experienced significant increases in college enrollment (Gandara, 2001). In *College Readiness Begins in Middle School*, George Wimberly and Richard Noeth (2005) shared the belief that these underrepresented minority and low-income groups are not being adequately prepared for educational opportunities beyond high school and "schools are failing to help all students engage in early postsecondary planning" (p. 3). These researchers conveyed that schools in low-income neighborhoods tend to offer their students above-level, college preparatory courses less often than schools in middle- and upper-income communities (2005).

Researchers Colin Austin and Ulysses Bell (2012) expressed, "Higher education is increasingly seen as a critical gateway out of poverty" (p. 371). With the alarming statistics regarding the percentage of minority youth living in poverty, the nation's economic stability is at risk if educators do not guide and prepare these students for postsecondary educational opportunities. According to the USDE (2011), the enrollment in postsecondary educational institutions is expected to increase 13% between 2009 and

2020. This projected increase, according to the USDE (2011), is based on an increase of 1% for White students, an increase of 25% for African American students, an increase of 46% for Hispanic students, an increase of 25% for Asian/Pacific Islander students, and a decrease of 1% for American Indian/Alaska Native students. The increase in minority enrollment in postsecondary educational institutions is projected to be a slow, yet steady increase over the next decade (USDE, 2011). Although the enrollment for minority students is expected to increase, the overall enrollment is still projected to be majority White in the year 2020 (USDE, 2011). These data, presented by both BLS (2010a) and USDE (2011), should heighten the urgency for school leaders to create a school culture which ensures college-readiness for all students. It is imperative for educators to strive to increase these college enrollment and employment projections by encouraging minority and low-income students to cultivate true dreams for their futures. School leaders should ensure this by promoting a college-focused culture in which educators engage minority and low-income students in college-talk, information-gathering seminars, postsecondary planning activities for both students and parents, and goal-setting activities (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011; Beegle, 2007; Bloom, 2007; Conley, 2010, Davis et al., 2005). It is also important for educators to convince minority and low-income students that they can be whatever they dream of becoming in life (Kuykendall, 2004). Furthermore, this encouragement must be accompanied with exposure to the benefits of postsecondary education as well as the exploration of career options.

The earlier educators expose minority and low-income students to the necessity and benefits of postsecondary training, the more time these students will have to consider their options, explore their career interests, assess their aptitudes, prepare academically

by enrolling in more rigorous courses, and explore their financial options and opportunities. Middle school is the perfect time to begin this postsecondary exploration, according to researchers George Wimberly and Richard Noeth (2005). These researchers revealed the U SDE's (2011) recommendation that students begin setting educational and career goals as early as sixth grade (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). Wimberly and Noeth (2005) espoused that middle schools and high schools play a central role in helping to prepare students, academically and introspectively, for a successful postsecondary education experience.

Nora Fleming (2011) concurred with Wimberly and Noeth (2005) regarding the importance of beginning postsecondary training as early as middle school. Fleming (2011) reported:

Middle school students are being asked to do much more than prealgebra these days; they are being asked to start launching their future careers. A rise in college- and career-readiness programs targeted at middle schoolers, particularly disadvantaged ones, has been spurred by mounting research that shows middle school is a key time to improve the academics and attitudes needed to succeed in high school, college, and beyond. (p. 1)

Middle school students are in a transition time in their lives; therefore, educators need to help these impressionable youth to begin to set career goals and to make wise choices about their education, including the courses they choose to take in middle school and high school. Patti Kinney, associate director of middle-level services for the National Association of School Principals, emphasized this perspective and conveyed that early adolescence is a critical time for students to begin considering their future lives;

therefore, middle school educators should support and guide their students in the exploration of future opportunities (Fleming, 2011). Amy Wade, director of I Know I Can, agreed that middle school is an important time for students to begin thinking about their future lives (Fleming, 2011). Wade maintained that middle school students do not understand that time will pass them by, so educators must expose these students to their options and encourage them to begin planning for college and beyond (Fleming, 2011). Moreover, Joel Vargas, vice president of Jobs for the Future, also supported the premise that middle school is the prime opportunity to begin to share the power of higher education (Fleming, 2011). Vargas suggested that programs such as the Early College High School, when started as early as the middle school level, help “students who might not be inclined to pursue a higher education see themselves as college students starting in middle school, and by high school, creates a much more accessible and affordable path to get there” (Fleming, 2011, p. 5).

Author Sharon Camblin (2003) concurred and explained that middle school educators have a tremendous impact on students’ postsecondary success because middle school is where students begin to determine what their adult lives will entail, what their career aspirations are, and what they need to do to align their desires with the expectations and prerequisites for college enrollment. Martinez and Klopott (2003) summarized the importance of beginning college- and career-preparation in middle school by sharing the following statement from Camblin’s (2003) article entitled *The Middle Grades: Putting All Students on Track for College*:

It is during the middle grades that students need to begin to develop college awareness/predisposition and to begin to plan for college by ensuring that their

academic plans are well aligned to college enrollment requirements and by developing an understanding that college is possible, even for students who don't come from traditional college-going families. (pp. 3-4)

In conclusion, the American public school system has an increasingly larger population of minority and low-income youth who have historically been under-represented in colleges and universities. The data presented by researchers suggested that unemployment decreases as educational attainment increases, and earnings increase as educational attainment increases (BLS, 2010b; USDE, 2011). It is crucial for educators to expose students, especially minority and low-income youth, to the possibilities of the future. The creation of a college- and career-focused culture, beginning in the middle grades and continuing throughout the high school years, is essential in order to produce a qualified workforce for the future.

Statement of the Problem

Research findings from educational organizations such as the College Board (2007, 2011), American College Testing [ACT] (2008a), BLS (2010a), and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2003) demonstrated that students from low- and moderate-income homes are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education. In order to adequately prepare America's youth to enter the workforce of the 21st century, it is essential to inform students of the necessity for postsecondary education and adequately prepare them with knowledge and skills to matriculate the application and financial assistance processes (Conley, 2010; Haycock, 2011; Martinez & Klopott, 2011; Murray, 2011; Weinstein & Savit-Romer, 2009). Secondary school students, especially students from minority and low-income homes, should be introduced to and educated regarding the

necessity, processes, and procedures of pursuing postsecondary education. In addition, it is essential to familiarize secondary students with the variety of career options available to them after high school graduation. The Literature Review for this study demonstrated that it is imperative for secondary principals to create a college-focused culture on their campus in order to educate, encourage, and motivate students from all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds to set postsecondary education and career goals.

Significance of the Study

Although there has been significant research in the past decade related to college- and career- readiness, and 31 states in the United States have adopted college- and career- readiness standards, there continues to be an enormous opportunity gap between low-income students and their peers from more advantaged backgrounds (Robelen, 2010). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2012) reported that children, who experience long-lasting poverty, “face developmental and social barriers to success” (p. 8). The foundation concluded that even children who experience situational and short-lived poverty during the developmental years “can have lasting effects on health, education, employment and earning power” (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012, p.8). Author Linda Murray (2011, 2012) articulated that there are achievement gaps and an opportunity gaps between minority and low-income students and the more advantaged students and between minority students and their White peers. Martinez and Klopott (2005b) maintained that educational research studies throughout the 20th century failed to adequately address the needs of college enrollment data related to minority and low-income students. Martinez and Klopott (2005a) also reasoned:

Although the reports viewed college attendance as an educational step toward democratic participation, none suggested that high schools return to their prior status as college preparatory institutions, nor did they specify ways in which college access could be improved or even made possible for minority and poor students. (p. 59)

The Schott Foundation is yet another research group which supported the notion of an opportunity gap, and concluded that the dropout rates for African American and Latino male students are over 50% in most American cities and these students are much less likely than their peers to enroll in and graduate from college (Noguera, 2012).

The failure of researchers in the 20th century to adequately address the needs of college enrollment data related to minority and low-income students is significant because these two demographic groups are experiencing tremendous population growth in the United States and Texas (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2011b). According to the TEA (2011b), the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Bureau of the Census reported the following about minority and low-income youth: “The total population, the number of school age children (children ages 5-17), and public school enrollment are growing at faster rates in Texas than in the United States” (p. 43). Educators in Texas, therefore, must be concerned about and focused on assisting this increased population in making vital life decisions which will affect students’ future earning potential, and in turn, will affect the economic outlook of Texas and the United States (TEA, 2011b). In Texas, the concern about the opportunity gap is significant since the percentage of economically disadvantaged students enrolled in public schools in the state increased from 49.2% (2,003,121 students) during the 2000-2001 school year to 59.1% (2,914,916 students) by

the 2010-2011 school year (TEA, 2011b). Furthermore, according to the TEA (2011b), the percentage of African American, Hispanic, and White students identified as economically disadvantaged in Texas public schools increased between the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years; however, “across racial/ethnic groups in 2010-2011, the percentage of individual group enrollment accounted for by economically disadvantaged students was largest for Hispanics (77.4%), followed by African American (71.6%)” (p. 11). This is noteworthy for Texas public school administrators since the enrollment data trend has clearly demonstrated that African American and Hispanic enrollment has steadily increased since the 2000-2001 school year; however, the White enrollment has decreased (TEA, 2011b). Hispanic students had the largest increase in enrollment in Texas public schools between the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years, with an increase of over 81,000 students (TEA, 2011b). During the 2010-2011 school year, Hispanic students encompassed the largest percentage of total enrollment at 50.3%, while White students accounted for 31.2% and African American students accounted for 12.9% of total enrollment (TEA, 2011b). White student enrollment decreased in 19 of the 20 education service center regions in Texas from the 2009-2010 to the 2010-2011 school year (TEA, 2011b).

Terrence Stutz (2012), reporter for *The Dallas Morning News*, reported the testimony of former Texas demographer Steve Murdock at the Texas public school finance trial. According to Stutz (2012), Murdock confirmed that the White population in Texas public schools is down and the Hispanic population continues to increase. According to Murdock, Hispanic enrollment in 2012 was 53% of the total public school enrollment (Stutz, 2012). In addition, Murdock proclaimed that the student population

will be 64% Hispanic and 15.5% White by the year 2050 (Stutz, 2012). TEA (2011b) also reported the percentage of economically disadvantaged students has increased in all 20 Texas education service center regions over the past decade. Murdock's testimony continued with the report that 26.8% of Hispanics in Texas live in poverty, while only 9.5% of White citizens in Texas live in poverty (Stutz, 2012). With these statistics, it is obvious that the number of students participating in Title I programs in Texas has increased over the years, by almost 1.2 million between the 2000-2001 and the 2010-2011 school years (TEA, 2011b). According to TEA (2011b), 66.2% of the students enrolled in Texas public schools participated Title I programs during the 2010-2011 school year.

Research has unmistakably supported the need for college- and career-readiness standards for all students, the importance of K-16 (kindergarten through college) continuity, the significance of an advanced and rigorous curriculum, and the value of early communication regarding postsecondary opportunities; however, not all school districts have made it a priority to incorporate these vital college and career initiatives in all schools within the district and to all students, regardless of their socio-economic status or ethnic identity (Achieve, 2008, 2011; ACT, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2011; Barth, 2004; Baum & Ma, 2007; College Board, 2007, 2010, 2011; Conley, 2005, 2007, 2010; Education Trust-West, 2011). Unfortunately, school districts cannot assume that students are receiving adequate guidance about future life decisions from parents or guardians (Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). In most middle- and upper- income homes, college is a basic expectation communicated to the children from an early age by both parents and grandparents (Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). In many low-income homes, the

parents do not encourage their children to dream beyond high school, and many low-income homes are being managed by parents with a high school degree or less (Baum & Ma, 2007; Beegle, 2009; College Board, 2007; DeWitt, 2011; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). Often times, these parents are not familiar with the college culture, do not comprehend the necessity of college in today's society, and are fearful of helping their children prepare for and complete the college application process (Baum & Ma, 2007; Beegle, 2009; College Board, 2007; DeWitt, 2011; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). The College Board (2007) suggested that first-generation students are often overwhelmed by the college application, admission, and selection process. In addition, the thought of leaving home, living on a college campus, and applying for and obtaining financial aid and scholarship assistance can be extremely confusing for first-generation college students (College Board, 2007).

Districts and schools can and should work to eliminate the fears of the unknown related to postsecondary decisions by sharing research, knowledge, and tools with minority and low-income students and their parents (Murray, 2011; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). Since these students may not receive the encouragement from their parents, it is essential for educators to inspire minority and low-income students to set goals, think about postsecondary opportunities, and enroll in challenging courses to better prepare for life after high school (Murray, 2011, 2012; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). Author Linda Murray (2011) advocated for minority and low-income students in the following declaration:

It's time to stop short-changing low-income students and students of color – the very students who are fast becoming the majority of those we educate in

California and many other states. They are our most fragile youth. They most often don't start out with a fair shake and they wind up marginalized further by an educational establishment that has basically given up on them. (p. xviii)

Minority and low-income students are far too often tracked into lower-level classes with minimum expectations (Beegle, 2009; Bloom, 2007; Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Haberman, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Murray, 2011, 2012; Phillips & Skelly, 2006). Furthermore, many educators are failing to encourage minority and low-income students to challenge themselves by taking more rigorous courses, such as AP and dual credit courses (Beegle, 2009; Bloom, 2007; Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Haberman, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Murray, 2011, 2012; Phillips & Skelly, 2006). Students who come from a more advantaged background are usually encouraged by their parents to enroll in advanced classes; however, minority and low-income parents often do not comprehend the benefits of these more challenging courses. Thus, they do not convey the need for their children to take advantage of these opportunities in high school (Beegle, 2009; Bloom, 2007; Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Haberman, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Murray, 2011, 2012; Phillips & Skelly, 2006). In order to decrease this opportunity gap, it is imperative that educators begin early to communicate the value of a college education and other postsecondary training opportunities to all children (Beegle, 2009; Bloom, 2007; Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Haberman, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Murray, 2011, 2012; Phillips & Skelly, 2006).

School district administrators must ensure that educators assigned to minority and low-income campuses are those who truly believe children from every socioeconomic

and cultural background are capable of and deserving of an education in preparation for a successful future after high school, whether that entails college or other postsecondary training opportunities to more adequately prepare them for the 21st century workforce and society (Conley, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Tileston & Darling, 2008; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). A college-focused culture will not develop on its own; therefore, educators must make a conscious effort and focus on the creation of this culture by actively infusing college and career communication and activities throughout the school day (Conley, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Tileston & Darling, 2008; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). It must be pervasive in all areas of the students' school day-- in the halls, cafeteria, offices, and classrooms (Conley, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Tileston & Darling, 2008; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). These efforts must also extend beyond the school day and engage the parents, so they will have the knowledge required to assist their children in making decisions about appropriate course selections in high school and about seeking postsecondary educational opportunities (Conley, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Tileston & Darling, 2008; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009).

In order to determine the effectiveness of the culture that educators are trying to implement, it is essential to seek input from the students regarding the postsecondary awareness initiatives because educators cannot assume that their efforts are being realized by the students (Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). Researchers Lauren Weinstein and Mandy Savitz-Romer (2009) explained that additional research is needed to determine "the extent to which students perceive college-going cultures in school" (pp. 9-10). Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2009) argued that countless school leaders believe they have developed a successful culture which focuses on high expectations for all; however,

they cannot assume what is actually perceived by the students. Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2009) advised school leaders to seek input from the student body before declaring the school culture a success. The information gained through this research study is significant because it contributes to the existing body of knowledge related to the importance of preparing minority and low-income students for postsecondary educational opportunities. This study provides additional information and verification of the significance of developing a college-focused culture at middle school and high school campuses with large enrollments of minority and low-income youth. This research study has significance to educators, administrators, and educational policymakers interested in preparing all students, from all income levels and all racial backgrounds, for successful American citizenship by guiding them to pursue additional learning opportunities beyond high school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how school leaders, particularly secondary school principals, can implement a college-focused culture in order to influence the perceptions of minority and low-income students regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education. This study examined the college-focused culture established by the leadership team at a highly diverse, largely economically disadvantaged, suburban, Title I high school and its two Title I middle school feeder campuses. By analyzing archival data from a district-created, student perception survey and comparing the survey results to the survey results of a control group, this study attempted to demonstrate how the creation of a college-focused culture (a) positively influenced the perceptions of minority and low-income youth regarding the importance

and attainability of postsecondary educational opportunities; (b) encouraged minority and low-income youth to enroll in more rigorous course work while in high school, such as AP and dual credit courses; and (c) positively impacted minority and low-income students' enrollment in colleges and universities directly after high school completion.

Research Questions

This study investigated the college-focused culture implemented by secondary school leadership in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the creation of a college-focused culture positively influence students' perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education?
2. Does the creation of a college-focused culture increase student enrollment in Advanced Placement and dual credit courses?
3. Does the creation of a college-focused culture increase student enrollment in colleges and universities directly after high school completion?

Definition of Terms

In order to gain a clear understanding of the concepts employed throughout this research study, the following definitions are provided:

- *Achievement gap*: Achievement gap refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students (ACT, 2010b). The achievement gap can be viewed between the performance of students from various racial groups, such as African American and Hispanic as compared to the performance of White students (ACT, 2010b). In addition, the achievement gap can be viewed between the

academic performance of economically disadvantaged students and their peers from more advantaged backgrounds (ACT, 2010b).

- *Advanced courses:* For the purposes of this study, advanced courses are those that provide students with rigorous and challenging academic work to better prepare them for postsecondary educational opportunities. Advanced Placement and dual credit high school courses are two examples of advanced courses discussed in this study.
- *Advanced Placement courses:* Advanced Placement (AP) courses are courses provided at the high school level and monitored by the College Board (College Board, n.d.). These courses are advanced, college-level courses which help students prepare for successful completion of an AP exam and award college credit to students while still enrolled in high school (College Board, n.d.).
- *College and career culture:* For the purposes of this study, the terms *college-focused culture* and *college and career culture* are used interchangeably and synonymously refer to the environment at a school campus which focuses students on pursuing and preparing for learning beyond high school (Conley, 2010). It is a belief system which permeates a campus and guides students to explore career options, gain knowledge about the required education necessary for their career interests, and seek additional education and/or training after high school to adequately prepare for successful careers (Conley, 2010).
- *College behavioral strategies:* College behavioral strategies are college-awareness activities educators provide for minority and low-income students to help them gain what researchers refer to as cultural or social capital. Researcher Henrietta

Singleton (2011) stated that these “strategies include activities and services that foster a college-going culture” (p. 12).

- *Dual credit courses:* Dual credit courses are those which a student can earn both high school and college credit for successful completion of the course. Dual credit allows students to enroll simultaneously in high school and college for one course, resulting in credit for both high school and college (Conley, 2010). Dual credit programs can be taught on a college campus by a college instructor, taught on a high school campus by a college instructor, or taught at a high school taught by a high school teacher with college teaching credentials (Conley, 2010).

- *Economically disadvantaged students (also referred to as low-income or low-socioeconomic students):* Economically disadvantaged students are those who receive assistance for either free or reduced school meals under the guidelines established by the National School Lunch Program of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service. For the purposes of this study, the 2010-2011 guidelines were used since the data from the study were gathered during the 2010-2011 school year. According to the USDA (2011), the income eligibility guidelines (IEG) for free and reduced school meals for 2010-2011 were as follows:

The 2009 - 2010 IEGs will remain in effect for the duration of the current (2010-2011) SY (school year) and that such schools and institutions should continue to use the 2009-2010 IEGs in making eligibility determinations for free and reduced price meals for SY 2010 – 2011. (p. 1)

In addition, according to the Federal Register (2009), the income eligibility guidelines (IEG) for free and reduced school meals for 2010-2011 were as follows:

These eligibility guidelines are based on the Federal income poverty guidelines and are stated by household size. The guidelines are used to determine eligibility for free and reduced price meals and free milk in accordance with applicable program rules. (p. 13411)

During the 2010-2011 school year, children living in a family of four would qualify for reduced priced meals if the total family annual income was \$40,793 or less, and the same children would qualify for free meals if the total family annual income was \$28,665 or less. (Federal Register, 2009, p. 13412)

- *Feeder pattern:* Feeder patter refers to the vertical alignment of schools. Schools within the same feeder pattern send students to one another, from elementary school to middle school to high school. In elementary and secondary education, feeder schools are seen in large districts where graduates of several elementary schools attend the same middle school. Likewise, graduates of several middle schools attend the same high school.
- *First-generation college students:* Students who are the first in their immediate family to attend college.
- *High school:* Although different states and districts define high school in various ways, depending on the school arrangements and needs of the community, this study defined high school in the same manner the district being studied did, grades 9-12.
- *Middle school:* Although different states and districts define middle school in various ways, depending on the school arrangements and needs of the community,

this study defined middle school in the same manner the district being studied did, grades 6-8.

- *Opportunity gap*: An opportunity gap is an achievement gap “reframed as a problem of unequal opportunities to learn experiences by many low-income, Hispanic, and African American students” (Flores, 2007, p. 29).
- *Postsecondary educational institution*: Postsecondary educational institutions are four year universities, two-year colleges, trade schools, vocational schools, and certification programs where students further their education after completing a high school education.
- *Poverty*: A family is considered poor if it has an income below the official poverty threshold, which is established by the U.S. Census Bureau and is based on the number of family members and children living in the home. The Census Bureau (2010) defined poverty as follows:

If a family's total money income is less than the applicable threshold, then that family and every individual in it are considered in poverty. The official poverty thresholds are updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition uses money income before taxes and tax credits and excludes capital gains and noncash benefits (such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits and housing assistance).
(p. 61)

In 2010, the poverty threshold for a family of four, consisting of two children under the age of 18, was \$22,133 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Service (2011), the poverty threshold for this same

family of four in 2011 was \$22,350. For the purposes of this study, the 2010 poverty threshold was used since the data from the study were gathered during the 2010-2011 school year.

- *Secondary school:* In Texas, secondary schools consist of middle schools and high schools.
- *Title I:* According to the USDE (2011), Title I is an educational policy focused on improving the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. The policy states:

The purpose of this title (Title I) is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. (USDE, 2011, SEC. 1001)

- *Title I schools:* Title I schools are those deemed to have a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students. These schools receive federal financial assistance to help ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to learn the academic standards dictated by the state (USDE, 2011).

Summary of Methodology

This quantitative research study examined the culture of six diverse, Title I secondary campuses located within a large suburban school district in the state of Texas. The study analyzed the culture of three study campuses (study campus High School A and its two feeder middle school campuses, study campus Middle School A and study campus Middle School B) which were involved in a multi-year grant initiative to increase

the postsecondary awareness and college-focused culture on each campus. Archival data from 2011 district-created, student surveys were analyzed and compared to a control group, three demographically similar campuses (control campus High School B and its two feeder middle school campuses, control campus Middle School C and control campus Middle School D). Secondly, the 2010-2011 data for AP and dual credit courses enrollment and AP testing were analyzed and compared between the study and control high school campuses. Lastly, the 2011 National Student Clearinghouse data for college and university enrollment were used to compare the study high school to the control high school regarding the percentage of the 2011 graduates who enrolled in a college or university within the United States directly following completion of high school.

Table 1 illustrates the total enrollment data, as reported by the TEA (2011a), for the three study and three control campuses. The demographics of these six campuses were incredibly similar during the last year of the multi-year grant initiative (2010-2011). The total student enrollment at High School A was 3,208, consisting of 22% African American; 54% Hispanic; 17% White; <1% American Indian; 6% Asian; 0% Pacific Islander; 2% mix of two or more races; and 58% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a). The two feeder middle schools had similar demographics. The total student enrollment of Middle School A during the last year of the grant (2010-2011) was 1,296, consisting of 26% African American; 58% Hispanic; 11% White; <1% American Indian; 2% Asian; <1% Pacific Islander; 3% mix of two or more races; and 70% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a). Likewise, Middle School B had a total student enrollment of 1,294, consisting of 15% African American; 57% Hispanic; 17% White; <1%

American Indian; 8% Asian; 0% Pacific Islander; 3% mix of two or more races; and 66% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a).

The control campus High School B feeder pattern, located in the same vicinity of the district, was selected for the control group. The student enrollment data for the three control group campuses were extremely similar to the study campus student enrollment data. During the 2010-2011 school year, the last year of the grant initiative, High School B had a total student enrollment of 2,488, consisting of 33% African American; 48% Hispanic; 12% White; <1% American Indian; 5% Asian; 0% Pacific Islander; 1% mix of two or more races; and 63% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a). The two feeder middle schools had comparable demographics. Middle School C had a total student enrollment of 1,370, consisting of 28% African American; 56% Hispanic; 10% White; <1% American Indian; 3% Asian; 0% Pacific Islander; 3% mix of two or more races; and 73% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a). Likewise, Middle School D had a total student enrollment of 1,351, consisting of 25% African American; 57% Hispanic; 11% White; <1% American Indian; 6% Asian; 0% Pacific Islander; 1% mix of two or more races; and 71% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a).

Table 1

2010-2011 Enrollment Data for Three Study and Three Control Campuses

School	Total	AA	H	W	AI	A	PI	Mix	ED
High School A	3,208	22%	54%	17%	<1%	6%	0%	2%	58%
High School B	2,488	33%	48%	12%	<1%	5%	0%	1%	63%
Middle School A	1,296	26%	58%	11%	<1%	2%	<1%	3%	70%
Middle School B	1,294	15%	57%	17%	<1%	8%	0%	3%	66%
Middle School C	1,370	28%	56%	10%	<1%	3%	0%	3%	73%
Middle School D	1,351	25%	57%	11%	<1%	6%	0%	1%	71%

Limitations of the Study

No research study is without limitations, and this study was limited by the following:

1. The sample population of the study included only two high school campuses and four middle school campuses within a single school district in the state of Texas.
2. Although the study campuses engaged the parents and students in a purposeful college-focused culture for three years, this study only analyzed the student perception survey results and student enrollment data for one school year (2010-2011).
3. The compositions of the school teaching and administrative staff were not taken into consideration in this study. Teacher and administrative characteristics, such as years of experience and level of educational attainment, were not considered in this study.

4. The student perception survey results were strictly self-reported data.
5. This study was only able to track college enrollment for the graduating class of 2011 because the class of 2011 was the first graduating class for the study high school.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Numerous research studies, books, and articles have addressed the necessities and benefits of postsecondary education and the role of secondary school leadership in developing a college-focused culture that will encourage and guide all students, minority and low-income students in particular, to further their education and training after completing high school. The review of current literature relevant to this study concentrated on the following seven salient themes related to postsecondary education and training: (a) an examination of the historical perspective of the importance of and purpose of the American public school system and how that system prepares students for successful lives beyond high school; (b) the benefits of postsecondary education and training; (c) an exploration of what researchers mean by the term *college-readiness*; (d) the school leadership's role in establishing campus culture; (e) the essential ingredients for cultivating a college and career culture on secondary school campuses; (f) the importance of preparing minority and low-income students for postsecondary education, ensuring equal access to knowledge about postsecondary opportunities and providing informational support; and (g) the importance of providing a rigorous curriculum, including AP and dual credit courses for all students, and encouraging students to challenge themselves to take these more rigorous courses.

Historical Perspective

The importance of education and the educational system in America has been touted by educational philosophers and politicians alike for centuries. In the late 20th century, the USDE (1993) conducted a study entitled *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*. In the introduction of this report, Diane Ravitch, assistant secretary

of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, stated that understanding history is important for all citizens (USDE, 1993). Ravitch explained how knowledge of historical events and trends help citizens understand and make sense of current times (USDE, 1993). Based on this perspective of the importance of understanding the historical context of the American educational system, a brief examination of the views of several noteworthy educational philosophers and American politicians were included in this literature review. Over the years, many influential educational philosophers and politicians have shared that education is the key to improving the American society and continuing to protect the freedoms of the American Republic. In addition, preparing America's youth for successful lives and careers has been a central theme in educational research over the years.

In the early- to mid-19th century, Horace Mann, American education reformer and politician, stressed that education is the *great equalizer* and believed poverty would disappear as the intellectual capabilities of all American citizens increases (Mason-King, n.d.). Mann, who was known as the *Father of American Education*, recommended that education be available and equal, as a birth right, for all American citizens (Mason-King, n.d.). He believed that all children, rich and poor, should have access to an education that will prepare them to successfully participate in society (Cremin, 1957). Furthermore, in the mid-19th century, Herbert Spenser stressed the importance of education by asserting, "School exists to help us answer the essential question of how to live" (Wiggins, 2011, p. 30). In the late 19th century, the Committee of Ten, led by the president of Harvard University, "argued that a college-prep education, including Latin and Greek, was appropriate for all students" (Wiggins, 2011, p.29). This committee suggested that the

purposes of education were as follows: (a) health- teach healthy life habits; (b) basic processes- teach basic skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and mathematics; (c) home membership- equip the student with knowledge and skills for contributing to a family; (d) vocational training- prepare the student to secure a livelihood for self and family; (e) citizenship- teach civic responsibility; (f) valuable use of leisure time- teach appreciation of music, art, literature, and drama; and (g) character development- ensure students learn ethical character traits (Wiggins, 2011). After reviewing the historical views related to the purposes of education, Wiggins (2011) concurred with the findings of the Committee of Ten and further explained that the purpose of education in the 21st century is “to prepare students to prosper in and contribute to a pluralistic and ever-changing democracy” (p. 32). Many of the viewpoints shared by educational philosophers in the 19th century were supported throughout the next century and continue to be advocated during the 21st century; however, this literature review will show that as the years progress, the knowledge and skills required for successful citizenship and employment continue to intensify.

Early in the 20th century, well-known educational philosopher John Dewey shared that he believed one of the key purposes of education is to prepare citizens for their future lives and expand the likelihood of their contributions to society (Gouinlock, 1972). Dewey (1916) also believed that students should be taught not only skills and knowledge, but how to apply their knowledge to problems they may face in their future lives. Dewey (1916) purported that schools should help students uncover their full potential and teach them how to use their potential for good within society. Also early in the 20th century, Franklin D. Roosevelt expressed the importance of postsecondary

education by stating, “A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car, but if he has a university education he may steal the whole railroad” (Western Kentucky University, 2005, Quotes section, *para.* 15).

During the mid-20th century, the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) distinctly explained the importance of education of all children in America and clarified that children who are denied the basic right to public education are also denied the right to quality and productive future lives. This historical Supreme Court decision stressed the significance of education for the success of all children and for the perseverance of the American society by espousing that education is important to a democratic society and that it is required to successfully fulfill adult responsibilities, including service in the military (National Center for Public Policy Research, 2008). Furthermore, the Supreme Court declared the following regarding public education:

It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. (National Center for Public Policy Research, 2008, Opinion section, *para.* 9)

Additionally, during the mid-20th century, Hyman Rickover (1962), a four-star United States Naval Admiral, reinforced these same thoughts and beliefs by advocating

that education is the most significant problem facing the United States. Admiral Rickover (1962) proposed that schools must not only transmit knowledge to students, but also develop intellectual skills that will enable the students to apply their knowledge to problems they may encounter in their adult lives. Admiral Rickover (1960) also espoused that the greatest responsibility parents and citizens have is to provide the best possible education for America's youth and that education must strengthening basic skills, particularly math and science skills, to help make our youth more adequately prepared for the increasingly technological world.

President Lyndon B. Johnson, also during the mid-20th century, expressed the significance of education by stating, "At the desk where I sit, I have learned one great truth. The answer for all our national problems – the answer for all the problems of the world – comes to a single word. That word is *education*" (Western Kentucky University, 2005, Quotes section, *para.* 36). Each of these prominent educational philosophers and politicians of the 19th and 20th centuries expressed the importance of education for all American children (Cremin, 1957; Dewey, 1916; Gouinlock, 1972; Mason-King, n.d.; Rickover, 1960, 1962; USDE, 1993; Western Kentucky University, 2005; Wiggins, 2011). Not only did they stress that education is crucial for children's future lives, they embraced and unmistakably conveyed that education of America's children will make a tremendous difference for the nation (Cremin, 1957; Dewey, 1916; Gouinlock, 1972; Mason-King, n.d.; Rickover, 1960, 1962; USDE, 1993; Western Kentucky University, 2005; Wiggins, 2011).

The benefits of education for both individual citizens and society as a whole have been touted as vital for centuries. In contrast, according to Martinez and Klopott (2005a),

high schools of the 20th century were seen by many as a “terminal institution from which students could enter the workforce directly,” (p. 59); however, that is not sufficient for the workforce of the 21st century. Martinez and Klopott (2005a) continued by sharing that the high schools of the 20th century were providing various educational and vocational tracks. They declared that these tracks were readily accepted as the best method of educating all students for their future lives (Martinez & Klopott, 2005a). Martinez and Klopott (2005a) professed, however, that “by the late 1970s, it became evident that comprehensive high schools were failing to prepare American students for the workforce and for postsecondary education” (p. 59). Furthermore, according to Martinez and Klopott (2005a), multiple reports in the 1980s conducted by key research groups such as the National Commission on Excellence in Education, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National Association of Independent Schools proclaimed the belief that “schools were not providing students with enough academic rigor, guidance, or support, and radical changes were needed to improve the comprehensive high school” (p. 59). The essential message conveyed in each of these reports was that schools do not sufficiently prepare students to successfully engage in and contribute to society and the workforce (Martinez & Klopott, 2005a).

The philosophies shared by politicians and educational researchers during the 19th and 20th centuries are even more pertinent during the 21st century. In a speech delivered on July 18, 2011, President Barack Obama shared the following:

A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our kids can compete for the best jobs but whether America can out-

compete countries around the world. America's business leaders understand that when it comes to education, we need to up our game. That's why we're working together to put an outstanding education within reach for every child. (White House Press Office, 2011, Press Release section, *para. 2*)

The White House Press Office (2009) further explained President Obama's views on education by clarifying that he believes a high-quality education is essential for all of the nation's children, and that, "Our nation's economic competitiveness depends on providing every child with an education that will enable them to compete in a global economy that is predicated on knowledge and innovation" (Address section, *para. 1*). President Obama expressed that he is "committed to providing every child access to a complete and competitive education, from cradle through career," ensuring that each and every child will have adequate knowledge and skills to continue their education in pursuit of their dreams after high school graduation (White House Press Office, n.d., Progress section, *para. 4*). Additionally, the White House Press Office (n.d.) communicated that President Obama aims to have more college graduates in America than any other nation by the year 2020. President Obama, as explained by the White House Press Office (n.d.), also adamantly believes that all high school graduates should continue their education by registering for at least one year of postsecondary education or training to better prepare them for the workforce of the 21st century. All students, regardless of their background, race, or family's economic status, are entitled to an education that prepares them for, and encourages them to pursue, postsecondary education and training. These sentiments expressed by President Obama unmistakably highlight the fact that preparing America's

youth for success in today's and tomorrow's workforce has been and will continue to be a cornerstone of the American public education system.

Benefits of Postsecondary Education and Training

Substantial research has been conducted by organizations such as the College Board (2006, 2007, 2010, 2011), the U. S. Census Bureau (2010), the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010a, 2010b), and the USDE (1993, 2007) to show the benefits, both personal and societal, of postsecondary education and training. An early report conducted by the USDE (1993) entitled *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* professed, "Education is generally considered important to individuals to help them obtain good jobs with relatively high pay. More highly educated individuals are paid more, on average, than less well educated persons" (p. 9). Over a decade later, Alan Blankstein (2004) espoused, "Schools are clearly for the common good, and they serve as the gateway to, and potential equalizer for, economic and life success for millions of under-served children" (p. 3). Patte Barth (2004), author and researcher, also maintained that education and skill training provides tremendous compensation for students in the workforce of the 21st century. Barth (2004) argued, however, that the skills learned through postsecondary training and education are more important than the degree earned. Barth (2004) shared that research has confirmed the fact that people with more developed skills are more marketable than people with the same educational level, but less developed skills. Barth (2004) acknowledged, "Simply, the more you know, the more you earn" (p. 18). Even though Barth (2004) affirmed the significant benefits of postsecondary education and training related to personal economics and the job market, she also explained an altering perspective that has not been shared by many other

researchers. Barth (2004) believed that everyday life requires a deeper understanding of the basic knowledge and skills taught in school. She rationalized that the world has become more complex and demanding, which requires citizens to be able to think at higher levels (Barth, 2004). Furthermore, Barth (2004) emphasized that citizens must communicate with a diverse population in society, analyze important issues as voters, make sense of scientific discoveries, and make decisions regarding environmental issues which require higher-level thinking and knowledge.

Researchers Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini (2005) confirmed that any level of postsecondary training will give a worker an advantage over other employees. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) shared that vocational training can “provide an estimated net occupation status advantage over a high school diploma of between .12 and .22 of a standard deviation;” an associate degree can provide a “net occupational status advantage over a high school diploma of between .24 and .44 of a standard deviation;” and a bachelor’s degree can provide a “net occupational status advantage of .95 standard deviation” (pp. 535-536). One of the primary suppositions of Pascarella and Terenzini’s research (2005) was that employability increases and unemployment decreases as educational attainment increases. Through their research and summarization of supporting documentation, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that “the average net annual earnings premium for a bachelor’s degree (versus a high school diploma) to be about 37 percent for men and about 39 percent for women” (pp. 535-536).

Jennifer Engle and Vincent Tinto (2008) concurred that education is a key ingredient to employability. In Engle and Tinto’s (2008) Pell Institute research entitled *Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation Students*,

they declared that between 2005 and 2015, 80% of the most rapidly-growing jobs in America will necessitate an associate degree and 50% will necessitate a bachelor's degree or higher.

Moreover, in a report conducted by the Alliance for Excellent Education (2009), it was professed that 90% of jobs with high growth and high wages require some postsecondary education or training. Another significant report was conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE) (2006) which conveyed the correlation between unemployment rates and educational attainment levels. The ACE (2006) declared that the unemployment rates in 2005 for adults 25 years or older were as follows: (a) 7% for less than a high school diploma; (b) 4.5% for a high school diploma; (c) 3.5% for some college, but no degree; and (d) 2.4% for a bachelor's degree or higher. These data are significant in that unemployment rates for high school dropouts were nearly three times that of someone who earned a four-year college degree (ACE, 2006). An additional noteworthy declaration from the ACE (2006) was that citizens who have a college degree pay 100% more income tax than citizens who only have a high school diploma. The data from this report regarding unemployment rates and income tax payments substantiate the importance of a college education and demonstrated the benefits to graduates as well as society as a whole.

Authors Donald Phillips and Kevin Skelly (2006) supported the conclusions from the above mentioned ACE (2006) report. Phillips and Skelly (2006) conveyed, "The primary mission of our public education system is to give every student the opportunity to live a meaningful and productive life, which includes earning a living wage" (p. 26). Phillips and Skelly (2006) continued by stating, "Creating access to the American dream

through public education has been an important building block of our society and becomes even more critical as we become increasingly diverse and interdependent in a global economy” (p. 26). Phillips and Skelly (2006) stressed that today’s students must obtain a more rigorous, higher-level education in order to contribute to the advancement of America in today’s global economy. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) supported Phillips and Skelly (2006) by stating, “The mission of the public education system must shift from *Educate some and prepare them for the 20th century American economy* to *Educate all and prepare them for the 21st century global economy*” (p. 4). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) concluded, “*Every child a college- and career- ready graduate* is a challenge for the 21st century that can no longer be ignored: it is the only path for the nation’s long-term economic and political security” (p. 10). In a previous report, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) also declared that high school is simply a starting place for careers and that the college opportunity must be readily available to all students, not just the top students.

