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Walden University

College of Education

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Brian M. Corey

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

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

College Readiness: Rural High School Graduates

by

Brian M. Corey

MA, The College of Saint Rose, 2001

BS, The College of Saint Rose, 1997

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

April 2021

Abstract

College readiness involves not only academics but emotional preparation, study skills, and time management and can be affected by students' backgrounds. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate perceptions among rural high school graduates and their college teachers regarding these students' levels of college readiness. The conceptual framework included Astin's involvement theory, Bandura's social learning theory, and Tinto's student integration model. Research questions focused on perceptions of students who graduated from a rural school district and college teachers' perceptions of these students' levels of college readiness. Data for this qualitative case study were collected through qualitative surveys and were analyzed based on common themes. The key findings of this study indicated that students in general are not college ready after completion of secondary education. A college readiness program was identified that could be implemented in secondary schools to better prepare students for college. A professional development training program was developed for K–12 educators regarding the readiness program. The results of this study can assist K-12 rural educators in developing a college readiness program to better prepare students for success throughout college. The results of this study also present potentials for social change through minimizing students' uncertainties, minimizing stress associated with college, endorsing a college culture, increasing college readiness, and promoting college persistence. The findings from this study can inform the efforts of secondary and postsecondary institutions in their work to improve students' postsecondary transition, retention, and degree completion.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents, Karen and Paul Corey; to my wife, Lisa Corey; and to my son, Paul N. Corey. Without their support and encouragement, I would not have been able to complete this work. I would especially like to dedicate this to my father who passed away while I was in the process of completing this work. He was the smartest and most inspirational man I have ever met. I am lucky that I can call him Dad. I miss him and thank him for making me who I am today.

Acknowledgments

This work has been in progress over the past 10 years of my educational career, and it represents the beginning of the next phase of my educational career. Education has been a significant part of my life throughout the years, as I have transitioned from a teacher to a principal and then to superintendent. It is my ambition to continue as an educational leader and encourage young educators in the field of education to become strong teachers and leaders.

I would like to thank and acknowledge my committee chairperson, Dr. Salice, for all her support, encouragement, direction, and assistance throughout the process of researching, writing, and publishing this project study. I would also like to thank Dr. Parent, my second committee member, for all her support and guidance in the process.

I would like to thank the Red Creek Central School District, the Jefferson Central School District, and the Berne-Knox-Westerlo Central School District for their support throughout the past 16 years of my life and for providing me an opportunity to practice the art of education at both an instructional and leadership level. A special thank you goes out to the Red Creek Central School District Board of Education for understanding and supporting me while completing this research.

I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me in this process and encouraging me to continue in difficult times: my mother, Karen Corey, for all the years of support and encouragement, and my father, Paul R. Corey, who unfortunately will not be able to witness me completing this process. I would like to extend a special thank you to Lisa Corey for standing by me while I completed this project.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

College students graduating from rural secondary schools are facing challenges they are not properly prepared to handle. An escalating level of students are completing high school underprepared for college life (Jackson, 2009). Arnold et al. (2012) stated, "Colleges reached the conclusion that more and more students are requiring remediation in one or more subjects in their first year of college, which reveals a lack of college readiness at the academic level" (p. 138). Porter and Polikoff (2012) claimed that 70% of U.S. high school students attend college, but many are not well prepared to face the level of academics that college requires. Rothman (2012) noted that 40% of students entering college are required to take at least one remedial course according to the National Center for Education.

Additionally, many students graduating from rural high schools are struggling socially. Rutschow et al. (2012) noted that many students arrive at college without the experiences or skills to cope with college demands; many students enter college lacking awareness of college expectations. Most college students who graduated from rural school districts are not considered prepared for higher education institutions, which is known as *college readiness* (Rutschow et al., 2012). Conley (2014) defined *college readiness* as "the preparation degree necessitated by a student so as to enroll and prosper, devoid of any remediation, in a credit-bearing overall curricular course at a postsecondary learning facility offering a baccalaureate program or referral to a baccalaureate program" (p. 4). According to Conley's definition of college readiness, the

level of preparation of a student is a main aspect in their success. Preparation is necessary in both the academic and social areas of student development.

In this section, I discuss the local problem associated with this study, the study's rationale, definition of key phrases and terms, significance of the study, research purpose and questions, conceptual framework, review of the broader question, significance of college education and readiness, and a conclusion.

I selected a small rural school district in New York for this study. The study site includes a local college where a significant proportion of students attend after secondary school graduation. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), the population of the county where the school district is located was 31,317. The average income was $25,000, with a household median income of $51,195 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The average educational attainment for high school or higher was 88.2%, while for a bachelor's degree or higher was 19.6%. Schoharie County public education is made up of six school districts with approximately 4,100 K–12 students, and 93.8% of the population is White. Schoharie County has one institution of higher education located in the county itself; however, neighboring counties also have institutions of higher education.

The rural setting of these schools offers students fewer opportunities to experience extracurricular activities, volunteering, and social interaction than students in other geographic locations. Students from urban or suburban areas are more likely to obtain other opportunities based on their location. In rural areas, students may lack access to the same opportunities due to lack of transportation and proximity (Gott, 2012). Rural students in the United States usually perform at minimal levels when compared to urban

students on globally recognized tests (Crosnoe, 2009; Howley et al., 2013; Kim, 2010). According to Strange et al. (2012), rural K–12 school enrollment outpaces nonrural enrollment, and rural educational needs have become more complex.

Further research (Strange et al., 2012) has revealed that 33% of students in the United States are educated in a rural school setting. Some researchers have suggested that students who attend rural schools are academically disadvantaged compared to students who attend schools in other settings (Howley, et al.; Sturgill & Smith, 2013; Wilcox et al., 2014). Students who graduate from rural schools have less exposure to technology, social emotional supports, and a diverse range of course offerings and opportunities (Howley, et al.; Sturgill & Smith, 2013; Wilcox et al., 2014). Therefore, rural-based high school students are disadvantaged compared to urban-based students, which can lead to neglect for early development of a practical postgraduation plan.

Many rural high school graduates do not have plans to continue their education. According to the New York State Education Department (NYSED, 2016), in the 2015–2016 school year, only 55% of the students had a postgraduation plan of attending college. On a county-wide level for the school district under study, 69% of students in 2015–2016 had postgraduation plans of attending college (NYSED, 2016). This percentage is much lower compared with other counties in the region. Among three nearby counties, an average of 84% of high school graduates planned to attend college after high school (Badke, 2012). Students who attend rural schools face geographic challenges that include access to social emotional support services. According to Durlak et al. (2011), technology is also a barrier due to no or slower internet access in rural areas.

Lack of access to technology hinders readiness of rural high school graduates for academic success in college. Rural high schools tend to provide a basic educational program with a traditional approach to instruction. According to Durlak et al. (2011), access to technology is limited; students need to share devices, teachers often lack the classroom resources or instructional technology skills to meet students' needs, and students rarely have access to technology at home. Teachers often struggle to teach using technology in this district because of the lack of technology access in school and at home (Gott, 2012). Furthermore, teachers cannot require students to access resources that may be unavailable due to geographic location or due to financial inability to afford the resources (Gott, 2012).

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE, 2010), it is more important than ever for rural high schools to ensure that all students graduate with the skills they need for college, careers, and life. Ensuring access to practicing these skills for rural school students will help guarantee both the sustainability of rural communities and the nation's ongoing competitiveness in the global economy (AEE, 2010). The AEE (2010) identified 10 elements that every rural school should have in place: (a) college and work-ready curriculum, (b) personal attention, (c) extra help, (d) real-world classroom experience, (e) family and community involvement, (f) a safe learning environment, (g) skilled teachers, (h) strong leaders, (i) necessary resources, and (j) user-friendly information for the parents and community. Additionally, differences in ethnicity, economics, and culture in rural areas may influence how students respond to instruction (Vega & Travis, 2011). Students facing economic challenges tend to display less college

readiness than students who did not face these challenges (Lee & Slate, 2014), and socioeconomics should be considered when researching the effectiveness of educational programming, particularly in the rural setting.

By focusing on available resources and placing value on rural culture, educators can progress despite the high poverty rates and lower economic conditions of a rural community (Wilcox et al., 2014). In a multiple case study contrasting high-performing and low-performing high schools in New York State, Wilcox et al. (2014) concluded that educator sensitivity to rural communities and the needs of rural students contributed to increasing graduation rates and college readiness. As a result, theorist Long (2012) investigated the reasons for these gaps, while motivating politicians and decision makers to ensure all students have equal access to an educational program that properly prepares them to be successful in the college setting.

The gap in practice for this study is represented by the gap in preparation that rural students have when leaving secondary school and the skills they lack when entering college. The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of rural high school graduates and college teachers regarding readiness of rural high school graduates for college from an academic and social perspective. This study has the potential to generate information that may assist K–12 rural educators in developing a college readiness program to prepare students for success in college.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The rationale to study college readiness of students who graduate from a rural K–12 school district revolves around two factors: (a) the academic skills of students who graduated from a rural K–12 school and now attend college and (b) the social skills of students who graduated from a rural K–12 school and now attend college. If this problem is not addressed, these students will be disadvantaged over students from other geographic areas.

Students have reported feeling as though they are not properly prepared for the challenges that occur when transitioning from secondary education to higher education (Durlak et al., 2011). Higher education administrators have found that first-year college students often require academic or social interventions (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Students face several barriers that can prevent them from succeeding in the initial semester in college, including lack of confidence in social interaction, change of learning setting, lack of proper channels to communicate barriers, and being nervous about completing their courses (High school graduate, personal communication, 2017). College teachers and administrators have confirmed that new students face various problems: time management, college navigation, and getting acquainted with learning methods (college teachers and college administrators, personal communication, 2017). There are concerns with the level of readiness of secondary rural graduates, which prompted me to focus my research on college readiness of students who graduated from rural schools.

Evidence of the Problem at the National Level

This study was conducted in the state of New York, where there is a correlation among possible reasons contributing to lacking preparedness among students coming from rural high schools. The possible reasons include lack of technology, inadequate qualified staffing, and insufficient student exposure to activities and opportunities that could help prepare them for higher education. Conversely, there is a high level of preparedness among college students coming from nonrural high schools (Todd, 2012). Additional problems at a national level include issues associated with change of home environment among first-year college students, part-time enrollment, and financial issues or economic factors (Todd, 2012). These issues are all related to the present objective of assessing the perceptions of rural high school graduates and college teachers regarding readiness of rural high school graduates for college—both academically and socially.

To manage the need for better postsecondary preparation, many states and educational institutions have joined together to create college readiness programs with the goal of better preparing students for both career and college (ACT, 2009; Venegas, 2006). Several states, such as Wisconsin and Texas, have implemented early commitment programs (Harnisch, 2009) to encourage middle-school students to set goals focused on postsecondary education. The federal government has introduced programs, such as Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and the Trio program from the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, to help students—specifically low-income and minority students—become more college ready (Marcos, 2003; Pitre & Pitre, 2009; Walsh, 2014).

Further research shows that the focus of college readiness programs has been centered in urban areas. According to Howley (2006), much of the work done in creating college readiness programs has been conducted in large urban districts. This leaves a gap in the research regarding how rural schools incorporate college readiness skills into their own curriculum (Howley, 2006). To meet this challenge, many secondary schools have implemented additional programs into their curriculum to improve students' college readiness prior to their graduation.

Programs, such as the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, have been introduced in public schools with the mission of adding support in this area. The AVID program was started as pedagogy to bridge the learning gap among low-income students at Clairemont High School in San Diego, California. Mary Swanson, a teacher at the school, founded the program. It is a supplemental educational program designed to prepare students for success in secondary and postsecondary education; the program has a special emphasis on students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education. Hubbard and Mehan (1999) supported Swanson's original initiative by illustrating AVID's role in making advanced courses in middle and high schools more accessible to underrepresented and disadvantaged populations. The AVID program emphasizes untracking middle-achieving students and placing them in the same college preparatory classes as their high-achieving peers while providing academic support to increase the likelihood of their success in those classes (Gándara et al., 1998; Hubbard & Mehan, 1999; Watt et al., 2004).

The intent of this study was to generate information that may assist K–12 rural educators in developing a college readiness program to better prepare students for success throughout their college years. The approach also presents potential for social change by minimizing students' uncertainties and stress associated with attending college, endorsing a college-going culture, increasing college readiness, and promoting college persistence. The findings from this study may inform the efforts of secondary and postsecondary institutions in their work to improve students' postsecondary transition, retention, and degree completion.

Definition of Terms

Several specific characteristics define the population of interest in this study. To understand these characteristics, they need to be properly delineated. Therefore, the following terms will be used throughout this study.