The USDE (2007), in a report entitled *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities*, concurred that postsecondary education is essential for citizens’ future work lives and financial wellbeing. This USDE report (2007) revealed, “Educational attainment is one indicator of an adult’s quality of life and contributes to future earnings and employment opportunities” (p. 122). This proclamation by the USDE (2007) is supported by countless researchers (ACE, 2010; BLS, 2010; College Board, 2010; Julian & Kominski, 2011; Pittman, 2010). Karen Pittman (2010), educational researcher, stressed this postulate by sharing a dim view of the nation’s youth and their employability even after attainment of a high school diploma. Pittman (2010) explained

that today's youth are finding it difficult to obtain quality employment after high school graduation. According to Pittman (2010), teenage unemployment, especially for minority and low-income youth, has risen to an all-time high within the past fifty years.

Researchers Sandy Baum and Jennifer Ma (2007) supported the notion that educational attainment leads to successful employability and expressed their belief that students must further their education beyond a high school diploma. Baum and Ma (2007) explained that students who attend college receive benefits in both their personal lives and their professional lives. They also shared that society as a whole benefits when citizens obtain college degrees (Baum & Ma, 2007). Baum and Ma (2007) asserted, "There is a positive correlation between higher levels of education and higher earnings for all racial/ethnic groups and for both men and women" (p. 2). In addition to higher earnings, Baum and Ma (2007) shared that college graduates typically profit more from employer's health insurance, are in better health, and live healthier lifestyles than non-college graduates. Baum and Ma (2007) concluded that the American society receives benefits (e.g., more tax revenues and fewer citizens to support with social service program) from students who obtain postsecondary education. Moreover, Baum and Ma (2007) maintained that citizens who earn a college degree have higher rates of "civic participation, including volunteer work, voting, and blood donation, as well as with greater levels of openness to the opinions of others" (p. 2).

Likewise, researcher Rustin Lewis (2009) maintained that college graduates benefit society by giving back to their community through monetary donations and volunteer efforts. Lewis (2009) reported that citizens who do not attend college, on the other hand, have a higher unemployment rate and lower median weekly income and that

these facts lead to “disparities in a community” (p. 41) such as crime, teen pregnancy, and child abuse. The Pell Institution, as reported by Engle and Tinto (2008), also shared research that suggested the same belief that education reduces the cost for the American society related to unemployment, crime, and poverty. Engle and Tinto (2008) explained that the Pell Institution research theorized that as a result of the demand for America to compete in the global economy, it is in the nation’s interest to boost the number of high school graduates who attend and graduate from postsecondary educational institutions, especially four-year universities.

Not only does society prosper from increasing college educated citizens, according to a survey of college graduates conducted by the ACE (2010), graduates believed their college education was of benefit to them personally and professionally. The graduates who took the ACE (2010) survey also indicated that they believed their education was a benefit to society. The ACE (2010) survey disclosed that 28% of the respondents reported that their college education helped prepare them for employment, 31% reported that college taught them to learn and to think critically, and 17% reported that college prepared them to solve problems that are facing the country. A similar survey, conducted by Achieve (2010), divulged that 89% of voters agreed that education or training beyond high school is essential for success in life. The Achieve (2010) survey concluded, “The high school diploma is no longer viewed as a terminal degree by the public. Agreement is near universal that everyone needs some additional education and training beyond high school to truly be successful” (p. 2-4). Another report shared by ACT (2010a), declared that education, computer specialties, management, community services, and marketing will be the five fastest growing careers in the next decade, and

those fields all require at least a two-year college degree. Given the fact that numerous studies have shown a direct correlation between educational level and salary earning, it is encouraging that this ACT report (2010a) revealed that 89% of the 2010 ACT test takers desired at least a two-year college degree.

Multiple additional research studies have shown the positive personal and professional benefits of a college degree. One such report, conducted by the College Board (2010), concluded, “The typical bachelor’s degree recipient can expect to earn about 66% more during a 40-year working life than the typical high school graduate earns over the same period” (Lifetime Earnings section, *para.* 1). According to author Andrew Delbanco (2012), some researchers even estimated the worth of a four-year college degree as high as “a million dollars in incremental lifetime earnings” (pp. 25-26). Also, as previously reported in chapter one, the BLS (2010a) has determined that the increase in employment in the United States since 1992 has been among workers who have attended some college, attained an associate degree, and especially attained a bachelor’s degree. To reiterate additional important themes from chapter one, the data from the BLS (2010a) related to earning potential and educational attainment also demonstrated the need for a college education. The research has suggested that the higher the education level, the higher the earning potential (BLS 2010a). The data from the BLS (2010a) disclosed the fact that the lower the education level, the lower the median weekly earnings and the higher the education level, the higher the median weekly earnings. The BLS (2010b) data related to the American unemployment rate in 2010 is represented in Figure 3. The BLS (2010b) data revealed a significant correlation between education level and the rate of unemployment. The lower the education level, the higher the

unemployment rate and the higher the education level, the lower the unemployment rate (BLS, 2010b).

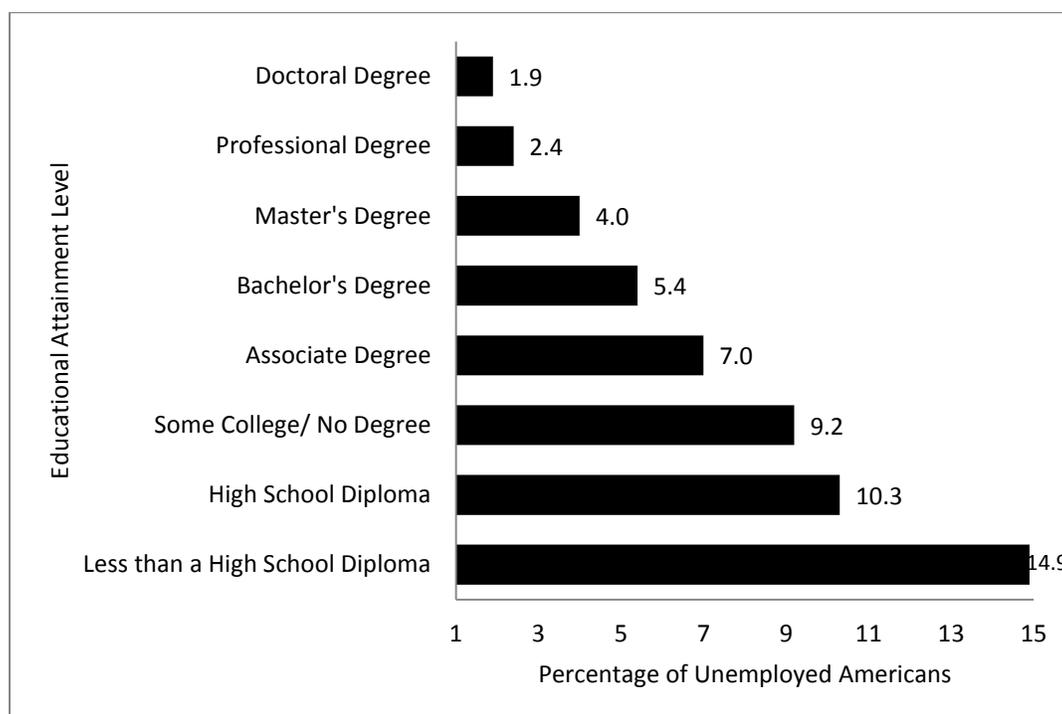


Figure 3. Percentage of Unemployed Americans by Educational Attainment in 2010. Data retrieved from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010a).

The U. S. Census Bureau supported the declarations regarding the preparation of all students for success in postsecondary education by publicizing that there is a strong correlation between education level and employment as well as education level and salary (Julian & Kominski, 2011). According to U. S. Census Bureau researchers Tiffany Julian and Robert Kominski (2011), “achievement of high levels of education is a well-established path to better jobs and better earnings” (p. 1). This same report by Julian and Kominski (2011) emphasized, “Higher levels of education allow people access to more specialized jobs that are often associated with high pay” (p. 2). Additionally, Julian and Kominski (2011) claimed that college degrees are often viewed as “job training that may be required for a position or earn the employee more pay within a position” (p. 2). This

report by Julian and Kominski (2011) provided the following statistics to support the notion that the higher the education level, the higher the chances of a citizen obtaining a full-time job: “68 percent of people with a doctorate are employed full-time, year-round compared to 38 percent of people with less than a high school diploma” (pp. 2-3). In addition, Julian and Kominski (2011) considered various additional factors that influence salary, such as gender, age, race, and ethnicity. Julian and Kominski (2011) concluded this report by surmising that “there is a clear and well-defined relationship between education and earnings, and that this relationship perseveres, even after considering a collection of other personal and geographic characteristics” (p. 13).

Author Linda Murray (2011) also supported the theory that the higher the education, the better the job and the better the salary. Murray (2011) declared, “Most good jobs that pay enough to support a family and point toward a meaningful career require some level of postsecondary education and training” (p. 4). Murray (2011) also explained that there have been multiple studies which “show that students whose education ends with a high school diploma are frequently less able to compete in the job market” and are more frequently employed in “low-end service industry jobs” for their entire work life (p. 4). Furthermore, Murray (2011) stressed the fact that citizens who graduate from college “are earning twice as much and can continue to move up the ladder” (p. 4).

To summarize, both individuals and society greatly benefit from the postsecondary education and training of the nation’s high school graduates. Individuals who obtain postsecondary education or training have a better understanding of how to interact in a diverse and competitive society, are more marketable in the workforce, are

better able to manage their personal finances, and are more able to freely contribute to the betterment of society. In turn, society will benefit from highly educated, employed, and contributing citizens, and the nation will be able to better compete with other nations in the global economy. Andrew Delbanco (2012) summarized the benefits of a college education by postulating that there is no doubt that a person's earning potential increases from attending college. The College Board (2007) also summarized these conclusions by asserting, "Education is the vital tool young Americans need to manage their lives. It is also the essential underpinning of our national capacity to succeed in a newly globalized economic environment" (p. 1). The future of America, according to the College Board (2007), is in jeopardy "without fully developing all of its human resources" (p. 1).

College Readiness

The research related to the meaning of college-readiness is extremely philosophically similar. Most researchers have concluded that college-readiness refers to the amount of preparation students receive in high school in order to pursue and ultimately succeed in postsecondary educational opportunities. Various educational researchers have asserted that the American public school system is not adequately preparing all students for enrollment and successful completion of postsecondary education (Conley, 2010; Murray, 2012; Pittman, 2010; Rothman, 2012). This section of the literature review explores how researchers have defined college-readiness and what essential components they believe should be in place in order to better prepare students to further their education after high school completion.

ACT (2011) has definition of college and career readiness as "the acquisition of the knowledge and skills a student needs to enroll and succeed in credit-bearing first-year

courses at a postsecondary institution (such as a two- or four-year college, trade school, or technical school) without the need for remediation” (About section, *para. 2*). Achieve (2012) similarly defined college-readiness as “being prepared for any postsecondary education or training experience, including study at two- and four-year institutions leading to a postsecondary credential” (What is College Ready section, *para. 1*).

Furthermore, Achieve (2012) declared that college-ready high school graduates have “the English and mathematics knowledge and skills needed to qualify for and succeed in the postsecondary job training and/or education necessary for their chosen career” (What is Career Ready section, *para. 1*). Achieve (2012) continued by espousing, “The bottom line is that today ALL high school graduates need to be prepared for some postsecondary education and/or training if they are to have options and opportunities in the job market” (College and Career section, *para. 2*). Achieve (2008) also indicated that in order to fully understand what is meant by college and career readiness, state educational agencies must engage their colleges, universities, and business leaders in helping to generate a list of skills and knowledge that are required for success in their areas. Colleges and universities should clearly communicate the baseline skills that students will need during their freshman year in college, and employers should clearly communicate the skills that would help a recent graduate enter the workforce successfully (Achieve, 2008). Once input is received from colleges and employers, it is crucial for the state educational agencies to revise their curriculum standards to encompass the articulated knowledge and skills (Achieve, 2008).

Author David Conley (2005, 2007, 2010) has dedicated over 30 years to teaching and researching the field of education and concurred with Achieve (2008). He also

highlighted the importance of increasing the alignment between secondary and postsecondary educational institutions. Conley (2005, 2007, 2010) conducted several significant research projects related to college and career readiness and accumulated his research in several resource books for educators. Conley (2010) provided a definition of college and career readiness similar to both ACT (2011) and Achieve (2012): “College and career readiness can be defined as the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed — without remediation — in a credit bearing course at a postsecondary institution” (p. 21). Additionally, Conley (2010) proclaimed, “A student envisioned by this definition is able to understand what is expected in a college course, can cope with the content knowledge that is presented,” (p. 21) and can utilize and apply the information learned.

Even though Conley’s (2010) definition of college-readiness is very similar to ACT (2011) and Achieve (2012), he extended the meaning of college-ready by sharing the necessary elements high schools and state educational agencies must consider in order to help students understand the required self-management skills needed for college, acquire knowledge about the college experience, pursue college as an option after high school, and prepare to successfully navigate a college system. Conley (2010) maintained, “High schools should be considered successful in proportion to the degree to which they prepare their students to continue learning beyond high school” (p. 9). Furthermore, Conley (2010) defined *learning* as the ability to participate in and process information received in various educational settings, including but not limited to university and college classrooms.

Conley (2005, 2010), however, maintained that high schools must do much more to help students succeed in postsecondary education and training. Conley (2005, 2010) asserted that high schools must go beyond simply working to graduate students or simply preparing students to enroll in college; they must strive to help students gain the knowledge and skills required to succeed in college and other postsecondary programs. Conley (2005) suggested that one of the essential ingredients for helping students achieve in college or other postsecondary educational opportunities is for school systems to develop a better aligned K-16 model, so that there is continuity between each level of education. According to Conley (2005), each level of education should flow directly from the previous level, and each step should increase the challenge and rigor, so that students are better prepared to succeed at the next level. Conley (2005) purported that high schools, in particular, should more closely mirror the expectations of the freshman year of college. He stressed that high school courses, including elective courses, “should be designed to meet a college requirement” (Conley, 2005, p. 23).

Moreover, Conley (2010) offered four key dimensions of college and career readiness: “key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual and awareness skills” (p. 31). The first dimension, key cognitive strategies, is essential for college success because the skills and strategies learned in high school should help students comprehend, apply, and remember content from college courses (Conley, 2010). The second dimension, key content knowledge, according to Conley (2010), is “achieved by processing information so that its structure becomes more apparent” (p. 35). Academic behaviors, the third dimension, can be summarized as the self-management skills that will aid students by helping them organize their time and

control their impulses when living on their own for the first time (Conley, 2010). Contextual skills and awareness, the fourth dimension, is concerning what Conley (2010) referred to as “College Knowledge,” (p.40) which includes understanding the college culture, college entrance requirements, college application and admissions processes, and financial aid procedures. In addition to these four key dimensions, Conley (2010) shared seven key principles of college and career readiness. These seven principles include the following: (a) creating a college- and career-focused culture that encourages exploration of college- and career-options; (b) aligning the secondary and postsecondary curriculum and grading policies; (c) teaching management and academic behaviors; (d) assisting students with understanding the college application process; (e) preparing senior students by ensuring challenging course loads; and (f) developing partnerships with local postsecondary educational organizations.

Author Linda Murray (2011, 2012) supported Conley’s (2010) views on college and career readiness and expressed that schools should focus on preparing all students for educational opportunities after high school. Murray (2011, 2012) claimed that it is the responsibility of educators to prepare all children for the array of opportunities they may encounter after high school graduation. According to Murray (2011, 2012), high school graduates should be able to choose and succeed in any avenue they desire due to the skills and knowledge gained from their high school education.

Author and educational researcher Patte Barth (2004) argued that a common mistake made is assuming that a high school curriculum will prepare graduates for success in college. Barth (2004) divulged that a large number of students are not allowed into college-preparation classes, blocked from the curriculum which is essential in

adequately preparing for postsecondary education. A key argument presented by Barth (2004) is that a high school degree has very little influence in the world's job market, and its power in preparing students for postsecondary educational opportunities is questionable. Barth (2004) asserted that the American school system should have a "strong default curriculum" (p. 33) which is available to all students, requires mastery of higher-level material, and provides rigor and challenge to prepare all students for postsecondary opportunities. Research conducted by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board (2010) supported Barth's (2004) conclusions that a high school degree does not sufficiently prepare graduates for postsecondary success. This research study found that almost 60% of students who are eligible for college enrollment are not satisfactorily prepared for college-level course requirements and must take remedial courses to strengthen their academic ability before taking credit-bearing courses (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). Karen Pittman (2010) also reported a depressing interpretation of the percentage of high school graduates who are adequately ready to pursue college and career opportunities:

Only three in 10 seniors, at best, are college-ready. College readiness rates are rising slowly, but the problem is huge. Only 23 percent of high school graduates taking the ACT in 2009 scored as college-ready in all four core subjects. Only one in 10 high school graduates, at best, are work-ready. (p. 12)

Moreover, Pittman's (2010) research illuminated that 40% of high school graduates lack math, reading, and writing skills essential for the workforce.

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board (2010) concurred with Pittman (2010) and reported, “Readiness standards, when set, are set too low and are based only on courses, with insufficient emphasis on the reading, writing, and math skills that enable students to learn at successively higher levels” (p.6). This report, however, declared that the college-preparatory curriculum, which Barth (2004) professed will prepare students for college, also leaves graduates unprepared for college-level work. One conclusion drawn from this research is that public schools and postsecondary education have historically set college readiness standards independently of one another and there is a strong need for closer alignment (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). This research report offered various solutions to these concerns, including the following: requiring pre-kindergarten (PK) through grade twelve college-readiness standards for all public schools; requiring colleges and universities to utilize the readiness standards for placement decisions; providing professional development regarding teaching strategies for the state college-readiness standards; and creating incentives for college readiness and completion (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and Southern Regional Education Board, 2010).

Mary Stein, Stephanie Robinson, Kati Haycock, Dan Vitale, and Cyndi Schmeiser (2005) also supported Barth’s (2004) claim that a college-preparatory curriculum will prepare high school graduates for postsecondary education. These researchers discovered that the high school students they investigated who challenged themselves to enroll in college-preparatory courses were the students who learned the skills essential for success

with college-level work (Stein et al., 2005). In addition, they found that these students performed better on college entrance exams (Stein, et al., 2005).

Even though each state in the United States uses different indicators to declare a graduate college-ready, most research in this area has concluded that students who are college-ready are able to enroll in college and successfully complete rigorous college courses without the need for remediation (College Board, 2007; Conley, 2010; Murray, 2012; Pittman, 2010; Rothman, 2012). The majority of the researchers in this area have professed a fervent demand for the PK-12 school system to collaborate with colleges and universities in order to align the curriculum to ensure that high school graduates will be college-ready (College Board, 2007; Conley, 2010; Murray, 2012; Pittman, 2010; Rothman, 2012).

School Leadership's Role in Establishing Campus Culture

School culture is the predominant belief system of a campus that is developed and communicated by a school's leadership team. According to the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) (2009), "Culture refers to such things as assumptions, values, norms, belief systems, history, heroes, myths, rituals, artifacts, and visible and audible behavior patterns" (School Climate section, *para.* 1). The development of a culture which encompasses the vision and mission of a school is primarily the responsibility of the building principal. Deb Gustafson, an elementary principal in Kansas, defined school culture as "how we do business, what we allow and don't allow, and the feelings you get when you walk into school" (Devaney, 2012, p. 8). Gustafson further explained that school climate is different from school culture because climate "changes day to day depending on what's going on...but it is the daily climate

that ultimately creates your culture, and culture will be eroded when people let climate issues like jealousy, disrespect, and negativity go unchecked” (Devaney, 2012, p. 8). In addition to communicating the vision and mission for the school, principals also have a responsibility to communicate expectations for staff members and students (Devaney, 2012). It is essential for both staff and students to clearly understand that their efforts and energy must be used toward creating positive and respectful learning environments where all students can enjoy their learning experiences and where all students are expected to achieve high academic success (Devaney, 2012). Principals should ensure that staff members work collaboratively with one another, strive to build positive relationships with students, and work to assist students to overcome their individual challenges (Devaney, 2012). Similarly, educational researcher Stephen Jacobson (2011) declared that instructional leadership has become known as the cornerstone between principals’ actions and student performance. Jacobson (2011) reviewed the efforts of the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) and shared the project’s findings regarding effective leadership in high poverty schools. The original ISSPP project analyzed 65 schools, including 13 high poverty schools (Jacobson, 2011). The project discovered that all of the principals expressed a strong desire to make a difference in the lives of all children and to provide an equitable education to the students in their schools (Jacobson, 2011). According to Jacobson (2011), these principals were passionate, determined, and hopeful. Jacobson (2011) proclaimed that these principals believed all students could learn and succeed, focused on creating a safe learning environment, engaged teachers in dialogue and professional development, involved

parents and community in campus decision making, and maintained high expectations for both teachers and students.

Author Anthony Muhammad (2009) supported the above mentioned declarations made by both Gustafson (Devaney, 2012) and Jacobson (2011), and he expressed his strong belief that school leadership must strive to change negative aspects of a school culture in order to positively impact student achievement. Muhammad (2009) maintained that by fostering a positive school climate for student success, educators can ensure an optimal learning environment where students will gain skills for success in their future lives. Muhammad (2009) also stressed that school leaders must strive for cultural change if they wish to prepare their students for the demands of the 21st century. Moreover, Muhammad (2009) declared that a school with a positive culture has a staff which seeks methods to successfully reach academic achievement for all students. Muhammad (2009) asserted that in order to effectively develop and maintain an advantageous school culture, staff members must be “united in purpose,” share “common vocabulary,” collaborate to solve problems, and “exhibit a high level of efficacy where the school mission and purpose were concerned” (p. 101).

Researchers Gene Hall and Archie George (1999) shared many of the same viewpoints regarding school climate and culture expressed by Muhammad (2009). Hall and George (1999) conducted research using The Change Facilitator Style Inventory in order to determine how principals can improve school climate. From their research, Hall and George (1999) determined that the health of the organization for both students and teachers is determined by the actions of the principal. These researchers concluded that the atmosphere of the campus is shaped by the principal (Hall & George, 1999). Hall and

George (1999) also imparted that “how teachers perceive and interpret the actions of the principal leads to the construction of the culture of the school and, in part, each teacher’s classroom culture” (p. 171). In other words, the classroom environments will mirror the environment the principal has established for the school. Hall and George (1999) also avowed, “The Change Facilitator Style of the principal is highly correlated with teacher success in implementing classroom innovations” (p. 186). Essentially, Hall and George (1999) found that the leadership of a school can make a substantial difference, and teachers will successfully implement new initiatives for student success if the principal provides strong leadership and direction for the staff.

Angus MacNeil, Doris Prater, and Steve Busch (2009) also concurred with the findings of Muhammad (2009), as well as the findings of Hall and George (1999). This research team shared the findings of key educational theorists, such as Phillip Hallinger, Ronald Heck, Elaine Fink, Lauren Resnick, and Kenneth Leithwood (MacNeil et al., 2009). MacNeil et al. (2009) contended, “Organizational theorists have long reported that paying attention to culture is the most important action a leader can perform” (p. 73). Each of these key researchers, according to MacNeil et al. (2009), emphasized that principals are responsible for the creation of a school culture conducive to teaching and learning. In addition, these key educational theorists, according to MacNeil et al. (2009), agreed that staff morale will improve with the development of a positive school culture. In turn, according to MacNeil et al. (2009), student achievement will increase as a result of teacher motivation and productivity. Furthermore, MacNeil et al. (2009) shared that staff and student relationships are an essential ingredient for developing a successful school culture. These relationships should be a top priority for every campus principal.

The research study conducted by MacNeil et al. (2009) analyzed the results of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) standardized test and compared the data to the results of the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) from 29 schools in southeast Texas. The study examined test results from 24, 684 students and 1,727 teachers (MacNeil et al., 2009). The results of this study found that “Exemplary schools (as rated by the TEA accountability system) consistently demonstrated higher scores on each of the 10 dimensions of organizational health than Acceptable schools” (MacNeil et al., 2009, p. 80). Therefore, the study concluded that “Exemplary schools were found to possess healthier climates than Acceptable schools” (MacNeil et al., 2009, p. 81). The study also concluded, however, that “statistical significance was not found between Exemplary schools and Recognized schools or Recognized schools and Acceptable schools” (MacNeil et al., 2009, p. 80). Goal Focus and Adaptation were two exceptions to this conclusion. According to MacNeil et al. (2009), these two dimensions are critical to students’ academic achievement. In addition, these two OHI dimensions can be used to discern “between the cultures of Recognized and Acceptable schools” (MacNeil et al., 2009, p. 81). MacNeil et al. (2009) concluded that “when principals interact with the climate of the school in ways that increase Goal Focus and build structures that support Adaptation, the climate will more effectively enhance learning for students” (p. 82).

Researchers have agreed that school leaders can influence teachers by persistently communicating a school vision which maintains that each and every student is capable of achieving at higher levels (Conley, 2010; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Sparks, 2012).

Teachers and leaders, once on the same page regarding the culture of the campus, can make significant changes in student achievement (Conley, 2010; Parrett & Budge, 2012;

Sparks, 2012). The assertions from the key educational theorists shared in the MacNeil et al. (2009) research are also supported by a research group consisting of Gregory Bangser, Christina Burgess, Theresa Chalhoub, Elisabeth Cohen, Katherine DiSalvo, Drew Haugen, Christina Henderson, Heather Kugelmass, David Mitchell, and Kevin Smith (2012). Bangser et al. (2012) concluded that one of the most prominent features of high-performing schools is “a strong and pervasive mission and culture that enjoys buy-in from the entire school – administration, teachers, staff, families, and students” (p. 16). Bangser et al. (2012) claimed that a high academic expectation for the entire student body is the most essential aspect of school culture which will lead to student success. Bangser et al. (2012) indicated that when educators believe in the students, they will continue to guide all students toward academic success. Furthermore, Bangser et al. (2012) concluded that the school leader is directly responsible for creating a culture which entails the following five characteristics of high-performing schools:

1. Statement of General Values (the orientation of the school);
2. Educational Approach (a plan for *how* students will learn);
3. Curricular Approach (a plan for *what* students will learn);
4. Target Student Populations (what kinds of students the school serves); and
5. Definition of Ambitious but Reasonable Goals (clearly articulated goals).

(p.17)

Researchers Kenneth Leithwood and Carolyn Riehl (2003) affirmed the theories espoused by Bangser et al. (2012) and purported that successful school principals strive to create a culture of shared norms, trusting relationships, and goal orientation.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) declared that effective school leaders who work with

minority and low-income student populations should focus on creating the following: strong instruction, strong communities, improved students' social capital, and "nurturing the development of families' educational cultures" (p. 7). Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) also professed that the creation of a productive school culture is a central feature in effective school leadership. Researchers Davis et al. (2005) explained, "Growing consensus on the attributes of effective school principals shows that successful school leaders influence student achievement through two important pathways – the support and development of effective teachers and the implementation of effective organizational processes" (p. 2).

Similarly, Alan Blankstein (2004), author of *Failure is Not an Option*, purported that school leaders can change the culture of a campus and make a distinct difference in student achievement by consistently communicating a clear purpose and taking actions to develop relationships amongst the staff. Furthermore, Blankstein (2004) claimed, "When courageous leadership permeates the school community, the 'how to' questions of school improvement become easier to determine and implement" (p. 29). Blankstein (2004) insisted, just as MacNeil et al. (2009) proclaimed, that courageous leadership creates motivation, and that motivation will lead to continued student achievement.

Robert Maranto and James Shuls (2011) solidified the beliefs expressed by the aforementioned researchers and theorists and declared that the most crucial lesson learned from the KIPP school in Arkansas was: "A strong culture is a common culture" (p. 55). The KIPP school, according to Maranto and Shuls (2011) was founded on a school mission clearly communicated and supported by the staff, consistent terminology used by every staff member, common expectations for student success, consistency

throughout the campus, nurturing relationships, and continuous measurements of achievement. KIPP essentially attributed the success of the program, as per Maranto and Shuls (2011), to the focus on developing the culture of the school. One KIPP principal, as shared by Maranto and Shuls (2011), explained that an effective school culture is one in which there are clear expectations that are consistently enforced. This same KIPP principal shared, “You tell students exactly what you want. Then, you rehearse and rehearse with feedback until it becomes habit. There is no magic to building culture; it’s just hard work” (Maranto & Shuls, 2011, p. 56).

The majority of educational theorists have supported the claim that one of the most essential components to successful school leadership is ensuring that a clear vision and direction is communicated and that all staff members stay true to that vision. Moreover, researchers have agreed that strong instructional leadership is needed to make improvements in the learning environment, so all students have caring and nurturing adults who strive to help each and every child learn at mastery levels (Jacobson, 2011).

College and Career Culture

The creation of a college and career culture is beneficial to all students, especially minority and low-income students who may lack knowledge or have misunderstandings about college and the enrollment process (Bouffard & Savitz-Romer, 2012; Conley, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Espinoza, 2012; Goodwin, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Murray, 2012; Parrett & Budge, 2012). Researchers have stressed that students should be exposed to skills and knowledge related to postsecondary educational opportunities throughout middle school and high school (ACT, 2008b; Baum & Ma, 2007; Bouffard & Savitz-Romer, 2012; Camblin, 2003; Conley, 2010; Dudley-Marling &

Michaels, 2012; Espinoza, 2012; Fleming, 2011; Kuykendall, 2004; Martinez & Klopott, 2003, 2005a; Murray, 2012; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). The earlier students are encouraged about and guided toward college, the more time they will have to set goals, develop a plan of action, and enroll in rigorous courses to help prepare them for the challenges they will experience in postsecondary education or training (ACT, 2008b; Baum & Ma, 2007; Bouffard & Savitz-Romer, 2012; Camblin, 2003; Conley, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Espinoza, 2012; Fleming, 2011; Kuykendall, 2004; Martinez & Klopott, 2003, 2005a; Murray, 2012; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). Educators and instructional leaders, especially the campus principal, must make it a priority to establish a culture which ensures high academic achievement for all students and successfully prepares all students for postsecondary education and training. If a school leadership team intends to create and maintain a college and career culture which prepares students for successful future education and career opportunities, the vision and focus must be clearly communicated by the school's principal (Bangser et al., 2012; Blankstein, 2004; Davis et al., 2005; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Goodwin, 2011; Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Parrett & Budge, 2012). College, careers, and preparation for both must be an overarching theme in each and every classroom within the school, especially when there is a large population of minority and/or economically disadvantaged youth (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Conley, 2005, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Jensen, 2009; Johnson, 2012). If preparing students to successfully enroll in and complete postsecondary education is to be a central focus for a school, it is the principal's responsibility to establish that culture (Bangser et al., 2012; Blankstein, 2004; Davis et

al., 2005; Goodwin, 2011; Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Parrett & Budge, 2012). Researchers and educators have diverse ideas and suggestions for how to create a college- and career-minded culture. This section of the literature review examined the research related to what it means to establish a college and career culture and explored suggestions for how to create this culture at the campus level.

Well-known educational theorists Kenneth Leithwood and Carolyn Riehl (2003), declared “School culture sets a tone and context within which work is undertaken and goals are pursued” (p. 5). In addition, Leithwood and Riehl (2003) advocated that effective school leaders who work with minority and low-income student populations should focus on “expanding the students’ social capital valued by the schools; and nurturing the development of families’ educational cultures” (pp. 6-7). These proclamations by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) are essential for school leaders who are attempting to implement a college and career culture on a campus with a large population of economically disadvantaged students, African American students, and Hispanic students, since they are historically underrepresented in America’s colleges and universities.

The College Board (2006) maintained, “A college-going culture builds the expectations of postsecondary education for all students- not just the best students” (p. 2). Researchers Nicole Holland and Raquel Farmer-Hinton (2009) concurred and explained that a college culture is one in which information about college is readily accessible by all students. Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) also shared that there should be “on-going formal and informal conversations” (p. 26) about the college enrollment process. In order to promote this college culture, as defined by Holland and Farmer-Hinton

(2009), campus personnel must believe that all children, regardless of their backgrounds or current achievement levels, can attend and be successful in college.

Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) conducted research in Chicago public high schools related to the relationship between school size and students' self-proclaimed involvement with a college culture. From this research, Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) discovered the following effective procedures for increasing student perceptions regarding their involvement in a college culture: "College Preparation Activities, College Talk, Teacher Advocacy, Counselor Advocacy, Student-Counselor Interactions, and Hands-on Support" (p. 31). Another significant finding of this research was that the smaller the school, the more the students were engaged in college preparation activities (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Additionally, Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) exposed that students who attended schools organized into small learning communities reported more college talk, greater teacher and counselor advocacy, and more assistance with college planning. Based on their research, Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) recommend that public schools create a college culture for all students, strive to reorganize into small learning communities, and provide opportunities for faculty and staff to get to know students in order to help students make appropriate choices about college-preparatory activities and courses.

The research related to the creation of college and career cultures is ripe with examples of successful programs. Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a college-preparatory program which can be found from elementary schools to college campuses, is one program touted by researchers (AVID, n.d.; Martinez & Klopott, 2005a). AVID is (AVID, n.d.). The AVID organization has declared that the AVID

program can benefit all students; however, its original intention was to serve minority and low-income students who are academically average (AVID, n.d.). According to the California Department of Education (CDE) (2011), the purpose of the AVID program is to close the achievement gap between low-income and more advantaged students by preparing all students for college readiness. AVID has helped districts and schools to “level the playing field for minority, rural, low-income, and other students without a college-going tradition in their families” (CDE, 2011, Background section, *para.* 2).

Research studies, as reviewed by AVID (n.d.) revealed that student participants were well prepared for college because of the key components and rigorous curriculum provided through AVID. AVID (n.d.) maintained that the program increases student achievement by exposing them to “Cornell notes, time management, binder organization, tutoring and small group collaboration, oral presentation skills, individual determination, and positive classroom environment” (p. 1). AVID (n.d.) asserted that the program can increase students’ expectations, increase students’ motivation to enroll in rigorous courses, prepare students for higher-level work, increase performance on state assessments, increase high school completion rates, and provide students with indispensable cultural and social capital.

Martinez and Klopott (2005a) claimed that the AVID program assists minority and low-income youth by providing open access to rigorous academic courses, eliminating the historical practice of tracking students, creating personalized learning environments for students, ensuring support for student development of relationships, and aligning curriculum between high school and postsecondary educational institutions. Additionally, Martinez and Klopott (2005b) imparted, “Because AVID proactively seeks

to raise achievement and increase college preparedness for students at risk, it deliberately addresses the predictors of college-going behavior” (p. 18). The research related to the AVID program maintained that AVID changes the culture of a campus, instilling hope and motivation in minority and low-income youth (AVID, n.d.; CDE, 2011; Martinez & Klopott 2005a, 2005b).

Just like the AVID program, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is another initiative that has made a difference by helping educators create a college-focused culture (USDE, n.d.). According to the USDE (n.d.), GEAR UP is a “discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education” (Program Description section, *para.* 1). The GEAR UP program, as espoused by Martinez and Klopott (2005a), emphasizes increased rigorous curriculum, for all students, but particularly low-income students beginning at the middle school level. One essential element of the GEAR UP program is the provision of mentors and tutors that support low-income students academically and motivates them to take more rigorous coursework (Martinez & Klopott, 2005a). This mentor and tutorial program serves to motivate and encourage low-income students, as well as offer them guidance regarding college and career exploration and preparation (Martinez & Klopott, 2005a).

Texas GEAR UP (2013) described the program as a “six-year federal initiative designed to increase early college awareness and readiness in traditionally underrepresented groups” (Welcome section, *para.* 1). Texas GEAR UP (2013) explained that the program strives to increase students’ and parents’ knowledge and awareness of college processes, including entrance requirements, course preparation, and

the admissions process. In a one-page program overview entitled *Texas GEAR UP: Making College the Dream...and the Dream a Reality*, Texas GEAR UP (n.d.)

communicated the following six goals of the program:

1. Work with postsecondary institutions, community and business partners to expand postsecondary awareness and opportunities;
2. Enhance advanced academic courses available to students;
3. Expand opportunities to explore and understand postsecondary options;
4. Create a strong support system among parents and community members;
5. Build local partnerships and capacity; and
6. Ensure long-term sustainability. (Program Goals section, *para. 1*)

Research conducted by ACT (2007) demonstrated the effectiveness of the GEAR UP program by comparing the EXPLORE and PLAN results from GEAR UP campuses to the results from non-GEAR UP campuses. This research concluded that students from GEAR UP schools showed a slight increase in academic achievement from eighth grade to tenth grade, demonstrated more college-ready skills in English and reading, and communicated plans to attend college at an earlier age (ACT, 2007). Furthermore, in a report conducted for the USDE, researchers Kim Standing, David Judkins, Brad Keller, and Amy Shimshak (2008) shared that student attending a GEAR UP school had more knowledge concerning postsecondary educational opportunities. In addition, Standing et al. (2008) discovered that these students registered for above-level science classes more frequently than students in a non-GEAR UP school. Moreover, as per Standing et al. (2008), students from GEAR UP schools had parents who were more knowledgeable

about postsecondary opportunities, were more involved in school activities, and had higher academic expectations for their children.

Terry Grier and Kent Peterson (2007) professed a different high school model which takes the college-focused culture to a new level. In their article entitled *High School with a College Twist*, Grier and Peterson (2007) explained how a middle college high school can benefit disengaged high school students. According to Grier and Peterson (2007), a middle college high school is located on a local college campus and serves a select group of students who, for one reason or another, have been disconnected and disengaged in a traditional high school setting. Students who attend this unique high school program earn both high school and college credit while attending classes on a college campus (Grier & Peterson, 2007). These students receive more individualized attention from the teachers and counselors, are influenced by the culture of the college campus, and have a reconnection to education (Grier & Peterson, 2007). Grier and Peterson (2007) argued, “Every college and university in the country should partner with school districts and host a middle college high school” (p. 36).

Another example of a school which increased the number of students who successfully enter postsecondary education and training was Mission High School in San Francisco, California (A Grand Entrance, 2007). Mission had a tradition of high academic rigor, and in 2007, the school offered AP exams in 11 subject areas (A Grand Entrance, 2007). Moreover, designed with small learning communities, the school offered an advisory class period four days a week, a four-period block schedule, an early release day for staff development, a college center, after-school support, summer camp, study hall support, community mentors, family nights, and looping in grades 9 and 10 (A

Grand Entrance, 2007). The principal of Mission High School professed that the small learning communities design enabled the staff to create personal connections with the students; thus, creating a culture which “is the gateway to academic success and higher education” (A Grand Entrance, 2007, p. 28). Another vital ingredient in the success at Mission High School was the assistance the students received with their college applications from the University of California and California State University systems (A Grand Entrance, 2007).

The advisory program, mentor programs, and personal connections described in *A Grand Entrance* (2007) are concepts in which Orvin Kimbrough (2012), senior vice president of development at United Way of Greater St. Louis, wholeheartedly agreed. In his keynote speech on February 15, 2012 at the University of Houston Action Alliance Workshop, Kimbrough (2012) conveyed that schools must change the campus mindset from *Are you going to college?* to one of *What college are you going to?* Kimbrough (2012) shared his personal story about growing up as a poor minority. Kimbrough (2012) knew college was important and it was the only access to opportunity; however, he was focused solely on surviving his circumstances. He shared that he did not fit the profile of a college-bound student and that he does not remember many adults who encouraged him to pursue college (Kimbrough, 2012). Kimbrough (2012) reported that educators not only need to attempt to change the nation’s expectations of minority and low-income youth, but they also need to shift the students’ own expectations. He stressed that education is a game changer for the next generation; therefore, educators must help all students believe in themselves (Kimbrough, 2012).

The College Board (2006) also presented research related to how high school campus leaders can create a college-focused culture. The first question a high school campus staff should ponder is, “How do we make our school and our community one where students are expected to attend college?” (College Board, 2006, p. 2). A college-focused culture, as per the College Board (2006), is one where the students realize the value of academics, desire to challenge themselves, and strive to succeed in order to better prepare for the college experience. The leadership of a school desiring to create a college-focused culture should begin by analyzing the campus and district goals to determine if the move toward a college-focused culture will assist in meeting those goals (College Board, 2006). Analyzing campus goals and monitoring those goals are essential components necessary for changing a school’s culture, which is one of the most important responsibilities for school leaders (College Board, 2006). The College Board (2006) provided examples of how school leaders can combine college-focused culture goals with previously established school goals in order to emphasize college enrollment as the ultimate outcome of each goal. One such example provided by the College Board (2006) was the following goal originally stated as, “Ninety-five percent of our students will have at least one teacher as a confidant and mentor” (p. 3). This goal can be modified to include a college-focused culture goal by changing it to read as, “Because each student’s college goals are individualized, college planning has to be individualized as well, leading to more one-on-one meetings with counselors and teachers to discuss college issues” (p.3).

It is critical, according to the College Board (2006), for school leaders to, “assess the needs of the school, train the staff members, research any outside support systems and

programs and, most important, welcome and engage parents into this culture” (p. 2). One suggestion the College Board (2006) provided regarding assessing the needs of the school was to survey students and parents, inquiring about their thoughts regarding college, their personal goals related to college, and their feelings about the attainability of college. Ultimately, in a school where a college-focused culture is present, the goals should move from helping students to graduate to preparing students for success in postsecondary education and training (College Board, 2006; Kimbrough, 2012). School leaders must ensure that staff members understand the shift in the culture and are provided with research and training to support the rationale for the change (College Board, 2006). Support from the staff is a vital aspect of changing a school’s culture, no matter the new focus (College Board, 2006). If school leaders move too fast to change the culture without the proper data analysis, needs analysis, communication, and training, the staff will reject the shift in the culture and the efforts will fail (College Board, 2006). The College Board (2006) reasoned, “For a successful culture shift, you will need to keep everyone in the school informed, focused on the same goal, and speaking the same college language” (p. 6).

The Pathways to College Network (2013) is a tremendous resource for any principal who desires to modify the school culture to include a college- and career-emphasis. This network has been described as “an alliance of national organizations that advances college opportunity for underserved students by raising public awareness, supporting innovative research, and promoting evidence-based policies and practices from kindergarten through college” (Pathways to College Network, 2013, About Us section, *para.* 1). The Pathways to College Network (2009) suggested various activities

for educational leaders who are interested in implementing a college and career culture.

The following are a few examples listed in the Pathways to College Network (2009)

resource entitled *Building a College-Going Culture Resource and Activity Book*:

- Help students learn about careers they may be interested in.
- Engage students in conversations about college.
- Invite upperclassmen and recent alumni to share what they did and wished they had done to prepare for college. (pp. 37-39)

The College Board (2006) added the following suggestions of activities school leaders can implement when beginning a college-focused culture:

- Implement an advisory program where students receive academic guidance and support on a daily basis.
- Organize a college fair.
- Organize a college major night.
- Schedule informational meetings about financial aid, college admissions, course selection, and college choices.
- Provide parents an open house where they can have face-to-face, individual time with the counselor to discuss college planning.
- Send out a monthly newsletter that provides college information for parents. (pp. 12, 15-17)

The Pathways to College Network, according to the College Board (2006), also emphasized that school leaders must promote a culture where staff members believe that each underserved student has the ability and potential to go to and succeed in college.

Furthermore, the College Board (2006) explained that the Pathways to College Network

articulated the necessity for schools to provide college-preparatory skills for students and their families.

Linda Murray (2011, 2012), based on her personal experience as a superintendent, unequivocally agreed with the College Board's (2006) recommendations. Murray (2011, 2012) suggested that school leaders utilize college-aged tutors, recruit community members to serve as student mentors, and incorporate college and career lessons into the curriculum in order to help maintain a college and career culture. Likewise, Anthony Muhammad (2009) concurred with the College Board's (2006) recommendations and stated that a school culture which emphasizes college and careers should be one where "educators have an unwavering belief in the ability of all of students to achieve success, and they pass that belief on to others in overt and covert ways" (p. 13).

Susana Navarro, executive director of the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence conveyed, as cited by Fleming (2011), that a college culture requires strategic activities to focus students on postsecondary opportunities. Navarro professed, "Creating a college-going culture is more than just putting diplomas on the wall and hanging college flags. There has to be a real internalization on the part of the teacher for the potential of each youngster" (Fleming, 2011, p. 4). The leadership of a campus must clearly communicate a student-centered vision which focuses on preparation for postsecondary education and training, and this vision must permeate the entire campus (College Board, 2006; Fleming, 2011). A staff focused on constructing and maintaining a college and career culture will strive to create hope and college aspirations in each and every student (College Board, 2006; Fleming, 2011). Research, as per Martinez and Klopott (2005a), found "that students who have higher beliefs in their ability to succeed,

are more pro-school and have higher aspirations in schools in which relationships with teachers are developed and teachers appear as caring and supportive” (p. 60).

Preparing secondary school students for college, postsecondary training, and successful lives and careers beyond high school has, according to researchers Lauren Weinstein and Mandy Savitz-Romer (2009), become the foundation of the public school system as well as the United States society. Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2009) shared that recent research has acknowledged the benefits of establishing a college-focused culture on secondary campuses. The research studies reviewed by Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2009) revealed that the cultivation of a college-focused culture will increase the number of students who enroll in postsecondary institutions. Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2009) agreed with the College Board (2006) and the Pathways to College Network (2009) and emphasized that it is essential for secondary schools to utilize new and innovative strategies to foster a college and career culture. This culture, according to Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2009), should “ensure all students are exposed to the expectations, knowledge, and informational support necessary for postsecondary success” (p. 1). Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2009) disseminated the following nine principles necessary for implementing a college-focused culture: (a) college talk, (b) clear expectations, (c) information and resources, (d) comprehensive counseling, (e) college-preparatory testing and curriculum, (f) faculty commitment and engagement, (g) family involvement, (h) K-16 partnerships, and (i) articulation and alignment.

David Conley (2010) supported Weinstein and Savitz-Romer’s (2009) second principle, clear expectations, by emphasizing that a basic, yet crucial, concept in creating a college-focused culture is to make college or postsecondary education an expectation

for all students and to maintain a school-wide focus on preparing students to successfully transition to college. Conley (2010) stressed this postulate by stating, “At the heart of creating this culture is the belief by all faculty that the school’s mission is to enable all students to be able to go on to education beyond high school if they so choose” (p. 105). By sincerely believing all students can improve their knowledge and skills and acting on that belief with encouragement and assistance, teachers can impact their students’ self-concepts regarding their competencies and abilities (Conley, 2010). Conley (2010) professed, “Research on cognition and brain functioning has been leading to the conclusion that intelligence is much more malleable than assumed previously” (p. 194). He declared that teachers’ attitudes can influence student achievement by encouraging them and challenging them to “do more than the students themselves think they can” (Conley, 2010, p. 194).

The programs and example schools discussed by researchers have shown evidence of the positive aspects of creating a college and career culture in secondary schools, especially schools servicing minority and low-income students who may be the first in their family to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities. Martinez and Klopott (2003) explained that these first-generation college prospects need tremendous guidance from educators who have experienced what is needed to successfully apply, enroll, and persevere in college. Whether a principal utilizes a formal program, such as AVID or GEAR UP, or simply strives to make college and careers a central focus and an articulated part of the school vision, research has indicated that all students benefit from this transformed school culture (ACT, 2007; AVID, n.d.; CDE, 2011; Espinoza, 2012; Grier & Peterson, 2007; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003;

Martinez & Klopott, 2005a). Development of a college and career culture, a culture where students feel hopeful and have strong support and nurturing from teachers, is ultimately the principal's responsibility (Conley, 2010; Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; MacNeil et al., 2009; Muhammad, 2009; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Spark, 2012). By clearly communicating the belief that all children can obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue postsecondary education and training and continuously sharing the importance of developing nurturing, respectful, and supportive relationships, a principal can ensure that all students will have the encouragement to believe in their own abilities and strive to reach the next step in their educational aspirations (Conley, 2010; Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; MacNeil et al., 2009; Muhammad, 2009; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Spark, 2012).

Minority and Low-Income Students

The Coalition for Civil Rights and Education (CCE) shared that the most important civil rights issue of the 21st century is education (Noguera, 2011). The CCE argued, however, that school reform should not change the focus from standards-based testing and school accountability to reducing poverty or improving the welfare of children living in poverty because doing so would only make poverty an excuse for low performance (Noguera, 2011). Nevertheless, research has shown that the challenges of living in poverty have a tremendous impact on students' readiness to learn and their achievement levels (Noguera, 2011). Noguera (2011) revealed "that a great deal can be done to counter the effects of poverty on children's lives and their education" (p. 10). School leaders should not expect or accept low performance from students in poverty (Noguera, 2012). Noguera (2012) explained that many students from low-income

backgrounds come to school from troubled neighborhoods where crime and violence are strong influences. He stressed that school leaders in low-income areas must strive to “create school cultures that counter the influences of gangs and affirm the importance of learning” (Noguera, 2012, p. 11). Additionally, Noguera’s (2012) research found that “strong, positive relationships between teachers and students are crucial ingredients of their success” (p. 11). These strong relationships are paramount for the success of minority and low-income students. Additionally, Noguera’s (2012) research discovered that effective schools for minority and low-income populations are those which provide safe learning environments, have strong discipline, have mentoring programs, teach character development, have strong leadership, offer academic support, work closely with parents and community, and provide internship contacts for students.

Educators who work with the 14 million American children living in poverty must be aware of these children’s struggles and be willing to help them overcome their deficiencies and challenge them to achieve success despite their living conditions (Wight, Chau, & Aratani, 2010). Researchers Janet Angelis and Kristen Wilcox (2011) conducted a longitudinal study related to the essential characteristics of schools whose low-income students perform better than expected. These researchers reported, “What the more effective schools have in common is not only the refusal to accept the limitations of poverty, but educators’ commitment to the vision that every student can succeed in school and in life” (Angelis and Wilcox, 2011, p. 30). Angelis and Wilcox (2011) also declared that these effective schools communicate high expectations, encourage students, and motivate students to achieve. Angelis and Wilcox (2011) indicated, however, that it takes more than cheerleading to help students from poverty

succeed. It takes academic programs and policies for interventions in an attempt to mitigate the negative effects of poverty (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011). Educators cannot eliminate the challenges in these students' lives, but they can create a culture where the students feel hope and are able to succeed (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011). In order to do so, according to Angelis and Wilcox (2011), educators must collaborate, share responsibilities, make data-driven decisions, and maintain a vision of high expectations for all students. Researchers Monica Martinez and Shaya Klopott (2003) argued that educators of minority and low-income students tend to unwittingly modify their expectations "based on their race, gender, socio-economic status, and other demographic characteristics" (p. 2). Unconsciously lowering expectations, according to Martinez and Klopott (2003), results in assigning less challenging work for these students.

A widely publicized fact in educational research is that minority and low-income students are historically underrepresented in postsecondary educational institutions in America (ACT, 2007; Gandara, 2001; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). Research conducted by the Education Trust-West (2011) revealed that, "students of color and low-income students are less likely to be college-ready than their more advantaged peers, with levels of college readiness far too low across the board" (p. 8). This research by the Education Trust-West (2011) continued by declaring, "Too few students, particularly students of color and low-income students, are graduating from high school with viable post-secondary options" (p. 8). With the continued trend of rising minority and low-income populations in the United States, it is critical for educators to better prepare, challenge, and encourage students from these groups to pursue college or additional training after high school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010; TEA, 2011b). It is sufficiently alarming to

educators to hear that 14 million American children live in poverty; however, Wight et al. (2010) expressed the belief that these data are severely underestimated. Wight et al. (2010) explained that the manner in which the nation sets the poverty thresholds is antiquated and has not been adjusted with the cost of living increases over the years. Wight et al. (2010), therefore, claimed that the nation has additional children whose families are not classified as living in poverty, but who are still unable to make ends meet. Furthermore, Wight et al. (2010) shared that, in 2008, the percentages of African American and Hispanic children living in poverty more than doubled that of White and Asian children. This is significant when examined in conjunction with William Elliott's (2012) research which found that White students in "high-income and high-net worth households" (p. 2) with at least one college-educated parent "are far more likely to be on course [for college] than their peers" (p. 2). Additionally, Elliott (2012) shared the following significant statistics:

- 88 percent of high-income compared to 38 percent of low-income children are on course [for college], a gap of 51 percent.
- 86 percent of children with parents who have a 4-year college degree or more compared to 47 percent of children who live with a parent who has a high school degree or less are on course [for college], a gap of 39 percent. (p. 2)

Elliott (2012) argued that the socioeconomic levels of students are a much higher predictor of college enrollment than student achievement levels and stated the following:

In other words, arguments that focus on college attendance and completion gaps often overlook the fact that the lowest-achieving children from high-income families attend college at a much higher rate than the lowest-achieving children

from low-income families (77 percent vs. 36 percent, respectively). In comparison, 97 percent of the highest-achieving children from high-income families attend college while only 78 percent of the highest-achieving children from low-income families attend college. (p. 3)

Elliott (2012) also revealed that the majority of high-achieving, low-income students in his research realized the value of a college education; however, many of them did not attend college because of their belief that college was not within their reach. Part of this belief, according to Elliott (2012), originated from the lack of financial resources and students who were fortunate enough to save money designated for college were more likely to see college as a distinct possibility. Moreover, research revealed that low-income students are more hesitant to take out student loans for fear of not being able to pay back the loans after college (Elliott, 2012; Johnson, 2012). Researchers Colin Austin and Ulysses Bell (2012) also shared these same concerns and divulged, “Many simply cannot afford to stay in school, because doing so would conflict with keeping a job, paying the bills, or responding to a crisis” (p. 371). In order to combat these issues, educators must continuously provide minority and low-income students with information regarding financial assistance and scholarships (Elliott, 2012; Johnson, 2012). It is imperative for educators working with these students to provide a consistent message that financial constraints should not be a deterrent to reaching for their dreams of a college education and the career of their choice (Elliott, 2012; Johnson, 2012).

Andrew Delbanco (2012) confirmed Elliott’s (2012) claim that students’ socioeconomic levels and financial means are a much higher predictor of college enrollment and educational attainment than student achievement levels. Delbanco (2012)

expressed that the higher the family's income, the higher the chances of their children obtaining a college degree. Delbanco (2012) exposed the following disturbing statistics:

If you are a child of a family making more than \$90,000 per year, your odds of getting a BA by age twenty-four are roughly one in two; if your family's income is between \$60,000 and \$90,000, your odds are roughly one in four; if your parents make less than \$35,000, your odds are one in seventeen. (p. 26)

Furthermore, Delbanco (2012) revealed that students from more affluent homes have a better chance of attending an elite college than students from poverty who have obtained the same academic achievement.

According to Martinez and Klopott (2005a), substantial research has been conducted regarding how to best prepare minority and low-income students for postsecondary success. These studies, as per Martinez and Klopott (2005a), have all concurred that academic preparation, social support, access to information, parental involvement, parental knowledge about postsecondary education, and financial aid are the strongest predictors of college attendance and completion. A myriad of researchers, however, have argued that there is an achievement gap or opportunity gap, as many researchers have called it, for minority students and students living in poverty (Flores, 2007; Murray, 2011; Robelen, 2010; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). This gap, a disparity in academic knowledge between these students and their more well-off peers, is created by their living conditions and are present before these students ever begin school (Beegle, 2009; DeWitt, 2011; Holzer, 2011; Jensen, 2009; Kuykendall, 2004; Sheehan & Hall, 2011; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009).

Even though poverty reaches all ethnicities, there are two ways to interpret the data, by number and by percentage. Researchers Donna Tileston and Sandra Darling (2008) reported that American schools use the definition of poverty presented by the U. S. Census Bureau (refer to definition of terms in chapter one) as well as the percentage of students who receive free and reduced school meals to define poverty. Tileston and Darling (2008) continued by explaining the following:

It should be noted that White children represent the largest *number* of children of poverty in the United States. However, children from other racial groups represent the largest *percentage* of children living in poverty for each racial group. We often think about poverty in terms of African Americans, Hispanic, and Native Americans. Perhaps that is because from a percentage point of view, these ethnicities tend to be more concentrated. (p. 13)

Furthermore, Tileston and Darling (2008) cited researcher Jawanza Kunjufu's example to help explain the difference between the number and percent living in poverty. According to Tileston and Darling (2008), Kunjufu espoused, "From an aggregate perspective, there are more Whites below the poverty line than African Americans -- 20 million to 9 million. From a percentage perspective, 25% of African Americans live below the poverty line and only 10% of Whites" (p.13).

Tileston and Darling (2008) also maintained that students' cultures typically shape their view of the importance of education. Tileston and Darling (2008) professed that students' ethnic cultures, as well as the culture of poverty, have a tremendous impact on their attitudes toward learning. Educators, as per Tileston and Darling (2008), must seek to understand each student's background and help them develop a sense of purpose

for their education. Educators must understand that it is not solely the students' ethnic cultures that mold their opinions related to the importance of education and their dreams for the future (Tileston & Darling, 2008). Tileston and Darling (2008) insisted that the negative effects of the culture of poverty also play a tremendous role in shaping the students' attitudes about education and create a lack of hope for their future lives.

The culture of poverty, however, can be conquered, according to the College Board (2007). A taskforce, established by the College Board (2007), focused on college access for students from low-income backgrounds. This College Board (2007) taskforce asserted that every child can and should be prepared for college and suggested that educators and parents are responsible for helping every child, from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, graduate high school ready for success in postsecondary education.

Educational researcher, Harry Holzer (2011) confirmed that there are achievement gaps between low-income and middle- and upper-income students, as well as between minority students and White students. Holzer (2011) declared that these achievement gaps emerge before children ever begin their school career, and "these gaps limit the ability of many youth to complete a high school diploma or to pursue any kind of postsecondary education or training" (p. 7). Actually, as reported in *Poverty Facts and Figures* (2011), the Children's Defense Fund publicized that 22% of children from impoverished backgrounds do not earn a high school diploma, and when these children live in poverty for over half their childhood, 32% do not earn a high school diploma.

Author Peter DeWitt (2011) supported Holzer's (2011) theory regarding the achievement gap many low-income students face. DeWitt (2011) shared that there is a plethora of research which indicates that conditions of poverty create hardships on

students in their pursuits of an education. DeWitt (2011) suggested, “Poverty has an effect on the social, emotional and physiological make-up of children which all directly effect the academic progress a student can make in school” (p. 1). DeWitt (2011) illuminated that children who grow up in poverty begin their education farther behind academically than their middle- and upper-income peers because of their exposure to risks from living in impoverished homes, which may not provide literacy opportunities, cultural experiences, proper nutrition, or adequate medical care. Therefore, according to DeWitt (2011), students from impoverished homes begin school at a disadvantage, and it is up to the educators to fill in the opportunity gap that has been created from the economic and social disparities these children encounter. In order to be given a fair chance in life, DeWitt (2011) emphasized that students from impoverished homes must be exposed to a high quality education. Additionally, Richard Murnane, Harvard University professor of education, as shared by Lesli Maxwell (2012), expressed the same sentiments as DeWitt (2011) by asserting that exposure to a high quality education can make a difference in the lives of children from poverty. Murnane, as quoted by Lesli Maxwell (2012), stated, “It’s true that there are schools that can make a difference even when family circumstances are extraordinarily difficult” (p. 22).

Researchers Lauren Weinstein and Mandy Savitz-Romer (2009) underscored this same sentiment and referenced the presence of an “opportunity gap that exists in America” (p. 1). Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2009) highlighted the inequality between students from high-income schools and those from low-income schools by explaining that high-income students usually have family support and influence that helps guide them in making decisions about their lives beyond high school. Martinez and Klopott

(2005a) agreed with Weinstein and Savitz-Romer's (2009) conclusions and declared that many low-income students come from home environments where parents may not have the "cultural capital to understand the academic work and college application processes" (p. 60) to successfully guide their children through postsecondary educational admissions. In schools with high numbers of students from poverty, it becomes the responsibility of the school staff to share information about college and careers, help students understand the entrance requirements and prerequisites for various postsecondary opportunities, encourage students to dream and set goals for their future, and embolden students to seek and prepare for life beyond high school (Beegle, 2009; Conley, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Kimbrough, 2012; Kuykendall, 2004; Murray, 2011; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2009) also conveyed that low-income students and their families may "hold low educational expectations shaped by poor educational experiences, low societal expectations, or previous foreclosure on postsecondary goals" (p. 7). Author David Conley (2010) also recognized the need for school personnel to assume this responsibility because "going to college is like entering a new culture. This profound transition, disorientation for even the best-prepared students, is particularly difficult for students from communities that have little prior experience with postsecondary education" (p. 20).

Although research has shown that there is a significant relationship between poverty, race, and school achievement, it has also provided valuable suggestions for helping students overcoming the detrimental effects of poverty (Flores, 2007; Martinez & Klopott 2005a; Murray, 2011; Robelen, 2010; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). Researchers Kevin Sheehan and Kevin Rall (2011) professed, "The real problem for

children of poverty may not be weak academic skills, poor teachers, or scant resources, but a lack of hope that they can alter their life conditions through effort” (p. 44). These researchers concluded that hope enables students to clearly see the future, set goals for the future, and determinedly strive to reach their goals (Sheehan & Rall, 2011). Every student should have the privilege to dream about their future and believe that they can succeed at achieving their dreams. Educators must ensure that all students, particularly minority and low-income students, are encouraged to dream and are pushed to challenge themselves to strive for their goals. Sheehan and Rall (2011) asserted that to have hopeful students, a school must have hopeful teachers. In addition, Sheehan and Rall (2011) declared that hopeful students will be more engaged and will increase their achievement in school.

Sheehan and Rall (2011) highlighted the importance of hope-building with the story of the De La Salle School in Freeport, New York. The De La Salle School, as reported by Sheehan and Rall (2011), was comprised of all male, minority, and low-income students in fifth through eighth grade. The students who were enrolled in this school were encapsulated in a school culture which made hope-building the foundation of the school (Sheehan & Rall, 2011). The students started each day with reciting positive affirmations related to their goals and abilities (Sheehan & Rall, 2011). There was a strong sense of community at the De La Salle School, and class sizes were kept small, so teachers could work closely with each student to achieve success (Sheehan & Rall, 2011). Students at De La Salle School succeed despite their poverty, ethnicity, family composition, and neighborhood conditions (Sheehan & Rall, 2011). Sheehan and Rall (2011) shared that all of the students who attended the De La Salle School graduated and

enrolled in a two- or four-year college or university (2011). This is significant because the majority of these students were the first in their family to attend college (Sheehan & Rall, 2011). This one shining example should serve as a model for principals and teachers who wish to positively change the future for minority and low-income youth (Sheehan & Rall, 2011).

Unfortunately, according to Crystal Kuykendall (2004), even some high school graduates feel deficient and unprepared for postsecondary education, training, and work opportunities. Kuykendall (2004) divulged an even bleaker view of minority students' perceptions. She proclaimed, "Many Black and Hispanic students go through high school without ever believing they can really make it 'legitimately' in a society they feel is against them" (Kuykendall, 2004, p. 5). Kuykendall (2004) professed that educators have the greatest influence on minority and low-income students; therefore, they should inspire these students to aim for success for their futures. Kuykendall (2004) suggested that low-income students need a "megadose of hope" (p. 113) in order to change their self-image and belief in their abilities. Kuykendall (2004) summarized the premise that hope building is fundamental to helping minority youth succeed by exclaiming that educators must help African American and Hispanic students appreciate that if "they can conceive it in their hearts and believe it, they can achieve it" (p. 118).

Researcher Eric Jensen (2009) reinforced Kuykendall's (2004) supposition, and emphasized that teachers' opinions and faith in students' abilities make a tremendous difference in student success, especially for low-income students who may have a lack of hope for their futures. Author Shane Lopez (2010) also claimed that hope is an essential predictor of success, and that students who have hope also have belief that they have the

ability to achieve their dreams, creating excitement and commitment to learning. Lopez (2010) asserted, “Perceiving the likelihood of good outcomes, these students focus on success and, therefore, experience greater positive affect and less stress” (p. 41).

Moreover, Lopez (2010) explained that students who have hope for their future will have the desire to strive for that future; however, they tend to need guidance regarding the strategies to use in pursuit of the large goals, such as graduation and career attainment. Educators must engage these students in conversations regarding options for the future, their hopes and dreams, and the action steps required to reach their goals (Conley, 2010; Murray, 2011).

Additionally, an essential ingredient in helping minority and low-income students reach their dreams is educators who assure these students that they believe in them and that they will help them work toward their goals (Beegle, 2009; Conley, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Kuykendall, 2004; Murray, 2011). Jensen (2009) expressed the need for educators of low-income students to create a culture of hope. Jensen (2009) stressed this argument by conveying, “Hope and learned optimism are crucial factors in turning low-SES students into high achievers” (p. 113). Jensen (2009) communicated that students who have hope work hard and persevere more in order to accomplish their dreams. He also asserted that students do better in school when educators express their belief in the students (Jensen, 2009). Jensen (2009) agreed with numerous well-known educational researchers, including Conley (2010), Kuykendall (2004), and Weinstein and Savitz-Romer (2009). He indicated, “Kids raised in poverty are more likely to lack – and need – a caring, dependable adult in their lives, and often it’s teachers to whom children look for that support” (Jensen, 2009, p. 11). Jensen (2009) concluded by asserting that schools

must provide a “360-degree wraparound student support system” (p. 70) for low-income students.

Furthermore, Jensen (2009) professed that one solution to preconceived ideas and low expectations for low-income youth is for educational leaders to change the culture of the campus “from pity to empathy” (p. 12). Jensen (2009) explained that pity results in low expectations, but empathy results in a culture of respect and caring. Students who feel respected and understood by educators will work harder, perform better, and persist in their efforts to achieve their goals (Jensen, 2009). Instead of feeling sorry for students in poverty and thinking these students are doing the best with what they have, Jensen (2009) expressed that educators must do things differently to get different results. Jensen (2009) maintained that in order to do well in school, “students need to have an academic operating system in place” (p. 55). According to Jensen (2009), an effective academic operating system should include the following components: the ability to defer gratification and persist toward goals, processing skills, focusing and engaging skills, memory aptitude, sequencing skills, and “a champion’s mind-set and confidence” (p. 55). Jensen (2009) stressed that these skills are essential elements for school success that can assist students in mitigating the negative effects of poverty.

Jensen (2009) also reported that the conditions of poverty affect the brain and that many children who are born and grow up in poverty begin school with an intelligence quotient (IQ) lower than the average, supporting Murray’s (2012) notion of an opportunity gap. The good news, according to Jensen (2009), is that research on the brain and IQ has supported the theory that IQ can change. Jensen (2009) maintained that educators can assist low-income students by helping to increase their brain capacity.

In order to assist low-income students increase these skills, Jensen (2009) suggested that educators support, challenge, and believe in students. Educators must, as per Jensen (2009), recognize that students can grow and improve, work to challenge students, strive to help students achieve success, and help build students' confidence by celebrating successes with the students. A "champion's mindset," (Jensen, 2009, p. 55) can only be built if educators help students set goals and persistently strive to reach them.

Researchers Tileston and Darling (2008) disclosed that they once believed there was little an educator could do to overcome the effects of poverty. They communicated, "Like many, we used to believe that we could not do anything about the achievement of children in poverty, because we couldn't 'fix' the poverty and therefore couldn't 'fix' the children" (Tileston & Darling, 2008, p. 24). However, like Jensen (2009), these theorists admitted this is antiquated thinking that must change (Tileston & Darling, 2008).

Tileston and Darling (2008) conceded that educators can assist low-income students "learn and succeed in spite of the obstacles" (p. 24).

Tileston and Darling (2008) proclaimed, however, that some programs and approaches to assist minority students and children from poverty have not been beneficial because they tend to function from a fixed mindset and low expectations. Tileston and Darling (2008) explained that there have been many types of programs implemented to assist low-income students and, "Some have been a disaster" (p. 17). Tileston and Darling (2008) declared that some of these disastrous programs "isolate minorities and children of poverty (for example, Title I and special education) have often added to the problem and may be based on preconceived ideas about these students" (p. 17). Tileston and Darling (2008) indicated that differentiation of context, content, product, and process

is critical in creating success for minority and low-income students. They claimed that differentiation will make a tremendous difference for these students (Tileston & Darling, 2008). The cultural context, according to Tileston and Darling (2008), is culture in which the students are being raised. These researchers proclaimed, “Children’s culture defines what they will focus their attention on, how they interpret the world to give it meaning, what background knowledge they bring to learning, and how they will value that learning” (Tileston & Darling, 2008, p. 25). The cultural context of the students, as per Tileston and Darling (2008), will help educators design classroom dynamics around aspects such as grouping arrangements. Interestingly, Tileston and Darling (2008) professed, “Culture trumps poverty in its impact on achievement. To effectively deal with the issues of poverty, we must first deal with differences based on culture” (p. 26). Understanding the cultural context each student brings to the classroom should help teachers differentiate the content taught, the processes used for engaging students, and the products the students create as an outcome of their learning (Tileston & Darling, 2008). Not only does the cultural background of students influence their attitude toward the value of education; their parent’s education level makes a tremendous impact on their educational aspirations (Beegle, 2009; Jensen, 2009; Kykendall, 2004; Tileston & Darling, 2008).

Author Donna Beegle (2007) is a living example of surviving poverty. Beegle avowed, “The education level of parents is strongly linked to the educational expectations for their children” (p. 67). Generally, people living in poverty, as per Beegle (2007), have very little education and, “are rarely educated beyond high school” (p. 67). People of poverty, however, according to Beegle (2007), dream of their children achieving more

than they did, yet they seldom promote college due to lack of knowledge or fear of the unknown. In her research, Beegle (2007) declared that most people of all races who live in poverty have had very little guidance regarding careers and the value of a good education. Furthermore, Beegle (2007) disclosed that the majority of the participants of her study who were living in poverty did not talk about education at home with their family members. Additionally, she indicated that this lack of communication gave the participants the impression that education was not important (Beegle, 2007). Conversely, in middle- and upper-income families, as per Beegle (2007), postsecondary education is fundamentally presumed as a basic expectation and communicated from early childhood. Beegle (2007) emphatically proclaimed, “For students in poverty, going to college is like touching the moon – not a possibility” (pp. 69-70). Since students living in poverty will most likely not hear about the importance of education from their family members, it is essential for educators to communicate the value of education and how postsecondary education can help children in poverty move beyond their current living conditions (Beegle, 2007). Beegle explained, “For many, a strong motivator is the desire to stop the poverty-related suffering of the people they love” (Beegle, 2007, p, 71).

It is imperative, according to Beegle (2007), for school leaders to stress to their staff the importance of developing trusting relationships with students from poverty and first-generation students. Mentors who provide encouragement and who show an interest in the lives of their students make a tremendous impact on students from poverty (Beegle, 2007). In her research, Beegle (2007) discovered that students from poverty who have successfully obtained a bachelor’s degree contribute their success to an important mentor “who went ‘above and beyond’ to show them they were special; someone who helped

them become more confident; someone who did not judge them for their poverty circumstances” (p. 110). Most importantly, Beegle (2007) asserted, “Students from poverty connect to people, rather than to abstract knowledge” (p. 101). As the old adage states, “Students don’t care what you know until they know that you care,” (Orphal, 2012, *para. 2*) educators must go the extra mile to get to know their students and show them that they care.

Researcher Janice Bloom (2007) supported Beegle’s (2007) theory regarding parents living in poverty and the fear they have of sending their children to college, a world they have never experienced. Bloom (2007) referred to the knowledge and experience with the college world and the inner-workings of the college system as “social and cultural capital” (p. 352). Since parents and students in poverty lack this knowledge and first-hand experience, according to Bloom (2007), they lack this critical social and cultural capital.

Even though many low-income parents lack the social and cultural capital, Deborah Wadsworth and Michael Remaley (2007) declared that they are no different than any other American parent. Wadsworth and Remaley (2007) maintained that all parents view education as the best path to a better future. Wadsworth and Remaley (2007) professed, “Large majorities of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and White young people say that they aspire to higher education as a way to earn society’s respect and ensure career advancement and financial security” (p. 24). Wadsworth and Remaley (2007) also revealed that 53% of the African American and Hispanic who responded to a 2004 survey about the importance of higher education indicated that a college education is essential for success in life.

Similarly, the Hanover Research Council (2009) indicated that first-generation college students do think college is important and this postsecondary education can lead to “career advancement” (p. 5). Students whose parents have had some experience with the college environment, on the other hand, “give their primary reason for attending college as personal growth” (Hanover Research Council, 2009, p. 5). This Hanover Research Council (2009) report also validated Beegle’s (2007) findings regarding how parents’ educational level influences students’ educational aspirations and revealed the following data:

- As early as 8th grade, only 55% of students whose parents hadn’t attended college aspired to obtain a bachelor’s degree, compared to 71% of students whose parents had some college and 91% of students whose parents had a bachelor’s degree.
- Only 25% of first generation students were likely to take the SAT or ACT, compared to 42% of students whose parents had some college and 73% of students whose parents had a bachelor’s degree. (p. 6)

Given these disconcerting statistics, it is critical for educational leaders in schools with high numbers of first-generation student to implement a college-preparation program which will engage the entire family in postsecondary exploration and awareness, lend guidance for completing the necessary steps for pursuing postsecondary education, and provide resources related to the college application and financial aid process (Hanover Research Council, 2009).

Researchers Sandy Baum and Jennifer Ma (2007) imparted similar findings regarding students whose parents did not attend college. Baum and Ma (2007) declared,

“For high school graduates from families with similar incomes, students whose parents went to college are significantly more likely to go to college themselves than those whose parents did not go to college” (p. 2). This same research outcome was highlighted by Kristin Moore, Zakia Redd, Mary Burkhauser, Kassin Mbwana, and Ashleigh Collins (2009) when they professed, “Poor children are more likely than their more affluent peers to be raised by parents who have completed fewer years of education” (p. 4). This lack of education, according to Moore et al. (2009), “negatively affects children’s cognitive and academic attainment” (p. 4). Baum and Ma (2007) reinforced the findings of Moore et al. (2009) by contending that a college education has a great impact on future generations because educated parents have children who, “display higher levels of school readiness indicators than children of parents who do not graduate from college” (p. 2).

To summarize recent research, parents living in poverty typically have less education and are less likely to be able to adequately prepare their children to: (a) enter school with the necessary prerequisite skills, (b) assist their children with school work, (c) sufficiently monitor and supervise their child’s activities after school hours, and (d) provide reliable guidance related to college and career pursuit (Baum & Ma, 2007; Beegle, 2007; Moore et al., 2009; Williams, 2011). Schools can help break this cycle by encouraging students, instilling hope in students, and providing knowledge and resources to minority, low-income, and first generation students and their parents (Baum & Ma, 2007; Beegle, 2007; Moore et al., 2009; Williams, 2011).

Providing a Rigorous Curriculum

According to researcher David Conley (2007), one of the chief reasons many students are not successful their first year in college is due to the gap between their high school experience and the expectations of rigorous college courses. College courses move at a faster pace and require complex problem solving and processing skills (Conley, 2007). In addition, college courses require students to be independent, self-sufficient learners who are critical thinkers, self-motivated, and self-starting (Conley, 2007). High school students, on the other hand, “often complete prescribed tasks that require little cognitive engagement” (Conley, 2007, p. 24). Many high school students, as per Conley (2007), do not look for evidence to support their personal opinions and are often offended if anyone challenges their beliefs. Furthermore, Conley (2007) found that high school students typically struggle with problems that have multiple solutions. In order to combat these discrepancies in academic expectations, Conley (2007) suggested that schools align the high school curriculum with the expectations of colleges and universities, utilize top-notch, rigorous syllabi for all high school classes, create and require senior seminars in order to keep high school seniors focused and engaged, and ascertain what essential content is missing from high school courses and add it to the curriculum. Conley (2007) emphasized that more students than ever before believe college is necessary for success in today’s global economy; therefore, secondary and postsecondary schools must work to pull the two programs together in closer alignment for the sake of the students.

Additional educational researchers, such as Barton (2007) and Bottoms (2007), concurred with Conley’s (2007) assumption that the misalignment between secondary and postsecondary expectations is what causes an ineffective transition to college. Barton

(2007), Bottom (2007), Martinez and Klopott (2005a) and Murray (2011) agreed with Conley's (2007) declaration that there is a lack of pre-collegiate academic rigor and that high schools have an obligation to work to mitigate this deficit.

Author Paul Barton (2007) supported Conley (2007) and declared, "The current high school reform movement focuses on beefing up curriculum to raise student achievement so that more students not only get into college, but also succeed there" (p. 26). Likewise, Gene Bottoms (2007) professed that high schools can and should prepare all students for postsecondary education or training. Bottoms (2007) asserted that making high schools more rigorous will better prepare student for success in their future. Additionally, Bottoms (2007) proclaimed that a rigorous high school program will help prepare students for the academic demands, as well as provide them with the necessary time-management skills that will aid them in successfully completing college-level work.

Educator Linda Murray (2011, 2012) declared that far too often minority and low-income students are tracked into low-level, unchallenging courses with little expectations. Murray (2011) argued that the low-level track "not only leaves them unprepared for college, but also leaves them unprepared for the reality of today's workplace" (p. xvii). Murray (2011) professed that the higher, more rigorous courses are beneficial to all students, regardless if they plan to attend college or not. She also explained that employers want the same skills from their worker that colleges want from their students (Murray, 2011). Murray (2011, 2012) argued against the myth that open enrollment into Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses will lower the standards because teachers will teach to the lowest student in the class. Murray (2011)

reported that the San Jose Unified School District in California required all students to begin the college-preparation track upon entering high school. District administrators in San Jose monitored the AP and IB programs vigilantly and discovered that the number of students who chose to enroll in AP and IB courses during their sophomore, junior, and senior years increased (Murray, 2011). Moreover, the AP exam passing rates in San Jose remained the same over a ten-year period, even with more minority and low-income students testing (Murray, 2011). Murray (2011) attributed the success of the San Jose students to beginning a college-preparatory track upon entering high school, which helped prepare students for the challenges of college-level coursework.