Academic readiness: The academic skills and awareness students need to prosper in accomplishing college-level studies and be college prepared (Maruyama, 2012).

College readiness: The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed without remediation in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program (Conley, 2008).

First-generation college students: Students who come from a family where neither parent completed a four-year college degree (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996; Thayer, 2000).

Graduation rates: "The percentage of students who graduate within four, five, or six years of entering high school" (Dynarski et al., 2008, p. 14).

Preparation: The process or action of students being made ready (or making students ready) in terms of school preparedness, both academically and socially, to achieve success (Conley, 2008).

Preparedness: Students' ability to be ready to accomplish school coursework or industry accreditation without the need for remediation, while also possessing the academic abilities and motivation after the completion of secondary education (Conley, 2008).

Rural: A low-density populated area, as described by Koziol et al. (2015). U.S. Census Bureau (2016) defined rural territory as an area that is more than 5 miles, yet fewer than 25 miles from an urban area. This description applies to the high school community of the current study.

Social awareness: The capacity to take the perception of and relate with others and identify and acknowledge personal and group similarities and dissimilarities (Maruyama, 2012).

Teamwork skills: Skills that focus on team development and performance. *Team development* refers to helping the team complete a goal, whereas *team performance* implies team dynamics and working to maintain relationships (Northouse, 2001).

Significance of the Study

The results of this study can have a significant impact on rural secondary educational systems. I sought to provide data that can assist in improving student

experiences in these schools, which can also improve the rural high school graduates' level of readiness and their performance at the college level. Equally, certain key stakeholders can benefit from this study, such as rural school graduates, rural school administrators, parents of at-risk students, college students who graduated from rural schools, and college administration. Rural school graduates can benefit from this study by planning their studies at colleges. According to Maruyama (2012), students from rural high schools would be motivated to plan for college attendance prior to their high school graduation, thereby, increasing their college preparedness, both academically and socially.

Rural school administrators, including principals and superintendents of rural schools, can also refer to the results of this study in their decision-making process with regards to student programming, in both academic and social areas. Students who attend rural schools can become aware of the advantages of being proactive and begin their college preparation earlier. Adams (2014) emphasized that for students to be successful in college, collaboration and the need to make early connections are key elements to success. As such, college administrators can increase their understanding of how to meet the needs of rural high school graduates. Parents of at-risk students can also use these data to help understand the importance of participation in recommended support services while students are in high school.

Better understanding of students' perceived views in relation to student college readiness can equally assist educators to make program and policy changes that will better meet the needs of the students and can bring positive social changes at rural K–12

schools (Pratt, 2015a). Positive social change becomes evident in an increase in rural secondary students being prepared for college, completing college programs, obtaining better paying jobs after graduating college, and making a higher level of contribution to the communities where they reside. Ultimately, due to better paying jobs, these individuals may also require less public assistance and support.

Research Question

In this research study, I sought to address the problem of students who graduated from rural secondary schools being unprepared to be successful in college. I investigated both academic and social college readiness of rural students prior to their enrollment in college. The purpose was to examine the perceptions of rural high school graduates and college teachers regarding the college readiness, both academically and socially, of rural high school graduates. Information provided by the study can be used by rural secondary schools to develop college readiness programs to better prepare students for the rigorous academic and social demands of college. The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of students who graduated from a rural school district regarding preparation for college, both academically and socially?

RQ2: What do rural high school graduates who entered college wish they had learned during their high school experience to better prepare them for college education, both academically and socially?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of college teachers regarding rural students' college preparation, both academically and socially?

Review of the Literature

While conducting this review, I used several different databases to investigate the topic. Thus, the review included the library at Walden University, along with the following search engines: EBSCO Host, SAGE Full Text, PsycINFO, and PsycArticles. For this research, the primary focus was college preparation programs' impact on current and former college students. Key words in searching the databases were *rural schools*, *college readiness*, *first generation students*, *college preparation programs*, *social readiness*, and *academic readiness and secondary education programs*.

Conceptual Framework

The project's conceptual framework was founded on three key theories: (a) Bandura's (1977b) social learning theory, (b) Astin's (1984) involvement theory, and (c) Tinto's (1975) student integration model. High school is a crucial transition time for young adults in their development (Erikson, 1968). During this critical phase of development, children experiment with many roles to define themselves (Erikson, 1968). Students look for role models, learn to develop intimate relationships, and learn how to be productive and independent. In this study, I sought to investigate perceptions of rural high school graduates and college teachers regarding readiness both academically and socially, of rural high school graduates for college.

Astin's Involvement Theory

Astin's (1984) involvement theory illustrates how the desired outcomes for college, among other facilities of higher learning, are perceived in accordance to how learners evolve and progress from being engaged with cocurricular activities. This

theory's key concepts are essentially defined by three elements: (a) the learner's inputs, such as demographics and their backgrounds, as well as earlier experiences; (b) the learner's environment, accounting for the student's college-life experiences; (c) and the outcomes, encapsulating learner's qualities, knowledge, attitude, beliefs, and values upon graduation. Astin's involvement theory shows the importance of students' involvement in the education process, while attending college.

Astin (1984) stated that participation necessitates an input of physical and psychosocial energy. Moreover, the author also revealed that the process of involvement is constant, while the level of energy invested differs from learner to learner. Astin suggested that the academic excellence of students is associated with student involvement. Due to cocurricular activities' positive features, institutions of higher learning have since endorsed student involvement. In a more recent study, Kuh and Pike (2005) confirmed Astin's theory, finding that students involved in student organizations, leadership positions, and residence hall life have a positive correlation with retention and academic success.

Therefore, I used Astin's theory as the conceptual framework to study rural students' perceptions of their own college readiness, focusing on the same three areas that Astin described as the student's inputs, environments, and outputs. Each of these areas was used to inform the development of the interview protocols. Astin's involvement theory also helped me to make connections within the results from the interviews. The first section of Astin's theory can be connected to the perceptions of previous experiences prior to college for the student participants. Second, a connection can be linked to

teachers' perceptions on student's readiness, based on the inputs and environments—some of which are controllable factors. The inputs and environments can be supported in the educational process at the secondary level to obtain better results at the outcome level.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura's (1977b) social learning theory is a model used to ensure students acquire cognitive knowledge in social settings via direct instruction or observation. Bandura's social learning theory is highly significant when studying in an unfamiliar setting or studying new subjects or curriculum. Through social settings, first-year college students can become socially ready for college life. Bandura offered the practicality of social learning theory by giving an illustration of human behavior in which human beings tend to learn from each other via observation within institutions of social learning settings. The social learning theory reflects in the research questions of this study, and I inquired with the participating students on their individual experiences and familiarity about college readiness, as well as the college experience.

Tinto's Student Integration Model

Another model that was considered in this study was the student integration model by Tinto (1975). This model continues to be one of the most pervasive dropout models, as far as tertiary education is concerned. As such, the present research was conducted to describe how the student integration model can be significant in modeling the factors that facilitate college awareness.

Tinto's (1975) model was designed to connect the environments of colleges and universities with rates of student retention. This specifically suggests that college students who are best able to immerse themselves in the new institutional context are more likely to persist in their studies and thrive in the environment (Tinto, 1975). This model is focused extensively on first-year students because that is when the greatest number of students will make their persistence decisions (Elkins et al., 2000; Tinto, 1975). Tinto's model relies on two core principles: academic integration and social integration, which Tinto suggested have a consistent and equal effect with respect to student perseverance. Tinto measured academic integration by student grade performance and intellectual development, though he emphasized that grades—which are easier to define and a more concrete form of endorsement from the academic system—represent the more important acknowledgement from the institution (Tinto, 1975).

Academic performance plays an important role, but Tinto suggested that social integration is just as meaningful to student satisfaction and, ultimately, to persistence decisions. Tinto also explained that integration into the social spheres of the campus, in informal peer groups, extracurricular opportunities, and interaction with faculty members and administrators, leads to students feeling rewarded and experiencing a sense of affirmation, which is important to how they evaluate the value and opportunity cost of attending college. This impacts a student's commitment to their education and to the institution (Tinto, 1975). According to Tinto (1975), these elements of social integration play a role in whether a student will stay in college or not. The student integration model

is reflected in the research questions, and I inquired with the participating students on their academic and social integration in their college experience.

Review of the Broader Problem

From the above literature, it is evident that several themes can be deduced regarding college readiness. Various scholars have used theories developed by Astin (1984) and Tinto (1975) in comprehending the college readiness of rural high school graduates. This subsection offers a description of the themes that emerged from the literature review and a comprehensive discussion on each theme. The two major areas of college readiness are academic readiness and social readiness. Other themes include the significance of higher education, high school practices, college attendance, dropout, poverty, rural education, and college-level programs in high schools.

College Readiness

According to Pratt (2015), college readiness can be delineated as the ability of students to be ready to efficiently accomplish credit-bearing school coursework or industry accreditation devoid of remediation, hold the academic abilities and personal motivation needed to carry on and advance in post high school education, besides having recognized career objectives and the required steps to attain them. Nonetheless, Hooker and Brand (2010) articulated the need for readiness to be accompanied by developmental maturity, such as to prosper in the progressively independent domains of post-high-school education, along with the cultural knowledge to comprehend the prospects of the college setting, to academically succeed.

There is a national necessity for students to be prepared for college. Jackson and Kurlaender (2013) and Kallison and Stader (2012) reported that students who enter college unprepared harm themselves and their community. The authors also suggested that courses to aid college success should be taken at the secondary level. Increasing the percentage of high school graduates prepared for college and career became the new national crisis in education (Royster et al., 2015). According to Johnson-Weeks and Superville (2014), educators struggle to prepare students for college, which results in students entering higher education underprepared without the support to be successful.

Additionally, Perna, and Jones (2013) noted that over 93 million adults lack the basic literacy skills necessary to be successful and advance in college and in the workplace. According to Perna and Jones (2013), basic literacy skills range from being fully unable to read to only being able to understand short, commonplace text in English, but nothing more advanced. Closing the learning gap is an issue that continued to plague the educational system. New York State experiences a problem with the lack of college readiness for low-income high school students, as the educational system is not preparing students for post-secondary studies (Perna & Jones, 2013). Currently, students graduate from high school and are still unprepared for the rigor of college and must, therefore, take developmental courses.

College readiness is essentially dissimilar from high school graduation, because college is different from high school (Conley, 2014). The high school graduation rate in the United States is about 70%, with only about one third of U.S. high school students' graduating ready for college (Hirschman et al., 2016). Furthermore, 40% of all students

entering college must take remedial courses (Tribune, 2013). The need to enhance school instructions is presently higher than at any other time in the history of American education.

Every year in the United States first-year college students discover that, despite having met all academic requirements to graduate from high school, they are not ready for postsecondary studies (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education & Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). The state of unpreparedness among high school students for postsecondary coursework was explained by several authors. Venezia and Jaeger (2013) identified some of these reasons as being the following: the differences between high school and college expectations, disparities in high school course offerings, and non-curricular variables, such as peer influence, parental expectations, and conditions that encourage academic study. According to Conley (2008), college readiness is far more complicated than students completing a high school degree program. Lombardi et al., (2011) also pointed out, "A student may be college-eligible…without being college ready" (p. 375). Another theme evidenced throughout the literature presents college readiness as the ability to succeed at college beyond the first year. Michaels and O'Connor (2012) revealed how approximately 70-75% of students who drop out of college, do so in the first 2 years, and most leave during their first year of enrollment" (p. 244). Conley (2008) stated that if students are able to persevere beyond the first year of college, they are much more likely to graduate college.

Academic Readiness

From the perspective of college preparedness, academic readiness was described as the academic skills and awareness needed by students to prosper in accomplishing college-level studies, while being 'college prepared' (Maruyama, 2012). Such readiness has been confirmed to comprise 3 key components: (a) academic abilities; (b) content awareness, as well as; (c) main cognitive mechanisms considered not content-definite, such as reasoning, interpreting, or arguing abilities (West, 2013). Academic readiness remained a single piece of college-preparedness enigma; however, it is imperative for students to show college readiness, rather than simply being college eligible. Given that the United States' school systems must evaluate college-preparedness utilizing high stakes consistent test scores, regulated by rigid liability procedures, reduced learning, and teaching settings may correspond to preparedness, although college-readiness will persist, being indefinable as far as high school graduates are concerned (Todd, 2012). Various academic behaviors were associated with aspects of college readiness, signifying student's self-regulation, self-awareness, and self-assessment, which are all critical for academic merit.