Researcher Mel Levine (2007) concurred with Murray (2011; 2012) regarding the importance of engaging high school students in more rigorous courses. Levine (2007) maintained that high schools need to equip graduates with the following cognitive skills: “Interpretation (becoming an in-depth comprehender), Instrumentation (acquiring a project mentality), Interaction (building and sustaining productive, fulfilling relationships), and Inner Direction (attaining malleable self-insights that inform self-launching)” (p. 19). Levine (2007) revealed, “Many high school graduates look back on their secondary school journey with disappointment, believing that they were not adequately prepared for college or for work” (p. 17). Additionally, Levine (2007) discussed a poll taken by high school graduates which revealed, “Approximately 40 percent of recent graduates reported key gaps in their preparation” (p. 17). These graduates polled by Levine (2007) indicated they would have worked harder and taken more rigorous courses if they had the opportunity to go through high school again. Educational researchers Deborah Wadsworth and Michael Remaley (2007) shared similar

data from their study related to the perceptions of ethnically diverse students, divulging that “58 percent of black students, 53 percent of Hispanic students, and 46 percent of white students” (pp. 26-27) indicated they could work harder if schools expected it of them. Wadsworth and Remaley (2007) proclaimed, “Schools would do well to hold students to higher expectations” (pp. 26-27).

Unfortunately, according to Mary Stein, Stephanie Robinson, Kati Haycock, Dan Vitale, and Cyndi Schmeiser (2005), there is a lack of college-preparatory courses in many high schools. Stein et al. (2005) reported that college-bound students are not challenging themselves to take the higher-level coursework that would better prepare them for success in college. Stein et al. (2005) cited the following from a 2004 ACT report which supported their claim: “Nearly 45% of students who declare an intention to attend college after high school have not taken the college-preparatory courses that will allow them to proceed to credit-bearing courses” (p. 24). Furthermore, Stein et al. (2005) maintained that high schools should guide all students into a “common college-prep core” (p. 24). Moreover, Stein et al. (2005) declared that even the lowest quartile students benefit from an intense college-preparatory program for at least four periods during the school day. In order for a school to shift from a goal of graduating all students to a goal of ensuring that every student has an opportunity to enroll in and successfully complete postsecondary education or training, it is essential to analyze the curriculum and academic expectations of every course at every grade level (Barton, 2007; Bottoms, 2007; Conley, 2010; Levine, 2007; Martinez & Klopott, 2005a; Murray, 2011; Stein et al., 2005; Wadsworth & Remaley, 2007).

The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) reported that “inequitable access to rigorous coursework prematurely shuts the door to college on many students” (p. 18). Secondary schools must ensure that all students, regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status, have access to rigorous courses that will adequately prepare them for college and the workforce (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) took the declarations from Stein et al. (2005) one step further by suggesting that voluntary enrollment in college-preparation coursework is ineffective and leaves little incentive for students who lack self-motivation. It can be inferred from the Alliance for Excellent Education’s (2008) assertions that a required college-preparation core would be highly recommended for all students, especially when a school has a large population of minority and low-income students. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) professed that minority and low-income students, many times, find that these “classes are not available or are filled by a select group of ‘college track’ students” (p. 18). According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2008), school leaders must open access and require college-preparation courses for all students in order to guarantee that every student has the academic knowledge and tools to succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Martinez and Klopott (2003, 2005a, 2005b) also maintained, through their research studies, that one of the best pre-collegiate strategies for preparing students for successful entry and completion of postsecondary education is providing access to a common core academic program for all students. Research has confirmed, according to Martinez and Klopott (2003), that students who take high-level courses in high school have a greater chance of enrolling in and graduating from a bachelor’s degree program.

Martinez and Klopott (2003), however, also divulged that “low-income, underrepresented minority, and first generation students are often unprepared for, and discouraged from taking such courses” (p. 6). Martinez and Klopott (2005a) contended that the results of their research revealed, “Among the predictors of college-going behavior, academic rigor and strong social and academic support were the most crucial predictors of student’s successful enrollment in, and completion of, postsecondary institutions” (p. 57).

Martinez and Klopott (2003) stressed the need for high school leaders to provide the necessary assistance for underrepresented minority and low-income students, so they can successfully challenge themselves to take academically rigorous courses which will prepare them for the future. In addition, Martinez and Klopott (2005a) emphasized that school leaders should work to remove non-academic, vocational tracks and align high school curriculum to higher education standards. Furthermore, Martinez and Klopott (2005a) stressed the need for high school leaders to increase opportunities for all students to enroll in AP and dual credit programs.

The AP program, promoted by Martinez and Klopott’s (2003, 2005a, 2005b) research, is a College Board (2006) program which began in 1955 as a collaborative effort between universities and high schools. The AP program was developed with the intentions of encouraging high school students to take college-level course work in order to prepare them for the college experience by exposing them to the rigor and content they will encounter as a freshman in college (College Board, 2006). The AP program allows students to gain experience with college-level expectation and rigor, practice college-level skills, and earn college credit through passing an AP examination at the end of the AP course (College Board, 2006). Upon successful completion of AP courses and AP

exams, students are able “to enter college with exemptions from entry-level college course requirements” (Martinez & Klopott, 2005a, p. 65). The ability to exempt entry-level college courses will allow students to focus on their college major earlier in their college career (Martinez & Klopott, 2005a). The College Board (n.d.) affirmed that there are AP opportunities and exams in 34 different courses which are all taught by teachers who have received rigorous training from the College Board. These AP courses, according to the College Board (n.d.), will help students prepare for postsecondary education by engaging them in powerful discussions and problem solving about topics which may lead to a college major or career choice. The College Board (n.d.) also explained that high school AP courses help students refine their academic skills, time management skills, and study habits which will lead them to a more successful postsecondary educational opportunity.

Even with these clear benefits of the AP program, approximately 43% of the schools in America do not offer any AP courses, and in schools where AP courses are offered, minority and low-income students are not enrolling in these courses at the same rate as White and Asian students (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). Martinez and Klopott (2005a) explained, “White students make up 66% of the youth ages 15-19, while they represent 67% of the students enrolled in AP Calculus AB classes” (p. 65). On the other hand, according to researchers Martinez and Klopott (2005a), “African American student comprise 15% of high school students, but represent 4% of the same course; and Hispanic student make up 14% of high school students, but represent 5% of AP Calculus AB students” (p. 65). Martinez and Klopott (2005a) revealed that secondary schools in

practically every state in the United States offer dual credit opportunities; however, they “predominantly serve White, middle class students” (p. 76).

Additionally, Martinez and Klopott (2005a) avowed that there is inconsistency in the preparation of AP teachers, declaring that many AP teachers in schools with large minority and economically disadvantaged student populations are not adequately prepared. Likewise, Martinez and Klopott (2005a) claimed that the most effective AP teachers who work with minority and low-income students are those who have the most teaching experience, who have the most experience teaching AP courses, who have a college major in the field they are teaching, and who have attended professional development that is geared specifically for teaching AP-level courses. Martinez and Klopott (2005a) implied that these proclamations from their study were particularly disturbing because teachers in minority and low-income schools typically are the least experienced and least prepared to teach AP-level courses. This lack of teacher preparation, as per Martinez and Klopott (2005a), results in a “disproportionate number of African American and Latino students scoring lower on AP exams than do White students” (p. 65). This disproportion is highlighted by Martinez and Klopott (2005a) in the following example: “While 21% of White students score 3 or higher on the AP Calculus exams, only 2% of African American and 6% Hispanic students do so” (p. 65). Martinez and Klopott (2005a) explained that most researchers acknowledge the benefits of the AP program. They maintained, “Whether or not students earn college credit through the program, the AP courses offer the rigorous, advanced-level curricula that students need to prepare for work at the postsecondary level” (Martinez and Klopott,

2005a, p. 65). Moreover, Martinez and Klopott (2005a) avowed, “Success in AP classes often gives students increased confidence that they can succeed in college” (p. 65).

Several years after Martinez and Klopott (2005a) made this proclamation, educational theorist Paul Gorski (2008) postulated, “The socioeconomic opportunity gap can be eliminated only when we stop trying to ‘fix’ poor students and start addressing the ways in which our schools perpetuate classism” (pp. 34-35). Gorski (2008) suggested that school leaders eliminate “the inequities listed above [e.g., less funding; lower teacher salaries; more limited computer and Internet access; larger class sizes; higher student-to-teacher ratios; a less-rigorous curriculum; and fewer experienced teachers] as well as abolishing such practices as tracking and ability grouping, segregational redistricting, and the privatization of public schools” (p. 34-35) in order to provide the most advantageous education for all citizens.

Likewise, the College Board’s (2006) research supported Martinez and Klopott’s (2005a) assertions and declared, “A rigorous high school curriculum is the greatest predictor of college completion, regardless of socioeconomic status or race” (p. 3). The College Board (2006) purported that a school with college as a focus should have an environment which places emphasis on academic rigor, “challenge the existence of low-level and unchallenging courses, and debunk negative myths about who can and who cannot achieve success in rigorous courses” (p. 6). The College Board (2006) advised school leaders to implement an AP program, expect all students to enroll in one or more AP courses before graduation, eliminate fees that may become an obstacle for low-income students, require a college-preparation track for all students, and offer college

entrance exam preparation courses during the school day in order to better equalize the opportunities afforded to students.

Additional educational theorists have also espoused the importance of opening access to higher-level and more rigorous courses for all students, especially low-income, underrepresented minority, and first-generation students (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Cole, 2008; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Jensen, 2009). Carol Burriss and Delia Garrity (2008) argued that current educational practices such as ability grouping and leveling are simply another way to sort and select students for the advanced track. These authors maintained that ethnic minority students have been tracked into the lower level for years, and it is time for educators to expand their opportunities and provide the assistance necessary to help them succeed (Burriss & Garrity, 2008). Burriss and Garrity (2008) argued that school leaders do a disservice to their students by justifying the educational practice of tracking students. Educators who have declared tracking as fair, according to Burriss and Garrity (2008), ultimately are affecting the students' ability to apply to and enroll in the nation's best colleges and universities.

Author Robert Cole (2008) also spoke out against the practice of sorting and selecting students. He proclaimed, "The most notorious of the harmful institutional practices is tracking, which dooms children in the low track to a second-rate education" (Cole, 2008, p. 4). Cole (2008) implied that tracking creates additional gaps between minority and lower-income students and their peers. Tracking, according to Cole (2008), labels students and causes them to "lose self-esteem and motivation" (p. 4). Cole (2008) explained that many educators tend to have lower expectations of minority and low-income students. He adamantly professed the importance of maintaining high

expectations for all students to perform to higher levels (Cole, 2008). Cole (2008) argued that it is not just the teachers who must raise their expectations. He asserted that school leaders play an enormous role in creating a climate to support all students achieving at higher levels (Cole, 2009). Principals, according to Cole (2008), must ensure that enough rigorous, college-preparation courses are offered in the master schedule, and counselors must guide more minority and low-income students to enroll in these courses.

Researcher Eric Jensen (2009) promoted the creation of an “enrichment mindset” (p. 94) for low-income students as opposed to lowering expectations and showing pity for low-income students. An enrichment mindset, according to Jensen (2009), will promote curiosity, engagement, and challenging for all students. Jensen (2009) recommended that educators acquiesce to the need to provide additional support to help students reach these higher expectations in this enriched learning environment. Jensen (2009) advocated for both AP and dual credit programs and insinuates that enrolling in AP and dual credit courses in high school “demystifies the college-going experience” (p. 123) and increases the likelihood of these students earning a bachelor’s degree. Jensen (2009) professed that AP courses will assist students by providing a hope-building curriculum which challenges and exposes student to postsecondary expectations. These college-preparation courses, as per Jensen (2009), “develop pride, self-concept, and self-esteem” (p. 122).

Like Jensen (2009), researchers Sergio Flores and Martin Gomez (2011) also purported that educational leaders must work to equalize access to AP programs by actively recruiting and encouraging underrepresented minority and low-income students. These researchers recommended that secondary principals “support the active expansion of the AP program by creating the needed infrastructure to prepare student for the AP

rigor” (Flores & Gomez, 2011, p. 65). Flores and Gomez (2011) maintained that students gain more knowledge, study skills, writing skills, and self-confidence by enrolling in AP courses; therefore, these courses are also beneficial to students who traditionally have not been in advanced courses. Flores and Gomez (2011) expressed that it is the job of the principal to change the culture from one where only the top students are capable of successful completion of AP classes to one where all students are encouraged to enroll in classes to better prepare them for postsecondary education and career opportunities. AP classes, according to Flores and Gomez (2011), should be the expectation for every student, and the school staff must create a belief system that promotes AP classes as critical for future success. Flores and Gomez (2011) suggested smaller AP class sizes, holding parent meetings to share the benefits of AP courses, and advertising AP courses through multiple avenues.

Support for Flores and Gomez’s (2011) assertions is provided by The Pathways to College Network, according to Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman, and Coles (2009). Savitz-Romer et al. (2009) explained that The Pathways to College Network is a partnership of organizations which work together to ensure that underserved populations receive academic and social support as they work toward college and career readiness. According to Savitz-Romer et al. (2009), this network advocates for changes not only in local school policy, but advocates for state policy changes which would require action by local school districts and schools. The Pathways to College Network expressed, as per Savitz-Romer et al. (2009), that all secondary students should have the opportunity to take challenging and rigorous courses to adequately prepare them for postsecondary education and training; however, they strongly recommend social and emotional support

to help students achieve success as they learn new skills and conquer new challenges. The Pathways to College Network recommended that state policymakers mandate that all students progress through a core of high academic standards for graduation, only allowing students to opt out of that requirement with parent permission (Savitz-Romer et al., 2009). The network, however, also stressed that policymakers must also have conversations about social support policies which would require secondary schools to provide support services to assist students, regardless of their socioeconomic status or prior educational opportunities, in meeting the higher standards (Savitz-Romer et al., 2009).

David Conley (2005) also proclaimed that schools have a responsibility to ensure that all students have equal access to college-preparation programs, such as AP and dual credit courses. Conley (2005) purported, “College preparation is a knowledge-intensive activity and that some students have much greater access to the necessary information than others” (p. xiv). He argued that properly taught AP courses drastically improve students’ readiness for postsecondary education and professed that these courses should be open to all students who wish to accept the challenge (Conley, 2005). Moreover, he reminded his readers that AP and dual credit opportunities give high school students experience with “content and performance expectations” (Conley, 2010, p. 62) reflective of the college freshman year. Additionally, AP and dual credit courses, according to Conley (2010), will decrease the overall cost of college because students will earn college credit while still in high school. Conley (2005) explained, however, that the College Board published research findings suggesting, “Schools that set strict prerequisites for AP enrollment exclude many students who could benefit from AP” (p. 51).

Dual credit courses, according to Conley (2005, 2010) are also appropriate venues for providing rigor and challenge for college-bound students in particular. Conley (2005, 2010) maintained that dual credit courses are an excellent method for exposing students to college-level work prior to graduating from high school. The experience with college-level requirements, espoused Conley (2005), will help students determine for themselves if they are capable of the pace and complexity of college work. Conley (2005) asserted that whether the dual credit courses are taught by college instructors, high school instructors, or offered through an on-line program, the experience is beneficial to students who are contemplating college enrollment.

The *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (2004) report also advocated for raised academic rigor in all secondary school classes. The report disclosed, “The completion of a solid academic core was more strongly correlated with a bachelor’s degree than high school test scores, grade-point averages, or class rank” (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004, p. 93). Additionally, the report maintained that a demanding curriculum had the strongest impact on African American and Hispanic students (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004). One of the strongest indicators of student success in postsecondary education programs, as discovered through this research, was the number of AP courses students completed in high school (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004). This study found that students who completed more than one AP course in high school were higher achievers in postsecondary education courses (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004). Along with raising the academic rigor for all students, another key recommendation from this report was for principals to contemplate, “How many low-income and how many minority students are enrolled in advanced courses?” (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004, p. 2). This report

suggested that principals advocate for and implement an open enrollment policy for honors, AP, and dual credit courses (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004).

Even though there are differing public opinions regarding equal access to college-preparatory programs, such as AP and dual credit program, the vast majority of educational researchers have concluded that secondary schools must stop building roadblocks to these rigorous, college-preparation programs for minority and low-income students (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Cole, 2008; Conley, 2005, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Flores & Gomez, 2011; Jensen, 2009; Murray, 2011, 2012). Researchers in this area have concurred that AP and dual credit programs provide significant benefits for all students, not just the top students (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Cole, 2008; Conley, 2005, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Flores & Gomez, 2011; Jensen, 2009; Murray, 2011, 2012). Students from all backgrounds should be encouraged, if not required, to complete a rigorous high school program, and educators must work to expand these college-preparatory opportunities which provide challenging, rigorous knowledge and skills that will better prepare students for both college and the workforce (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Cole, 2008; Conley, 2005, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Flores & Gomez, 2011; Jensen, 2009; Murray, 2011, 2012). Minority and low-income students, according to a plethora of educational researchers, must be given equal opportunity to participate in college-level academics, and it is up to the secondary educational leaders and teachers to raise the expectations and better prepare all students for successful entry into postsecondary education and the workforce (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Cole, 2008; Conley, 2005, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Flores & Gomez, 2011; Jensen, 2009; Murray, 2011, 2012).

Educational researchers have shared a wealth of knowledge related to the necessities and benefits of postsecondary education and have adamantly communicated the role of secondary school leadership in developing a college-focused culture to encourage all students, including minority and low-income students, to further their education and training after high school graduation. From the beginning of the American public school system, philosophers expressed that education is essential to ensure that all citizens become contributing members of society. According to researchers presented in this literature review, in order to adequately prepare citizens for the workforce of the 21st century, it is critical for educators to prepare students by establishing a school culture which encourages students from all ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds to enroll in challenging courses to adequately prepare them for future endeavors.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine how school leaders, particularly secondary school principals, can implement a college-focused culture in order to influence the perceptions of minority and low-income students regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education. This study explored the effects of the college-focused culture created at three study Title I secondary campuses and compared the results to a control group, three additional Title I secondary campuses that did not benefit from the same college-focused initiatives.

Description of the Research Design

This research was a quantitative study, using categorical data, designed to identify associations between the college-focused cultures implemented by secondary school leaders and student perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), “Quantitative researchers seek to establish relationships between variables and look for and sometimes explain the *causes* of such relationships” (p. 15). This study utilized archival data collected from descriptive, district-created, student surveys which were administered in person to the entire student body enrolled in six secondary campuses. Survey research, according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), is “an attempt to obtain data from members of a population to determine the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables” (p. G8). Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) explained that descriptive survey responses are calculated and reported in the form of “frequencies or percentage of those who answer in a particular way to each of the questions” (p. 12). This research study reported the responses of the student perception surveys through descriptive statistics,

which, according to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), are “data analysis techniques that enable the researcher to meaningfully describe data with numerical indices or in graphic form” (p. G2). In addition, this research study utilized the Pearson chi-square procedures to calculate the student survey questions on each of the three district-created, student surveys.

This research was also designed to identify the associations between the college-focused cultures implemented by secondary school leaders and the AP and dual credit enrollment data, as well as the college enrollment data for the 2011 graduating classes of a study high school, High School A, and a control high school, High School B. Causal-comparative research was used in this study. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) defined this type of research as that which “is intended to determine the cause for or the consequences of differences between groups of people” (pp. 11-12). Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) explained that causal-comparative research is beneficial in “identifying *possible* causes of observed variations in the behavior patterns of students” (p. 12). Causal-comparative research is also known as *ex post facto* research because it studies the effects of variables to which groups have already been exposed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) explained that in *ex post facto* research, “investigators attempt to determine the cause or consequences of differences that already exist between or among different groups or individuals” (p. 363). This study attempted to show that the college-focused culture to which the school leaders of the study campuses purposefully exposed students to was a possible cause for increased enrollment in AP courses and dual credit courses. In addition, this study attempted to show that the college-focused culture these students were exposed to was a possible cause for increased enrollment in colleges and

universities immediately following high school graduation. The study compared the data from the three study campuses to the data retrieved from the demographically similar control campuses, which did not purposefully expose students to the same college-focused culture.

Research Questions

This study investigated the college-focused culture implemented by secondary school leadership in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the creation of a college-focused culture positively influence students' perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education?
2. Does the creation of a college-focused culture increase student enrollment in Advanced Placement and dual credit courses?
3. Does the creation of a college-focused culture increase student enrollment in colleges and universities directly after high school completion?

Setting

In a large, diverse, suburban school district in Texas, the focus district's leaders were increasingly concerned that many of their minority and low-income students were not pursuing postsecondary educational opportunities and believed the district's middle and high schools were not doing enough to assist these underrepresented students in preparing for their futures. In an effort to address these concerns, the focus district participated in a multi-year, postsecondary success grant initiative that was funded by a federal non-profit organization. With a clear understanding that minority and low-income students often need substantial support navigating the college entrance process,

the focus district's grant initiative concentrated on promoting a college-focused culture on three Title I campuses, study campus High School A and its two feeder middle school campuses, study campus Middle School A and study campus Middle School B. A core belief of the focus district's grant initiative was that it is essential for all schools, not just middle- and upper-income schools, to build a college-focused culture where staff, students, and parents expect students from all walks of life, not just the top performing or most elite students, to pursue postsecondary training or college education to prepare them for a better future.

The influential American educational reformer John Dewey (1916) stressed the importance of helping young people realize their potential and how to use their abilities for the greater good of mankind in an occupation that fits their talents and interests.

Dewey (1916) expressed:

An occupation is the only thing which balances the distinctive capacity of an individual with his social service. To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness. Nothing is more tragic than failure to discover one's true business in life, or to find that one has drifted or been forced by circumstance into an uncongenial calling. A right occupation means simply that the aptitudes of a person are in adequate play, working with the minimum of friction and the maximum of satisfaction. (Chapter 23, *para.* 5)

Through the focus district's grant initiatives, the three study campuses attempted to show the students exactly what John Dewey (1916) meant by discovering one's true business in life. Study campuses High School A, Middle School A, and Middle School B worked to enlighten the students on how to select an occupation that fits with their

aptitudes by immersing them in a career-minded culture, exposing them to college-entrance testing that revealed both their interests and aptitudes for various careers, and informing them of various career paths. With the same mindset as John Dewey (1916), the focus district was committed to ensuring that college awareness, access, and guidance are available to all of its students, regardless of their family's economic status. The superintendent who served the focus district during the grant initiatives expressed:

This initiative is an example of matching resources with rhetoric. Through this grant, our students will truly be able to have choices when they complete high school, instead of being well-prepared with nowhere to go. Our students deserve a quality education that provides them with quality choices for their futures; that is our commitment. (D. Antonio [pseudonym], personal communication, November 15, 2007, p. 2)

The focus district spent the 2007-2008 school year planning the grant initiatives prior to implementation, and the grant initiatives were implemented in the fall of 2008. The focus district was funded by the federal non-profit organization grant for three school years: 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011.

Subjects

The sample for this study was drawn from the population of the six secondary school campuses in the focus district, two high school and four middle school campuses. The demographics of the student population within the focus district during the inaugural year of the grant initiatives (2008-2009) included a total student enrollment of 100,505 (TEA, 2009). The demographic breakdown of the total district student population was as follows: 15.7% African American, 38.1% Hispanic, 37.1% White, 0.3% Native

American, 8.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 41.5% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2009).

The focus district began by establishing an infrastructure to guide, connect, and coordinate strategies for developing a college-focused culture at study campuses High School A, Middle School A, and Middle School B. High School A feeder pattern campuses were extremely diverse and had large economically disadvantaged student populations. At the onset of this project, during its inaugural year (2008-2009), the enrollment at High School A was a total student population of 1,535 students (as shown on Table 2), which encompassed 20% African American, 53% Hispanic, 21% White, <1% Native American, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 56% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2009). The two feeder middle schools had similar demographics. Also shown on Table 2, the total population of study campus Middle School A during the first year of the project was 1,417 students, which encompassed 28% African American, 52% Hispanic, 16% White, <1% Native American, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 68% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2009). Likewise, Table 2 shows that Middle School B had a total enrollment of 1,322 students, which encompassed 14% African American, 53% Hispanic, 24% White, <1% Native American, 9% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 58% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2009).

In order to adequately evaluate the impact of the grant initiatives on student perceptions, a control group was examined for comparison. The control group campuses, the High School B feeder pattern, had similar demographics during the inaugural year (2008-2009) and were located in the same vicinity in the district. During the 2008-2009 school year, High School B had a total student enrollment of 3,074 students (as shown on

Table 2), which encompassed 30% African American, 43% Hispanic, 21% White, <1% Native American, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 52% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2009). The two feeder middle schools in the control group had similar demographics. Also shown on Table 2, Middle School C had a total enrollment of 1,476 students, which encompassed 32% African American, 47% Hispanic, 15% White, <1% Native American, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 64% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2009). Likewise, Table 2 shows that Middle School D had a total student enrollment of 1,549 students, which encompassed 26% African American, 53% Hispanic, 15% White, <1% Native American, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 66% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2009).

Table 2

2008-2009 Enrollment Data for Three Study and Three Control Campuses

School	Total	AA	H	W	NA	A/PI	ED
High School A	1,535	20%	53%	21%	<1%	6%	56%
High School B	3,074	30%	43%	21%	<1%	5%	52%
Middle School A	1,417	28%	52%	16%	<1%	3%	68%
Middle School B	1,322	14%	53%	24%	<1%	9%	58%
Middle School C	1,476	32%	47%	15%	<1%	6%	64%
Middle School D	1,549	26%	53%	15%	<1%	5%	66%

Over the three-year period of the grant initiative, the population of the focus district and the population of each school in this research increased in minority students, increased in economically disadvantaged students, and decreased in White student

enrollment. The demographics of the student population within the focus district during the final year of the grant initiative (2010-2011) included a total student enrollment of 105,860 (TEA, 2011a). The demographic breakdown of the total district student population was as follows: 15.5% African American, 42.5% Hispanic, 31.0% White, 0.2% American Indian, 8.0% Asian, <1.0% Pacific Islander, 2.7% two or more races, and 46.5% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a).

During the last year of the grant initiative (2010-2011), the enrollment at High School A, as shown on Table 3, had a total student population of 3,208 students, which encompassed 22% African American, 54% Hispanic, 17% White, <1% American Indian, 8% Asian, 0% Pacific Islander, 2% two or more races, and 58% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a). The total population of Middle School A during the last year of the project, as shown on Table 3, was 1,296 students, which encompassed 26% African American, 58% Hispanic, 11% White, <1% American Indian, 2% Asian, <1% Pacific Islander, 3% two or more races, and 70% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a). Likewise, during the last year of the initiative, Middle School B had a total enrollment of 1,294 students, which encompassed, as shown on Table 3, 15% African American, 57% Hispanic, 17% White, <1% American Indian, 8% Asian, 0% Pacific Islander, 3% two or more races, and 66% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a).

Again, just as with the study group, the control group population increased in minority students, increased in economically disadvantaged students, and decreased in White students over the three years of the grant initiatives. During the last year of this initiative (2010-2011), High School B had a total enrollment of 2,488 students, as shown on Table 3, which encompassed 33% African American, 48% Hispanic, 12% White,

<1% American Indian, 5% Asian, 0% Pacific Islander, 1% two or more races, and 63% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a). The two feeder middle schools had similar demographics. During the 2012-2011 school year, control campus Middle School C had a total enrollment of 1,370 students, as shown on Table 3, which encompassed 28% African American, 56% Hispanic, 10% White, <1% American Indian, 3% Asian, 0% Pacific Islander, 3% two or more races, and 73% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a). Likewise, during the last year of the grant initiative, control campus Middle School D had a total population of 1,351 students, as shown on Table 3, which encompassed 25% African American, 57% Hispanic, 11% White, <1% American Indian, 6% Asian, 0% Pacific Islander, 1% two or more races, and 71% economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2011a).

Table 3

2010-2011 Enrollment Data for Three Study and Three Control Campuses

School	Total	AA	H	W	AI	A	PI	Mix	ED
High School A	3,208	22%	54%	17%	<1%	6%	0%	2%	58%
High School B	2,488	33%	48%	12%	<1%	5%	0%	1%	63%
Middle School A	1,296	26%	58%	11%	<1%	2%	<1%	3%	70%
Middle School B	1,294	15%	57%	17%	<1%	8%	0%	3%	66%
Middle School C	1,370	28%	56%	10%	<1%	3%	0%	3%	73%
Middle School D	1,351	25%	57%	11%	<1%	6%	0%	1%	71%

Grant Program Initiatives

Even though the focus district had several college- and career- readiness initiatives and programs in place, the initiatives were inconsistently implemented across

campuses, and the initiatives lacked a systematic structure across the district. The district wanted to design an infrastructure for its vision of a college-focused culture through the development of a scope and sequence that would guide, connect, and coordinate strategies that span the essential factors that determine if first-generation, low-income, and minority students will attend college. The focus district was the fortunate beneficiary of a three-year grant “aimed at increasing the rates of postsecondary enrollment and success for significantly higher percentages of under-represented minorities, low-income, and first-generation students” (C. Sanders [pseudonym], personal communication, November 12, 2007, *para.* 1). This grant was funded by a federal non-profit organization which communicated the following objectives for the district to include in their efforts:

- 1) Aim to improve post-secondary access and success among the district's students, especially among low-income students and those who are the first-generation in their family to pursue post-secondary education.
- 2) Aim to increase rates of postsecondary enrollment, especially for low-income, first-generation students.
- 3) Chart student outcomes, including the following:
 - a) successful completion of college preparatory curriculum;
 - b) completion of accelerated learning courses (honors, AP, and dual credit enrollment).
- 4) Aim to increase student attainment of high-quality scores on college entrance exams.
- 5) Aim to increase student completion of the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) in time to take advantage of financial aid opportunities.

- 6) Aim to increase student qualification, while in high school, for credit-bearing courses in college, by passing rigorous high school courses, especially in English and math, and college placement tests. (Preparing for College [pseudonym], 2011, Objectives section, *para.* 1)

The focus district also included the following five objectives for the grant program:

- 1) The district will develop a scope and sequence that will realign current activities, address existing gaps, and cultivate a college and career culture that will impact all students in grades 6-12.
- 2) The district will establish a College and Career Center at High School A designed to serve all students, but targeting at least 50% of low-income ($n = 1,072$) and all first generation students and increasing the number of low-income students served each year by 10%.
- 3) The district will create data collection methods to evaluate participation in the College and Career Center as well as the Parent Night, analyze survey data collected from parents, students, and staff, and evaluate the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) data for each campus.
- 4) A district committee will evaluate current practices and recommend policy and procedural changes that will promote greater access and increase participation of low-income and/or first generation students in advanced courses.
- 5) The district will establish a partnership with a local community college located within the district to increase the number of low-income and first

generation students enrolling in postsecondary institutions. (Focus district memo, personal communication, February 11, 2009, p. 1)

With a clear understanding that minority and low-income students often need substantial support navigating the college entrance process, the focus district concentrated the grant program efforts on addressing parents' and students' need for more information about college. One of the central components of the grant program was the establishment of a College and Career Center, which was located in the library at High School A. The College and Career Center served as the heart of the grant program and was the first facility of its type in the focus district. The center provided essential services for faculty, parents, students, and families by offering resources and hands-on opportunities that fostered aspirations, awareness, and knowledge related to the college application and admissions process. The center was open during evening hours in order to better meet the needs of working parents and students, which was the majority of the student population at High School A. This College and Career Center was the central hub for college and career information and resources, offering informative workshops and individual assistance with college and financial aid applications, dual credit registration, and college entrance exam registration. The students and community were aware that the College and Career Center was the place to go for postsecondary information, resources, and assistance. The center was led by a college and career specialist, who steadily increased the number of students served over the years. The college and career specialist tracked data regarding the number of student visits to the College and Career Center, as well as the number of after-hours college and career presentations conducted by the center's staff. In the fall of 2009, the College and Career

Center serviced 325 students. In comparison, the center serviced 500 students during the fall of 2010. In the fall of 2009, the college and career specialist and her team gave 487 after-hour college and career presentations and increased that in the fall of 2010 to 555 presentations. In addition to increasing after-hour presentations, the college and career specialist and her team more than doubled their classroom presentations during the school day at High School A. The college and career specialist maintained a high level of collaboration with teachers, counselors, and other departments in order to ensure that all students received support and services necessary for college readiness. In addition, the specialist communicated with and trained campus personnel on college- and career-readiness initiatives, established and maintained a working relationship with college and technical training programs, and coordinated the dual credit and AP programs on campus. The College and Career Center also provided materials and speakers for both Middle School A and Middle School B during each of their parent and community events. Anytime the middle school campuses held an event or activity on campus, there was always a high school representative available with college resources for the middle school parents. This outreach to the middle school feeder campuses helped inform parents of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students about the importance of investigating college and career possibilities and preparing for the college application process as early as possible. The College and Career Center was a true asset for the middle school study campuses and their parents. Through these valuable parent and community events, middle school parents and students began to see college as a real possibility within their reach.

An annual parent and student college and career conference, organized by the College and Career Center staff of High School A, focused on preparing students for the workforce and college readiness. This parent and student college and career conference is just one example of the many community events that transformed the culture of each of the study campuses to one of college- and career-focused. This community event was in addition to the annual district-wide college and career parent night held at the focus district's educational resource center. Participants at the conference attended sessions of their choice concerning financial aid (loans, grants, and scholarships), military options, effective study skills, college entrance requirements, selecting a college, college entrance examinations, dual credit opportunities, and AP course opportunities available at the high school level. The majority of the above-mentioned breakout sessions were conducted in both English and Spanish in order to ensure that the Spanish-speaking parents were able to participate and gather vital information to better guide their child in decisions about postsecondary education and training. Additionally, the conference organizers ensured that there were always multiple information booths set up for participants to visit and obtain information about local and state career opportunities and university options. Participation at this community event steadily increased over the three years of the grant. Even though the grant officially concluded after the 2010-2011 school year, the focus district continued this crucial community outreach tradition at High School A and extended invitations to all district middle and high school students and parents.

Minority and low-income youth are more likely, according to Patricia Gandara (2001), to have low or unrealistic aspirations for their future. Research has indicated that these underrepresented youth are less likely than White, middle class students to plan for

higher education (Gandara, 2001). This is a significant research finding because realistic aspirations facilitated by adult role models are very strong predictors of educational outcomes (Gandara, 2001). Transforming a middle or high school campus to a college-focused campus requires training the teachers to use college talk and share real-life examples through their content curriculum. Another aspect of changing the culture requires the staff to change the campus visual displays to reflect positive messages related to postsecondary exploration. Most importantly, this transformation requires guidance lessons and increased opportunities to advise students regarding the key components of successful enrollment in college. Through the grant program initiatives, the focus district developed a middle school college and career curriculum which focused on goal setting, resume building, interviewing skills, career exploration, postsecondary training exploration, the college application process, and college financial assistance opportunities. Middle School A and Middle School B piloted the college and career curriculum during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. The middle school college and career lessons were taught during a student advisory period where an adult advisor assisted the students with creating a portfolio related to their skills and aspirations. These lessons started to transform the middle school students' thinking regarding life beyond high school.

Another way the grant program initiatives transformed the culture at each of the study campuses was by involving the students and parents in a community career and education expo sponsored by a local Hispanic non-profit organization. Even though the annual career and education expo is open to the public, the focus district strongly supported this community event and took as many students, teachers, and parents as

possible to the event. Many students at these three focus district campuses have never left their suburban neighborhood to venture to the urban downtown area. In addition, many have never attended an event the magnitude of the career and education expo. The three study campuses heavily promoted this community event each year, and provided transportation for both students and parents to the event. This expo provided an abundance of information regarding current and future careers and the required credentials for those careers. Breakout sessions were facilitated in both English and Spanish and covered an array of topics such as financial assistance, the college application process, and educational requirements for lucrative careers. Additionally, colleges and universities from around the state of Texas provided guest speakers and set up information booths to promote their institutions. The popularity of this event grew over the years, and the parents and students have conveyed how informative and beneficial the sessions had been to them.

In addition to the career and education expo field trip, the study campuses developed strong relationships with state and local colleges and universities. The study campuses promoted *Explore University* (pseudonym), an annual Saturday fieldtrip to a Texas four-year university, for students and parents. Students at the study campuses applied for the opportunity to engage in this fieldtrip each year. Students were selected for participation based on their answers to the application questions, as well as their grades and scores on college-readiness benchmark testing. Students and parents who attend the *Explore University* trip were taken on a tour of the university campus and given pertinent information regarding enrollment requirements and degree programs available. Additionally, each year, the three study campuses have taken groups of

students to the local community college for a day of touring, exploring, and attending lectures about college life. During each year of the grant initiative, Middle Schools A and Middle School B engaged their entire eighth grade classes in this special community college event. The college staff and students worked arduously each year to make these trips to the college very exciting and informative for the middle school students.

College entrance exams can be very costly and intimidating for low-income students. In order to help combat these issues, the three study campuses involved in the grant program engaged their eighth, ninth, and tenth grade students in free college-readiness benchmark testing. For at least five years, the focus district tested all 10th grade students from each high school campus with a free PSAT (preliminary SAT) in order to expose the students to and assist the students with preparing for the SAT college entrance exam. With the grant opportunity, the focus district was also able to also expose the eighth and ninth grade students at the study campuses to the EXPLORE and PLAN tests which are the precursors to the ACT college entrance exam. In addition, the eighth graders at study campus Middle School A took the Readistep test which is the first test in the SAT series. In order to enable middle school students and their parents to begin the process of developing educational and career goals, the results of the EXPLORE and Readistep testing (e.g., subject area test scores, college-readiness indicators, and career skillset indicators) were shared with them. The testing reports and data obtained from these testing experiences assist students and parents with making critical educational decisions and provided valuable data related to students' interests, career aptitudes, skills, strengths, and college readiness. Research has suggested that students benefit from the exposure to and experience with these longitudinal exams (ACT, 2008a). By the time the

study campus students actually engaged in the official ACT and SAT college entrance exams during their junior or senior year, they had experienced at least three pre-tests: EXPLORE, PLAN, and PSAT. Students from study campus Middle School A experienced four pre-tests, Readistep, EXPLORE, PLAN, and PSAT before they took their official college entrance exam, either SAT and ACT. According to research conducted by ACT (2008a), students who participate in these pre-tests have higher college aspirations and are twice as likely to consider college a necessity in their career path.