Social Readiness

Maruyama (2012) examined the significance of social readiness in improving and supporting college preparedness. More specifically, Maruyama examined how high school students were ready to socially adapt to college environments, their individual enthusiasm and engagement concerning learning, as well as their perceived associations with fellow colleagues and faculty staff (Maruyama, 2012). The students believed that

being adequately acquainted with college preparedness courses would increase their social readiness, as far as college preparedness was concerned (Maruyama, 2012). Arnold et al. (2012) examined the perceptions of freshly enrolled first-years college students regarding college preparedness and social readiness, as well as their capacity to balance academic and extracurricular performances. Those who took college preparedness courses at their high schools were able to balance academic and social activities, while those who never did found it hard to cope with both (Arnold et al., 2012). Arnold et al. further claimed the importance of the impact of guardians or parents in students' anticipations and experiences concerning college education and social activities.

Social Awareness

Social awareness is described as the capacity to take the perception of and relate with others, identify and acknowledge personal and group similarities and dissimilarities, besides identifying and utilizing family, community, and school resources (Maruyama, 2012). A principal feature of social awareness is the capacity to acknowledge and show respect to the perceptions of other people within social interaction settings. Social awareness should equally comprise the capacity to recognize situations whereby social support can act as a resource to deal with problems (Maruyama, 2012).

ACT (2013) revealed that many students do not complete college degrees due to a lack of academic preparation in high school. Success may be tied to a student's high school performance, but there may also be other factors that contribute to that success in their first year of college (McGhie, 2012). Some studies attributed the problem of persistence to students' lack of understanding the meaning of being college-ready

(Michaels & O'Connor, 2012; Niu & Tienda, 2013), while other studies discussed a relationship between persistence, content knowledge, and academic preparation (Michaels & O'Connor, 2012).

In addition, researchers discussed cultural, community, and family influences as important facets in college persistence; when students are ready to learn, then they will be willing to carry on with their courses effectively (Conley, 2014). As such, college readiness increases college persistence (Wardley & Belanger, 2013). Conley and French (2013) discussed an ownership of learning by college learners through offering a description of these pertinent areas: thinking skills, attitudes toward content comprehension, possession of learning skills and practices, as well as contextual understanding. Additionally, Nichols and Valenzuela (2013) wrote about an individual's ability to be self-regulated and ready to work independently through goal completion such as to be an indicator of success in college.

According to Kuh et al. (2011), students in their first learning year confirmed feeling instantly skeptical, besides lacking the capability to deal with finding information associated with class processes and measures. In their study, Kuh et al. equally revealed how learners' non-cognitive and motivational practices are associated with student achievement in college. Equally, Davidson et al. (2009) and Alarcon and Edwards (2012) described the personally-founded and affective aspects of college success, including practical skills, such as time management, housekeeping, and organization. There are also familial influences that have an impact on a new college student. Authors discussed that students' need for parental support regarding the college experience is linked to comfort,

success, preparedness, and eventual persistence (Leonard, 2013; Surjadi et al., 2011). Additionally, parents may be very involved in student decision-making about the college-going experience and may be considered as an input to situations influencing preparedness (Roderick et al., 2011). Thus, the contribution of parents and guardians in students' readiness and persistence in college education is highly significant.

According to Johnson-Weeks and Superville (2014), "this population is entering higher education underprepared, and few find the necessary support to be successful. Educators are challenged with finding innovative ways to prepare students for college". Stern (2013) indicated that there is a need for more collaboration between higher education and secondary education. Stern (2013) suggested, in order to prepare students for college readiness, conversations between secondary education and higher education institutions are needed. Paul Weeks, ACT Vice-president for Career and College Readiness, suggested that "increased collaboration between secondary and postsecondary institutions can have increasingly positive results in the performance of high school graduates at the collegiate level" (as cited in Stern, 2013).

Hawkins et al. (2009) reported little research on the developmental period between adolescence and adulthood, especially in terms of success in school. Peper and Dahl (2013) discussed the significance of understanding puberty and maturation on cognitive engagement and motivation, while Shin and Stega (2016) reported the importance of understanding the adolescent's need for having purpose and meaning in learning.

This section has comprehensively addressed social readiness as a key aspect in preparing students for college learning and environment, through a deep analysis of academic readiness, as well as social readiness. The section exemplified that cultural, community, and family influences are important facets in college persistence; when students are ready to learn, then they will be willing to carry on with their courses effectively (Shin & Stega, 2016).

Importance of Higher Education

President Obama (2009), as well as the prior U.S. presidents, the nation's governors, Congress, and the State Department have all called for raising the awareness and availability of postsecondary education for all Americans, declaring that higher education benefits individuals and society (Baum, et al., 2013; Perna & Thomas, 2009). Success in higher education is necessary for competitiveness in international markets in many fields, such as business, education, and finance, as well as being a requirement for many current and future jobs in the United States (Perna & Thomas, 2009). According to Wu (2014), "the K-12 educational system in the United States evolved and arrived at college readiness standards without communicating with higher education institutions". While 90% of jobs in growing industries will require some postsecondary training, business and industries also question if traditional high school graduates are prepared for college or career (Hein et al., 2012).

Therefore, literature findings resulting from the significance of college education in the US education system was highly applied in devising interview questions, such as to fully explore the research questions of this study. This was significant in assessing

college preparation perceptions from social and academic points of view, support, high school expectations, as well as preparation of these students.

According to Wu (2014), "Earning a postsecondary education is well recognized and has implications for economic growth, quality, and social mobility, and can ultimately lead to better wages and lifetime earnings, which lowers unemployment and poverty" (p. 10). Students who have college degrees have more opportunities for improved jobs and careers, as well as considerably higher incomes than those without college degrees (Alarcon & Edwards, 2012; Morisano et al., 2010). Considering the above examined studies, the present paper seeks to investigate the significance of higher education from an individual and social point of view. Therefore, while the above literature is confirming a huge gap between high school and college graduates in terms of income, this study was intended to show the significance of having a framework of college oriented and prepared mind among high school students before joining college, to minimize the current dropout gap along with the income gap.

High School Practices Related to College Readiness

Jackson and Kurlaender (2013) revealed that effective preparation for college readiness is done through programs and seminars provided by high schools. Jackson, and Kurlaender (2013), and Tinto (1975) discussed that even though researchers were aware for many decades about the problem of persistence, an effective intervention in the postsecondary setting is still to come. Jackson and Kurlaender suggested that requiring high school students to undergo difficult classes may enhance college perseverance. Venezia and Jaeger (2013) considered rigorous courses and teachers' expectations in high

schools can have a positive impact on self-regulated learning in college. Some secondary schools have implemented college-level courses with college credit. As stated by Dweck et al. (2011) and Edmunds et al. (2010), if administered correctly, such courses can appropriately help a high school student understand what is expected in college.

Belasco (2013) reported that high school guidance counselors are the primary source for information related to college entrance and that their input is usually positive and significant to the college-going process. However, the local high school guidance department noted that information given to students was usually limited to statistics, housing facts, and other similar data that were reported in college brochures and on college websites. Additionally, the guidance counselors reported that even when students experienced colleges through tours and information sessions, little was learned about the day-to-day process of leaving home and living away.

On the literature concerning cognitive approaches considered in colleges, Conley (2014) discovered that the following key cognitive strategies are integrated in new student-level courses: problem design, examination, analysis, communication, as well as accuracy and precision. The four dimensions of college readiness are (a) key cognitive strategies, (b) content knowledge, (c) academic behaviors, and (d) college knowledge (Conley, 2014). Some college readiness' dimensions proposed by Conley (2014) offer a baseline comprehension of the necessity for high school learners to embrace success towards the subsequent level of education. Conley's concept goes beyond academic preparation and identifies other important aspects that are at times ignored, such as behaviors, parental support, fiscal support, and general college knowledge. Highlighting

these aspects contributed to the overall academic success of students (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). Having thoroughly examined the above literature, my intent was to utilize the recommendations related to how students can more effectively be prepared to obtain their goals after the completion of their secondary education.

College Attendance

Beginning in the 1980s, the rise in dropout rates within institutions of higher learning stimulated a measure by teachers and policy makers to implement interventions (Bower, 2013; Domina & Ruzek, 2012; Murphy et al., 2010). About 30% of high school graduates in the United States are not admitted for college courses soon after attaining their diplomas (Glancy et al., 2014). Various explanations can be made on account of the above statement, being a result of work demands, affordability issues, and lack of academic readiness.

Nevertheless, there was reported a tremendous increment in students' enrollment in colleges and universities within the last 30 years or so (Bound et al., 2010). As stated by Brown (2012), government, society, secondary, as well as the postsecondary institutions in the USA endorsed a "college-going" culture, indicating the need for all students to attend an educational institution after high school. In fact, according to Howell et al. (2010) and Bound et al. (2010), more students than ever are applying to institutions of higher learning in the US. As such, it is imperative for the present study to propose and implement measures and frameworks of facilitating college enrollment among high school students and their ability to complete their selected courses without any increment in dropout cases.

Dropout

Throughout the last 40 years, numerous studies focused on the relationship between student engagement and persistence, revealing that students continue to leave college after the first year at a high percentage (Jackson & Kurlaender, 2013; Kallison & Stader, 2012). According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2010), it is estimated that about 7,000 students drop out of school every day. Students that drop out of school will most likely not make it to a post-secondary school and will be limited in their ability to be self-sufficient. Students who are unsuccessful in school are an economic cost to society (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010; Deyé, 2011; Rumberger, 2011). With the literature on college dropout cases being on an alarming level, this study intends to utilize the recommendations regarding how students can more effectively be prepared to obtain their goals after the completion of their secondary education.

Rural Education

Researchers found that rural students place high value on family and home environments (Dodeen et al., 2012; Hendrickson, 2012; Tsai et al., 2011). To this end, Hendrickson (2012) revealed that many rural students' families do not place higher education at high levels within their value system.

According to Strayhorn (2015), fewer students who graduated from rural schools attend college in comparison to students who graduated from suburban and urban schools. This situation is determined by the teachers' lack of cultural sensitivity (Strayhorn, 2015). Often, the teachers' structure of the learning experience is uncoordinated with the rural experience (Perna & Jones, 2013). According to Shuffelton

(2013), teachers are often unaware of other rural life experiences in relation to the learning process of rural students. In this regard, Lawrence and Sanders (2012) suggested that insufficient training of teachers, lack of access to technology, and shortages in funding impede consistency in the implementation of educational reform practices. The link between learning principles and standards implementation is often blurred in practice in rural education.

Poverty

Children in the United States who grow up in poverty are less likely to have access to quality education (Max & Glazerman, 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics (2013) claimed that poverty is a major influence in student performance in rural high schools (Aud, S., et al., 2013). Tutak et al. (2011) found that there are extensive cultural aspects related to the rural situation that influence the learning of rural learners. First Generation College Students Research stated that students whose parents went to college are more likely to attend college themselves (Goyette, 2008). On the other hand, Gandara and Bial (2001) revealed that many students face impediments, such as a limited cultural support system, lack of community resources, below average peer supports, racism, ineffective counseling, and limited networking opportunities with people who succeeded in college. Pelco et al. (2014) revealed that in the case of first-generation students, these efforts are particularly important because the number of first-generation college students is rapidly increasing, while also first-generation students are at a very high risk of leaving higher education prior to completing a bachelor's degree (Pelco et al., 2014). Additionally, many of these students' experience anxiety from the

pressure of having to pave the way, as they are the first in their families to achieve these milestones (Davis, 2010).

Literature Summary

From the above literature, it is evident that several themes can be deduced as far as college readiness is concerned. The above section offered a description of the themes that emerged from the literature review, along with a comprehensive discussion of each theme. The two major areas of college readiness are academic readiness and social readiness. Other themes include the significance of higher education, high school practices, college attendance, dropout, poverty, rural education, and college level program in high schools.

Implications

The findings of this study have the potential to document student's experiences prior to their enrollment into college, regarding academic and social preparation that they may or may not receive while attending their secondary education program. These findings can provide information about the phenomenon that will be useful for secondary educators, politicians, and education decision makers when developing policies, academic and social programming for secondary education institutions.

The first possible implication includes developing a policy that affects the level of students' preparation for college by school administrators, in addition to the assistance offered by the college administration team and faculty to students during their transition process. The second possible implication consists of a professional development program for college administrators and faculty members, to increase their awareness of rural high

school graduates' academic and social readiness for college, along with the best practice in which to assist these students. The third possible implication refers to policy recommendations for the local college on how to improve classroom expertise via active involvement, enhance accessibility of faculty to the students, as well as creating a friendly learning environment between the students and faculty, both academically and socially.

One of the more popular college level programs in high schools is that of dual enrollment. According to Klopfenstein and Lively (2012), dual enrollment was created to challenge talented students, help smooth transition between high school and college, and give students momentum toward a college degree (Klopfenstein & Lively, 2012). Dougherty and Mellor (2010) contended that the focus of dual enrollment should be on increasing the level of rigor in the K-10 curriculum, so that students are better prepared to work at a college level by 11th grade (Dougherty & Mellor, 2010).

Another form of college level readiness program at the high school level implies the bridge class program. A 2013 study (Martin, & Broadus, 2013) revealed that over 50% of students who were involved in a bridge or prep class experience passed the GED within 6 months. This is significantly higher than the 23% passage rate of those who did not participate in a class or program (Martin & Broadus, 2013) While it appears that institutions of higher education are willing to accept GED students into their schools, the preparation of these students is largely the responsibility of the secondary school.

Information from this study might result in a policy paper which could be used by educators and policy makers in rural areas to better provide opportunities for students to

develop their academic and social skills, such as to be more successful in the college setting. School administrators in rural areas may use this study to drive programming for students to be better prepared for their transition into college.

Summary

Students who attended rural school K-12 educational programs tend to be at a disadvantage compared to their suburban and urban counterparts. Many of these students attending college struggle both academically and socially. Venezia and Jaeger (2013) contended that most of students in high school desire to enroll into some form of college or institutions of higher learning; however, a huge number of these students seem to join such facilities without having acquainted themselves with the much-needed skills, knowledge, or practices needed to succeed. In this light, Venezia and Jaeger found that students are not prepared for postsecondary education upon the completion of high school, with a primary reason being the disparity in instruction between high school and college. Unfortunately, this issue is more prevalent in rural schools (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). In the United States, one third of the K-12 student population receives their education from a rural K-12 school. On a local level, rural school enrollment is greater than non-rural enrollment. Students on a local level struggle academically and socially after graduating from these rural schools in the college setting. The gap in practice for this study is, therefore, the academic and social skills that students have when leaving secondary school and the skills that they do not have when entering college.

This section provides an overview of this problem at the local level and as described in the research literature. The purpose of the study, the research questions

guiding the study, and the identified theoretical frameworks were also discussed. This section provided a brief review of the research literature that is relevant to these research questions. Using the information presented in this literature review, Section 2 of this study outlined the qualitative methods used to determine the perceptions of the studies students and teachers on their college readiness preparation. Using biographical information, along with a series of focus group and individual interviews, the participants of this study will be asked to share their views on college readiness and their preparation from rural school education. Using this data information, a secondary school program could be developed to help guide students toward better college readiness and college knowledge.

In Section 3, I will discuss the doctoral project including how the project genre was determined from the study's findings, the development of the project and implementation, how the project will be evaluated for effectiveness and growth, the implications of the project, and its impact upon social change within the local community college and community. In Section 4, I will discuss reflections and conclusions of the project's strengths, limitations, and how I developed as a scholar, project developer, and social change leader.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

In Section 1, I discussed the gap in practice identified as the discrepancy in preparation and skills for college readiness among students who graduate from a K–12 rural school. Students who graduate from K–12 rural schools need to be better prepared upon leaving secondary education and entering college. The purpose was to investigate perceptions of rural high school graduates and college teachers regarding academic and social college readiness of rural high school graduates.

To achieve the purpose of the study, I used a qualitative case study approach. The objective of qualitative research is to understand how people interpret experiences. This type of research focuses on the reasons behind experiences, using questions to gain a better understanding of these experiences (Merriam, 2009). As such, I conducted this study to explore the problem of students who graduate from rural secondary schools not being prepared to be successful in college, investigating the academic and social preparation of students prior to their admission into college.

This study was intended to provide a better understanding on the preparation of rural students for college after secondary education. While studies incorporate several methods of collecting data, the most appropriate methodology for the present study of second- or third-year college students' perceptions regarding their college readiness after graduating from a rural high school was a case study. There are several options in collecting data in a qualitative approach to research (Creswell et al., 2007; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002). Qualitative approaches are used to focus on paradigms, theoretical

overviews, identity, and moral agency (Creswell et al., 2007). Students under investigation have completed their secondary education and have entered college. Researchers use collected data to help guide the development of a plan. These data may help rural K-12 school leadership develop a program to address this concern.

Justification for Case Study Approach

When considering the case study, I selected the qualitative approach for this research. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined a case study as "a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event" (p. 59). As such, because this research is focused on students' views concerning their preparedness for college after secondary education in a rural school setting, a case study design was selected. A better understanding of student viewpoints, in relationship to academic and social preparation, can bring about positive social change at rural K–12 schools.

The characteristics of a case study design, according to Creswell (2003), are: "(a) defined case, (b) bounded system, and (c) description of context and setting" (p. 36–37). The case study research design was considered appropriate for this study for the following reasons: (a) the study is bounded to one rural school at one point in time, (b) there is no comparable school, and (c) as the researcher I had firsthand knowledge of the situation within the given context of the study. Merriam (2002) described a case study as research that gathers and describes information about a group (p. 27). Furthermore, Merriam (2002) stated, case study research does not investigate a cause-and-effect relationship. In accordance with Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the framework involved in

case studies is highly significant in engaging qualitative research. Case studies focus on the case's empirical knowledge, while concentrating on the impact of its political, social, and other settings, simply retrieved by practice and method by the researcher whose knowledge level is acceptable to induce participants to respond applicably (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Reasons for Dismissing Other Qualitative Research Designs

While qualitative studies can be conducted through several research design approaches, I selected a case study over other methods, such as grounded theory, ethnographic study, narrative inquiry, or phenomenological study. In a phenomenological research approach, a researcher pursues the essential description instead of explanation, commencing from the idea without preconceptions or hypotheses (Creswell, 2012). Researchers using this approach seek to describe the common experience by individuals during a phenomenon. The main purpose here in this study was to minimize personal experiences with a situation to an explanation of the universal essence. While this approach is highly valuable for various research groups, like teaching professions, therapists, policy makers, as well as healthcare practitioners, I disqualified this method for my study. Its requirement to bracket individual experiences of the participants would be highly complex to implement. Such an approach necessitates a researcher to make a decision on how individual comprehensions will be incorporated to the study.

The grounded theory approach surpasses the idea of description, discovery, or generation of a hypothesis, a process's abstract analytical schema, while a researcher is expected to reserve theoretical concepts such as to determine the emergence of analytic

and substantive theory (Creswell, 2012). The investigator equally faces the challenge of establishing saturation of categories or ample explanation of the hypothesis. The research approach is considered to entail the comprehensive assessment of the intervention group in most cases via participant observation, whereby the investigator is immersed into the daily activities of the participants for observation purposes (Creswell, 2012). Regardless of this, the ethnography approach is considered highly intricate because the researcher is expected to be grounded in cultural anthropology, as well as the denotation of a social-cultural approach, besides the ideas that is usually examined by ethnographers (Creswell, 2012). However, in this case, data collection is time consuming, because it comprises extensive field duration.

Finally, narrative inquiry is another qualitative study design that could have been employed in this study; however, it was dismissed due to various challenges associated with it. While it is comprehended as written or spoken information explaining an action/event or several actions or events, chronologically connected, narrative inquiry is highly complicated because the investigator is expected to gather comprehensive information pertaining to participants and is expected to have a strong comprehension of the participants' life contexts (Creswell, 2012). Moreover, diverse issues (such as ethical issues) occur during data collection and analysis.

The research designs listed above were considered but were not selected. Creswell (2007) elaborated on several of these designs. It should also be noted that the intent of this study was to resolve a local problem, not to develop a theory. Creswell (2007) stated "ethnography is used to describe and interpret shared patterns of people within the same

cultural group" (pg. 72). Although the setting for the study was an important aspect in the design, the phenomena of the students' perceptions of college and career readiness was the focus. Moreover, an ethnographic study would have required an immense amount of observation and interviewing. This study's timeline was not ideal for that form of research. Finally, a biographical study was also inappropriate because a single person was not being examined. The views of multiple individuals in a case study can provide a more complete analysis of the situation.

Participants

Population and Sample Size

According to Merriam (2009), participants should be selected based on who best understands the research problem in the study. Merriam (2009) suggested selecting a purposeful sample of participants who have in-depth information about the phenomenon to be explored. To collect sufficient data to address the approached problem, I sought two major categories of participants: (a) rural high school graduates currently enrolled in college and (b) college teachers who teach a first-year college course. The sample size for college students, who are at least 18 years of age and graduated from a rural school district, would be comprised of 10–20 participants, and the sample size of college teachers who teach first-year college courses would also be 10–20 participants.

Sampling Procedure

I used the sampling procedure suggested by Creswell (2013), Yin (2009), and Alarcon and Edwards (2012). Thus, Creswell (2013) proposed using purposeful maximal sampling to provide different perspectives on the topic, explaining that the samples can

represent both the ordinary and the unusual. Yin (2009) discussed that it is important to have literal replications of data collection for each case in a case study. Furthermore, Alarcon and Edwards (2012) recommended that the sample and interview size should represent the population, while leading to saturation and comparison of data. According to Broddy (2016), in qualitative research the determination of sample size is contextual and partially dependent upon the scientific paradigm under which investigation is taking place. Broddy (2016) suggested that theoretical saturation is a useful guide when designing qualitative research.

In consultation with a peer de-briefer, I determined that increasing the sample size of both populations of participants would increase the validity of the research. To comply with these above guidelines, for this study I purposefully planned a research sample of 10-20 college students who graduated from a rural high school and 10-20 college teachers who work at the study site and with first year college students. I was able to obtain 16 college students and 20 college teachers which brought the sample size above the recommendation of at least 12 to a total of 36 participants.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

Merriam (2009) suggested participants need to be selected based on how well they understand the research problem presented in the study. Merriam (2009) also stated a participant group should reflect a population where the most information can be learned; therefore, the selection process is essential. Additionally, Merriam proposed selecting a purposeful sample of participants who have in-depth information about the phenomenon to be explored. Purposeful sample permits the researcher to select

participants with same or similar characteristics that can aid in answering the research question (Creswell, 2013). For present study sample, the process of gathering information implies interviewing two groups of participants. The first group of participants consisted of rural high school graduates who are enrolled in college, while the second group was formed of college teachers who teach a first-year college course. Firstly, through the purposeful sampling method I sought to select 10-20 students who graduated from a rural high school in upstate New York and who are currently in their second or third year of college. These students have already graduated from a small rural school in upstate New York, with the participants hailing from different rural high schools in Schoharie County.

Gaining Access to Participants

The local site for this study considers a 4-year college, which has a significant population of students from the local rural area. As to recruit and gain access to potential participants, promotional flyers were issued via emails to the potential participants from the college. The students willing to take part in the research were asked to complete and return a survey electronically. The recruited students by the college included those who graduated from different rural high schools but were admitted in the same local college.

The first step in the process for gaining access to the participants was through the local college's institutional review board (IRB) and Walden University's IRB. My IRB approval number is #11-19-19-0350810. Procedures for gaining access to participants were initially performed by receiving permission from the college students and college teachers. In this sense, a survey with a cover letter was sent out electronically via email to the participants requesting permission to contact potential participants (Hatch, 2002). The

survey served as a letter of cooperation, a consent form and letter of cooperation with the local college, which are all presented in the appendix section. Equally, the teachers were sent the survey via email to their current place of employment and email address. Their emails were obtained through their employee website, which was researched online via use of search engines, like Google.

Establishing a Researcher–Participant Working Relationship

As an administrator with knowledge of the school under investigation, I did not personally know any of the graduates who participated in this study. I was fully aware that an objective view is essential to the data collection process. Equally, it should be noted that having a working relationship with the participant is highly important in increasing data accuracy, as I was expected to collaborate with the respondents to fully comprehend their subjective experience.

Methods for Ethical Protection of Participants

It is important for the researcher to ensure ethical protection of participants which includes confidentiality throughout the research. All participants must be protected from any harm or deception during the study. I followed strict ethical guidelines (Yin, 2009). To design and guarantee that ethical protection and standards were met for this study, the process reflected certain guidelines. I obtained the approval of the Walden IRB and the local college prior to conducting the research. A consent form was presented to the participants prior to the interview sessions. This document included the purpose of the study, the process of conducting the research, and the safeguards in place to ensure confidentiality. The study also offered specific safeguards in the form of a disclaimer

explaining the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time, along with the assurance that no harm is expected. To ensure ethical protection of the study, pseudonyms were used throughout the study to avoid identifying participants.