Explaining and emphasizing the importance of and encouraging the enrollment in advanced courses, including AP and dual credit courses, in high school was another key component of the grant program in the focus district. As shared in the literature review, research in the area of AP and dual credit course work has unmistakably indicated there are a multitude of positive benefits for high school students, especially for underprivileged youth, who challenge themselves with these more advanced courses. AP and dual credit courses are beneficial for all high school students who have aspirations of continuing their education after graduation because these courses help the students experience college-level expectations and gain college credit prior to graduation (College Board, 2006; Jensen, 2009; Martinez & Klopott, 2005b). Low-income students, in particular, need to experience success with rigorous curriculum in high school in order to build their confidence and hope for the future (Jensen, 2009). Successful completion of rigorous AP and dual credit courses helps to demystify the college experience (Jensen, 2009). This is incredibly imperative for low-income students who may not have parents who are familiar with college life and cannot help ease their children's apprehensions

about college. With this research in mind, the focus district continuously stressed to the students of each of the study campuses the importance of and benefits of challenging themselves to take advanced courses, especially AP and dual credit courses in high school.

The focus district worked with their grant team over the three years of the grant and assessed the implementation plan, evaluated the effectiveness of each initiative, and modified the grant initiatives to better meet the needs of the students, parents, and community. Planning meetings involved a comprehensive review of the data, an examination of each component of the grant program, and a dialogue about the key objectives and tasks for the program. Continuous evaluation and discussion of the data from each initiative in the program assisted the grant team in making adjustments to their plan to better prepare the students at the study campuses for postsecondary educational opportunities.

Data Collection Procedures

For the purposes of this research study, archival quantitative data were utilized to answer the three research questions. The following data sources were explored:

- (a) archival data from a district-created high school student perception survey;
- (b) archival data from a district-created middle school student perception survey;
- (c) archival data from a district-created senior student survey; (d) the focus district's AP and dual credit enrollment data; (e) the 2011 College Board AP Five-Year School Score Summary report; and (f) the college enrollment data for the 2011 graduating classes of High School A and High School B retrieved from the National Student Clearinghouse.

First, the data collected for this research study were obtained from descriptive, district-created, student perception surveys which were administered in person to all students enrolled in six secondary campuses. Both the high school and middle school perception surveys were administered in May, at the end of the 2010-2011 school year, and asked a variety of questions related to the importance and attainability of postsecondary education. Students enrolled in the study and control high school campuses completed a 28-question, district-created, student perception survey. For the purposes of this research study, questions 1-18 were analyzed by the researcher. On these 18 questions, the students marked their level of agreement to the survey questions by choosing one of the following responses: (a) "Strongly Agree," (b) "Agree," (c) "No Opinion," (d) "Disagree," (e) "Strongly Disagree" or (f) "I Don't Know." For purposes of this investigation, student responses of "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" were merged to form an agreement response and "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree" were merged to constitute a disagreement response. Below are the 18 questions analyzed for this research study:

- 1) *I plan to go to college after graduating.*
- 2) *I believe I can succeed in college.*
- 3) *My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.*
- 4) *My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.*
- 5) *I can make more money if I graduate from college.*
- 6) *It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.*
- 7) *Information about college is being shared with me at school.*
- 8) *Information about careers is being shared with me at school.*

- 9) *The career I want requires a college degree.*
- 10) *I have earned grades that will get me into college.*
- 11) *I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.*
- 12) *I would consider college more strongly if I can get financial assistance (student loans/scholarships).*
- 13) *I will not go to college because I cannot afford it.*
- 14) *I know what high school courses I need to go to college.*
- 15) *I know what it means to take a dual credit course.*
- 16) *I know what it means to take an Advanced Placement course.*
- 17) *After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).*
- 18) *After high school, I plan on joining the military.*

Students enrolled in the study and control middle school campuses completed a 20-question, district-created, student perception survey. For the purposes of this research study, questions 1-13 were analyzed by the researcher. On these 13 questions, the students marked their level of agreement to the survey questions by choosing one of the following responses: (a) “Strongly Agree,” (b) “Agree,” (c) “No Opinion,” (d) “Disagree,” (e) “Strongly Disagree” or (f) “I Don’t Know.” For purposes of this investigation, student responses of “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” were merged to form an agreement response and “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” were merged to constitute a disagreement response. Below are the 13 questions that were analyzed for this research study:

- 1) *I plan to go to college after graduating.*
- 2) *I believe I can succeed in college.*

- 3) *My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.*
- 4) *My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.*
- 5) *I can make more money if I graduate from college.*
- 6) *It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.*
- 7) *Information about college is being shared with me at school.*
- 8) *Information about careers is being shared with me at school.*
- 9) *The career I want requires a college degree.*
- 10) *I know what courses I need to take to get into college.*
- 11) *I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.*
- 12) *After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).*
- 13) *After high school, I plan on joining the military.*

In addition to the student perception survey data, this research study utilized archival data obtained from nine questions on a district-created, senior student survey which was administered to all senior students enrolled at the study and control high school campuses in May, 2011. The first question on the senior survey that was analyzed for this study asked the students, *Did you complete the FAFSA form?* For this question, the students selected their response from the following answer choices: (a) “Yes,” (b) “No,” (c) “I Don’t Know,” or (d) “Not Applicable (NA).” The next five questions from the senior survey that were analyzed for this study required the students to select their responses from the following answer choices: (a) “None,” (b) “1-3,” or (c) “4 or More (4+).” The five additional senior survey questions analyzed for this study are as follows:

- 1) *How many AP or dual credit courses did you take?*

- 2) *How many college applications did you submit?*
- 3) *How many scholarship applications did you submit?*
- 4) *How many college acceptance letters have you received?*
- 5) *How many college campuses have you visited?*

For the last three questions, the senior students rated each question with their answer choices of (a) “Excellent,” (b) “Good,” (c) “Fair,” or (d) “Poor.” These three questions were analyzed in order to answer Research Question Two of this study. The last three questions on the senior survey that were analyzed for this research study were:

- 1) *When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate your high school course work?*
- 2) *When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the information presented about college/careers?*
- 3) *When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the support/assistance given to you related to college/careers?*

Additional data sources, such as district archival data related to the enrollment of students in AP and dual credit courses, were analyzed with descriptive statistics in order to illustrate a comparison between the two high school campuses, the study campus which received the grant initiatives and the control campus which did not receive the grant initiatives. This study also utilized the AP Five-Year School Score Summary report prepared by the College Board. This report was used to show a comparison between the study campuses and the control campuses related to the amount of AP exams taken and passed by the students. This report was also utilized to show a comparison between the study campuses and the control campuses related to the number of minority students,

specifically African American and Hispanic, who challenged themselves to take an AP exam at the end of the 2010-2011 school year.

The last data source utilized in this study was the archival quantitative data provided to the focus district from the National Student Clearinghouse. The data were also analyzed with descriptive statistics to show a comparison between the two high school campuses, the study campus which received the grant initiatives and the control campus which did not receive the grant initiatives related to the percentage of students who enrollment in colleges and universities directly after high school graduation. The National Student Clearinghouse report was also examined to show a comparison between the graduates from the study and control high school campuses related to the number of students enrolled in public universities, private universities, four-year colleges, two-year colleges, in-state (Texas) institutions, and out-of-state (non-Texas) institutions.

Methodology Instrumentation

This study utilized three student survey instruments in order to make comparisons and draw conclusions about the impact of the college-focused cultures created through a myriad of grant initiatives at each of the study campuses. The student perception surveys were administered in person to the entire student body of the six secondary campuses during May, 2011 at the conclusion of the three-year grant initiative. At the high school level, the student perception survey consisted of 28 items, and the survey was administered to students in grades nine, ten, and eleven. At the middle school level, the student perception survey consisted of 20 items, and the survey was administered to students in grades six, seven, and eight. For the purposes of this research study, questions 1-18 on the high school student perception survey and questions 1-13 on the

middle school student perception survey were examined with descriptive statistics in order to answer Research Question One of this study. Likewise, the senior student survey was administered in person during May, 2011 to all senior students enrolled at both the study and controls high school campuses. The senior survey consisted of 18 questions; however, only nine of these questions were analyzed in order to answer the research questions of this study. After the administration of each of the student surveys, raw score data were converted to percentage data for each of the survey items. The percentages were determined from the raw scores gathered from the administration of the student survey, and raw scores were self-reported and based on the perceptions of the students completing the survey.

Each of the district-created, student survey instruments were field tested prior to the first administration. A focus group of students was used to test the readability of the student surveys. The focus groups completed the survey and provided feedback regarding the wording of the questions, including the students' understanding of what each question asked, the order and types of questions asked, and the terminology used in each question. Modifications to each survey were made based on the feedback from the student focus group.

This research study utilized the collected data from the student perception surveys, senior student survey, district course enrollment data, College Board AP Five-Year School Score Summary report, and National Student Clearinghouse report to show comparisons between and draw conclusions about the sample of students being studied and the effect of the college-focused campus cultures created at the study campuses through the implementation of the college- and career-focused grant initiatives.

Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze each set of data for this study.

Descriptive statistics is a data analysis method which allows the researcher to summarize data with numerical indicators (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Descriptive statistics also permits researchers to describe data in graphic form, such as tables, charts, graphs, and scatterplots (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). This research study calculated and reported categorical data, the number and percentages of student answers for each survey question, in order to illustrate how the study campus data compared to the control campus data. Moreover, the data collected for this research study was related in graphic forms (e.g., tables, bar graphs, scatterplots, and pie charts) in order to illustrate a comparison between the study and control group. These descriptive statistical calculations and graphics were used to assist in answering the three research questions and in drawing conclusions about the effect of the college-focused cultures which were purposefully initiated at each of the three study campuses. For this research study, tables, bar graphs, scatterplots, and pie charts were created and shared in order to help clarify and interpret the quantitative data retrieved. These graphic representation techniques were used in this research study in order to summarize the data collected.

Moreover, to determine the extent to which the creation of a college-focused culture influenced students' perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education, Pearson chi-square procedures were calculated for each of the student survey questions for all three surveys: (a) middle school student perception survey, (b) high school student perception survey, and (c) senior student survey.

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), the chi-square test is a common nonparametric

technique used to analyze categorical data. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) explained that the chi-square test is “a nonparametric test of statistical significance appropriate when the data are in the form of frequency counts; it compares the frequencies actually observed in a study with expected frequencies to see whether they are significantly different” (p. G-1). If the frequencies are comparable, the researcher can conclude that the groups do not differ (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) further explained, “If there are considerable differences between the expected and the obtained frequencies, on the other hand, then researchers conclude that there is a significant difference in attitude between the groups” (p. 234). For each Pearson chi-square procedure, a post hoc Cramer’s V was also calculated to determine the effect size of the relationship between the variables. Pearson chi-square procedures were conducted in order to analyze the categorical student survey data, assist in answering the three research questions, and aid in drawing conclusions about the effect of the college-focused cultures that were purposefully initiated at each of the three study campuses.

Limitations

No research study is without limitations, and this study was limited by the following:

1. The sample population of the study included only two high school campuses and four middle school campuses within a single school district in the state of Texas.
2. Although the study campuses engaged the parents and students in a purposeful college-focused culture for three years, this study only analyzed the student

perception survey results and student enrollment data for one school year (2010-2011).

3. The compositions of the school teaching and administrative staff were not taken into consideration in this study. Teacher and administrative characteristics, such as years of experience and level of educational attainment, were not considered in this study.
4. The student perception survey results were strictly self-reported data.
5. This study was only able to track college enrollment for the graduating class of 2011 because the class of 2011 was the first graduating class for the study high school.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this research study was to examine how school leaders, particularly secondary school principals, can implement a college-focused culture in order to influence the perceptions of minority and low-income students regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education. Explored in this study were the effects of the creation of a college-focused culture at study campuses, three Title I secondary campuses. The results were compared to a control group, three additional Title I secondary campuses that did not benefit from grant initiatives.

Research Questions

Investigated in this study was the college-focused culture implemented by secondary school leadership in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the creation of a college-focused culture positively influence students' perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education?
2. Does the creation of a college-focused culture increase student enrollment in Advanced Placement and dual credit courses?
3. Does the creation of a college-focused culture increase student enrollment in colleges and universities directly after high school completion?

Results for Research Question One

Students' perceptions regarding the importance of and attainability of postsecondary education were measured through the administration of three district-created, student perception surveys: (a) high school student perception survey for grades 9 through 11; (b) middle school student perception survey for grades six through eight;

and (c) senior student perception survey for students in grade 12. Each of these surveys were administered to the entire student population for each perspective grade level at the six secondary campuses in May, at the end of the 2010-2011 school year.

On the high school student perception survey, students were asked 28 questions related to the importance of and attainability of postsecondary education. For the purposes of this research investigation, only questions 1 through 18 were analyzed by the researcher. On these 18 questions, students indicated their level of agreement to the survey questions by choosing one of the following responses: (a) “Strongly Agree,” (b) “Agree,” (c) “No Opinion,” (d) “Disagree,” (e) “Strongly Disagree” or (f) “I Don’t Know.” For purposes of this investigation, student responses of “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” were merged to form an agreement response and “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” were merged to constitute a disagreement response. The responses of “No Opinion” and “I Don’t Know” were not included in statistical analyses, thus permitting only agreement and disagreement with survey items to be examined. Results are presented separately by grade level for both the study and control campuses.

Represented in Table D1 in Appendix D are the results of Grade 9 student perceptions regarding the importance of and attainability of postsecondary education at the study and control high school campuses. High levels of agreement (i.e., above 90%) were present for Grade 9 students in both school settings for *I can make more money if I graduate from college*; *It is easier to move up to a job when you have a college degree*; and *My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future*. Survey items on which the most variance was present between the study and control high school participants were: *Information about college is being shared with me at school*, with 85%

of the Grade 9 study school students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree,” compared with 71% of the control high school students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree”; *I know what it means to take a dual credit course*, 64% and 45%, respectively; and *I know what it means to take an Advanced Placement course*, 77% and 65%, respectively. For these three survey items, Grade 9 study school students reported more agreement than did the Grade 9 control high school students.

Table D2 reveals the results of the Grade 10 student perception survey regarding the importance of and attainability of postsecondary education at the study and control high school campuses. High levels of agreement (i.e., above 90%) were present for Grade 10 students in both school settings for *I plan to go to college after graduating*; *I believe I can succeed in college*; *My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college*; *I can make more money if I graduate from college*; *It is easier to move up to a job when you have a college degree*; and *I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT*. Survey items on which the most difference of opinion was present between the study and control high school participants were: *Information about college is being shared with me at school*, with 92% of the Grade 10 study school students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree,” compared with 72% of the control high school students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree”; and *Information about careers is being shared with me at school*, 80% and 68%, respectively. For these two survey items, Grade 10 study school students reported more agreement than did the Grade 10 control high school students.

Delineated in Table D3 are the results of the Grade 11 student perception survey regarding the importance of and attainability of postsecondary education at the study and

control high school campuses. High levels of agreement (i.e., above 90%) were present for Grade 11 students in both school settings for *I plan to go to college after graduating; I believe I can succeed in college; My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college; I can make more money if I graduate from college; It is easier to move up to a job when you have a college degree; and I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.* Survey items on which the most variance was present between the study and control high school participants were: *Information about college is being shared with me at school*, with 88% of the Grade 11 study school students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree,” compared with 75% of the control high school students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree;” *Information about careers is being shared with me at school*, 78% and 64%, respectively; *I know what high school courses I need to go to college*, 84% and 75%, respectively; *I know what it means to take a dual credit course*, 83 and 73%, respectively; and *I know what it means to take an Advanced Placement course*, 85 and 75%, respectively. For these five survey items, Grade 11 study school students reported more agreement than did the Grade 11 control high school students.

Revealed in Table D4 are the aggregated student perceptions (i.e., Grade 9, 10 and 11 students) regarding the importance of and attainability of postsecondary education at the study and control high schools. High levels of agreement (i.e., above 90%) were present for students in both school settings for *I plan to go to college after graduating; I believe I can succeed in college; My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college; I can make more money if I graduate from college; and It is easier to move up to a job when you have a college degree.* Presented in Table D4 are the perceptions of all

students from both the study high school and the control high school regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education.

One student perception survey item on which the most dissimilarity was present between the study high school and control high school participants was: *Information about college is being shared with me at school*, with 88% of the study high school students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree,” compared with 72% of the control high school students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree.” Figure 4 displays a visual representation of the differences in student responses to this item.

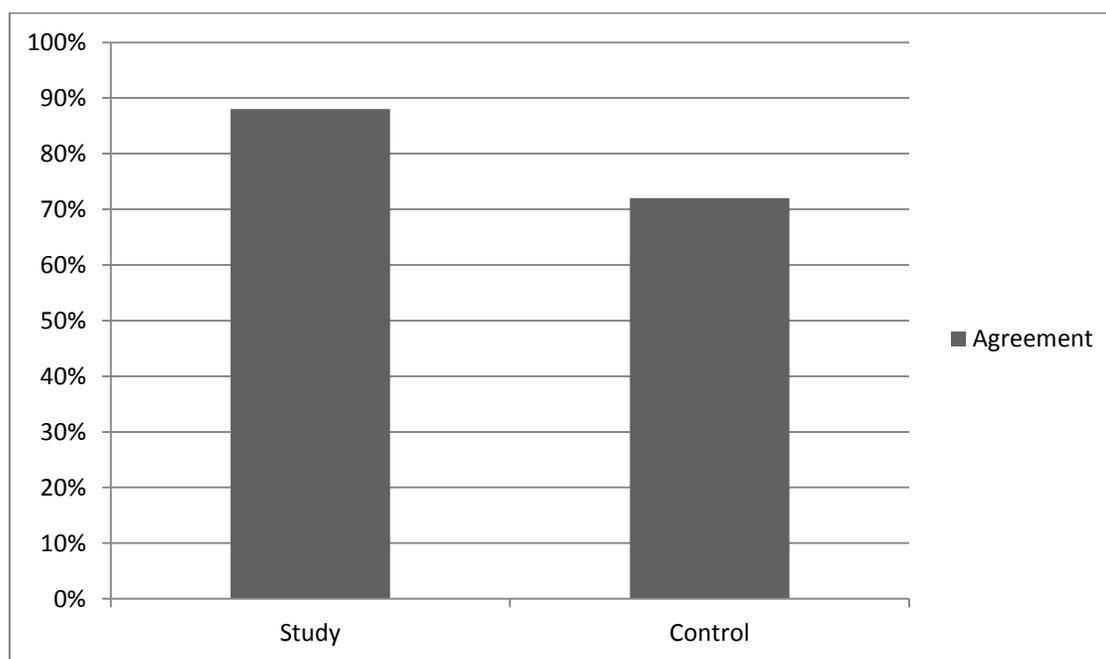


Figure 4. Percentage of high school student agreement to *Information about college is being shared with me at school*.

A second student perception survey item on which the study high school and control high school students differed in their responses was *Information about careers is being shared with me at school*. As depicted in Figure 5, 80% of students enrolled in the study high schools expressed agreement, compared to only 71% of the students enrolled in the control high schools.

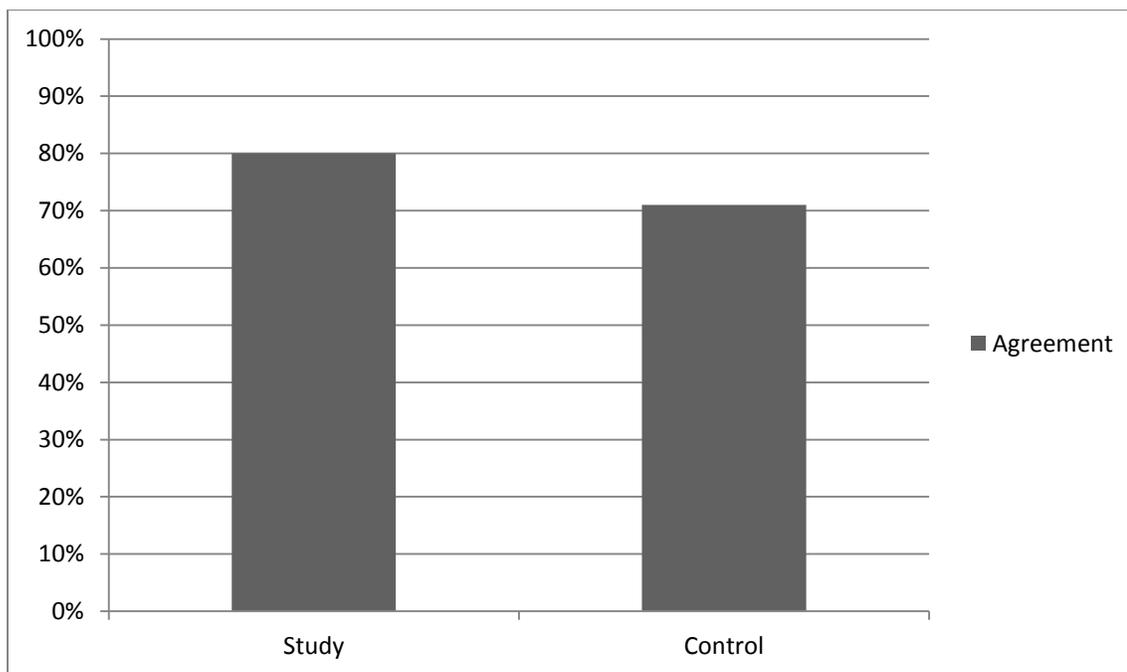


Figure 5. Percent of high school student agreement to *Information about careers is being shared with me at school*.

Another student perception survey item worthy of mention was *I know what high school courses I need to go to college*. For this survey item, 78% of students in the study high school responded with agreement, compared to 69% of students enrolled in the control high school. Student responses for this student perception survey item are visually presented below in Figure 6.

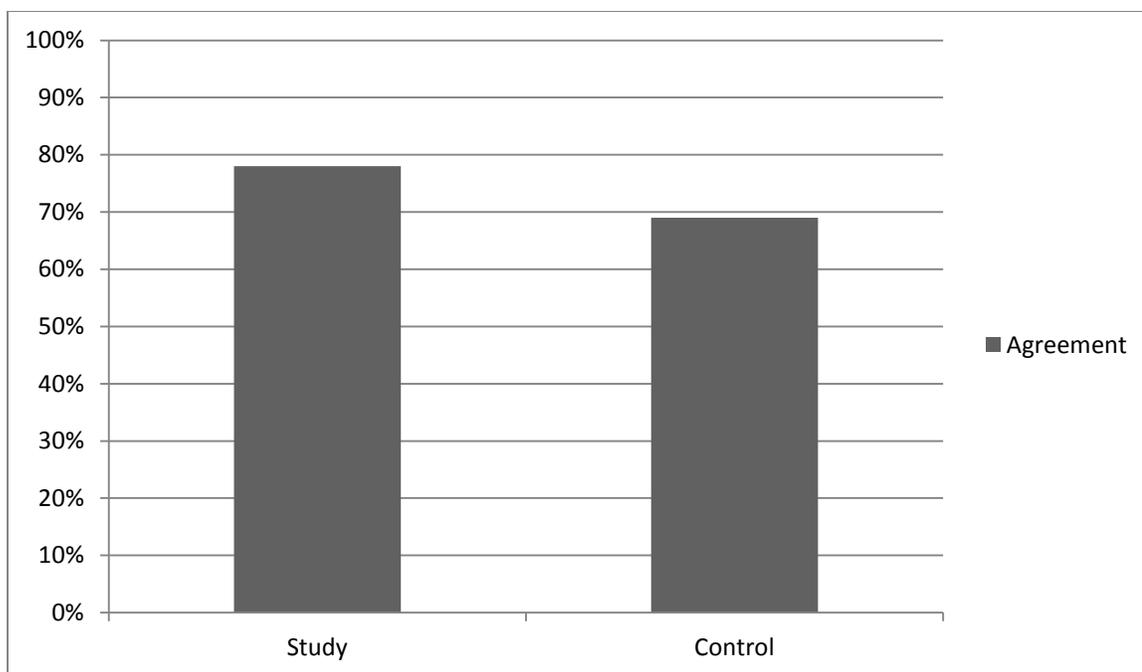


Figure 6. Percent of high school student agreement to *I know what high school courses I need to go to college*.

Figure 7, displays a visual representation for an additional student perception survey item to which differences were present between students in the study high school and control high schools. This survey item, *I know what it means to take a dual credit course*, resulted in 74% of the students from the study high school agreeing to the statement, compared to only 61% of the students from the control high school stating agreement.

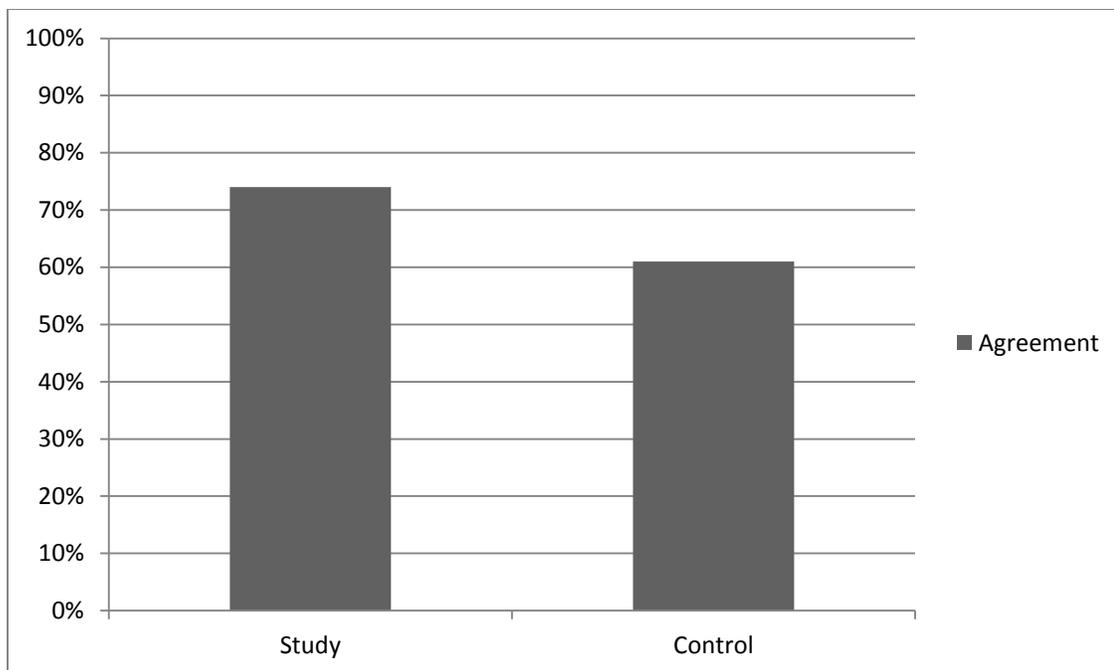


Figure 7. Percent of high school student agreement to *I know what it means to take a dual credit course*.

Finally, the high school students from the study campus High School A and the control campus High School B expressed different levels of agreement to *I know what it means to take an Advanced Placement course*. A higher percentage of students in the study high school, 81%, agreed with this item than students in the control high school, 71%. Revealed in Figure 8 are the levels of student agreement to this survey item. For the five survey items on which figures have been generated, study school students reported more agreement than did the control high school students.

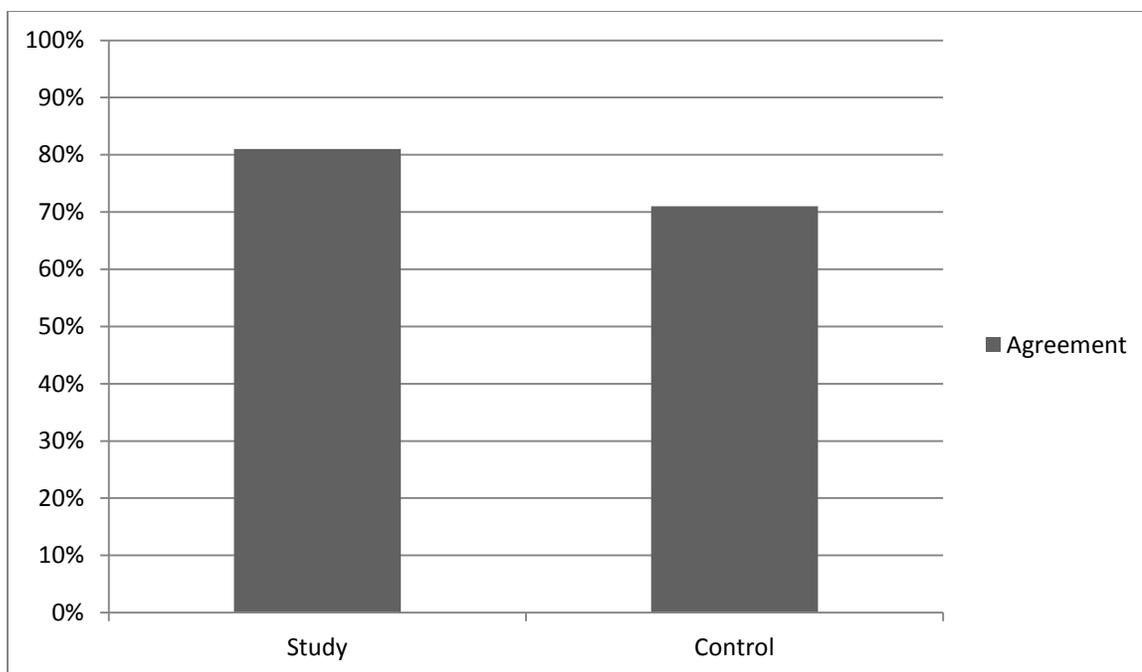


Figure 8. Percent of high school student agreement to *I know what it means to take an Advanced Placement course*.

To determine the extent to which the creation of a college-focused culture influenced students' perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education, Pearson chi-square procedures were calculated for each of the 18 survey questions. For each analysis, the independent variable was the school status (i.e., study or control high school) and the dependent variable was one of the 18 survey items. Thus, 18 Pearson chi-square analyses were conducted. Statistically significant differences were present between students in the study and control high schools for the following 7 survey items: *Information about college is being shared with me at school*, $\chi^2(3) = 262.08$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .28, small effect size (Cohen, 1988); *Information about careers is being shared with me at school*, $\chi^2(3) = 80.98$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .16, small effect size (Cohen, 1988); *I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT and/or ACT*, $\chi^2(3) = 36.12$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .10, small effect size

(Cohen, 1988); *I know what high school courses I need to go to college*, $\chi^2(3) = 44.04$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .12, small effect size (Cohen, 1988); *I know what it means to take a dual credit course*, $\chi^2(3) = 91.78$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .17, small effect size (Cohen, 1988); *I know what it means to take an Advanced Placement course*, $\chi^2(3) = 44.31$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .12, small effect size (Cohen, 1988); and *After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech)*, $\chi^2(3) = 19.93$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .09, trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988).

Students who were enrolled at the study high school indicated more agreement to 11 of the survey items than did the students who were enrolled at the control high school. Students enrolled at the control high school indicate higher levels of agreement for only two survey items: (1) *I will not attend college because I cannot afford it.* and (2) *After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).*

Statistically significant differences were not present between students in the study and control high schools for the following 11 survey items: *I plan to go to college after graduating* ($p = .63$); *I believe I can succeed in college* ($p = .11$); *My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college* ($p = .14$); *My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future* ($p = .12$); *I can make more money if I graduate from college* ($p = .55$); *It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree* ($p = .46$); *The career I want requires a college degree* ($p = .14$); *I have earned grades that will get me into college* ($p = .06$); *I would consider college more strongly if I can get financial assistance (i.e., student loans/scholarships)* ($p = .85$); *I will not go to college because I cannot afford it* ($p = .18$); and *After high school, I plan on joining the military* ($p = .20$). For these survey items, responses were not different for students who

were enrolled at the study high school from the responses of students enrolled at the control high school.

On the middle school student perception survey, students were asked 20 questions related to the importance of and attainability of postsecondary education. For the purposes of this research investigation, only questions 1 through 13 were analyzed by the researcher. On these 13 questions, students indicated their level of agreement to the survey questions by choosing one of the following responses: (a) “Strongly Agree,” (b) “Agree,” (c) “No Opinion,” (d) “Disagree,” (e) “Strongly Disagree” or (f) “I Don’t Know.” For purposes of this investigation, student responses of “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” were merged to form an agreement response and “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” were merged to constitute a disagreement response. The responses of “No Opinion” and “I Don’t Know” were not included in statistical analyses, thus permitting only agreement and disagreement with survey items to be examined. Results are presented separately by grade level for both the study and control schools.

Tables D5 and D6 portray the results of the Grade 6 student perception survey regarding the importance of and attainability of postsecondary education at the study and control middle school campuses. Table D5 reveals the percentage of Grade 6 students from each of the study and control campuses who answered “Strongly Agree/Agree” to each of the survey items. High levels of agreement (i.e., above 90%) were present for Grade 6 in all four school settings for *I plan to go to college after graduating*, *My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college*, and *I can make more money if I graduate from college*. The survey item on which the most difference of opinion was present between the study and control middle school campuses was *Information about*

college is being shared with me at school, with 87% of study middle school campus A and 84% of study middle school campus B, compared to 70% of the control middle school campus C and 78% of the control middle school campus D students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree.” For this survey item, Grade 6 study middle school students reported more agreement than did the Grade 6 control middle school students. Another survey item showing a variance was *Information about careers is being shared with me at school*, with 88% of study middle school campus A and 87% of study middle school campus B, and 72% of the control middle school campus C compared to 92% of the control middle school campus D students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree.” For this survey item, Grade 6 control middle school campus D students reported more agreement than did the Grade 6 study middle school students and control middle school campus C students.

Table D6 presents the percentage of Grade 6 students from each of the study and control campuses who answered “Strongly Disagree/Disagree” to each of the survey items. Similar percentages of disagreement were expressed to the following survey items: *After high school, I plan on joining the military*; *After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech)*; *I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT*; and *I know what courses I need to take to get into college*.

Represented in Tables D7 and D8 are the results of the Grade 7 student perception survey regarding the importance of and attainability of postsecondary education at the study and control middle school campuses. Table D7 reveals the percentage of Grade 7 students from each of the study and control campuses who answered “Strongly Agree/Agree” to each of the survey items. High levels of agreement (i.e., above 90%)

were present for Grade 7 in all four school settings for *My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college, I can make more money if I graduate from college, and It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.* The survey item on which the most difference of opinion was present between the study and control middle school campuses was *Information about college is being shared with me at school,* with 86% of study middle school campus A and 79% of study middle school campus B, compared to 57% of the control middle school campus C and 77% of the control middle school campus D students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree.” For this survey item, Grade 7 study middle school students reported more agreement than did the Grade 7 control middle school students.

Table D8 presents the percentage of Grade 7 students from each of the study and control campuses who answered “Strongly Disagree/Disagree” to each of the survey items. Two survey items on which the most dissimilarity was present between the study and control middle school participants were: *After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech),* with 38% of study campus Middle School A and 29% of study campus Middle School B responding “Strongly Disagree/Disagree,” compared to 48% of control campus Middle School C and 40% of control campus Middle School D responding “Strongly Disagree/Disagree;” *After high school, I plan on joining the military,* with 59% of study middle school A and 57% of study campus Middle School B responding “Strongly Disagree/Disagree,” compared to 66% of control campus Middle School C and 64% of control campus Middle School D responding “Strongly Disagree/Disagree.” For these two survey items related to non-college postsecondary

opportunities, Grade 7 study campus middle school students reported less disagreement than did the Grade 7 control campus middle school students.

Presented in Tables D9 and D10 are the results of the Grade 8 student perception survey regarding the importance of and attainability of postsecondary education at the study and control middle school campuses. Table D9 presents the percentage of Grade 8 students from each of the study and control campuses who answered “Strongly Agree/Agree” to each of the survey items. High levels of agreement (i.e., above 90%) were present for Grade 8 in all four school settings for *I plan to go to college after graduating; I believe I can succeed in college; My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college; I can make more money if I graduate from college; and It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.* Survey items on which the most variance was present between the study and control middle school campuses were: *Information about college is being shared with me at school*, with 94% of study campus Middle School A and 89% of study campus Middle School B, compared to 83% of the control campus Middle School C and 80% of the control campus Middle School D students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree;” *Information about careers is being shared with me at school*, with 86% of study campus Middle School A and 84% of study campus Middle School B, compared to 73% of the control campus Middle School C and 90% of the control campus Middle School D students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree;” *I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT*, with 80% of study campus Middle School A and 77% of study campus Middle School B, compared to 75% of the control campus Middle School C and 76% of the control campus Middle School D students responding “Strongly Agree/Agree.”

Table D10 presents the percentage of Grade 8 students from each of the study and control campuses who answered “Strongly Disagree/Disagree” to each of the survey items. Similar percentages of disagreement were expressed to the following survey items: *After high school, I plan on joining the military; After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech); I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT; and I know what courses I need to take to get into college.*

Revealed in Tables D11 and D12 are the aggregated student perceptions (i.e., Grade 6, 7 and 8 students) regarding the importance of and attainability of postsecondary education at the study and control middle schools. Table D11 depicts the percentages of the aggregated student population from each of the study and control campuses who answered “Strongly Agree/Agree” to each of the survey items. High levels of agreement (i.e., above 90%) were present in all four middle school settings for the following survey items: *I plan to go to college after graduating, My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college; I can make more money if I graduate from college; and It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.* The greatest variance in percentages of middle school students was in the area of the survey item *Information about college is being shared with me at school*, with study campus Middle School A reporting 89%, study campus Middle School B reporting 84%, control campus Middle School C reporting 70%, and control campus Middle School D reporting 78% agreement.

Depicted in Figure 9 is that a higher percentage of middle school students in the two study schools, 86.5%, expressed agreement to *Information about college is being shared with me at school* than was expressed by middle school students in the two control middle schools, 74.0%. As such, a substantially higher percentage of students at the

study schools reported that they were provided with more information about college at school than was reported by students at the control middle schools.

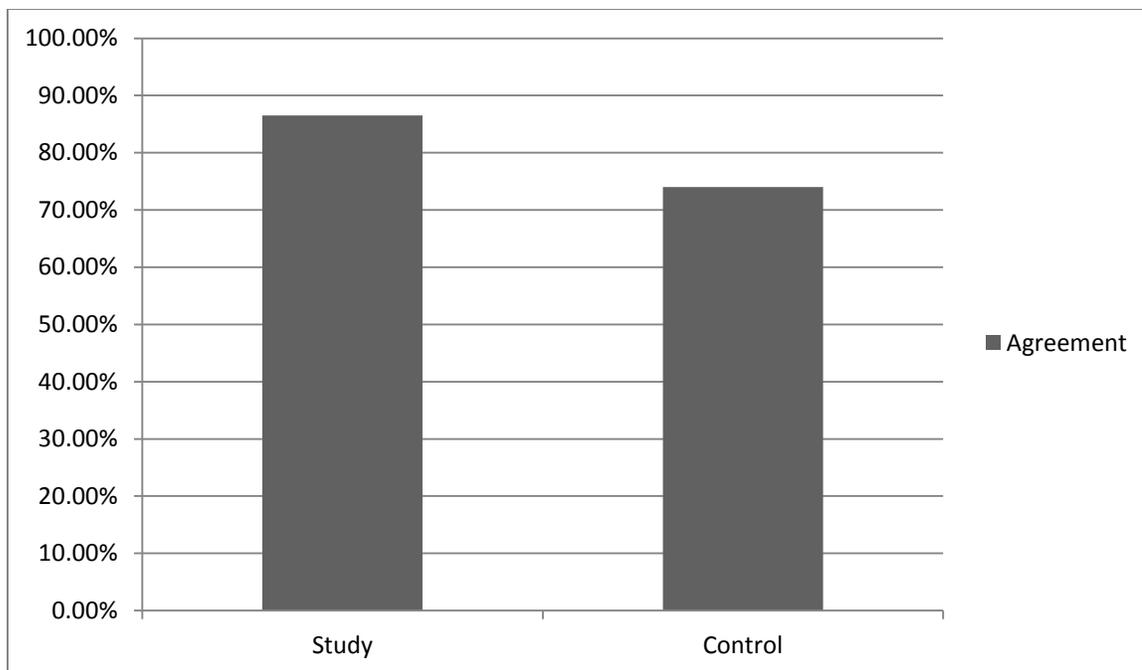


Figure 9. Percent of middle school student agreement to *Information about college is being shared with me at school*.