For this study, I was solely responsible for the collection and security of the data. No other person, can access the data, which was placed on an external hard drive and stored in a locked file cabinet at my personal residence. The consent forms were sent with the instruction to maintain a physical copy of the signed consent form for their personal record. Yin (2009) suggest that protecting participants rights when conducting qualitative research is extremely important. After 5 years, I intend to destroy the data.

Data Collection

To collect participant statements and experiences, I developed the qualitative survey questions. The intent of these surveys was to engender information on a narrow range of topics (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As such, I was able to gain rich, in-depth information from the participants. To accomplish this, I organized the survey questions in accordance to the research questions (Appendix B). This practice will assist in the process of organizing the data appropriately so that I will be able to better gain a clear understanding of the information needed to answer my research questions.

These accounts were rooted in the participants' first-hand experiences, representing an important part of the data collection process (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). A total of 16 college professors and 20 third year college students participated in this study. The week after the surveys were completed, I performed an examination of data collected

to determine if follow-up interviews were necessary. This was determined not to be needed based on the information provided from the two groups of participants.

As the main instrument in this study, I implemented the use of a qualitative survey. The survey consisted of a set of 20 questions which aimed to guide the process. The survey questions (see Appendix B) were different for each of the two participating groups. The questions were considered in answering different research questions; that is certain research questions were addressed by certain survey questions. These surveys were reviewed by a peer debriefer whose feedback was used to strengthen and align the questions to the research questions.

Survey and Data Process Plan

The data were collected by use of a qualitative survey which uploaded to a data sheet. Each survey took the participant 30 minutes or less to complete. The survey questions were organized according to the three research questions. RQ 1 was: What are the perceptions of students who graduated from a rural school district regarding preparation for college, both academically and socially? RQ 2 was: What do rural high school graduates who entered college wish they had learned during their high school experience such as to better prepare them for their college education, both academically and socially? What are the perceptions of college teachers in regard to rural students' college preparation, both academically and socially?

Keeping Track of Data

The analyzed surveys are stored in a secured location. These electronic files are stored within a computer file and an external storage drive. Only I can access the files.

The files are also password protected. Quotes from the survey responses were positioned in a working document that became the study's findings. The data will be kept for 5 years by engaging a flash drive as the storage medium, and then destroyed through reformatting the drive. I used a reflective journal to record my thoughts and impressions to gain insight by recording information and making connections to further my understanding. Journals written by researchers in practical settings constitute a source of narrative research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Phelps (2005) stated that reflective journals not only are an important means for the collection of data in qualitative research but they allow us to learn the topic about ourselves. Phelps suggested that the information recorded in the journals provide significant insight in the study.

Role of the Researcher

For qualitative design studies, the researcher can affect the study in diverse methods, such as defining the study approach and engagement (Saldana, 2011). The interest in college preparedness and academic readiness comes on the aftermath of escalating college dropout in the United States. While Section 1 identified the problem of high school graduates' readiness for college, Section 2 explained the research design that helped me to identify and avoid inclusion of personal biases.

I currently hold no authority or power over any of the individuals who participated in this study. Despite this aspect, some of the participants may have been familiar with me as a local school district administrator. Possible participants were made aware of my concern regarding the issue of college readiness. The association with these individuals was positive and proved to be helpful regarding their willingness to provide

useful and unbiased data to assist in the ultimate conception of a project that can help address this concern. My role in this study was to collect and analyze the data.

It is always important for researchers to limit the effect of personal bias on the study. As a researcher, I identified two of my biases. The first bias that I have is that rural students are not as prepared for post-secondary education as those from a larger school system that can provide a greater variety of resources. The second basis that I have is that rural students do not have as much emphasis on higher education which results in students not being as focused on preparing for higher education. As the researcher, I have developed my survey so that the questions are broad and the participants are able to reflect on their own experience. As the researcher I will be able to code the collected date appropriately without inflecting my basis into the study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is well-defined as "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 145). Once the survey data were collected, I engaged in analyzing the data. The analysis of the qualitative surveys was begun within one week following data collection.

Creswell (2012) identified four steps to analyzing data. The first step of the process is to prepare the data for analysis through collecting the data. After collecting the data, I prepared the data for analysis, which also implied reading through the data that required multiple readings. As a procedure to organize the data, a coding system was

administered. Thus, while reading the data, I coded the data and then wrote descriptions to be used in the text. This system consisted of color-coding similar fragments of participants' narrative and unifying them within a matrix. Creswell (2007) suggested keeping the information manageable, while building upon it.

The next step was for me to identify the evident themes. While these steps are not always sequential, they are a method for managing the data that will be employed in the research. Creswell also suggested the development of a matrix to organize the source material, while all data should be stored on a personal-computer and backed up on an external hard-drive. After reviewing the collected data, a short list of categories or themes were developed. In this regard, the researcher used inductive analysis to seek out meaning from developing themes and examined each transcript, such as to cross reference and manually color code common themes.

In any research, data analysis entails offering a summary of the data gathered, while facilitating the results in a manner that links the most significant aspects. Qualitatively, the focus is to discover the huge picture by engaging diverse methods to achieve it. This entails the use of data in designating an occurrence, to reveal its implications and, ultimately, comprehend it. Diverse methods require diverse forms of analysis. Data analysis involves basic and higher levels of analysis. The basic level entails a descriptive data account, involving the interviewee's narrations, or what the researcher observed or documented without anything to read into it or assume about it. For higher level analysis, the nature is highly interpretative, as it focuses on the meaning of the response, the implication or inference.

In accordance with Denscombe (2010), highly efficient results will always be achieved by following some principles relating to qualitative data analysis. The initial principle is the compaction of broad and varied raw data into a concise structure. This entails the conversion of the raw data into tables and charts, offering the researcher a comparison to arrive at data to focus on. Subsequently, clarifying the correlation between the research objectives and the summary is of high significance during qualitative analysis of data. Finally, it is important for the researcher to reach a conclusion by creating a model or by improving the conceptual basis of the study.

Steps of Data Analysis

This research consisted of the administration of a survey to collect the data. Due to the use of this model, there was no need to transcribe the data. In this study, the method of data analysis involved coding which lead to emerging themes.

A researcher can use several strategies to code data. Creswell (2013) suggested using an open-coding strategy to label the information into themes. Open coding allows the researcher to "induce themes from text" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 2). Esterberg (2002) suggested open coding is a multi-stage process that begins with the researcher reviewing the transcript and documenting emergent categories and themes. According to Esterberg (2002), the following steps are involved in the open coding of data:

1. Read and re-read each qualitative survey.
2. Take notes to become familiar with the content.

3. Identify commonalities and patterns in individual participant' responses (at this stage of data analysis the researcher should shift to reviewing notes and not transcripts).
4. Identify emergent themes in individual participant responses and begin to make connections.
5. Repeat the process for each case, treating each one independently of the others.
6. Look for themes across cases.

As such, through the above process, I was able to make connections of commonalities in participants' responses, leading to the identification of the themes (Esterberg, 2002). Thus, during Step 1, I read and reread each participant's survey, while in the second step, notes were written directly on the transcripts in order to help me become familiar with the information that was to be included. In step 3, I began to focus on the notes taken in Stage 2 of the process, followed by step 4, where I reviewed the notes for emerging themes in participants' responses. The steps in Esterberg's process were repeated for each of the participants' survey. Once going through the steps for all participants, step 6 was applied, by looking for themes across participant responses. Based on the comparison of themes across participant responses, I was able to draw conclusions from the data analysis.

Evidence of Quality

According to Creswell (2003), qualitative research establishes trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility in a study. Creswell stated that without integrity and validity, the quality of the research is of poor value and is useless. Many strategies can be used to

establish quality. According to Creswell (2007), transcriptions of participants are considered a valuable way to obtain high quality data.

Peer Debriefer

Peer debriefing is a technique used by many qualitative researchers. “It is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Peer debriefing allows a qualified peer researcher to review and assess transcripts, emerging and final categories from those transcripts, and the final themes or findings of a given study. A peer may review selected site documents, observational notes, and possibly other written work of the researcher. The peer de-briefer may determine whether a researcher has missed a key point, overemphasized a minor one, or repeated one or more points. The peer debriefer acts similar to an auditor. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that peer debriefing enhances the trustworthiness and the credibility of a research project.

For my research, I enlisted a peer de-briefer from the institution that I obtained the participants from. My peer de-briefer is a Professor from the Psychology department of the institution who is tasked partially to conduct research. I enlisted him to review all the questions that would be administered to both participant groups. The de-briefer reviewed the questions and provided me with feedback. Additional demographic questions were added based on his recommendations and the wording and structures of other questions were adjusted.

Triangulation

To clarify and verify the interpretations of the data, the study employed the triangulation technique (Brause & Mayher, 1998). Per Creswell (2007), qualitative inquirers triangulate among different data sources to enhance the accuracy of the study. Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). For my triangulation method, I used the students and teachers as different individual data sources. I incorporated the impressions and connections that I had from my reflective journal as I coded the data and themes emerged.

Credibility

According to Patton (1990), credibility depends more on richness and analytical abilities of the researcher and less on the sample size of the gathered information. Glesne (1999) described rapport established with participants as equivalent to establishing trust. Researchers cannot specify the transferability of findings; however, they can only provide sufficient information that can then be used by the reader to determine whether the findings are applicable to the new situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By providing adequate detail and background information, I was able to provide readers and researchers with enough information to determine whether the results may be transferable to other rural secondary schools. Furthermore, it is important for qualitative researchers to have their qualitative studies validated. Methods to be considered in data validation include peer debriefing, lengthy engagement, triangulation, negative case assessment,

external auditing as well as audit trail. The triangulation method was used to validate this qualitative study.

Data were analyzed by utilizing the process of manually coding data and reviewing the data trends over and over. I made written reference to the survey data throughout the process of reporting and discussing the findings, such as to ensure that the findings are accurately represented. Additionally, the use of rich, descriptive writing should assist readers as they attempt to connect to the experiences shared by the participants (Creswell, 2003). As such, the reader can also decide transferability and characteristics shared (Creswell, 2007).

Merriam (2002) suggested that a qualitative study's design is not rigid but is adaptable. This flexibility is practical, as it permits the researcher to shift the focus of the study in the event that new data were produced from the research participants. Inconsistencies within the thematic analysis of data are to be expected. As per Padgett (2004), the researcher must understand that others may differently interpret data. Therefore, triangulation, peer debriefing, and bias checking were implemented to help with interpreting data. In some cases, as the interview process progresses, what may initially appear as a theme in the data collection procedure may be determined to be immaterial, all data deemed was kept in a separate file and revisited at intermittent intervals to ensure that the data were not usable for the study. For this research, discrepant cases imply interviews where the participants do not provide information based on the questions asked or in cases in which the information does not align with

most of the participant's information. These data, although deemed contradictory, were recorded and reported as discrepant cases.

Data Analysis Results

This section was organized by the following sections: data generated, gathered and recorded; findings; patterns, relationships, salient data; evidence of quality; and summary. The object of this study explored the perceptions of college students who graduated from a rural secondary school as well as the perceptions of college teachers who teach first year students in regard to the students' level of college readiness. The surveys presented in Appendix B and C were used to obtain information regarding college readiness of students from both a student and teachers' perspective. A survey was developed for each of the two participant groups and sent out via email. The first participant group was the teacher group. The survey was sent to each department chair of the college with a letter stating that the research has been approved and asking for them to send out the survey to their departments. The second group was the student group. These surveys were also sent out by a cooperating professor from the sociology department. The participants answered the survey questions by accessing a link that was provided in the email. The data directly uploaded from the survey where I was able to aggregate the data as needed.

The data analysis for this case study began with a reading of the survey results followed by a coding and theming process that identified phrases and/or sentences relevant to the study in relation to the research questions. Following the coding and theming, I used a comparison analysis of themes and pattern matching logic procedure to

explore responses to the research questions. The data collected in this process has identified a need for secondary schools to implement a system wide approach to better prepare students for college readiness. The deliverable for this project was to make a recommendation for a systemic program and provide the professional development support to successfully implement the program.

Data Generated, Gathered, and Recorded

This study was conducted at a small college located in the Northeastern part of the United States. The study investigated the perceptions of college students and college teachers regarding students who graduated from a rural secondary school and rural students' level of college readiness. Due to COVID-19 outbreak, the governor of the State for the study site enacted an executive order resulting in school closures and mandated social distancing. Because of this, my intended interview process needed to be adjusted. Walden University institutional review board (IRB) originally allowed me to use interviews to conduct my research. Due to the social distancing regulations, I used two surveys to capture the data for this study. I developed specific surveys for each of the participant groups. These surveys were initially identical to the original interview questions; however, demographic questions were added to capture information that may have been obtained in the interview setting. This process was developed in collaboration with the peer de-briefer. The questions were provided to the peer de-briefer and feedback was provided to me. Additional questions were added based on the feedback. The surveys were sent out with an email to the potential participants inviting them to participate. I sent out the survey directly to the teachers and the student survey was sent out by department

chairpersons of the institution in which the students attend and the teachers instruct. Due to the change in process, I added to the number of participants from the original proposal. This ensured that I have a broader population sample being that I am using surveys instead of the interviews. The rationale behind adding to the population sample when implementing surveys was to provide a greater sample which would make the research findings more statistically relevant.

Participant Demographics

This study examined the perceptions of 16 college teachers in regards to their experience with the level of college readiness with the students that they teach. The teachers (Table 1) who participated in this study were called Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, Teacher 4, Teacher 5, Teacher 6, Teacher 7, Teacher 8, Teacher 9, Teacher 10, Teacher 11, Teacher 12, Teacher 13, Teacher 14, Teacher 15, and Teacher 16. Over 50% of the teachers interviewed have been teaching at this particular college for 6 or more years and over 40% have been teaching there for 11 or more years. Fifty-six percent of the teachers have been teaching in their field for 20 or more years. Fifty-six percent of the teachers surveyed were male and fifty four percent were female. Eighty- one percent of the teachers were white and 19% were other than white.

This study also examined the perceptions of 20 college students regarding their own level of college readiness. The students (Table 2) that participated in this study were called Student 1, Student 2, Student3, Student 4, Student5, Student 6, Student 7, Student 8, Student 9, Student 10, Student 11, Student 12, Student 13, Student 14, Student 15, Student 16, Student 17, Student 18, Student 19 and Student 20. Forty-five percent of the

students lived in a rural setting prior to attending college while 35% percent lived in a suburban area and 20% in a city. Eighty-five percent of the student participants were female and 15% percent where male. Seventy-five percent indicated that they were white and 25% described themselves as other.

Overall, the participants included a total of 16 teachers and 20 students. The student population was more diverse than anticipated due to the shift for using surveys in the study protocol. The population of students who responded to the survey were broken into three categories. Forty-five percent of the students are categorized as student who attended a rural secondary school. Thirty-five percent were categorized as attending a Suburban school and twenty percent were categorized as attending a city school.

Table 1

Demographic of Teacher Participants

Participants	Years teaching in college	Years teaching at college level	Gender/sex	Race ethnicity
Teacher 1	16-20	Over 20	Male	White
Teacher 2	16-20	Over 20	Female	White
Teacher 3	16-20	Over 20	Female	White
Teacher 4	16-20	Over 20	Male	Asian American
Teacher 5	1-5	6-10	Male	Other
Teacher 6	Over 20	Over 20	Male	White
Teacher 7	1-5	16-20	Male	White
Teacher 8	11-15	11-15	Male	White; Other
Teacher 9	Over 20	Over 20	Female	White
Teacher 10	Over 20	Over 20	Male	White
Teacher 11	11-15	16-20	Female	White
Teacher 12	11-15	16-20	Female	White
Teacher 13	Over 20	Over 20	Male	White
Teacher 14	6-10	16-20	Female	White
Teacher 15	6-10	11-15	Female	White
Teacher 16	1-5	Over 20	Male	White

Table 2

Demographics of Student Participants

Participants	Years in this college	Gender/Sex	Race ethnicity
Student 1	3	Male	Hispanic
Student 2	3	Female	Black
Student 3	3	Male	White
Student 4	2	Female	Black
Student 5	3	Female	White
Student 6	3	Female	White
Student 7	2	Male	White
Student 8	2	Female	White
Student 9	2	Female	White
Student 10	2	Male	White
Student 11	2	Female	White
Student 12	3	Male	Black
Student 13	3	Female	White
Student 14	2	Female	White
Student 15	3	Male	White
Student 16	3	Female	Hispanic
Student 17	2	Female	White
Student 18	3	Female	White
Student 19	2	Male	White
Student 20	3	Female	White

Research Question 1

Research question 1 was: What are the perceptions of students who graduated from a rural school district regarding preparation for college, both academically and socially? Out of the overall population of students who participated in this study, only 30% of them indicated that they were very prepared for college after graduating from secondary school. Forty-five percent indicated that they were somewhat prepared and 25% indicated that they were somewhat or not prepared for college. The results from the rural school graduates showed that twenty two percent of the students indicated that they

were very prepared but eighty-eight percent indicated that they were not very prepared or only somewhat prepared for college. Fifty-five percent of all students indicated that they needed to take a remedial course upon entering college. Forty-four percent of the rural students indicated that they were required to take a remedial course when they entered college.

When asked if the rural students felt that they were more or less prepared than their peers, 25% indicated that they were more prepared, 33indicated less prepared and 42 indicated neither more or less prepared. When the students were asked what they felt prepared them to most for college during their secondary education, 9 out of 20 of them indicated that they took one or more Advanced Placement courses or College Courses while they were in secondary school. They indicated that these courses better align with the expectation and level or rigor of the courses that they took in college. Three of the students indicated that their secondary teachers either challenged them or had a close personal connection which assisted in their transition.

Eight out of 20 students indicated that their biggest challenge academically was in the area of math. Three students indicated that they were not properly prepared in the area of organization and study skills. One student stated, “I was not prepared for the level of classes; high school was not challenging enough for me”. Three students indicated that the social pressures of living alone or being in college was a challenge while transitioning into college. While looking at the data, it is clear that a trend can be seen that the student’s perception is that math was a challenge for them. Two of the rural students indicated organization was a challenge and one stated that they were socially unprepared.

When the students were asked what challenges, they had in regards to academic preparation, the data showed a trend in time-management, organization and self-motivation. Four out of the 20 students indicated that managing their own time was a struggle. Six of the 20 students indicated that they struggled with their own organizational skills. Three out of the 20 students indicated that they were not self-motivated as they entered college.

When asked what challenges the students had socially, a common theme was making strong social connections with their peers. Seven out of 20 students stated that they had challenges making friends their first year of college. Four out of the 9 students form rural school indicated that they did not have any problems adjusting socially to college.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 was: What do rural high school graduates who entered college wish they had learned during their high school experience such as to better prepare them for their college education, both academically and socially? When asked what content would have been helpful prior to entering college a major concern found in the data was real world experience, one student indicated that “it would have been helpful to know how to prioritize your time because it is easy to waste time on something that you thought was necessary but really was not”, another student stated “economic budgeting”. A third student offered, “learning how to be independent and live successfully on your own”. A fourth student commented, “nothing in particular, but I feel like all schools should offer some kind of classes with more real-world material”. Four

students indicated that they would like to have better demand of personal finance management prior to entering college.

When asked what courses students would have thought to be beneficial prior to attending college, thirty percent indicated that life skills would be the most beneficial prior to entering college. Twenty-five percent indicated that college or advanced placement courses would be beneficial and 25% indicated some type of college preparation course would be beneficial.

Forty-four percent of the students who graduated from a rural school stated that they would have like more exposure to study and life skills in secondary school and 44% also felt that they needed more exposure to more rigorous courses such as advanced placement and college courses prior to college entry.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 was: What are the perceptions of college teachers in regard to rural students' college preparation, both academically and socially? Sixteen college teachers answered the survey. When asked if they see a difference in college preparation between students from rural areas, as opposed to other areas, 56% indicated they did not and 44 indicated that they did. Sixty-nine percent of the teachers indicated that students from the suburbs are somewhat prepared and thirty-one percent are somewhat underprepared. Zero percent indicated that these students were very prepared or very unprepared for college. When asked about students from cities, 50% indicated that these students were somewhat prepared, 38% were somewhat underprepared and 12% were very underprepared. When asked specifically about rural students, 50% stated that they

were somewhat prepared, 7% were somewhat underprepared and 6% were very underprepared.

When asked what areas teachers feel that rural students struggle the most, five teachers indicated that students struggle with reading and writing. Four teachers recognized that students from rural areas struggle with time management and two stated application of content knowledge. It is important to state that Teacher 4 stated “it is difficult to say, I think that it varies from individual to individual. I feel the overall secondary school system needs more work to help students”. Teacher 11 stated “they often have trouble speaking up when they don’t understand as so don’t improve. Managing their time is also difficulty”. Teacher 12 stated “Same as for students from urban and suburban areas: not enough initiative, readiness to follow instructions instead of solving problems. Teacher 15 stated “my answer is the same for all students: critical thinking”.

When asked what differences do you notice regarding college readiness between students from a rural school vs. other schools most of the teachers did not see a significant difference or were not able to tell where a student was from. One teacher stated “honestly they are all taught to the test, important differences are slight”. With regards to academics a few of the teachers indicated that students from rural areas tend to have been exposed to less cultural diversity resulting in less interpersonal skills. Thirty-seven percent of teachers believed that students need more practice on critical thinking skills to be successful in college. Nine out of sixteen (56%) teachers indicated that all

students need to have stronger reading comprehension and writing skills prior to their entry into college.

Some of the college teachers indicated that the students need to have better life skills in order to be ready for college. Teacher 4 stated, “students need to have a growth mindset, an ability to find value in what they are learning”. Teacher 5 stated, “critical thinking, writing, reading, speaking constructively and determination” were the key to college readiness. Teacher 7 stated, “motivation and a work ethic” while Teacher 12 stated, “Making decisions about their time. Taking notes and asking questions when they don’t understand. Understanding that teaching is not information transfer but a structured process of supporting learning and they have to do the work”.

When teachers were asked about what social skills do students need to be ready for college, the main idea that came to the forefront was strong personal skills. Teacher 3 stated, “the ability to be other-focused instead of self-focuses; ability to think independently”, Teacher 4 stated, “interpersonal skills”, Teacher 8 stated, “empathetic understanding of otherness and what othering can do to people. Teacher 9 stated, ability to recognize their own biases”. Several of the other teachers commented on the need for students to be willing to take initiative, be self-motivated, have tolerance, and be open-minded. Teacher 17 stated, “collaboration, cooperation, comfort in making mistakes, and desire to seek answers” are the skills needed to be college ready socially.

When teachers were asked what courses and skills are needed to be included in secondary education to ensure college preparedness for students in their field, 56% of the teachers indicated that critical thinking skills need to be a part of the curriculum in

secondary schools. Teacher 15 states, “critical thinking skills; how to critically analyze information they read”, Teacher 16 indicates, “logic and critical thinking (formal critical thinking, not loose opinion swapping)”. Teacher 17 stated, “Research. Validity of sources, evaluation of facts, critical thinking”.

When the teachers were asked if they had any additional thoughts regarding student’s college readiness comparing rural students to their peers, 31% percent of the teachers indicated that they have not thought about that question prior, did not answer or stated that they no specific information for the question.

Presentation of Themes

The analysis of data was compiled and presented according to themes. A deep analysis of the data based on the perceptions of the college students and teachers revealed three themes. The themes were captured from data collected and analyzed according to three research questions. The findings will be reported according to each theme that emerged.

Theme 1: Student Social Connection

Both students and teachers indicated that students real-life or real-world experiences were one of the main challenges that all students have while transitioning into college. Socially, the students discussed the problems that they had making strong social connections with their peers. Students commented that they did not feel that they could approach their peers to build relationships when they first entered college. Teachers indicated that students seemed to be lacking the ability to communicate effectively to the

teachers but also with each other. Teachers indicated that students needed more exposure to diversity and social interactions to be able to communicate effectively.

As students transition from secondary schools they are coming from very different settings. Rural students in particular do not have the same level of access to social interactions that their peers tend to have. Students from other areas have an easier time interacting outside of the school building as geographically those areas lend themselves to less barriers. Rural students, until they can drive, primarily rely on their parents to transport them to places where they would interact socially. Students in other areas have access to other transportation means such as a short walk or public transportation.

Some teachers also indicated that students need to be focused on not just themselves but others. This trend also supports the theme of social connection. If students are just focused on themselves, they tend to engage less with others. Communication skill have become more global as has the economy. Job opportunities are not as local as they use to be as people now need to communicate on a larger scale. Rural students are not used to this experience. They typically interact with their own local community and possibly a neighboring community.

Theme 2: Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

The teachers indicated that they feel that students need stronger problem solving and critical thinking skills. Although the teachers generalized this statement to all students, this can be assumed that rural students are in the same situation. Teachers indicated that students were hesitant to think independently. They stated that students

come to college thinking that teachers will deliver content and they will just need to memorize information. Overall, college teachers wanted their students to be able to better understand information, be able to solve problems, and defend arguments with support of real data and not opinions. The students indicated that they were not ready for the higher expectations of the college teacher with regards to being independent. They indicated that in secondary schools the teachers tended to "hold their hand" and keep on top of them for submitting their work. This can be compared to the teacher's perception of students not ready to be able to think on their own and problem solve. If teachers in secondary education do not allow for students to be independent in their learning, they do not learn how to be independent thinkers which lead to the lack of problem solving and critical thinking skills.