Depicted in Figure 10 is that a higher percentage of middle school students in the two study schools, 84.0%, expressed agreement to *Information about careers is being shared with me at school* than was expressed by middle school students in the two control middle schools, 79.5%. Accordingly, a substantially higher percentage of students at the study middle schools reported that they were provided with more information about careers at school than was reported by students at the control middle schools. Responses to this survey item were commensurate with student responses regarding information about colleges being provided to them at school.

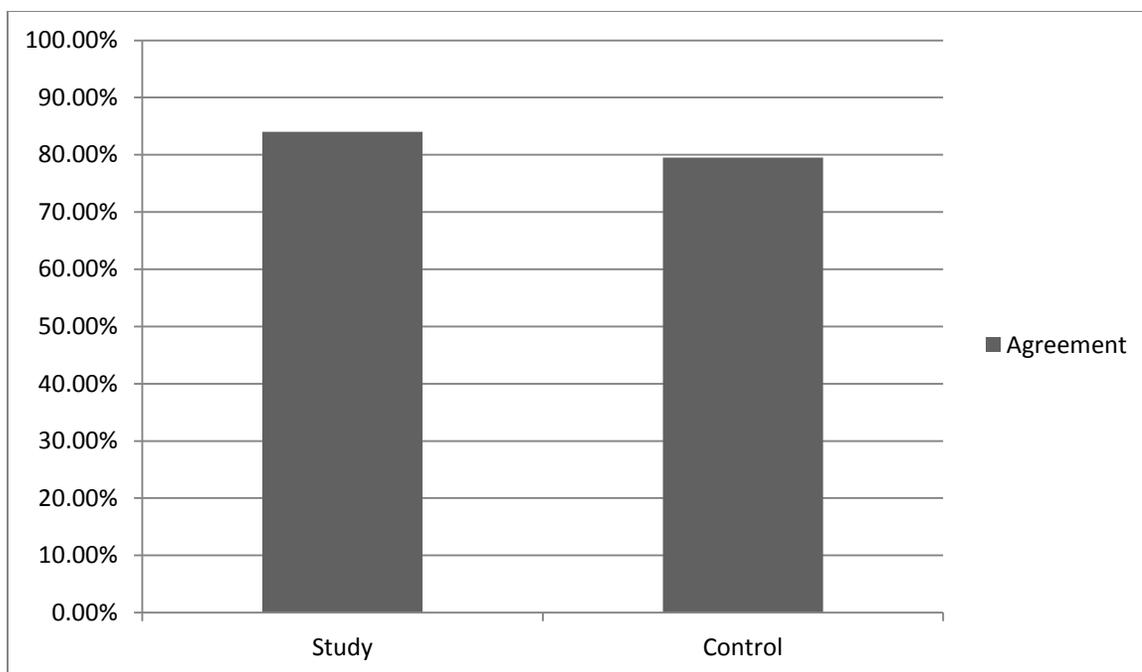


Figure 10. Percent of middle school student agreement to *Information about careers is being shared with me at school*.

Depicted in Figure 11 is that a higher percentage of middle school students in the two study middle schools, 55.0%, expressed agreement to *I know what courses I need to take to get into college* than was expressed by middle school students in the two control middle schools, 50.0%. As such, a substantially higher percentage of students at the study middle schools reported that they were aware of the courses they needed to take to get into college than did students at the control middle schools. Responses to this survey item were commensurate with student responses regarding information about colleges and about careers being provided to them at school.

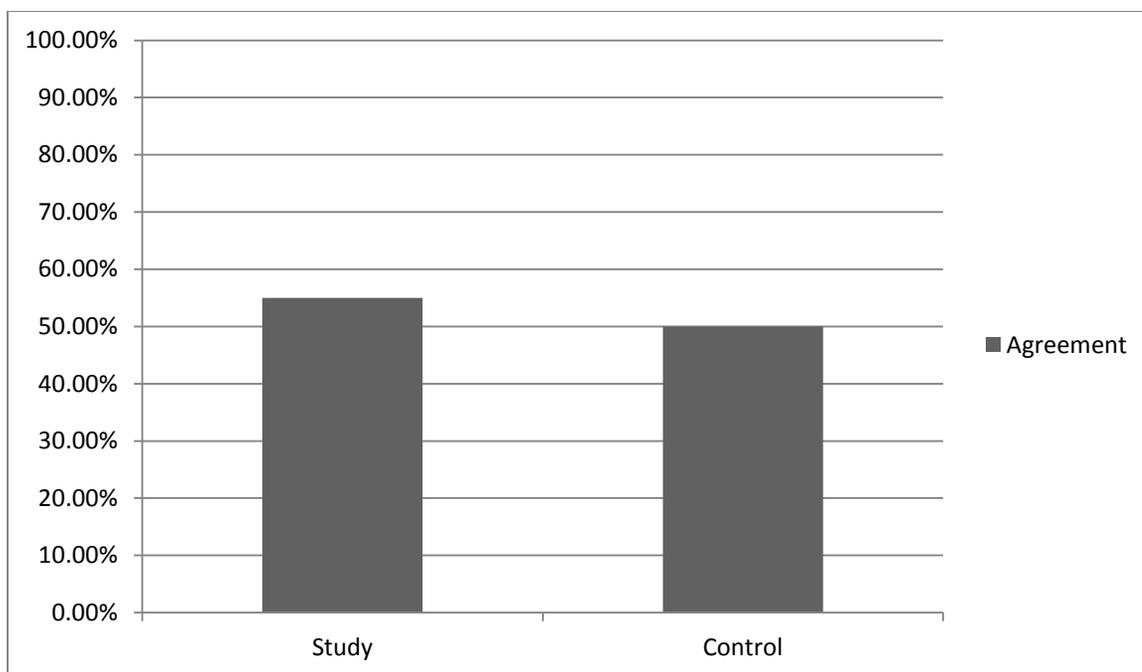


Figure 11. Percent of middle school student agreement to *I know what courses I need to take to get into college*.

Table D12 shows the percentage of the aggregated student population from each of the study and control campuses who answered “Strongly Disagree/Disagree” to each of the student perception survey items. Similar percentages of disagreement were expressed to the following survey items: *After high school, I plan on joining the military*; *After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech)*; *I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT*; and *I know what courses I need to take to get into college*.

To determine whether middle school student responses to these survey questions were different between the study and control middle schools, Pearson chi-square procedures were calculated, similar to the statistical procedures used for the high school student surveys. For the survey question, *My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college*, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $\chi^2(3) = 9.28, p = .026$, Cramer’s *V* of .045, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988). Furthermore, statistically

significant differences were present for the following survey items: *My parent(s)/ guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future*, $\chi^2(3) = 17.46$, $p = .001$, Cramer's V of .064, a trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988); *I can make more money if I graduate from college*, $\chi^2(3) = 10.61$, $p = .009$, Cramer's V of .05, a trivial effect; and *The career I want requires a college degree*, $\chi^2(3) = 11.02$, $p = .012$, Cramer's V of .05, trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988). A higher percentage of students enrolled at the control middle schools indicated more agreement with these four items than did students enrolled at the study middle schools.

For the following survey items, middle school students at the study middle school responded with more agreement than did the control middle school students: *Information about college is being shared with me at school*, $\chi^2(3) = 119.24$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .17, a small effect (Cohen, 1988); *Information about careers is being shared with me at school*, $\chi^2(3) = 29.82$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .08, a trivial effect; *I know what courses I need to take to get into college*, $\chi^2(3) = 13.72$, $p = .003$, Cramer's V of .065, a trivial effect (Cohen, 1988); *After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech)*, $\chi^2(3) = 14.95$, $p = .002$, Cramer's V of .076, a trivial effect (Cohen, 1988); and *After high school, I plan on joining the military*, $\chi^2(3) = 27.45$, $p < .001$, Cramer's V of .087, a trivial effect (Cohen, 1988).

Statistically significant differences between the study and control middle schools were not present for the following items: *I plan to go to college after graduating* ($p = .46$); *I believe I can succeed in college* ($p = .62$); *It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree* ($p = .51$); and *I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT* ($p = .44$).

In addition to the student perception survey data, archival data were analyzed from a nine questions district-created senior student survey which was administered to all Grade 12 students enrolled at the study and control high school campuses in May, 2011. The last three questions on the senior survey were analyzed to answer Research Question One of this study. For these last three questions, Grade 12 students rated each question with their answer choices of (a) “Excellent,” (b) “Good,” (c) “Fair,” and (d) “Poor.” Results of these three senior survey questions are depicted in Table D13. The survey items on which the most variance was present between the study and control high school seniors were: *When you consider your preparation for life after high school and how would you rate the information presented about college/careers?* and *When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the support/assistance given to you related to college/careers?* For these questions, the “Excellent” and “Good” answer choices were combined to reflect a positive response the question. For the question *When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the information presented about college/careers?*, 72% of the study high school seniors responded positively, compared to only 58% of the control high school seniors responding the same. For the question *When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the support/assistance given to you related to college/careers?*, 67% of the study high school seniors responded positively, compared to only 52% of the control high school seniors responding the same. For these two survey items, study high school Grade 12 students reported more favorably regarding their preparation and support for postsecondary education and careers than did the control middle school C students.

Figures were generated for the three questions on the senior survey in order to show a visual representation of the results. Revealed in Figure 12 are combined student responses of “Excellent” and “Good” to reflect a positive response to the question *When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate your high school course work?* For this question, there was no difference in the percentage of students at the two schools for students responding positively. For this question, both campuses had 73% of the Grade 12 students respond positively.

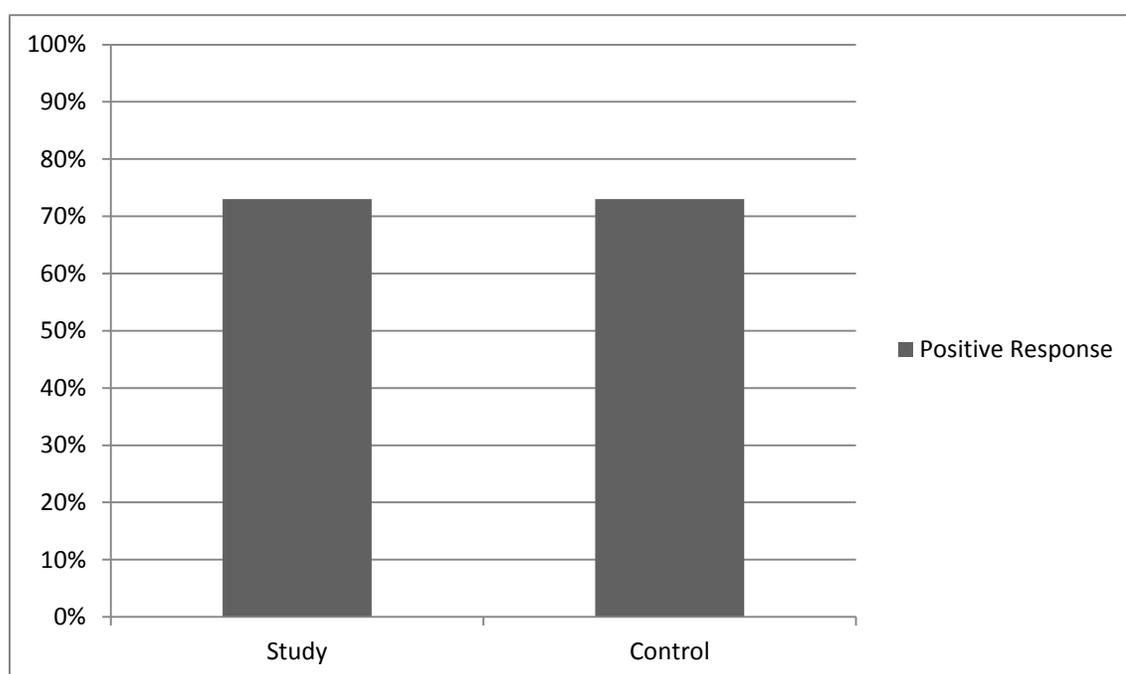


Figure 12. Grade 12 student responses to the survey question of When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate your high school course work?

Next, a figure was generated for the survey item of *When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the information presented about college/careers?* As revealed in Figure 13 below, a much higher percentage of Grade 12 students enrolled in the study high school responded positively, 72%, than did students who were enrolled in the control high school, 58%.

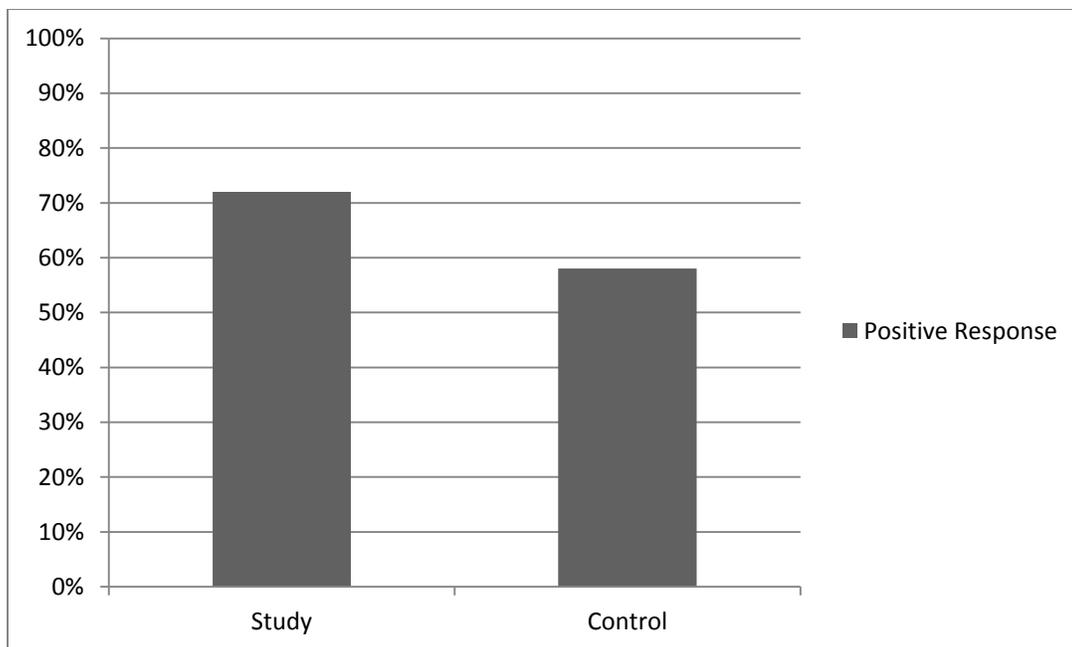


Figure 13. Grade 12 student responses to the survey question of When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the information presented about college/careers?

Finally, a figure was generated for the survey item of *When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the support/assistance given to you related to college/careers?* As revealed in Figure 14, a much higher percentage of Grade 12 students enrolled in the study high school responded positively, 67%, than did students who were enrolled in the control high school, 52%.

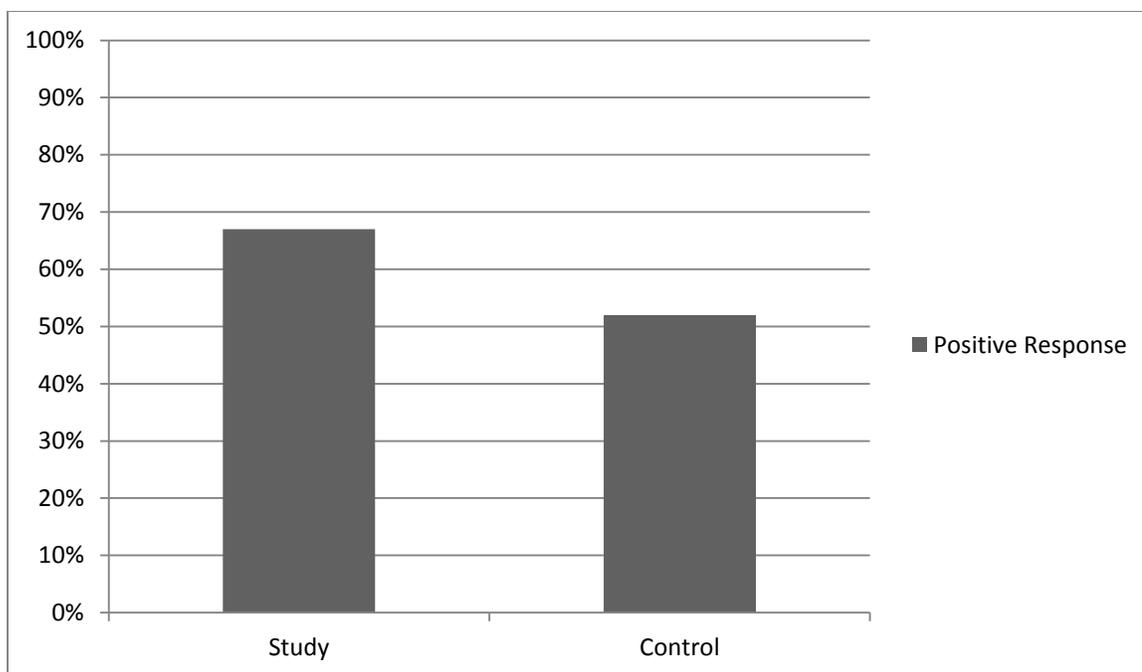


Figure 14. Grade 12 student responses to the survey question of When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the support/assistance given to you related to college/careers?

Results for Research Question Two

A district-created senior student survey was administered in person to all Grade 12 students enrolled at both the study and control high school campuses in May, at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. The senior student survey consisted of 17 questions; however, only six questions from the survey were analyzed in order to answer Research Question Two of this study. In this senior survey, Grade 12 students in the study and control high schools were asked about their enrollment in Advanced Placement and dual credit courses, as well as their college application activities. As depicted in Table D14, high school seniors were asked five questions regarding these areas. For these five survey questions, students choose one of the following responses: (a) “None,” (b) “1-3,” or (c) “4 or More (4+)”. With respect to these five questions, the percentages were similar for students in the study and in the control high schools. However, 49% (296

students) of the study high school seniors reported that they enrolled in at least one AP or dual credit course, with 20% (120 students) reporting that they enrolled in four or more AP or dual credit courses. In comparison, 43% (173 students) of the control high school seniors reported that they enrolled in at least one AP or dual credit course, with only 12% (49 students) reporting that they enrolled in four or more AP or dual credit courses. For this survey item, more than double the number of seniors at the study high school campus than at the control high school campus reported taking multiple Advanced Placement and dual credit courses in high school.

Table D14 also depicts that 68% from the study high school campus reported completing at least one college application, and 47% reported receiving at least one college acceptance letter. Similarly, 64% of the students from the control high school reported completing at least one college application, and 51% reported receiving at least one college acceptance letter. On the other hand, 60% of the study high school students reported that they did not submit any scholarship applications, compared with 56% of the control high school students reporting that they did not submit any scholarship applications.

To determine whether statistically differences were present between the responses from students in the study and control high schools for the senior student survey questions, Pearson chi-square procedures were calculated. Again, for each chi-square analysis, the independent variable was the school status (i.e., study or control high school) and the dependent variable was one of the survey items. For the survey question, *How many AP or dual credit courses did you take?*, a statistically significant difference was revealed, $\chi^2(3) = 11.81$, $p = .008$, Cramer's V of .11, small effect size (Cohen, 1988).

Moreover, a statistically significant difference was present for the survey question, *How many college applications did you submit?*, $\chi^2(3) = 7.91$, $p = .048$, Cramer's V of .09, trivial effect size (Cohen, 1988). In these two cases, students enrolled in the study high school completed more AP or dual credit courses and submitted more college applications than did students enrolled in the control high school. There was also a statistically significant difference present for the question *How many scholarship applications did you submit?*, $\chi^2(3) = 10.09$, $p = .018$, Cramer's V of .10, small effect size (Cohen, 1988). In this case, however, students enrolled in the control campus submitted more scholarship applications than did the students enrolled in the study campus. Statistically significant differences were not present for the following survey items: *How many college acceptance letters have you received?* ($p = .12$) and *How many college campuses have you visited?* ($p = .99$).

Another question on the senior student survey that students were asked was *Did you complete the FAFSA form?* Students in the study high school responded that 53% had completed the form, compared to 54% of the control high school students. Similar percentages of students responded that they did not complete the form, 34% and 30%, respectively, or responded that they did not know whether or not they had completed the FAFSA form, 10% and 10%, respectively. The Pearson chi-square analyses did not yield a statistically significant difference in student responses to this item ($p = .13$).

District Advanced Placement and dual credit course enrollment data, as depicted in Table 4, revealed that students from the study high school campus enrolled in 697 Advanced Placement/dual credit courses, compared to 290 students from the control high school campus during the fall semester of the 2010-2011 school year. The district

enrollment data showed that even though the study high school had 58% economically disadvantaged students enrolled during the 2010-2011 school year, the campus had the second highest enrollment in the district in Advanced Placement/dual credit courses during the fall semester of the 2010-2011 school year. The highest Advanced Placement and dual credit enrollment in the district was in high school three (HS 3), as depicted in Table 4, which only had 24% economically disadvantaged students enrolled. The lowest Advanced Placement/dual credit enrollment in the district during the fall semester of 2010-2011 was in the control high school campus, which had the highest economically disadvantaged student enrollment at 62%.

Table 4

District Advanced Placement and Dual Credit Enrollment Data for the Fall Semester of the 2010-2011 School Year

Campus	Economically Disadvantaged		# AP/DC
	Total Student Enrollment	Student Enrollment (%)	
Study HS	3,136	58%	697
Control HS	2,405	62%	290
HS 3	3,252	24%	704
HS 4	3,261	35%	674
HS 5	3,298	39%	661
HS 6	2,655	17%	620
HS 7	2,253	14%	568
HS 8	3,049	41%	561
HS 9	2,849	37%	488
HS 10	2,946	53%	483

The district data relative to the number of student enrolled in AP and dual credit course revealed a significant difference and is worthy of representing in a visual display. As illustrated in Figure 15, the study high school had 407 more students than the control high school enrolled in AP and dual credit courses during the fall semester of 2010-2011. These numbers represent how many students were enrolled in all of the AP/dual credit courses offered on these campuses. These numbers, however, do not reflect how many individual students because the students may have enrolled in multiple AP/dual credit courses; therefore, they were counted for each AP/dual credit course in which they enrolled. Moreover, the study high school had only seven students less enrolled in AP and dual credit courses than HS 3, which had the most students enrolled in these advanced courses.

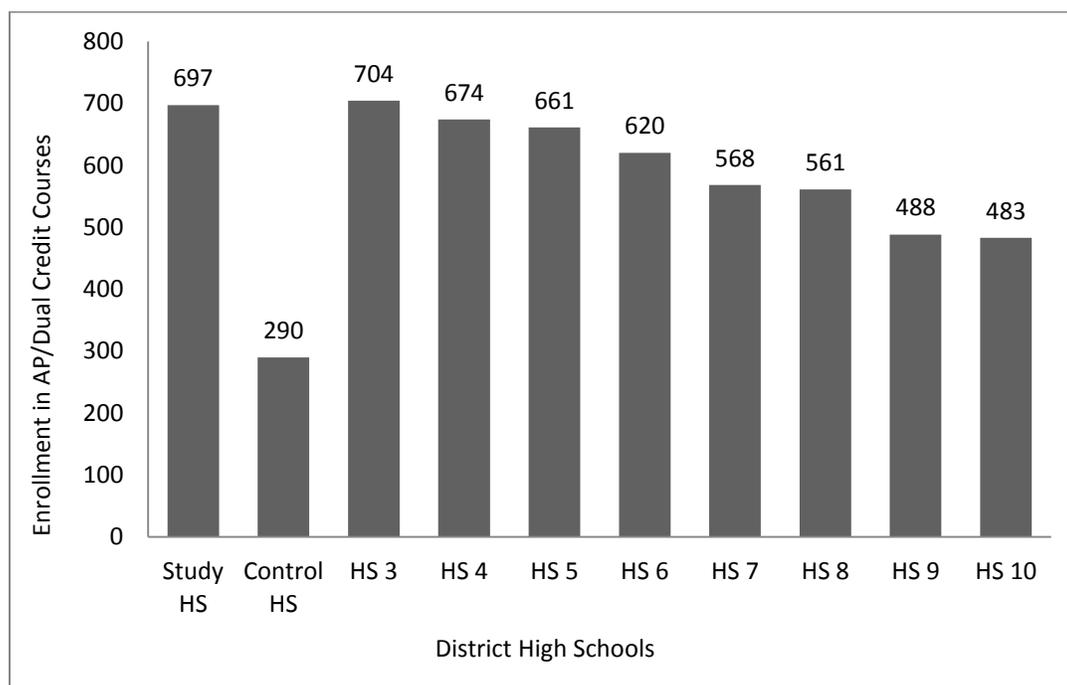


Figure 15. Enrollment in AP/dual credit courses at each of the focus district's high school campuses, fall semester 2010-2011. Source: Focus District's enrollment data, fall 2010-2011 school year.

Presented in Table 5 are the data from the College Board AP Five-Year School Score Summary which reveals the number of students from both the study and control high school campuses who, in 2011, enrolled in an Advanced Placement course; the number of students who took an Advanced Placement exam; the number of students scoring three or higher on the exam; and the percentage of students scoring three or higher on the exam. These data established that more students from the study high school campus enrolled in an Advanced Placement course, 428, than did students from the control high school campus ($n = 193$).

Table 5

College Board AP School Score Summary, 2011

School	# AP Students	# AP Exams	# Earning 3+	% Earning 3+
Study High School	428	708	183	42.5%
Control High School	193	357	88	45.6%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because some students did not respond to items. 3+ means a score of 3, 4, or 5 which is considered successful on an AP exam.

Figure 16 provides a visual depiction of the number of student enrolled in AP courses at the study campus in comparison to the control campus. As seen in this visual representation, the study high school had 235 more students enrolled in AP courses than did the control high school ($n = 193$).

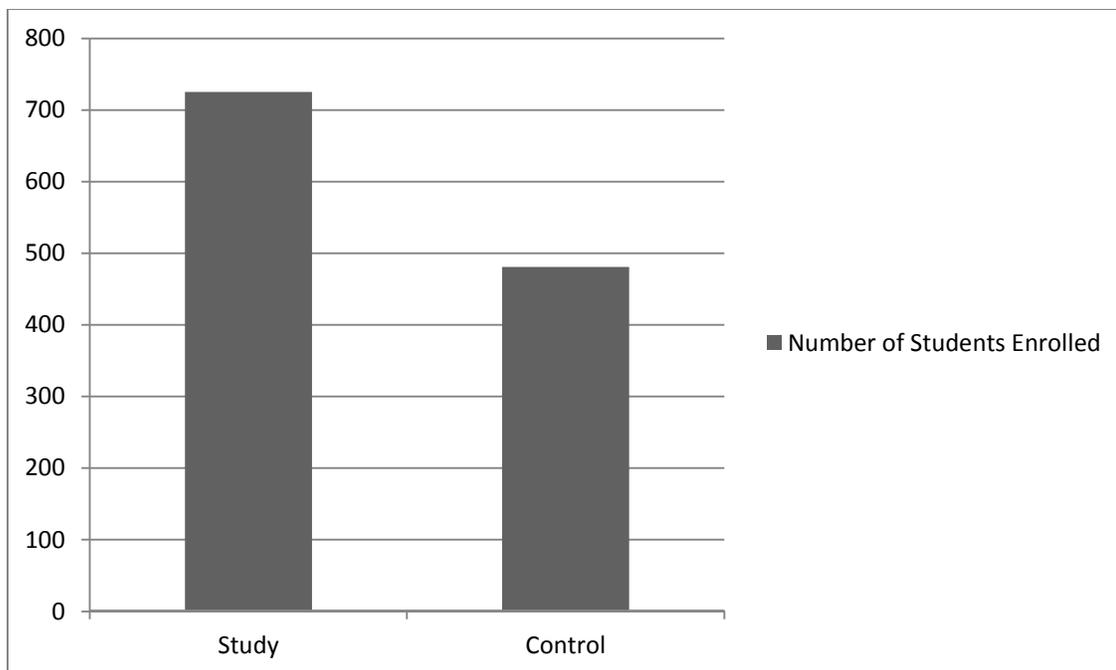


Figure 16. Number of students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses for students in the study and control high schools.

Furthermore, data presented in Table 5 reveals that students from the study high school campus took more Advanced Placement exams, 708, compared to the 357 exams taken by students from the control high school campus. Figure 17 provides a visual depiction of these numbers. Almost twice as many Advanced Placement exams were taken by students in the study high school than in the control high school.

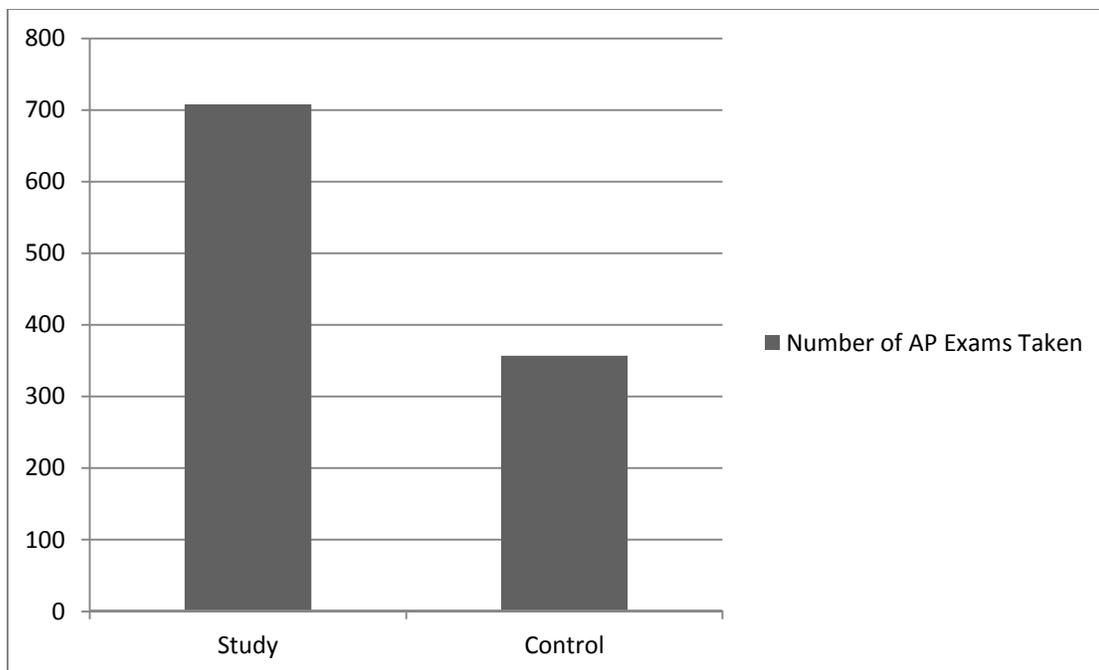


Figure 17. Number of Advanced Placement exams taken by students in the study and control high schools.

Also delineated in Table 5 is that more students from the study high school campus scored a three or higher on the AP exam to earn college credit, 183, compared with the 88 students from the control high school campus. Figure 18 shows the number of study high school students who obtained an Advanced Placement exam score of 3 or higher was double the number of control high school students.

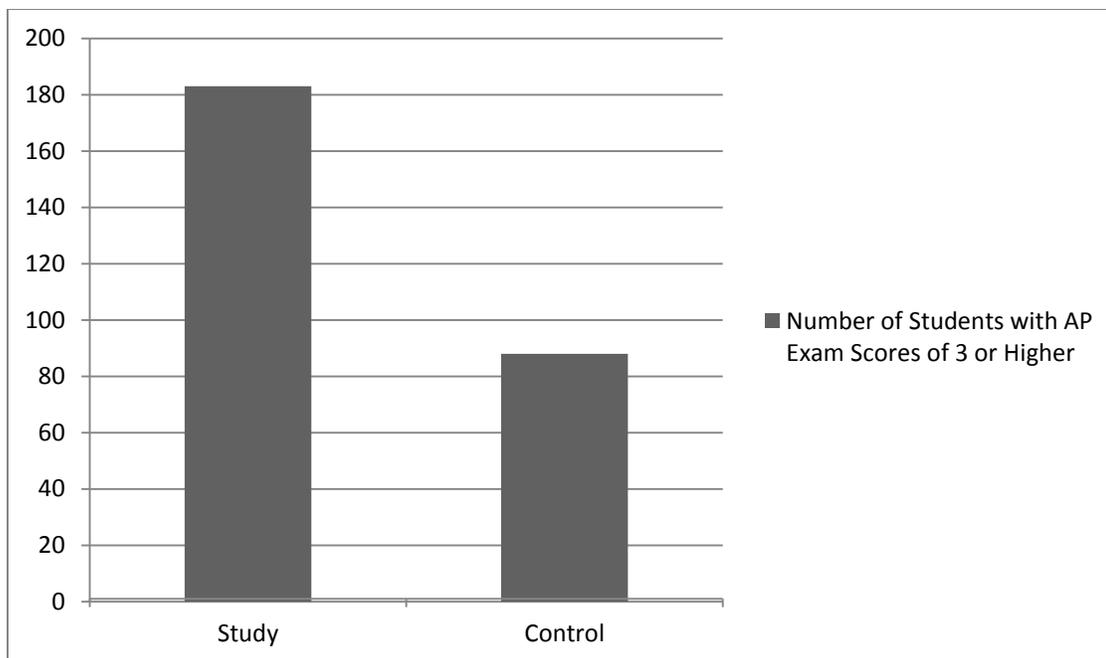


Figure 18. Number of students who obtained an Advanced Placement score of three or higher in the study and control high schools.

Even though more students from the study high school campus took an Advanced Placement exam and scored a 3 or higher, a higher percentage of students from the control high school earned a 3 or higher on the exam (Table 5), 45.6%, compared with 42.5% from the study high school campus. Below in Figure 19, the reader is presented with a visual depiction of the percentages of students at the study high school and control high schools who earned an Advanced Placement exam score of 3 or higher.

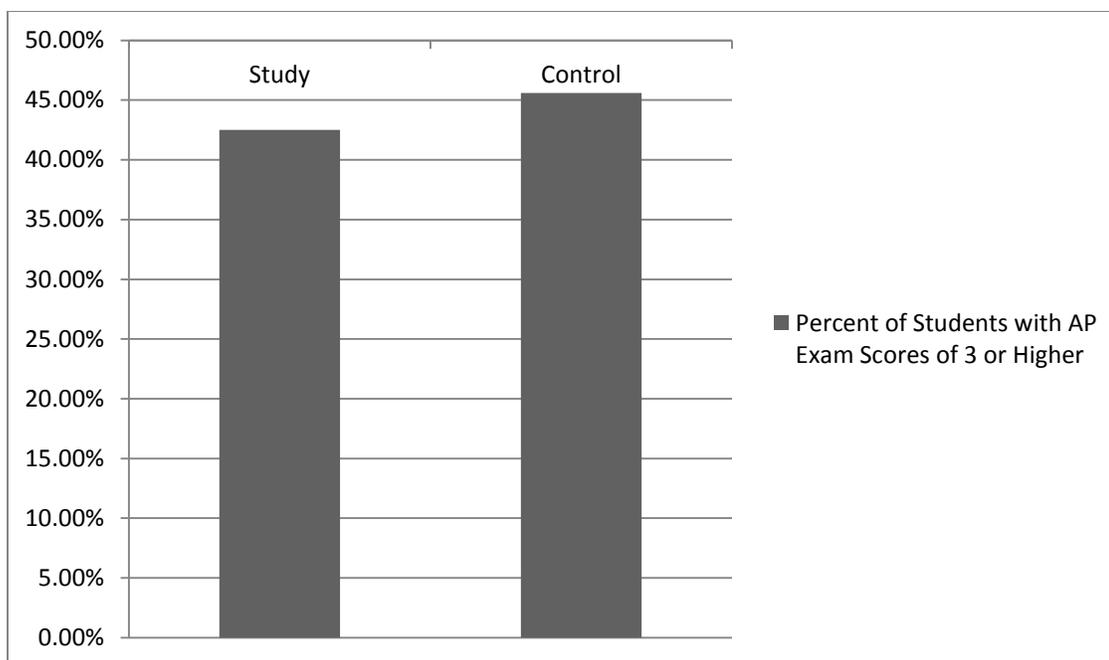


Figure 19. Percentage of students who obtained an Advanced Placement score of three or higher in the study and control high schools.

Represented in Table 6 is data regarding the number of AP exams taken by African American students from the study high school and the control high school campuses during the 2010-2011 school year. The data reflected on Table 6, taken from the College Board AP Five-Year School Score Summary report, show a comparison between the study campus and the control campus related to the number of African American students from each campus who challenged themselves to take an AP exam. The data also reveal the number and percentage of African American students from each campus who earned a successful score, three or higher, on an AP exam during the 2010-2011 school year. These data exhibit that the exact same number of AP exams were taken by African American students from the study high school campus, 54 exams, as were taken by African American students from the control high school campus, 54 exams. These data divulge, however, that a higher percentage of the total AP exams were taken by African American students at the control high school campus, 15%, in comparison to the

percentage of the total AP exams taken by African American students at the study high school campus, 8%. In addition, more exams taken by African American students from the control high school campus, 14 exams (26%), resulted in a score of three or higher, indicating success on the exam, compared to 8 exams (15%) taken by African American students at the study high school.

Table 6

AP Testing Participation and Results for African American Students, 2011

Test Score	Study High School		Control High School	
	<i>n</i> exams	% of population	<i>n</i> exams	% of population
Total	54 out of 708	8% of total exams	54 out of 357	15% of total exams
5	0	0%	1	2%
4	1	2%	4	7%
3	7	13%	9	17%
2	24	44%	25	46%
1	22	41%	15	28%

Note. Totals from Tables 6-9 do not add up to the total number of AP exams taken, as reported on Table 5, because some students chose not to report their ethnicity.