Theme 3: Basic Literacy Skills

Both students and teachers indicated that students need to have a stronger command of reading and writing skills upon college entry. Teachers provided more depth to this theme, as they stated that students are not ready to write while applying knowledge and purpose. Also, teachers indicated that students do not have the proper stamina for writing at the college level. Teachers stated that regardless of the content area, students needed to be better prepared to read and write, at a higher level than expected at the secondary level, with purpose and independence. Most of these comments were also generalized to all students and not just the rural students. The students indicated that one of the most important factors that helped to prepare them for college was higher level learning opportunities that they took in secondary school. The students stated that the

rigor of the college courses opened their eyes to what they would be expected to do in college.

With regards to rural students, most of them indicated that they did not have as much access or exposure to higher level courses than some of their peers did in secondary school. This is often the case in secondary schools as access to these courses can be challenging due to budgetary constraints.

In summary, the participants in both groups brought unique experiences and perceptions to share. Some of the response were almost the same; however, the teachers had more depth to their thoughts. The students seemed to understand their challenges but had a difficult time relaying why. The teachers were able to provide more detail and insight regarding the challenges.

For this study, I analyzed the data provided to me in the form of a survey which included two participant groups. Three research questions guided the study and three major themes emerged from the data. The study was looking at specifically rural students' preparedness for college; however, most of the findings can be generalized to college students at a broader level. The challenges seem to be consistent regardless of the type of secondary school they attended. The data does support the fact that rural students tend to have less exposure to higher education courses and social opportunities while in secondary school, which supports the premises that rural students have a disadvantage compared to some of their peers in regards to college readiness.

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases are the surveys responses that revealed information providing a perspective contrary to the majority of information gathered. To avoid adhering to initial conclusions, I factored the discrepant cases into the overall analysis of data throughout the process of data analysis. Data collection included survey results, researcher notes and researcher reflection. Using these two forms of data collection coupled with member checking helped to create triangulation. All the data collected fell within similar parameters. This triangulation enhances the study's credibility through the recurrent appearance of similar themes (Creswell, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), triangulation confirms the data being presented from individuals describes a theme in qualitative research. There was only one discrepant case found in the responses collected from the participants. The only discrepant case occurred as a result of one participant's role within the institution. Participant T8 at the time of the study was a college teacher. Resulting from this experience T8 felt that the students were generally well prepared for college readiness. T8 stated that "I do not feel that the students that I teach are underprepared for college upon their entry". This was not the typical response from the participants of the group.

Project Deliverable

In Section 3, I will describe a project which is developed from the findings of the research and the review of literature in relation to professional development for a secondary school focusing on the implementation of a college readiness program system wide. There are many published articles on the effects of professional development on

teacher performance and student achievement. Researchers suggest professional development as a primary way to impact change within the classroom and identify improvements in performance (Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2019). Ensuring that professional development addresses teachers' needs is one way of ensuring the effectiveness of the professional development being presented (Covay, Desimone, Lee, & Hochberg, 2016). For these reasons, I have decided that a 3-day professional development would be effective in addressing the challenges found in the implementation of a system wide college readiness program. The three-day professional development will be developed to meet the needs for teachers and administrators so that they have a clear opportunity to understand the research behind college readiness as well as the program and also have the proper supports provided for the implementation of the program. The same professional development will be provided to all staff I the future. Section 3 will detail the 3-day professional development and literature review focused on addressing the data findings.

Summary

Section 2 of this project study showed the methodology, research design, and approach, while presenting the manner of selecting its participants. The method for gaining access and ethical protection were equally discussed, while data collection and analysis methods were outlined, along with identifying my role as the researcher.

The results of this research study can be used to reevaluate educational programs in secondary rural schools, such as to better prepare students who are interested in attending college. By understanding the perception of college students and college

teachers, secondary college readiness programs may be improved or developed to better meet the needs of these students. In this light, Section 3 discusses the method for disseminating the findings of this study. A case study research design was used for this qualitative study because it was important to ascertain the information from a descriptive account "what happens" to research that can be worthwhile in considering next steps (Rowley, 2002). After the data were analyzed, the implementation of a systemic, school-wide program; namely AVID, will be implemented and an ongoing training program was recommended to address the college readiness needs of students which will be developed in section 3.

Within Section 3 of this project study, I will address the need for a systemic, school-wide program with focused professional development that will support a successful implementation of the AVID program. I will also discuss the description and goals, rationale, review of literature, implementation, project evaluation, and implications to social change.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

College readiness is a major focus among secondary education institutions and higher education institutions. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the level of college readiness of college students who graduated from a rural secondary school. The study focused on a 4-year higher education institution in upstate New York.

The original plan for gathering data was to conduct interviews with both students and teachers. Due to the executive order implemented by the governor of New York, I was required to practice social distancing and change my process for data collection. The information was gathered using surveys. The student surveys were sent out by department chairs to students enrolled in their department. This was facilitated by a research professor in the psychology department of the institution. Teacher surveys were sent directly by me. Two to three teachers from each department and the department chairs were selected for this sample. These surveys were identical to the interview protocol questions except for additional demographic questions. Although, I was forced to change my model, I believe that the use of surveys allowed me to capture similar data than I would have conducting interviews.

Surveys allow for a researcher to gain rich, in-depth information from participants. According to Creswell (2013), survey designs can be used in qualitative research in which a researcher administers a survey or questionnaire to a small group of people to identify trends in attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of a large group pf people. The participant pool consisted of second- and third-year college students

who graduated from a rural secondary school and college teachers who teach first-year college students. Although the sample size was limited, the results of this study provided a solid foundation for the assessment of college readiness among students who graduated from a rural secondary school.

In further research, I was able to identify a program designed to build educators' skills to close the opportunity gap, so they can prepare all students for college, careers, and life. One of the programs that I researched was the AVID program created by a nonprofit organization that helps schools shift to a more equitable, student-centered approach to education.

The project that developed from this study is a series of professional development trainings that include a curriculum and materials for rural secondary educators including teachers and administrators. The first goal of the project was to provide a recommendation for secondary schools to implement a systemic program to address the need for better preparation for students for college readiness. The second goal was to create a professional development plan to assist in the implementation of this program. The research indicated that implementation of a program in rural schools rooted in specific core beliefs will assist students in being better prepared for higher education than other traditional programs. The AVID program was the suggested program for implementation. According to Magee (2015), AVID focuses on students who possess the capacity to complete college-preparatory coursework with the proper academic and emotional support. Equity in education is AVID's fundamental principle (Magee, 2015). I will further describe the goals, rationale, and review of the literature, implementation,

project evaluation, and implications including social change. The completed, doctoral-level product can be found in Appendix A.

I found that the AVID program can be effective for those who are properly trained and consistently implement the program. Difficulties exist when programs are not consistently implemented and do not follow a school-wide systematic approach. Leadership plays an important role in the success of a systemic program. A strong leader will set the tone, provide professional development opportunities, and hold staff members accountable for implementation.

The AVID program was developed in 1980 to meet students' academic and emotional needs. The mission of the AVID program (2015) is to close the achievement gaps and prepare all students for success in college or university and in global society. AVID classrooms promote student-centered learning, student-centered decision making, teachers as students' advocates and advisors, and emphasis on data and trained teachers providing supports for the students.

Rationale

Findings of this study highlighted that students who graduated from a rural secondary school show signs that they are often less prepared for college readiness compared to their peers; however, the findings also indicate that all students are underprepared for college. The recommendation from this study is to implement a systemic program namely, AVID throughout the rural institution. Such implementation would require a strong professional development program to be conducted for the faculty and staff of the institution.

The goal of this project was to help incorporate the AVID program into the rural school as part of their curriculum and expectations. This program would be school-wide or systemic throughout the institution. The professional development program would provide the foundation of the AVID program to equip teachers and administrators with a strong operational skill set to effectively implement AVID to improve students' level of college readiness both academically and socially. The school leader must create the foundation to lead all stakeholders in appropriate training and support school-wide effective and consistently implementation of the AVID program.

Review of the Literature

A scholarly review of the literature was conducted on the importance of ongoing professional development and its impact on teachers' effectiveness in their profession. According to Flynn et al. (2016), ongoing professional development keeps teachers up to date on new research, practices, and resources and provides opportunities for reliability in using tools and strategies. Professional development is not designed to be a one-time training; it should be ongoing. Rebora (2011) suggested that it is important that training is not a onetime event. Ongoing training throughout the use of the program or throughout a professional's career is more productive.

For this project, I used two major sources to research the literature relevant to this study: Walden University Library and Google Scholar. Using the Walden University Library led me to searches in ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and SAGE Premier. The key search terms included *professional development, leadership,* and *Advancement Via Individual*

Determination (AVID). The literature selection was on current peer-reviewed literature published within the last 5 years.

Professional Development

This project resulted in the recommendation for secondary schools to implement a system-wide program to support college readiness among students in secondary school. For implementation of a system-wide program to be effective, professional development focused on the initiative needs to be present. According to Flynn et al. (2016), "Professional development opportunities in school are designed for the intended purpose of providing opportunities for educators to gain knowledge and skills to enhance their professional growth" (pg. 32). Focused professional development programs allow educators to transfer their knowledge and skills into better professional and instructional practices.

According to the National Education Association (2015), professional development can range from a smorgasbord model to a systematic approach. The smorgasbord model allows for participants to attend workshops and conferences delivered in short periods of time that are not sequential. This model lends itself to short-term information that does not require further follow up. The systematic approach tends to be more focused, purposeful, and organized and builds on the participants' previous experiences. A systematic approach allows for the participants to understand the initiative at a much deeper and richer level. The professional development in this project was designed to meet the participants at each step along the implementation process and

support them as they are doing the work. Essentially, they are learning the work as they are doing the work.

Continuous professional development is critical for teachers as well as the school system. As education evolves, shifts in educational practices need to align with the ever-changing way that students learn as well as the changes in what they need to learn. Killion (2012), identified that well informed teachers are the most important school related factor in student achievement. There is also an overabundance of research that has been presented that provides data that has discredited the effectiveness of professional development that is presented as a onetime initiative presented with no follow up or plan for implementation in the classroom (Scarparolo & Hammond, 2018). Often teachers who receive professional development have a tendency not to provide the professional development content in the classroom after their return. Some teachers may resent having to participate in non-degree-related professional development. The purpose of professional development as described by Bates and Morgan is to "positively influence teacher knowledge and practice and, in turn, student learning" (Bates & Morgan, 2018, p. 623).

Harfitt and Tsui (2015) found that teachers who participate in professional development programs remain in the profession longer. Sustainability of professional development is important. Skill development is not a onetime occurrence. Teachers need the opportunity to revisit their skill sets and adjust them when necessary for continuous improvement. Long-term programs have proven to be instrumental in showing substantial success (Esser et al., 2016). Teacher induction programs that include mentorship of new

teachers increase the rate of teacher retention (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Avalos and Valenzuela (2016) conducted a study to ascertain the relationship between teacher accountability and burnout. The study highlighted several situations in which teachers experience burnout due to not meeting expectations. These experiences often lead to teachers leaving low-performing schools. Gaikhorst et al. (2017) claimed that professional development contributes greatly to high self-efficacy, which leads to teacher retention. Guili and Zeller (2016) claimed that teacher preparation, teacher education, and the quality of both may be determining factors when teachers are making the decision of whether to continue to teach. Teacher turnover has posed a challenge to those charged with staffing public schools (Papay et al., 2017).

Coldwell (2017) stated that professional development can influence student academic success and have a positive impact on teacher retention. Wells (2018) claimed that high- quality programs and retention rates are related; therefore, high teacher turnover leads to low-quality education for students. Kelchtermans (2017) stated that qualified teachers who made the decision to leave the profession felt that there might not be a good fit between themselves, their professional goals, and their ambitions and the goals of the school.

According to Hawken et al. (2015), professional development should be ongoing because of the continuous communication aspect. Ongoing professional development allows for frequent engagement where educators can exchange ideas and practices. In a study conducted in 2015, communication was an integral component of professional development (Wenghofer et al., 2015). Further, for a system wide program to be effective

the leadership needs to not only understand and support the implementation by leading the implementation, but also need to be able to effectively communicate and transfer of information, which will result in the success of the program implementation.