Figure 20 provides a visual representation of the African American exam results for students from both the study high school and control high school who took AP exams during the 2010-2011 school year. This scatterplot reveals that more African American students from the control high school earned scores of 3 or higher, thus earning college credit. Additionally, more African American students from the study campus earned a score of 1, the lowest score on than can be earned on an AP exam.

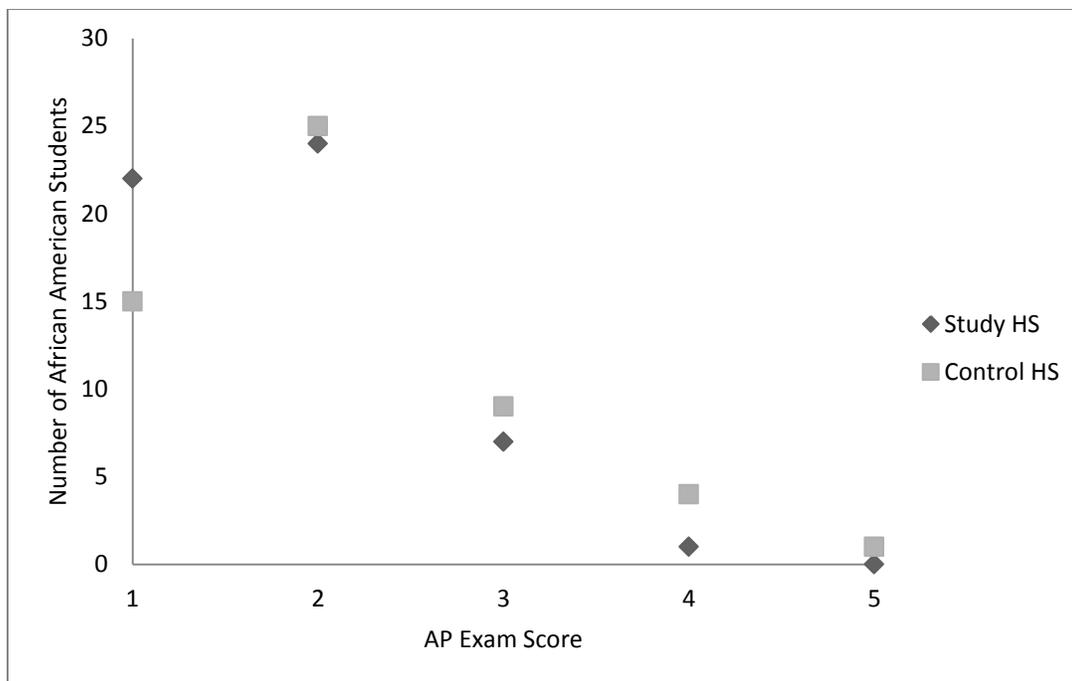


Figure 20. Number of study high school and control high school African American students earning scores 1-5 on a 2011 AP test. Data retrieved from the College Board AP Five-Year School Summary report, 2011.

Delineated in Table 7 is the number of AP exams taken by Hispanic students from the study high school and the control high school campuses during the 2010-2011 school year. The data reflected on Table 7, taken from the College Board AP Five-Year School Score Summary report, show a comparison between the study campus and the control campus related to the number of Hispanic students from each campus who challenged themselves to take an AP exam. The data also reveal the number and percentage of Hispanic students from each campus who earned a successful score, three or higher, on an AP exam during the 2010-2011 school year. More than double the number of AP exams at the study high school were taken by Hispanic students, 316 exams, compared to the number of AP exams at the control high school that were taken by Hispanic students, 153 exams. When scrutinizing the percentage of exams taken by Hispanic students from the study and control high school campuses, however, the gap is much narrower, 45%

and 43% respectively. Similarly, more exams taken by Hispanic students from the study high school campus, 109 exams, resulted in a score of three or higher, indicating success on the exam, compared to 71 exams taken by Hispanic students at the study high school. When analyzing the results using percentages, however, a higher percentage (46%) of the exams taken by Hispanic students at the control high school campus resulted in a successful score of three or higher, compared to 34% of the exams taken by Hispanic students at the study high school campus.

Table 7

AP Testing Participation and Results for Hispanic Students, 2011

Test Score	Study High School		Control High School	
	<i>n</i> exams	% of population	<i>n</i> exams	% of population
Total	316 out of 708	45% of total exams	153 out of 357	43% of total exams
5	13	4%	17	11%
4	33	10%	21	14%
3	63	20%	33	22%
2	102	32%	49	32%
1	105	33%	33	22%

Note. Totals from Tables 6-9 do not add up to the total number of AP exams taken, as reported on Table 5, because some students chose not to report their ethnicity. Hispanic numbers reported are a combination of Mexican, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Latino, Latin-American and other Hispanic.

Figure 21 provides an illustration of the exam results for Hispanic students from both the study high school and control high school who took AP exams during the 2010-2011 school year. Hispanic numbers reported by the College Board AP Five-Year

School Score Summary are a combination of Mexican, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, and other Hispanic, Latino, and Latin-American. This scatterplot divulges that even though more Hispanic students from the control high school earned the highest score of five, more Hispanic students from the study high school earned credit by scoring a three or higher.

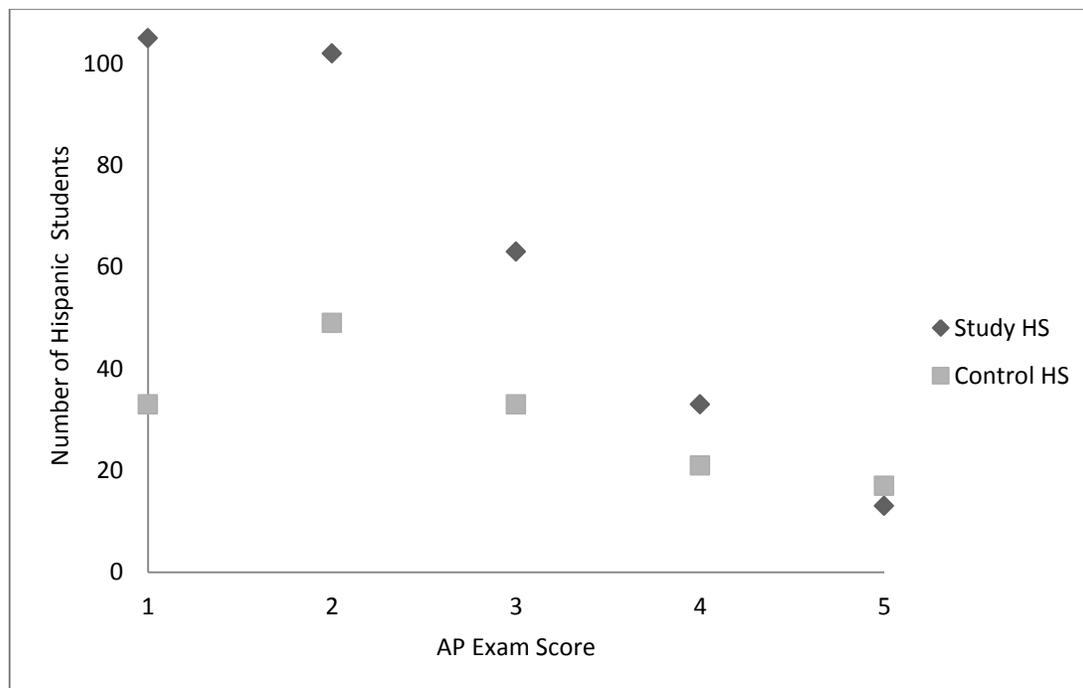


Figure 21. Number of study high school and control high school Hispanic students earning scores 1-5 on a 2011 AP test. Data retrieved from the College Board AP Five-Year School Summary report, 2011.

Depicted in Table 8 is the number of AP exams taken by Asian/Pacific Islander students, which reveals that 153 AP exams (22%) were taken by Asian/Pacific Islander students at the study high school campus. In comparison, 68 exams (19%) were taken by Asian/Pacific Islander students at the control high school campus. Additionally, more exams taken by Asian/Pacific Islander students from the study high school campus, 58 (38%), resulted in a score of three or higher, indicating success on the exam, compared to

23 exams (34%) taken by Asian/Pacific Islander students at the control high school campus.

Table 8

AP Testing Participation and Results for Asia/Pacific Islander Students, 2011

Test Score	Study High School		Control High School	
	<i>n</i> exams	% of population	<i>n</i> exams	% of population
Total	153 out of 708	22% of total exams	68 out of 357	19% of total exams
5	6	4%	4	6%
4	19	12%	6	9%
3	33	22%	13	19%
2	48	31%	22	32%
1	47	31%	23	34%

Note. Totals from Tables 6-9 do not add up to the total number of AP exams taken, as reported on Table 5, because some students chose not to report their ethnicity.

Figure 22 illustrates the exam results for Asian/Pacific Islander students from both the study high school and control high school who took AP exams during the 2010-2011 school year. This visual representation highlights the fact that not only did more Asian/Pacific Islander students from the study campus take an AP exam, more of them also scored three or higher on the exam to earn college credit.

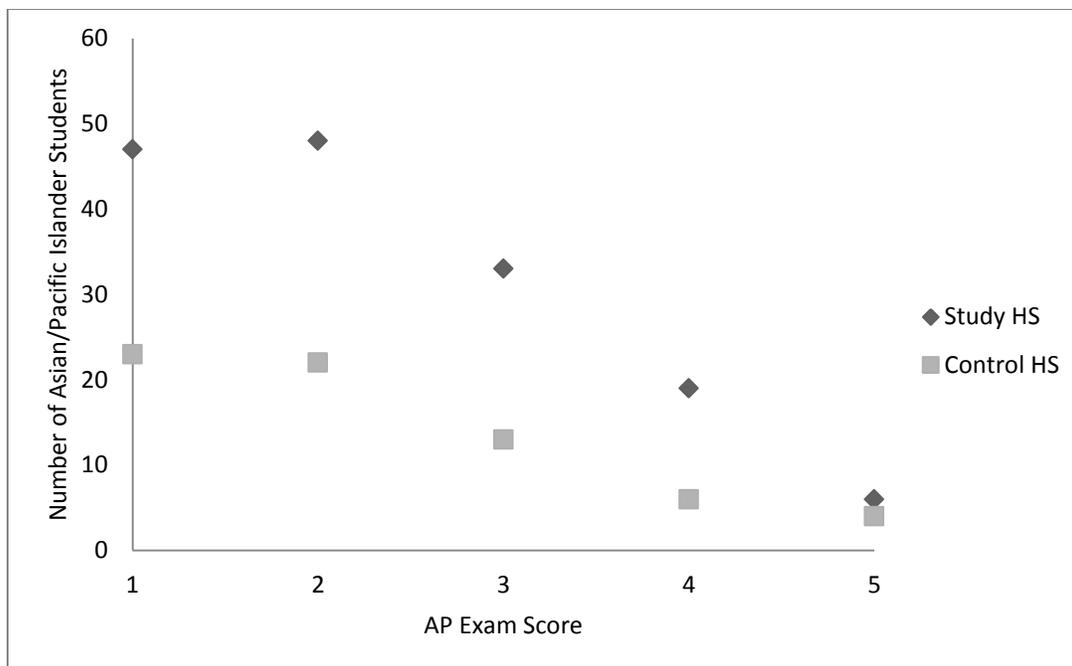


Figure 22. Number of study high school and control high school Asian/Pacific Islander students earning scores 1-5 on a 2011 AP test. Data retrieved from the College Board AP Five-Year School Summary report, 2011.

Table 9 displays the number of AP exams taken by White students, revealing 167 (24%) exams were taken by White students at the study campus. In comparison, 65 (18%) exams were taken by White students at the control campus. Moreover, more exams taken by White students from the study high school campus, 99 (59%), resulted in a score of three or higher, indicating success on the exam, compared to 32 exams (49%) taken by White students at the control high school campus.

Table 9

AP Testing Participation and Results for White Students, 2011

Test Score	Study High School		Control High School	
	<i>n</i> exams	% of population	<i>n</i> exams	% of population
Total	167 out of 708	24% of total	65 out of 357	18% of total
		exams		exams
5	14	8%	4	6%
4	29	17%	6	9%
3	56	34%	22	34%
2	32	19%	21	32%
1	36	22%	12	18%

Note. Totals from Tables 6-9 do not add up to the total number of AP exams taken, as reported on Table 5, because some students chose not to report their ethnicity.

As visualized below in Figure 23, more White students from the study high school took an AP exam in comparison to White students from the control high school. In addition, more White students from the study high school earned a score of three or higher on the exam to earn college credit.

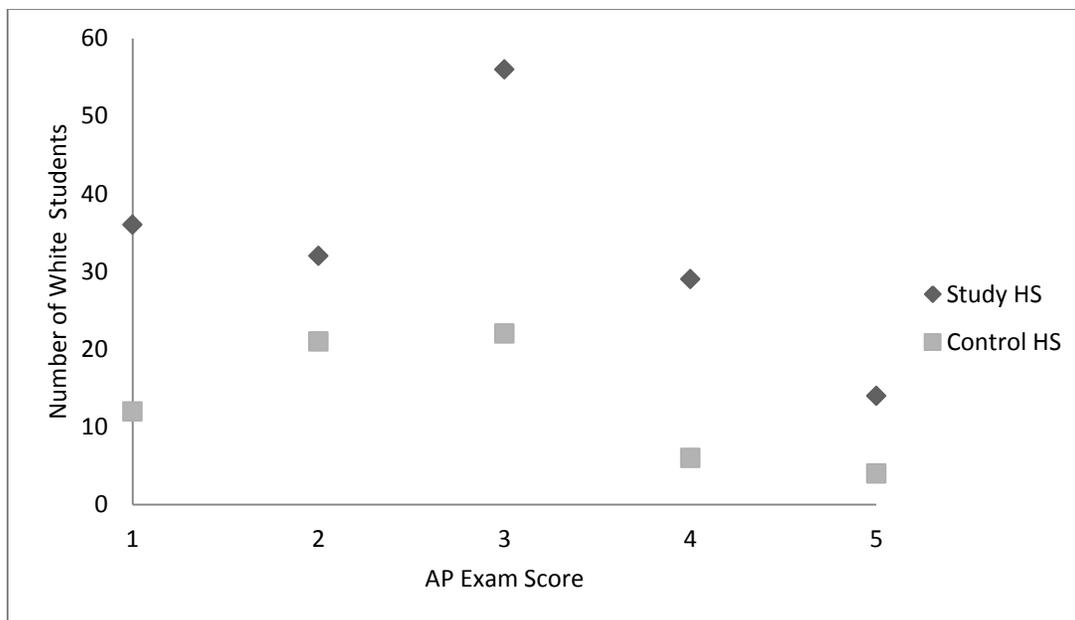


Figure 23. Number of study high school and control high school White students earning scores 1-5 on a 2011 AP test. Data retrieved from the College Board AP Five-Year School Summary report, 2011.

AP testing participation by ethnicity is visually depicted on Figure 24. This visual representation provides a clear picture of the number of students from four ethnicity categories who took AP exams: African American, Hispanic (Mexican, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, and other Hispanic, Latino, and Latin-American), Asian/Pacific Islander, and White. The figure shows that in every category, except African American, there were more students from the study high school campus who took an AP exam.

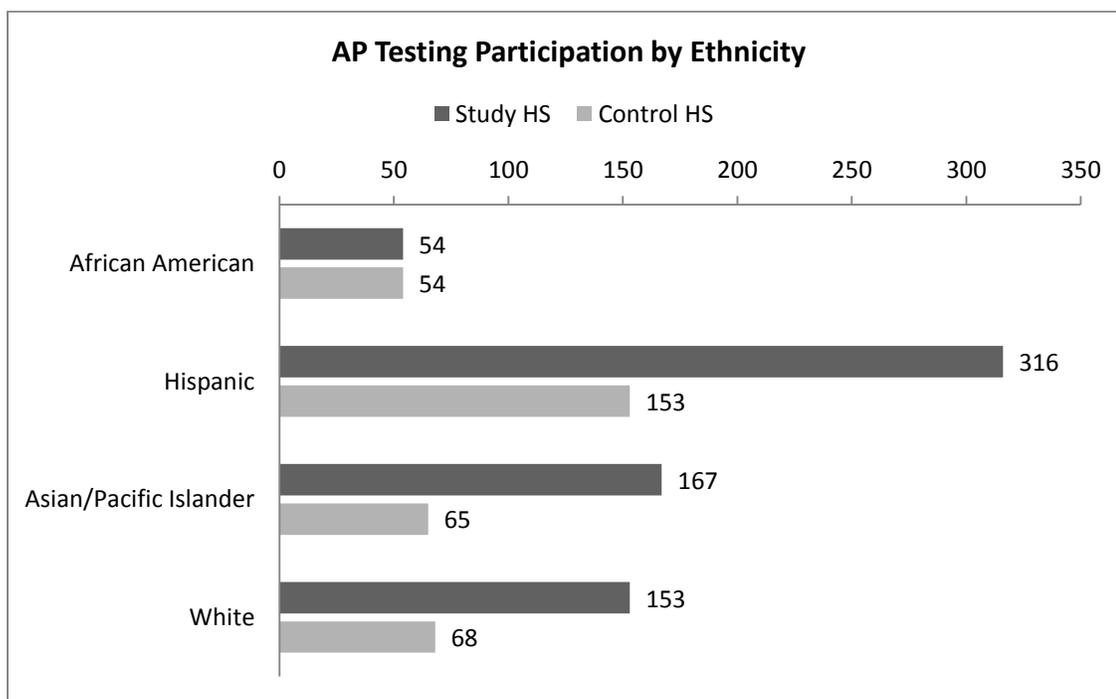


Figure 24. Number of study high school and control high school students by ethnicity who participated in 2011 AP testing. Data retrieved from the College Board AP Five-Year School Summary report, 2011.

Results for Research Question Three

In this research question, the focus was on whether the creation of a college-focused culture increased student enrollment in colleges and universities directly after high school completion. In the study high school, as depicted on Figure 25, 59% of the graduates enrolled in college in the fall of 2011, compared to 57% of the control high school graduates.

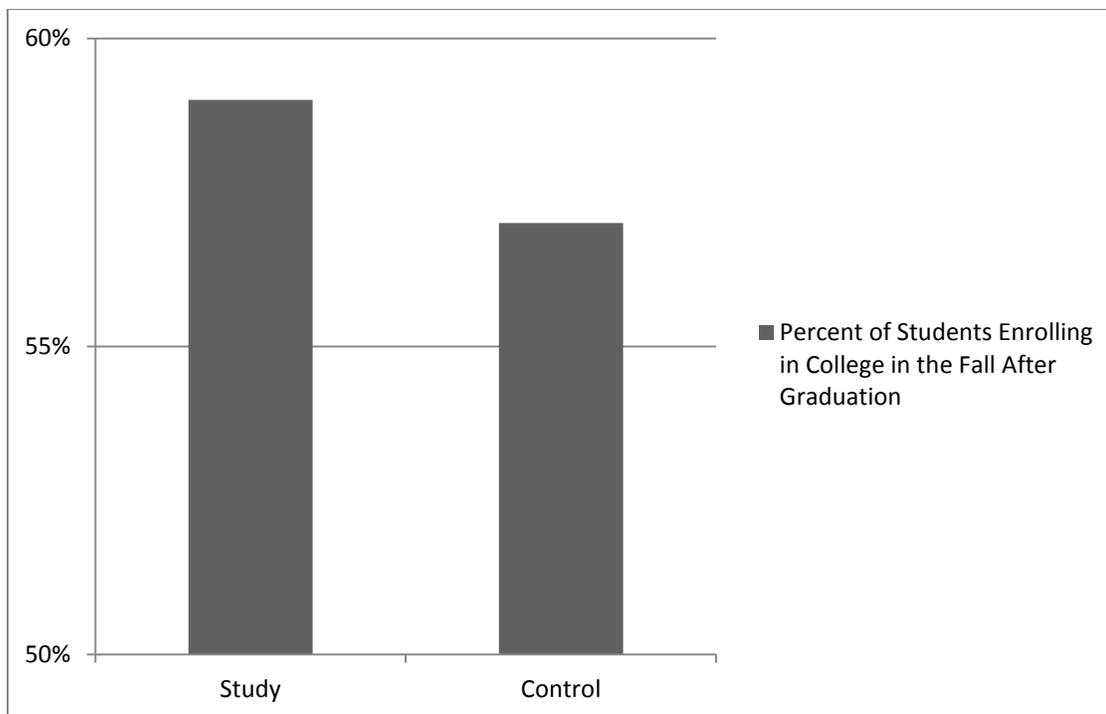


Figure 25. Percentage of study and control high school students who enrolled in a college during the fall directly after graduation, 2011.

Table 10 reveals that the identical percentages of graduates from the study and the control high schools who enrolled in college during the fall directly after high school graduation enrolled in public and private institutions. Table 10 also discloses that similar percentages of the graduates from these two high schools enrolled in 2-year and 4-year colleges during the fall of 2011. Furthermore, Table 10 shows that the identical percentages of the graduates from these two high schools enrolled in Texas and non-Texas Colleges.

Table 10

Percentage of 2011 Graduating Class Who Enrolled in College for the Fall, 2011

College	Study High School		Control High School	
	<i>n</i> enrolled	% enrolled	<i>n</i> enrolled	% enrolled
Total	354 out of 598		259 out of 452	
	graduates	59%	graduates	57%
Public College	335	95%	245	95%
Private College	19	5%	14	5%
2-year College	205	58%	152	59%
4-year College	149	42%	107	41%
Texas College	332	94%	244	94%
Non-Texas College	22	6%	15	6%

The data provided by the National Student Clearinghouse for the study high school and control high school graduating class of 2011 revealed identical percentages in all areas except enrollment in 2-year and 4-year colleges, which were also extremely similar. Depicted in Figure 26, 42% of the study high school graduates of 2011 enrolled in a 4-year college and 58% enrolled in a 2-year college.

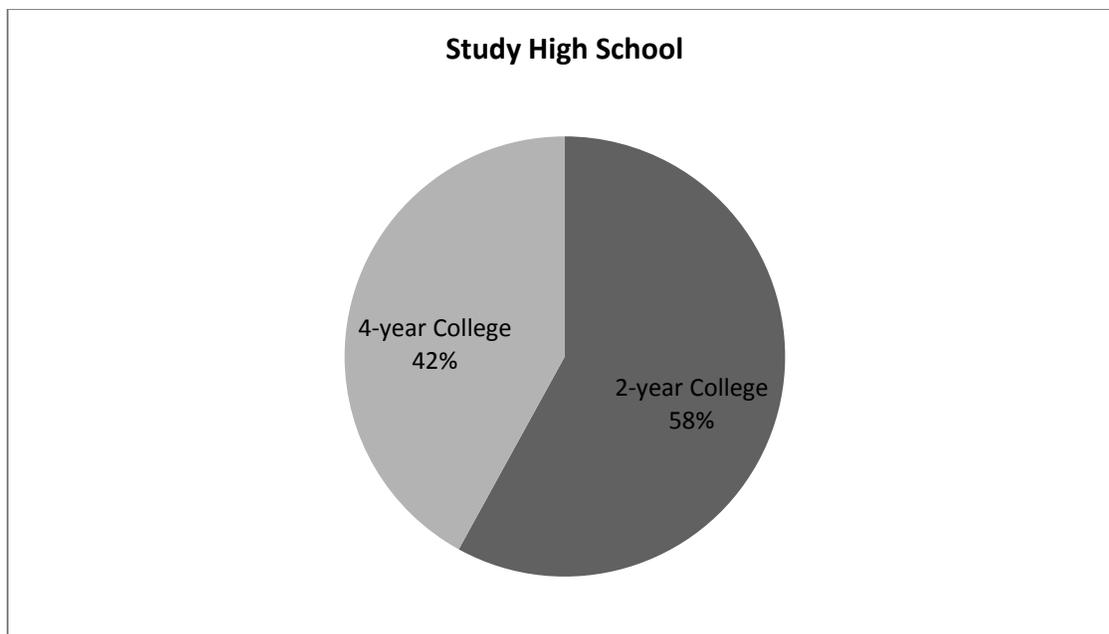


Figure 26. Percentages of study high school 2011 graduating class who enrolled in 2-year and 4-year colleges during the fall of 2011. Data retrieved from National Student Clearinghouse for graduating class of 2011.

Similar to the study high school graduates of 2011, the percentage of control high school graduates who enrolled in 2-year and 4-year colleges, as represented in Figure 27 were 41% and 59% respectively. The differences in the National Student Clearinghouse data for the study and control high school campuses were not significant.

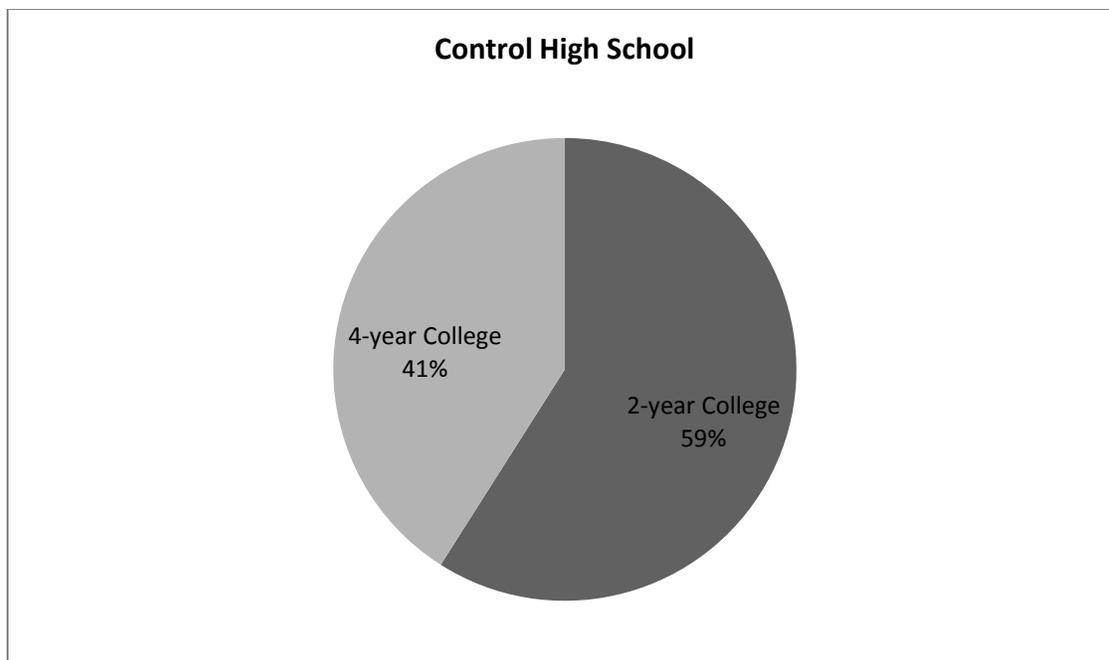


Figure 27. Percentages of control high school 2011 graduating class who enrolled in 2-year and 4-year colleges during the fall of 2011. Data retrieved from National Student Clearinghouse for graduating class of 2011.

Summary of Research Findings

In conclusion, the data from the student surveys revealed that even though there were high levels of agreement (i.e., above 90%) for students in both school settings on several survey questions, there were also significant differences in student responses between the study campuses and control campuses. In the questions which revealed the highest variance in student responses, the students from the study high school expressed more agreement than the students from the control campus. In addition, the results of the Pearson chi-square procedures disclosed statistically significant differences between the perceptions of the students from the study campuses and the perception of the students from the control campuses, which indicated that the college and career initiatives had an impact on the students at the study campuses.

The data regarding AP and dual credit enrollment and testing also exposed a substantial difference between the students enrolled in the study high school and the control high school. More students from the study high school took AP courses, AP exams, and dual credit courses. Again, the chi-square procedures conducted on the senior survey revealed statistically significant differences for questions related to AP courses, college applications, and scholarship applications.

Lastly, the National Student Clearinghouse data related to college enrollment did not reveal a significant difference in graduates enrolling in college directly after high school completion. Even though there was a slightly higher percentage of 2011 graduates from the study high school who enrolled in college during the fall of 2011, the difference was not significant.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how school leaders, particularly secondary school principals, can implement a college-focused culture in order to influence the perceptions of minority and low-income students regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education. The sample of this study consisted of six Title I secondary campuses located in a large, diverse, suburban school district in the state of Texas. This research study explored the effects of the college-focused culture created at three study Title I secondary campuses and compared the results to a control group, three additional Title I secondary campuses that did not benefit from the same college-focused initiatives. The entire student population of the six Title I secondary campuses in the research study was surveyed. The following was the student enrollment during the 2010-2011 school year: 3,208 enrolled in study campus High School A; 2,488 enrolled in control campus High School B; 1,296 enrolled in study campus Middle School A; 1,294 enrolled in study campus Middle School B; 1,370 enrolled in control campus Middle School C; and 1,351 enrolled in control campus Middle School D.

This research study was a quantitative research study and used categorical data designed to identify associations between the college-focused cultures implemented by secondary school leaders and student perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education. The following data sources were explored for this research study: (a) archival data from a descriptive, district-created, high school student perception survey, (b) archival data from a descriptive, district-created, middle school student perception survey, (c) archival data from a descriptive, district-created,

senior student survey, (d) the focus district's AP and dual credit enrollment data, (e) the 2011 College Board AP Five-Year School Score Summary report, and (f) the college enrollment data for the 2011 graduating classes of High School A and High School B retrieved from the National Student Clearinghouse. This research study reported the responses of the student perception surveys through descriptive statistics and utilized Pearson chi-square procedures to calculate each of the student survey questions on the three student surveys.

This research was also designed to identify the associations between the college-focused cultures implemented by secondary school leaders and the district's AP and dual credit enrollment data, as well as the college enrollment data for the 2011 graduating classes of High School A and High School B. Causal-comparative research was used in this study to attempt to determine the cause or consequences of differences that existed between the students from the study campuses and the students from the control campuses. This study attempted to demonstrate that the college-focused culture to which the school leaders of the study campuses purposefully exposed students was a possible cause for increased enrollment in AP courses, dual credit courses, and college entrance immediately following high school graduation. The study compared the data from the three study campuses to the data retrieved from the demographically similar control campuses, which did not purposefully expose students to the same college-focused culture. This comparison allowed the researcher to investigate student perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education and training and draw conclusions about the impact of the college-focused culture established on the three study campuses.

Discussion of Results

This study investigated the college-focused culture implemented by secondary school leadership in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the creation of a college-focused culture positively influence students' perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education?
2. Does the creation of a college-focused culture increase student enrollment in Advanced Placement and dual credit courses?
3. Does the creation of a college-focused culture increase student enrollment in colleges and universities directly after high school completion?

Research Question One

For the first research question, the student perception surveys revealed that a higher percentage of students from the study high school and study middle school campuses perceived support and guidance related to postsecondary educational and career opportunities. Analysis of the student survey responses revealed noticeable differences between the perceptions of the students from the study schools in comparison to the students from the control schools. As such, these results may be interpreted to mean that the creation of a college-focused culture had positive influences on students' perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education.

Students from the study high schools indicated more agreement than did the students from the control high school to 11 of the survey items. Students enrolled at the control high school indicated higher levels of agreement for only two survey items: (1) *I will not attend college because I cannot afford it.* and (2) *After high school, I plan on*

attending a technical school (ITT Tech.). As such, these results may be interpreted to mean that the creation of a college-focused culture had positive influences on students' perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education.

The following five survey questions revealed that the study high school students had significantly higher agreement than did the students from the control high school: *Information about college is being shared with me at school; Information about careers is being shared with me at school; I know what high school courses I need to go to college; I know what it means to take a dual credit course; and I know what it means to take an Advanced Placement course.* The first student perception survey item on which dissimilarity was present between the study high school and control high school participants was: *Information about college is being shared with me at school*, with 88% of the study high school students responding "Strongly Agree/Agree," compared with 72% of the control high school students responding "Strongly Agree/Agree." The second student perception survey item on which High School A and High School B students differed in their responses was *Information about careers is being shared with me at school*. The study exposed that 80% of students enrolled in High Schools A expressed agreement, compared to only 71% of the students enrolled in High School B. The results of the survey item *I know what high school courses I need to go to college* revealed 78% of the students from High School A were in agreement, compared to 69% of the students from the High School B. Additionally, High School A had higher percentages of agreement with survey item *I know what it means to take a dual credit course*, 74% compared to 61% of the control campus students. Another significant difference was revealed through analysis of the survey item *I know what it means to take an Advanced*

Placement course, disclosing 81% of High School A students in agreement, compared to 71% of High School B students.

The results of these survey items suggest that the strategic college- and career-focused activities at High School A were beneficial. The results suggest that it is vital for school leaders, especially principals of schools with large populations of minority and/or low-income students, to provide guidance and support regarding postsecondary opportunities. Furthermore, the results of the high school student perception survey indicated that it is essential for school leaders to effectively and consistently communicate college and career opportunities with the student body. Students, especially countless low-income students, do not have a clear understanding of college entrance requirements, and this lack of knowledge is in part a result of these students' parents not having the knowledge of or experience with postsecondary education. The results of this research study found that the college and career initiatives infused at the study campuses provided the essential college and career cultural or social capital to both students and parents regarding the necessary requirements for college admission. The results of this high school student perception survey indicated that the creation of a college-focused culture on the study high school campus had positive influences on students' perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education. Thus, the support and assistance related to college and careers was deemed helpful by students in the study high school.

Three middle school survey questions revealed the largest discrepancies between the study and control campus responses. First, *Information about college is being shared with me at school* disclosed the following results: Middle School A with 89% agreement,

Middle School B with 84% agreement, Middle School C with 70% agreement, and Middle School D with 78% agreement. Second, *Information about careers is being shared with me at school* exposed the following data: Middle School A with 86% agreement, Middle School B with 82% agreement, Middle School C with 70% agreement, and Middle School D with 89% agreement. Middle School D displayed the highest percentage agreement for this survey item. This indicated that High School D most likely had some career awareness initiatives in place during the 2010-2011 school year. Third, *I know what courses I need to take to get into college* disclosed the following data: Middle School A with 55% agreement, Middle School B with 55% agreement, Middle School C with 49% agreement, and Middle School D with 51% agreement.

The data from the middle school student perception suggested that the campus culture developed at the study middle schools provided information and support for students related to postsecondary opportunities. Thus, the information presented about college and careers was judged to be helpful by students who were enrolled in the study middle schools. Therefore, these results lent support to the existing research which professes that it is imperative for school leaders to not only strive to create a culture which focuses on college and careers, but they must also seek the input from the student body to determine the effect of the established culture.

The analysis of the responses to the senior student survey exposed that the college and career initiatives provided at the study high school campus were deemed helpful by students in the study high school. The results of this senior survey disclosed that the support and guidance related to postsecondary opportunities had a positive impact on

these senior students. One of the key findings of this research study was that more than double the number of seniors from the study high school ($n = 405$; 67%) than the control high school ($n = 203$; 52%) reported a positive response to the survey question *When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the support/assistance given to you related to college/careers*. Thus, the support and assistance related to college and careers was deemed very helpful by students in the study high school. In addition, a much higher percentage of students enrolled in the study high school responded positively, 72%, than did students who were enrolled in the control high school, 58% to the survey item *When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the information presented about college/careers?* Thus, the results of the senior student survey implied that the information presented about college and careers was judged to be valuable by students who were enrolled in the study high school.

The results of the Pearson chi-square procedures for all three student surveys indicated that there were statistically significant differences between the perceptions of the students from the study campuses and the perceptions of the students from the control campuses. The statistical differences revealed through the Pearson chi-square procedures suggested that the college and career initiatives had a positive impact on the students at each of the study campuses. These results provided evidence of the potential for college- and career-focused school cultures to positively alter the perceptions of minority and low-income students regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education.

Research Question Two

Responses to the senior student survey were analyzed in order to answer Research Question Two of this study. In this senior survey, Grade 12 students in the study and control high schools were asked about their enrollment in Advanced Placement and dual credit courses, as well as their college application activities. One of the fundamental differences in senior student responses from the study and control high school campuses was in the area of AP and dual credit course enrollment. The data indicated that more than double the number of seniors at the study high school campus than at the control high school campus reported taking multiple AP and dual credit courses in high school. The chi-square procedures conducted on the senior survey exposed a statistically significant difference for three questions related to AP courses, college applications, and scholarship applications. Students from study high school, High School A, indicated that they enrolled in more AP or dual credit courses than did the students enrolled in the control high school, High School B. The results of this senior student survey item provided confirmation of current research which emphasizes the potential for a college- and career-focused school cultures to positively influence minority and low-income students to challenge themselves by enrolling in more academically rigorous courses, such as Advanced Placement and dual credit courses, to better prepare themselves for postsecondary educational opportunities. Furthermore, students enrolled in the study high school disclosed that they submitted more college applications than students enrolled in the control high school. Thus, these results suggested that the college-focused culture established at the study campuses had a positive impact on the students' goals and aspirations related to postsecondary education. Students enrolled in the control high

school, however, submitted more scholarship applications than did students enrolled in the study high school. These results indicated that it is imperative for school leaders to provide knowledge and assistance related to grants and scholarships, especially to low-income students who may not be able to attend college without financial assistance.

The focus district's enrollment data for Advanced Placement and dual credit courses exposed that students from the study high school campus enrolled in 697 Advanced Placement/dual credit courses, compared to 290 students from the control high school campus during the fall semester of the 2010-2011 school year. The district enrollment data disclosed that even though the study high school had 58% economically disadvantaged students enrolled during the 2010-2011 school year, the campus had the second highest enrollment in the district in Advanced Placement/dual credit courses during the fall semester of the 2010-2011 school year. The highest Advanced Placement and dual credit enrollment in the district was in high school number three, which had 24% economically disadvantaged students enrolled. The lowest Advanced Placement/dual credit enrollment in the district during the fall semester of 2010-2011 was in the control high school campus, which had the highest economically disadvantaged student enrollment at 62%.

Additionally, according to the College Board's AP Five-Year School Score Summary report, students from the study high school campus took more Advanced Placement exams, 708, compared to the 357 exams taken by students from the control high school campus. The fact that nearly twice as many Advanced Placement exams were taken by students in the study high school than in the control high school is strong evidence that the college-focused culture established through the grant initiatives in the

focus district were successful in motivating minority and low-income students to challenge themselves by enrolling in more academically rigorous courses. According to College Board Senior Vice President of Advanced Placement and College Readiness, Trevor Packer (2013), the number of AP exams taken by low-income students in the United States increased from 82,000 in 1999 to 610,000 in 2012. This tremendous increase is “a powerful change that is reducing the costs of college and improving college readiness for the nation's most disadvantaged students” (Packer, 2013, p.1). These significant numbers reported by Packer (2013), along with the data retrieved from this research study, added credence to secondary school principals ensuring equal access to advanced courses, such as AP courses to students from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Even more telling was that more students from the study high school campus scored a 3 or higher on the AP exam to earn credit, 183, compared with the 88 students from the control high school campus. This research study also reported ethnically disaggregated data for the results of the AP exams taken by the study and control high school students. These data revealed that there were more students from the study high school campus than the control high school who took an AP exam in the following ethnic groups: Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and White. More Hispanic students from the control high school earned the highest score of 5. On the other hand, more Hispanic students from the study high school earned college credit by scoring a 3 or higher. Analysis of the ethnicity of exam participants suggested that the culture created on the study high school campus encouraged minority students, especially Hispanic students, to enroll in more rigorous, college-preparatory courses and take the AP exam to earn college credit. Analysis of the data related to AP and dual credit courses provided

evidence of the potential for the creation of a college-focused culture to increase student enrollment in Advanced Placement and dual credit courses.

Research Question Three

In Research Question Three, the focus was on whether the creation of a college-focused culture increased student enrollment in colleges and universities directly after high school completion. In the study high school, as depicted on Figure 25, 59% of the graduates enrolled in college in the fall of 2011, compared to 57% of the control high school graduates. The analysis of the National Student Clearinghouse data did not reveal a significant difference in graduates enrolling in college directly after high school completion. Even though there was a slightly higher percentage of 2011 graduates from the study high school who enrolled in college during the fall of 2011, the difference was not significant. These results indicate that the college- and career-focused culture established at the study high school did not significantly increase the percentage of students enrolling in college directly after high school. It was, however, hypothesized that the longer the subjects are exposed to a purposeful college-focused culture, the more likely they will enroll in college after high school graduation. The 2011 high school graduates of this study had been exposed to the college-and career-focused culture for three years. Students who were in the sixth grade during the initial year of the grant's 2008-2009 initiatives will experience seven years of the culture before graduation. Thus, the study high school graduation class of 2015 is hypothesized to have a much higher college enrollment during the fall semester following graduation. It is recommended that the focus district continue to track the data for the students of these six Title I campuses

through the graduation class of 2015 in order to obtain more accurate and precise data relative to the college- and career-focused grant initiatives.

Implications for School Leaders

Numerous existing educational research studies have emphasized the importance of school leaders establishing a campus culture which encourages students from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds to challenge themselves academically in order to prepare for successful postsecondary education, training, and career opportunities (Bouffard & Savitz-Romer, 2012; Conley, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Espinoza, 2012; Goodwin, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Murray, 2012; Parrett & Budge, 2012). The research has suggested that principals must make postsecondary education and training an expectation for all students and to maintain a school-wide focus on preparing students to successfully transition to college after high school (Conley, 2010; Devaney, 2012; Jacobson, 2011; Muhammad, 2009). This research study has confirmed the need for principals and other campus leaders to develop a school culture which: (a) focuses on high expectations and academic rigor for all students; (b) presumes and communicates that all students are capable of taking challenging courses; (c) provides students with the experiences to propel them into successful postsecondary educational opportunities; (d) provides the necessary support, guidance, and knowledge (referred to by researchers as *cultural capital* or *social capital*) for students who may have an opportunity gap due to their economic status or family background; and (e) provides hope for minority and low-income youth by providing them with experiences they may never have as a result of a lack of self-confidence, a lack of resources, or a lack of knowledge regarding the options for their future (Bloom, 2007; Conley, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Weinstein &

Savitz-Romer, 2009). The outcomes of this research study supported many key researchers' findings and added compelling evidence for school leaders that the establishment of a college- and career-focused culture is a valuable method for sustaining and promoting historically underserved minority and low-income students.

Moreover, previous research regarding the importance of postsecondary education has demonstrated that school leaders, particularly principals, are the crucial component in influencing teachers' attitudes and practices (Banger et al., 2012; Blankstein, 2004; Hall & George, 1999; Jacobson, 2011; MacNeil et al., 2009). According to existing research, schools that have shown success in preparing all students for postsecondary opportunities are those that have a strong vision and culture which permeates the campus and has buy-in from all constituents (Bangser et al., 2012; Blankstein, 2004; Davis et al., 2005; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Goodwin, 2011; Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Parrett & Budge, 2012). Researchers have declared that teachers' attitudes can influence student achievement by encouraging them and challenging them to do more than they think they can (Bloom, 2007; Conley, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). The outcomes of this research study confirmed that when educational leaders and teachers communicate strong belief in the students and remove road blocks to rigorous curriculum, the students will challenge themselves to enroll in more challenging courses in preparation for life after high school. By clearly communicating the belief that all children can obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue postsecondary education and training and continuously sharing the importance of developing nurturing and supportive relationships, a principal can ensure that all students will have the encouragement to believe in their own abilities and strive to reach

the next level of their educational aspirations (Bangser et al., 2012; Conley, 2010; Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; MacNeil et al., 2009; Muhammad, 2009; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Spark, 2012). This research study supported the findings of previous researchers who shared that by persistently communicating a school vision which maintains that each and every student is capable of achieving at higher levels, school leaders can alter both teachers' and students' attitudes and perceptions (Bangser et al., 2012; Conley, 2010; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Sparks, 2012). Teachers and campus leaders, once on the same page regarding the culture of the campus, can make substantial changes in student achievement (Bangser et al., 2012; Conley, 2010; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Sparks, 2012). This study contributed to existing research studies which have maintained that school principals who wish to create and maintain a college- and career-focused culture must create and communicate a vision which clearly emphasizes the necessity of preparing all students for successful educational opportunities and careers (Bangser et al., 2012; Blankstein, 2004; Davis et al., 2005; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Goodwin, 2011; Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Parrett & Budge, 2012). College, careers, and preparation for both must be an overarching theme in each and every classroom within a school, especially when there is a large population of economically disadvantaged and/or minority youth (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Conley, 2005, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Jensen, 2009; Johnson, 2012).

Existing researchers have expressed the need for school personnel at campuses with high concentrations of low-income students to assume the responsibility of supporting and influencing the students regarding their postsecondary and career options (Conley, 2010; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). At these campuses, it becomes the

responsibility of the school staff to share knowledge about postsecondary educational opportunities with both students and parents, help the students understand the entrance requirements and prerequisites for various postsecondary opportunities, encourage students to dream and set goals for their future, and encourage students to seek and prepare for postsecondary opportunities (Beegle, 2009; Conley, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Kimbrough, 2012; Kuykendall, 2004; Murray, 2011; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009).

The strategic college- and career-focused activities implemented through the grant initiatives at the three Title I study campuses proved to be successful in expanding the students' social capital which supports existing researchers who have declared that effective school leaders who work with minority and low-income student populations should focus on increasing all students' social and cultural capital, developing parents' postsecondary education knowledge, and promoting postsecondary education possibilities for all students (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). This research study affirmed and contributed to the current research related to the essential components which are imperative to fill in the opportunity gap which many minority and low-income youth endure. It also confirmed the importance of providing knowledge, support, and guidance to help students from minority and low-income backgrounds gain the fundamentals for setting goals for their future lives. The establishment of the College and Career Center at High School A was one of the most beneficial initiatives because it provided the students and parents from three low-income and highly minority schools a plethora of resources, guidance, and support related to college and careers, thus building their social and cultural capital. The development of a college and career informational center for both students and parents is recommended to all high school leaders who work

with largely minority and low-income students. By providing easy access to college and career information and resources, school leaders can help reduce the opportunity gap for minority and low-income students. In addition to the activities mentioned in this research study, it is recommended that school leaders develop and implement strong student mentor programs to assist students who come from homes where they are the first in their family to pursue postsecondary education or training. These first-generation students will benefit from a meaningful mentoring relationship with an adult role model who has lived the college experience and can provide guidance toward these students' postsecondary education and career aspirations.

Another powerful revelation from this research study was that the focus of preparing all students for postsecondary educational opportunities encouraged more students to challenge themselves to take AP and dual credit courses. Researchers in this area agreed that AP and dual credit programs have noteworthy benefits for all students, not just the top students (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Cole, 2008; Conley, 2005, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Flores & Gomez, 2011; Jensen, 2009; Murray, 2011, 2012). Furthermore, researchers agreed that minority and low-income students must be given equal opportunity to participate in college-level academics, and it is up to the secondary educational leaders and teachers to raise the expectations and better prepare all students for successful entry into postsecondary education and the workforce (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Cole, 2008; Conley, 2005, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Flores & Gomez, 2011; Jensen, 2009; Murray, 2011, 2012). Researchers have espoused that students from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds should be encouraged to complete a rigorous high school program, and educators must work to expand these

college preparatory opportunities which provide challenging, rigorous knowledge and skills that will better prepare students for both college and the workforce (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Cole, 2008; Conley, 2005, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Flores & Gomez, 2011; Jensen, 2009; Murray, 2011, 2012).

AP and dual credit programs engage students in courses with college-level expectations, so that they can practice and improve their college-level skills prior to college enrollment. The results of this research study, revealing that significantly more students from the study high school enrolled in AP and dual credit courses, added support to previous research studies which have proclaimed that principals must ensure that enough rigorous, college-preparation courses are offered in the master schedule, and counselors must guide more minority and low-income students to enroll in these courses (Cole, 2008; Conley, 2005, 2010; Jensen, 2009; Murray, 2011). The results of this study supported existing research which suggested that leaders of schools with high minority and economically disadvantaged populations implement an AP program which allows open access to all students who wish to challenge themselves to be better prepared for success after high school graduation (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Cole, 2008; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Jensen, 2009). The data from this study related to AP and dual credit courses alone should prompt school leaders to encourage minority and low-income students to enroll in more rigorous courses in preparation for postsecondary education and the workforce. The results of this research study supported existing researcher studies which have claimed that in order for a school to shift from a goal of graduating all students to a goal of ensuring that every student has an opportunity to enroll in and successfully complete postsecondary education or training after high school,

it is essential to analyze the curriculum and academic expectations of every course at every grade level (Barton, 2007; Bottoms, 2007; Conley, 2010; Levine, 2007; Martinez & Klopott, 2005a; Murray, 2011; Stein et al., 2005; Wadsworth & Remaley, 2007).

Recommendations for Further Research

The data from this research study indicated that the systematic changes (i.e., the college and career initiatives and open access to advanced courses) have begun to make a difference in student perceptions and behaviors. Even though the data obtained regarding the college enrollment for the 2011 graduating class of the study and control high schools was not significantly different, there were 2% more students from the study high school who enrolled in college the fall semester following graduation. Researchers Paul Harris, Katie Myers, Song Han, Emily Warren, Palmer Castrodale, David Talmage, and Lisa Addison (2013) espoused that most high school students understand the necessities of postsecondary education and countless students, no matter their economic status, express interest in attending college. Harris et al. (2013), however, further explained that minority and low-income students may lack the social and academic preparation required for successful admission to a four-year university. This lack of knowledge and lack of access to information and college-level preparation courses, according to Harris et al. (2013), may contribute to the opportunity gap and the gap in college enrollment of “previously marginalized groups in the United States, such as minority groups and individuals from low socioeconomic status” (p. 10). The 2011 graduating class of High School A experienced the college and career culture for only three years, beginning in their sophomore year. It is recommended that the focus district continue with the systematic changes at High School A and that the district continue to track the college

enrollment of the students from both the study and control campuses to gauge whether the differences in college enrollment data increase over the years. A longitudinal study, at least through the graduating class of 2015, is recommended in order to more adequately assess the effects of the college-focused culture over the years. Students who were in the sixth grade at the onset of the grant initiatives will be in the graduating class of 2015, and these students will have experienced the college and career culture for seven years, their entire secondary educational career. It is hypothesized that the longer the students are immersed in this college- and career-focused culture, the more these students will acquire the social and academic preparation necessary for successful college enrollment, and the district will begin to see statistically significant differences in the college enrollment data.

This research study found that while the researcher believed the college- and career-focused culture of the study campuses instilled hope in the students of the three study campuses, there was not a statistically significant difference present for survey items that suggested hope: *I plan to go to college after graduating* ($p = .63$) and *I believe I can succeed in college* ($p = .11$). In order to gain a better perspective on the results of the college and career initiatives at the three Title I study campuses, the researcher believes it is important to seek the perceptions of each graduating class from the study and control high schools through 2015. Students who were enrolled as sixth graders during the onset of the grant initiatives have been infused with this college and career culture their entire secondary education career. It is hypothesized that the longer the students are immersed in this college- and career-focused culture, the more hope they will express regarding their postsecondary educational opportunities. Furthermore, it is

hypothesized that students' perceptions regarding the importance and attainability of postsecondary education and training will increase if school leaders ensure parental involvement in the college and career school culture and initiatives. Parental involvement is essential in changing minority and low-income students' perceptions. If parents see the value of postsecondary education and realize the difference it can make in their children's futures, their attitudes will influence their children's opinions regarding this worthwhile endeavor. It is recommended that research be conducted to ascertain the power of parental involvement in college-focused school cultures.

This research study revealed significant findings related to increasing minority and low-income students' aspirations to enroll in more rigorous courses, such as AP and dual credit courses, to better prepare them for a successful college experience. There is substantial research related to the benefits of AP and dual credit courses; however, more research is recommended to determine the long-term benefits of the AP experience, particularly for students who did not score a 3 or higher to earn college credit. This research study found that notably more students at the study high school enrolled in AP courses and AP exams than did the students enrolled in the control high school; however, not all of those students earned credit by scoring a 3 or higher on the AP exam. Additional research is recommended to determine if the experience with AP courses in high school, particularly when credit is not earned, assists students in their college experience, especially during their freshman year. In other words, it is recommended that research be conducted to track students who completed AP courses in high school but failed to score high enough on the AP exam to earn credit to determine if the course

content and pace provided them with the skills necessary to successfully complete credit-barring courses during their freshman year in college.

Although this research study revealed that some statistically significant differences were present between the data obtained from the study campuses and the control campuses, the long range results have not been determined. It is recommended that additional research be conducted to ascertain whether or not targeted, systematic efforts related to increasing postsecondary education knowledge and awareness actually increase postsecondary persistence for minority and low-income students. In other words, a longitudinal study is recommended to determine if a systematic college-focused culture created on secondary campuses ultimately increases minority and low-income student success in college. To fully assess the effects of a college- and career-focused culture, it is recommended that a research study be conducted which follows minority and low-income students throughout their secondary and postsecondary educational career, sixth grade through college graduation, and into their first professional employment opportunity.

Conclusions

Most school leaders in the 21st century clearly understand how significant the campus culture is to student success; however, they may not fully comprehend the necessity of highlighting postsecondary education and training as a basic requirement for survival in today's society. Nearly all existing research related to the development of college- and career-focused cultures revealed the positive impact these intentionally created cultures have on students, particularly minority and low-income students (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011; Baum & Ma, 2007; Beegle, 2007; Bouffard & Savitz-Romer, 2012;

Conley, 2010; Dudley-Marling & Michaels, 2012; Elliott, 2012; Espinoza, 2012; Flores, 2007; Goodwin, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Moore et al., 2009; Murray, 2011; Noguera, 2011; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Robelen, 2010; Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009; Wight et al., 2010; Williams, 2011; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). Principals of campuses with large numbers of minority and low-income students must understand that the culture they establish on their campus is essential in sustaining and promoting these historically underserved students. Overall, this research study substantiated existing salient research related to the important role principals and other educational leaders have in developing campus cultures which encourage and support students in their preparation for postsecondary educational and career pursuits. Each and every educational leader must be cognizant of the prerequisites for successful entry into the workforce of the 21st century, the labor needs for a global economy, and the advantages of postsecondary education. Given the trend of increased minority and low-income student enrollment in American public schools, all educational leaders must realize the fact that they play a pivotal role in adequately preparing these historically underserved students to enter the workforce of the 21st century. If education in America is to become what Elliott (2012) referred to as the “great equalizer” (p. 1), educational leaders have a moral obligation to create a campus culture which will positively impact student perceptions and choices for postsecondary education.

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APPENDIX A

APPROVAL FROM UNIVERISTY OF HOUSTON

HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Appendix A
Approval from University of Houston Human Subject Research Committee

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON
DIVISION OF RESEARCH

July 26, 2012

Laura Perry
c/o Dr. Steven Busch
Deen, Education

Dear Laura Perry,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: CREATING A CULTURE THAT IMPACTS STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND CHOICES FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION" was conducted on July 18, 2012.

In accordance with institutional guidelines, your project is exempt under Category 4.

As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review.* Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and approval by the Committee.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,



Kirstin Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **July 1, 2017**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 12563-EX

316 E. Cullen Building Houston, TX 77204-2015 (713) 743-9204 Fax: (713) 743-9577

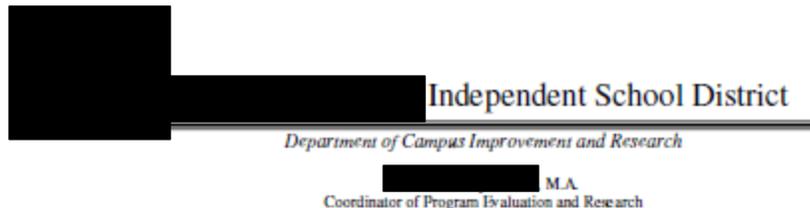
COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

APPENDIX B

APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FOCUS DISTRICT

Appendix B

Approval to Conduct Research in the Focus District



To: Laura Perry
From: [Redacted] M.A.
Date: January 3, 2012
Re: Approval of Application to Conduct Research in [Redacted] ISD

Your request to conduct the following research project in [Redacted] ISD has been approved: Increasing College Aspirations in Low-Income and Minority Youth: Creating a College- and Career- Going Culture at Title I Middle School and High School Campuses.

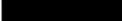
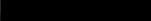
As you pursue this project, please refer to the conditions listed below:

- Practice confidentiality while conducting the various steps necessary to complete the project. Use a random code system to analyze data, never use school names or district name.
- You may utilize the following archival data for research purposes. Data is limited to the following six schools:
 MS. The following data will be provided to you:
 - Student Perception Survey results for the selected six schools from the 2010 and 2011 reports. The 2010 report will provide data from 2008-09 and 2009-10 survey administrations. The 2011 report will provide data from the 2009-10 and 2010-11 survey administrations. The results were internally calculated from the Department of Campus Improvement and Research.
 - AP exam results for the selected six schools. For each campus you may utilize the following reports: Five-Year School Score Summary (data from 2007 to 2011), Current Year Score Summary (2011), and School Summary by Student Demographics (2011). The results were obtained from the CollegeBoard on January 2, 2012.
 - AP/DC course enrollment during Semester One of the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years. The results were internally calculated from the Department of Campus Improvement and Research. The 2010-11 report does not contain any middle school data. The 2011-12 report does include middle school data. Data displayed are delineated by grade level, school, and the number of AP and/or Dual Credit courses taken. Please note that data are displayed for other schools
- Student Tracker data for [Redacted] and [Redacted] graduating class of 2011 has not yet been shared with principals and therefore, may not be shared for research purposes.
- Results regarding first generation college attendees is provided in the Student Perception Survey.
- Dropout data is publicly available on the AEIS report found at the following link [http://www.\[Redacted\].campusimprove/studentachievement.htm](http://www.[Redacted].campusimprove/studentachievement.htm)

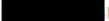
[Redacted]

[Redacted]


 Independent School District*Department of Campus Improvement and Research* M.A.
Coordinator of Campus Improvement and Research

To: Laura Perry
From: , Ed.D.
Date: June 11, 2012
Re: Approval of Application to Conduct Research in  (Addendum)

As an addendum to your research approval memo dated September 30, 2011, you are also approved to use the following data for research purposes only:

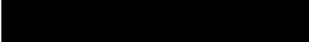
-  National Student Clearinghouse Report (Internally dated 1-19-2012)
-  National Student Clearinghouse Report (Internally dated 1-19-2012)

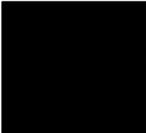
No additional data may be collected.

Practice confidentiality while conducting the various steps necessary to complete the project.

Use a random code system to record data collected. Never use the actual campus names.

Use a pseudonym instead of the district or campus name in your research.




 Independent School District*Department of School Improvement and Accountability* M.A.
Coordinator for Program Evaluation and Research

To: Laura Perry
From: , M.A.
Date: December 19, 2012
Re: Approval of Application to Conduct Research in  ISD (Second Addendum)

As an addendum to your research approval memos dated September 30, 2011 and June 11, 2012 you are also approved to use the following data for research purposes only:

- Masked student level data from the 2011 High School Student Perception Survey
 - Masked student level data from the 2011 Middle School Student Perception Survey
 - Masked student level data from the 2011 Senior Survey

 - No additional data may be collected.
 - Practice confidentiality while conducting the various steps necessary to complete the project.
 - Use a random code system to record student data collected. Never use student names or ID numbers.
 - Use a pseudonym instead of the district or campus name in your research.
-
- 
- 

APPENDIX C

PRINCIPAL SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Middle School Student Perception Survey Continued						
<u>Questions</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>I Don't Know (IDK)</u>
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
The career I want requires a college degree.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
I know what courses I need to take to get into college.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
<u>Questions</u>	<u>Daily</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Yearly</u>	<u>Never</u>	
How often do you receive help from your teachers regarding your plans after high school?	<input type="radio"/>					
How often do you receive help from your counselor regarding your plans after high school?	<input type="radio"/>					

Middle School Student Perception Survey Continued

From whom else/where else do you receive information regarding your plans after high school? _____

Who is helping you the most to develop your plans after high school?

parent(s)/guardian(s) friends teachers counselor
 other family member others no one has talked to me

If you decide to go to college, would you need help to pay for college?

- No, I expect to pay all expenses with my parent(s)/guardian(s) help and/or my own savings and earnings.
 Yes, I need help to pay for college although my parent(s)/guardian(s) and/or I could pay some expenses.
 Yes, I will need help to pay for college because my parent(s)/guardian(s) cannot pay for any college expenses.
 I am not sure.

In your home, did your parent/guardian (Father) attend college?

- Yes No I don't know

In your home, did your parent/guardian (Mother) attend college?

- Yes No I don't know

Have you been a member of any of the following school groups? **(Bubble all that apply)**

- Sports Student Council Community Service Social Clubs
 Academic teams Academic Clubs Cheerleading or dance team Arts (music, choir, theater, photography...)
 None Other: _____

High School Student Perception Survey Continued						
<u>Questions</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>I Don't Know (IDK)</u>
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>				
<u>Questions</u>	<u>Daily</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Yearly</u>	<u>Never</u>	
How often do you receive help from your teachers regarding your plans after high school?	<input type="radio"/>					
How often do you receive help from your counselor regarding your plans after high school?	<input type="radio"/>					
At your school, where do you hear about information on college and careers? _____						
From whom else/where else do you receive information regarding your plans after high school? _____						
If you decide to go to college, would you need help to pay for college?						
<input type="radio"/> No, I expect to pay all expenses with help from my parent(s)/guardian(s) and/or my own savings and earnings.						
<input type="radio"/> Yes, I need help to pay for college although my parent(s)/guardian(s) and/or I could pay some expenses.						
<input type="radio"/> Yes, I will need help to pay for college because my parent(s)/guardian(s) cannot pay for any college expenses.						
<input type="radio"/> I am not sure.						

High School Student Perception Survey Continued

In your home, did your parent/guardian (Father) attend college?

- Yes No I don't know

In your home, did your parent/guardian (Mother) attend college?

- Yes No I don't know

I have visited/plan to visit at least one college.

- Yes, I have visited at least one college.
 Yes, I plan to visit at least one college.
 No, I do not plan to visit a college.
 I don't know.

I have completed at least one college application.

- Yes, I have completed at least one college application.
 Yes, I plan to complete at least one college application.
 No, I do not plan to complete a college application.
 I don't know.

Have you been a member of any of the following school groups? (**Bubble all that apply**)

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Sports | <input type="radio"/> Student
Council | <input type="radio"/> Community Service | <input type="radio"/> Social Clubs |
| <input type="radio"/> Academic
team | <input type="radio"/> Academic
Clubs | <input type="radio"/> Cheerleading or dance
team | <input type="radio"/> Arts (music,
choir, theater,
photography...) |
| <input type="radio"/> None | <input type="radio"/> Other: _____ | | |

Name:
Eng. Period:

Grade:

Student ID#:
Eng. Teacher:

Senior Survey

Directions: Write and/or bubble in the answers to the following questions.

1. When did you begin attending school in this district?
 elementary middle school high school
2. How many AP or dual credit courses did you take?
 none 1-3 4 or more
3. Did you complete the FAFSA form?
 yes no I don't know N/A

Questions

- | | <u>None</u> | <u>1-3</u> | <u>4 or more</u> |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 4. How many college applications did you submit? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. How many scholarship applications did you submit? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. How many college acceptance letters have you received? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. How many college campuses have you visited? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. Which college do you plan to attend? | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> Texas A & M <input type="radio"/> University of Texas <input type="radio"/> University of Houston | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> Texas State <input type="radio"/> Baylor <input type="radio"/> Sam Houston | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> Lone Star College <input type="radio"/> Blinn College <input type="radio"/> Other: _____ | | | |
| 9. Which college readiness assessments have you taken? (Bubble all that apply) | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> READYSTEP <input type="radio"/> EXPLORE <input type="radio"/> PLAN <input type="radio"/> PSAT | | | |
| 10. Which college admissions tests have you taken? (Bubble all that apply) | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> ACT <input type="radio"/> SAT | | | |

Senior Survey Continued

11. What are your plans after high school? (**Choose ONLY one**)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Associates degree from a 2-year community college | <input type="radio"/> Bachelor's degree from a 4-year college/university |
| <input type="radio"/> Technical or vocational school | <input type="radio"/> Enter the workforce (not attend college/university) |
| <input type="radio"/> Military | <input type="radio"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> I don't know | |

12. Will you work while attending college/university?

- yes no I don't know N/A

13. If you will be attending college next year, will you be the first person in your family to attend?

- yes no I don't know N/A

14. If you are enrolling in a college/university, what career do you plan to pursue?

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> agriculture, food & natural resources | <input type="radio"/> architecture & construction | <input type="radio"/> arts, AV technology & communications |
| <input type="radio"/> business, management & administration | <input type="radio"/> education & training | <input type="radio"/> finance |
| <input type="radio"/> government & public administration | <input type="radio"/> health science | <input type="radio"/> hospitality & tourism |
| <input type="radio"/> human services | <input type="radio"/> information technology | <input type="radio"/> law, public safety, corrections & security |
| <input type="radio"/> manufacturing | <input type="radio"/> marketing, sales, & services | <input type="radio"/> science, technology, engineering & mathematics |
| <input type="radio"/> transportation, distribution & logistics | | |

15. When considering your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the following?

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>
A. High school course work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
B. Information presented about college/careers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
C. Support/assistance given to you related to college/careers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

APPENDIX D

FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES

Appendix D

Frequency and Percentage of Survey Participants' Responses

Table D1

Grade 9 Student Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education

Student Survey Question	Study High School		Control High School	
	SA/A	SD/D	SA/A	SD/D
I plan to go to college after graduating.	89%	1%	90%	1%
I believe I can succeed in college.	89%	1%	89%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	92%	1%	93%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	86%	5%	85%	6%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	94%	2%	94%	1%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	94%	1%	94%	1%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	85%	4%	71%	13%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	82%	6%	77%	9%
The career I want requires a college degree.	76%	8%	77%	7%
I have earned grades that will get me into college.	60%	13%	54%	15%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	85%	4%	78%	8%
I would consider college more strongly if I can get financial assistance (student loans/scholarships).	82%	5%	82%	5%
I will not go to college because I cannot afford it.	5%	68%	7%	65%
I know what high school courses I need to go to college.	72%	10%	65%	15%
I know what it means to take a dual credit course.	64%	16%	45%	29%
I know what it means to take an Advanced Placement course.	77%	10%	65%	15%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	9%	51%	12%	47%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	8%	69%	7%	74%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know* and *No opinion*. SA/A refers to answer choices *Strongly agree* and *Agree* and SD/D refers to answer choices *Strongly disagree* and *Disagree*.

Table D2

Grade 10 Student Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education

Student Survey Question	Study High School		Control High School	
	SA/A	SD/D	SA/A	SD/D
I plan to go to college after graduating.	96%	1%	93%	0%
I believe I can succeed in college.	94%	2%	94%	0%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	95%	1%	94%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	88%	3%	90%	3%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	95%	1%	93%	1%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	96%	1%	94%	1%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	92%	3%	72%	15%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	80%	7%	68%	16%
The career I want requires a college degree.	83%	4%	78%	6%
I have earned grades that will get me into college.	67%	8%	62%	11%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	94%	1%	91%	3%
I would consider college more strongly if I can get financial assistance (student loans/scholarships).	84%	4%	82%	5%
I will not go to college because I cannot afford it.	6%	72%	7%	66%
I know what high school courses I need to go to college.	78%	8%	70%	13%
I know what it means to take a dual credit course.	79%	9%	72%	15%
I know what it means to take an Advanced Placement course.	83%	7%	75%	11%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	5%	58%	10%	54%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	7%	75%	7%	71%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know* and *No opinion*. SA/A refers to answer choices *Strongly agree* and *Agree* and SD/D refers to answer choices *Strongly disagree* and *Disagree*.

Table D3

Grade 11 Student Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education

Student Survey Question	Study High School		Control High School	
	SA/A	SD/D	SA/A	SD/D
I plan to go to college after graduating.	93%	2%	93%	2%
I believe I can succeed in college.	94%	2%	93%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	92%	3%	92%	2%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	88%	4%	87%	5%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	95%	2%	92%	2%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	96%	1%	93%	2%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	88%	5%	75%	13%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	78%	12%	64%	20%
The career I want requires a college degree.	82%	5%	78%	5%
I have earned grades that will get me into college.	70%	10%	68%	10%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	92%	2%	92%	2%
I would consider college more strongly if I can get financial assistance (student loans/scholarships).	87%	4%	85%	4%
I will not go to college because I cannot afford it.	7%	75%	6%	67%
I know what high school courses I need to go to college.	84%	7%	75%	8%
I know what it means to take a dual credit course.	83%	5%	73%	12%
I know what it means to take an Advanced Placement course.	85%	6%	75%	10%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	7%	65%	10%	56%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	7%	76%	5%	74%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know* and *No opinion*. SA/A refers to answer choices *Strongly agree* and *Agree* and SD/D refers to answer choices *Strongly disagree* and *Disagree*.

Table D4

All High School Students' Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education

Student Survey Question	Study High School		Control High School	
	SA/A	SD/D	SA/A	SD/D
I plan to go to college after graduating.	92%	1%	92%	1%
I believe I can succeed in college.	92%	1%	92%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	93%	2%	93%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	87%	4%	87%	5%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	94%	2%	93%	2%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	95%	1%	94%	1%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	88%	4%	72%	14%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	80%	8%	71%	14%
The career I want requires a college degree.	80%	6%	77%	6%
I have earned grades that will get me into college.	66%	11%	60%	12%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	90%	3%	86%	5%
I would consider college more strongly if I can get financial assistance (student loans/scholarships).	84%	4%	83%	5%
I will not go to college because I cannot afford it.	6%	71%	7%	66%
I know what high school courses I need to go to college.	78%	9%	69%	13%
I know what it means to take a dual credit course.	74%	11%	61%	19%
I know what it means to take an Advanced Placement course.	81%	8%	71%	12%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	7%	57%	11%	52%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	7%	73%	7%	73%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know* and *No opinion*. SA/A refers to answer choices *Strongly agree* and *Agree* and SD/D refers to answer choices *Strongly disagree* and *Disagree*.

Table D5

Grade 6 Student Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education: Strongly Agree/Agree

Student Survey Question	Study MS SA/A		Control MS SA/A	
	MS A	MS B	MS C	MS D
I plan to go to college after graduating.	94%	91%	91%	92%
I believe I can succeed in college.	92%	88%	88%	88%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	93%	93%	92%	91%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	86%	81%	83%	79%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	92%	91%	95%	93%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	91%	89%	95%	92%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	87%	84%	70%	78%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	88%	87%	72%	92%
The career I want requires a college degree.	79%	74%	75%	78%
I know what courses I need to take to get into college.	59%	53%	50%	50%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	56%	52%	55%	51%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	19%	20%	18%	14%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	13%	15%	16%	11%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know* and *No opinion*. SA/A refers to answer choices *Strongly agree* and *Agree*

Table D6

Grade 6 Student Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education: Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Student Survey Question	Study MS SD/D		Control MS SD/D	
	MS A	MS B	MS C	MS D
I plan to go to college after graduating.	1%	1%	0%	0%
I believe I can succeed in college.	0%	1%	1%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	0%	1%	0%	2%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	4%	6%	4%	6%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	1%	1%	1%	1%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	1%	1%	1%	1%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	3%	4%	10%	6%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	3%	4%	11%	2%
The career I want requires a college degree.	2%	3%	2%	3%
I know what courses I need to take to get into college.	10%	11	9%	11%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	14%	16%	12%	12%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	39%	30%	41%	37%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	65%	59%	62%	62%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know and No opinion*. SD/D refers to answer choices *Strongly disagree and Disagree*.

Table D7

Grade 7 Student Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education: Strongly Agree/Agree

Student Survey Question	Study MS SA/A		Control MS SA/A	
	MS A	MS B	MS C	MS D
I plan to go to college after graduating.	95%	91%	91%	89%
I believe I can succeed in college.	92%	87%	89%	88%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	92%	92%	93%	91%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	80%	74%	81%	78%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	91%	92%	92%	91%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	91%	91%	93%	92%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	86%	79%	57%	77%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	85%	80%	64%	85%
The career I want requires a college degree.	71%	68%	66%	72%
I know what courses I need to take to get into college.	51%	54%	45%	50%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	55%	68%	61%	54%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	11%	11%	10%	14%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	13%	14%	12%	12%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know* and *No opinion*. SA/A refers to answer choices *Strongly agree* and *Agree*.

Table D8

Grade 7 Student Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education: Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Student Survey Question	Study MS SD/D		Control MS SD/D	
	MS A	MS B	MS C	MS D
I plan to go to college after graduating.	0%	0%	0%	1%
I believe I can succeed in college.	0%	2%	1%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	1%	1%	0%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	7%	6%	6%	5%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	0%	0%	1%	2%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	1%	1%	1%	1%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	3%	5%	15%	8%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	3%	5%	14%	4%
The career I want requires a college degree.	5%	3%	4%	6%
I know what courses I need to take to get into college.	13%	9%	17%	14%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	13%	7%	15%	12%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	38%	29%	48%	40%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	59%	57%	66%	64%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know and No opinion*. SD/D refers to answer choices *Strongly disagree and Disagree*.

Table D9

Grade 8 Student Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education: Strongly Agree/Agree

Student Survey Question	Study MS		Control MS	
	MS A	MS B	MS C	MS D
I plan to go to college after graduating	93%	92%	91%	91%
I believe I can succeed in college.	91%	90%	91%	93%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	93%	90%	90%	94%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	83%	77%	84%	85%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	93%	95%	91%	92%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	93%	93%	92%	91%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	94%	89%	83%	80%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	86%	84%	73%	90%
The career I want requires a college degree.	74%	69%	69%	76%
I know what courses I need to take to get into college.	57%	59%	53%	53%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	80%	77%	75%	76%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	9%	12%	6%	11%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	10%	13%	12%	12%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know* and *No opinion*. SA/A refers to answer choices *Strongly agree* and *Agree*.

Table D10

Grade 8 Student Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education: Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Student Survey Question	Study MS		Control MS	
	MS A	MS B	MS C	MS D
I plan to go to college after graduating	1%	1%	2%	1%
I believe I can succeed in college.	1%	0%	1%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	1%	2%	1%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	6%	6%	4%	4%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	1%	1%	2%	2%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	1%	1%	1%	1%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	1%	2%	6%	6%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	5%	5%	10%	4%
The career I want requires a college degree.	5%	4%	6%	6%
I know what courses I need to take to get into college.	16%	11%	16%	16%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	6%	6%	11%	6%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	44%	36%	53%	48%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	65%	60%	63%	63%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know* and *No opinion*. SD/D refers to answer choices *Strongly disagree* and *Disagree*.

Table D11

All Middle School Student Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education: Strongly Agree/Agree

Student Survey Question	Study MS SA/A		Control MS SA/A	
	MS A	MS B	MS C	MS D
I plan to go to college after graduating.	94%	91%	91%	91%
I believe I can succeed in college.	92%	88%	89%	90%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	93%	92%	92%	92%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	83%	77%	83%	81%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	92%	92%	93%	92%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	92%	91%	93%	92%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	89%	84%	70%	78%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	86%	82%	70%	89%
The career I want requires a college degree.	75%	70%	70%	75%
I know what courses I need to take to get into college.	55%	55%	49%	51%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	63%	66%	63%	60%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	13%	14%	11%	13%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	12%	14%	13%	12%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know* and *No opinion*. SA/A refers to answer choices *Strongly agree* and *Agree*.

Table D12

All Middle School Student Survey Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education: Strongly Disagree/Disagree

Student Survey Question	Study MS SD/D		Control MS SD/D	
	MS A	MS B	MS C	MS D
I plan to go to college after graduating	1%	1%	1%	1%
I believe I can succeed in college.	0%	1%	1%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) expect me to go to college.	1%	1%	1%	1%
My parent(s)/guardian(s) discuss the importance of college for my future.	5%	6%	5%	5%
I can make more money if I graduate from college.	1%	1%	1%	2%
It is easier to move up in a job when you have a college degree.	1%	1%	1%	1%
Information about college is being shared with me at school.	2%	4%	11%	7%
Information about careers is being shared with me at school.	4%	6%	12%	4%
The career I want requires a college degree.	4%	3%	4%	5%
I know what courses I need to take to get into college.	13%	10%	14%	14%
I am aware of the following college admission tests: PSAT, SAT, and/or ACT.	11%	10%	13%	10%
After high school, I plan on attending a technical school (ITT Tech).	40%	32%	47%	41%
After high school, I plan on joining the military.	63%	59%	64%	63%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students responding *I don't know* and *No opinion*. SD/D refers to answer choices *Strongly disagree* and *Disagree*.

Table D13
High School Senior' Perceptions of the Importance and Attainability of Postsecondary Education

Student Survey Question	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate your high school course work?				
Study High School	16%	57%	21%	4%
Control High School	19%	54%	22%	2%
When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the information presented about college/careers?				
Study High School	30%	42%	20%	7%
Control High School	13%	45%	32%	6%
When you consider your preparation for life after high school, how would you rate the support/assistance given to you related to college/careers?				
Study High School	30%	37%	23%	9%
Control High School	14%	38%	34%	11%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students did not respond to the items.

Table D14

High School Seniors' Survey: Advanced Placement, Dual Credit, and College Involvement Activities

Student Survey Question	None	1 to 3	4+
How many AP or dual credit courses did you take?			
Study High School	51%	29%	20%
Control High School	55%	31%	12%
How many college applications did you submit?			
Study High School	32%	52%	16%
Control High School	35%	43%	21%
How many scholarship applications did you submit?			
Study High School	60%	27%	12%
Control High School	56%	25%	19%
How many college acceptance letters have you received?			
Study High School	52%	40%	7%
Control High School	49%	43%	8%
How many college campuses have you visited			
Study High School	38%	57%	4%
Control High School	38%	57%	4%

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because of some students did not respond to the items.