Leadership

Leaders who support the professional development in their schools show a much stronger outcome for implementation. Dolan and Donnell-Kay (2013), felt that school leaders are more effective when they receive continuous professional development. A continual review of the literature revealed that a principal who leads is critical in the development and upkeep of school effectiveness (Wright & da Costa, 2016). O'Sullivan et al. (2016) believe that when professional development is supported by the principal, teachers tend to be more engaged. As school leaders, the responsibility of the principals is to develop teachers' instructional abilities through continuous learning (Zepeda & Lanoue, 2017). Strong leaders tend to have schools that are well organized and focused on improving instructional strategies of teachers that lead to enhanced student achievement (David et al., 2016). The success of a school is based on the leadership ability of the principal to focus and communicate the actions needed to enhance school outcomes and student achievement. The leader of successful schools needs to be able to determine the effectiveness of academic programs and provide the supports need to achieve positive results.

As the concern over students' performance continues to grow, teachers focus on their own capacity to prepare students for the meeting the challenges. The University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning staff (2016) discussed the importance of how

specifically designed professional development based on needs is critical to needs driven professional development for teachers and hence for students. Yesilçinar and Çakir (2018) discussed professional development efforts that provided minimal benefit to the teachers because the sessions were designed based on generic topics and not teacher input. Hordern (2016) explained that teaching is a specialized practice that must be supported by all stakeholders. The teacher should be an integral part of the professional development process as it is important to the constitution of professional knowledge (Holmstrom et al., 2016). It is therefore imperative that the teacher perspectives are considered in establishing what practices will be implemented in schools and at district and campus level professional development (Holmstrom et al., 2015).

In providing professional development, teachers who participate are better prepared to advance in their craft of teaching. Althauser (2015) conducted a study about teacher efficacy and student outcomes and found that job-embedded professional development could provide what teachers need to improve student achievement. Althauser (2015) reiterated the importance of collegial support in helping teachers transform instructional practices. Providing professional development on specific research-based literacy practices and allowing teachers the time to collaborate could influence classroom instructional practices and ultimately affect student progress.

Several models of continuous professional development exist. Many modes are designed to motivate participants to become more engaged in the learning that promotes or stimulates growth (Holbrook & Rannikmäe, 2014). Effective professional development formats have specific steps that are followed during the implementation

process. Professional learning Communities (PLC) and coaching are two models that are used effectively. Learning walks is a strategy that can be incorporated with the PLC and coaching. Teachers often become stagnant as far as practices they incorporate within the classroom.

A study conducted by Havice et al. (2018) reported that professional development can help to promote teacher skills through networking and enhancement of self-efficacy. Havice et al. (2018) explained networking as an opportunity for the teachers to collaborate about their practices. Allowing teachers to observe other teachers through coaching and learning walks can provide the participants exposure to different approaches in teaching.

Professional Learning Communities

Another professional development format that is effective in supporting the development of teacher knowledge and skills is the use of PLCs. Through PLCs teachers collaborate with other teachers in their own school and share ideas and practices with their peers. Stahl (2015) explained that PLCs promote change and are widely used because they often do not require additional resources, can be conducted within the school day and allow for small groups of teachers to work together. Ohlson and Donis-Keller (2017) reported that teachers enjoyed engaging in discourse with their peers about their school data. Additionally, teachers reported their experience in the PLCs to have a positive impact on their classroom practices (Ohlson & Donis-Keller, 2017). This level of collaboration regarding practices implemented in the classroom helps to provide opportunities for teachers to learn from each other.

Coaching

Another approach that can be used to present professional development that is often used in education is the use of coaching. Coaching has proven successful in supporting teachers and improving students' success levels. Coaching cycles have been described as an in-service professional development program where coaches or peers observe each other during instruction and provide feedback to foster individuals' improvement (Kraft et al., 2018). During observations coaches will provide feedback, allowing for teachers to develop their craft of teaching and develop their content knowledge on specific skills or strategies that were observed. Ernest and Strichik (2018) explained that coaches should serve as support for the teachers and administrators. Through coaching cycles, the teachers build their capacity by using their own assets to enhance existing abilities and develop new skills (Czajka & McConnell, 2016; Ernest & Strichik, 2018). Coaching provides a level of support and mentoring for participants. Using coaching when implementing new practices, can make the process more manageable.

Learning Walks

A learning walk is an opportunity for teachers to visit and observe different classroom practices being implemented in different classrooms. Houck and Novak (2017) explained the benefits of teachers having an opportunity to observe other teachers in practice. A learning walk is nonjudgmental and geared at collecting data about specific teaching practices (Houck & Novak, 2017). Ginsberg et al. (2018) also promoted the use of learning walks coupled with lesson studies to enhance students' academic success. In

their research, Ginsberg et al. (2018) explained how they used learning walks to collect data that were later used during collaboration among teachers. Data were collected and analyzed and further utilized to determine what was working and what the possible next steps for the school personnel would be. Teachers reported that their expertise was developed through collaboration about the learning walks. It is imperative that teachers have an opportunity to collaborate with other teachers in multiple settings.

Professional development should occur long-term to provide teachers the opportunity to change their processes. Professional development should affect the teachers' knowledge and also have a long-term effect on teacher confidence and ability to teach (Naizer et al., 2017). Lambrechts et al. (2017) suggested that professional development initiatives should be framed as an organizational change system that empowers. If professional development does not empower, initiatives will have no significance and result in lack of connectivity to the big picture. Alexandre (2016) supported that the theoretical and practical understanding of teachers derived from experience, training, and shapes the way that these teachers present the subject.

AVID

This section will provide an overview of the AVID program, describe AVID's essential elements and program components, and review research on the program. AVID is a college-readiness program that supports students to be successful the in their academic coursework needed to be prepared for college. The AVID program promotes school-wide instructional strategies, organizational tools, and a college-going school culture that supports students' socio-emotional and academic development. Focused on

building students' growth mindset, mastery goal orientation, and academic self-efficacy, AVID aims to prepare students for college (McAndrews, 2015).

The AVID program was built on Bandura's (1977a) Social Cognitive Theory and Carol Dweck's (2000) Growth Mindset theory. These theories are supported by Goal-Setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2006) and Achievement Goal theory (Harackiewicz et al., 2002). The study of growth mindset, self-efficacy, and goal orientation aim to explain what people do when faced with both challenge and failure. Utilizing the information from these theories helps us to better support students in the classroom setting.

The foundation for the AVID program was developed in the classroom of Mary Catherine Swanson, a high school English teacher who wanted to support her low-income students from diverse backgrounds with the skills needed to be successful in advanced coursework and be prepared to go on to higher education. Her Master's thesis in education (McAndrews, 2015) formed the foundational philosophy, practices, and curriculum for what is now called the AVID Elective (McAndrews, 2015). Currently, AVID is implemented in 4,837 K-12 schools and 41 higher education campuses in the United States and internationally. AVID's mission is to "close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society" (AVID Center, 2016). In 1996, the AVID Center was formed by Swanson "…to strengthen and support the worldwide AVID community" (McAndrews, 2013, p.3). The AVID Center ensures fidelity to implementation by requiring adherence to guidelines called "essentials" for schools to be certified as AVID program sites (McAndrews, 2013). McAndrews (2015) explains that the AVID program includes the following components:

- a non-traditional classroom setting meeting the academic and emotional needs of individual students
- the teacher as advisor/counselor/student advocate
- an emphasis on objective data
- the student at the center of decision-making regarding educational goals
- a student contract outlining willingness to work and setting learning goals
- student support from teachers and skilled, trained tutors
- a curriculum emphasizing academic reading and writing
- reliance on the Socratic process (McAndrews, 2015).

AVID is now considered a school-wide reform model. The AVID College Readiness System is composed of AVID Elementary for grades K-8, the AVID Elective for students grades 6-12, and AVID School-wide aimed at the implementation of AVID strategies used in classrooms school-wide to benefit the learning of all students (McAndrews, 2013). AVID Secondary is used to describe the program for grades 6- 12. There is also an AVID for Higher Education program used by colleges (McAndrews, 2013). As a system, AVID's goals include empowering:

- "students to graduate from college by helping them develop their academic strengths and social adaptability and helping them discover and grow their individual determination
- educators with instructional strategies and best teaching practices to provide rigorous, relevant, and differentiated academic opportunities for all students

- families to support and guide their learners through their educational journey by providing learning resources, process roadmaps, and strategies for academic and social success
- a feeder pattern (i.e., grouping of elementary and middle schools that feed to a singular high school in larger districts) to strengthen their accountability, articulations, assessment and calibration within vertical and horizontal teams." (McAndrews, 2013, p. 4)

AVID Secondary is examined as a comprehensive school reform model. Studies have discussed the impact of AVID on state achievement test scores and school accountability ratings. Research describes the related effects of school-wide implementation and common outcomes for high performing AVID high schools such as growth in AP programs and enrollment, graduation rates, and college enrollment (Watt et al., 2006). Qualitative research describes students' experience in the AVID elective and how those experiences impact college performance (Llamas et al., 2014; Parker et al., 2013). Finally, self-efficacy as an outcome of the AVID program is examined in relationship to student achievement scores (Peak, 2010).

Multiple research studies describe an "AVID effect" (Mehan, et al., 1996). Secondary schools which implement AVID elective cohorts see school-wide changes such as increased enrollment in AP courses (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2002) and increases in school state achievement test scores (Watt et al., 2004; Watt et al., 2006) as a result of increasing the academic performance of traditionally disadvantaged students and students of color enrolled in AVID.

Guthrie and Guthrie (2002) found that schools' college-going rates grew because non-AVID students also began to see college as a possibility for their future and they received information about college-related requirements and deadlines from their AVID peers. Principals of AVID schools recognize that the program can be used as a school-wide change model when AVID methodology and philosophy is adopted school-wide (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2002).

Guthrie and Guthrie (2002) completed a study of eight top performing California high schools that implemented AVID. The schools were selected by AVID regional directors based on the high performance of AVID students at those schools in terms of academic achievement, college acceptance, and attendance rates. The study was a "best practices" study designed to determine the key features that made the schools successful with the AVID program to inform potential changes in AVID program essentials or training provided by the AVID Center. One key finding was that the schools implemented AVID with the utmost fidelity to the 11 essentials required by the AVID Center as part of AVID program implementation at the secondary level (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2002). According to Guthrie and Guthrie (2002), there are 11 essentials of the successful implementation of the AVID program.

The first of the essentials is student selection which includes a focus on students "in the middle" with academic potential. These students are typically known as the underachievers who suffer with obstacles to achievement. The second essential is that you establish voluntary participation of staff, students, and parents. The AVID program suggests that there is a high correlation between success and those who voluntarily

commit. The third essential is the AVID Elective, which is a full year elective course, and includes a philosophical and financial support system necessary for success. The school must be committed to full implementation of the program which is viewed and promoted as a centerpiece for college preparation. The fourth essential is a policy that promotes enrolling students in a rigorous curriculum with the goal to attend a 4-year college. The students will prepare a long-term educational plan, work with counselors, be exposed to college and career expectations, practice in test-taking (PSAT, SAT, ACT), and receive direct instruction in practice with study skills including time management, assignment and grade recording, tutorial logs, and binder organization. The AVID Libraries provide a curriculum that features preparation in writing, academic reading, and math.

The fifth essential is the writing curriculum. Curriculum consists of students receiving instruction in writing-to-learn strategies, writing process, and timed writing. It includes Cornell note taking, learning logs, letter writing, and essays. The focus for writing is for review, study, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation which incorporates scaffolding reading instruction to help develop comprehension skills. This also provides connection to prior knowledge, understanding text structure, and using text-processing strategies in the writing process. The sixth essential is inquiry emphasis where students will develop and practice critical thinking skills, learn how to develop questions for their Cornell note taking and tutorial groups, receive questioning at a higher level, participate in Socratic dialogue and use inquiry as a tool for learning. The seventh essential is collaboration. Collaboration includes students working collaboratively, training in group etiquette, development of group process ground rules, and a purpose for working

together. Students will learn to quickly and efficiently organize themselves into working and/or tutorial groups, to interact effectively and respectfully, and to take responsibility for their own and for one another's success in learning. The eighth essential is the use of trained tutors who will facilitate student access to rigorous curriculum, use writing, inquiry, and collaboration to facilitate student growth as independent learners, and provide an important bridge between the experience of the students and the expectations of the coordinator.

The ninth essential is data collection and analysis. This includes a program implementation where student progress is monitored through AVID data systems, evidence of success and data that provide the mechanisms for continued improvement, and a basis for action planning. The tenth essential is a school or district committed to the resources. Staff will attend an AVID summer institute and be provided continued staff development focusing on the program. The eleventh essential is to establish an active interdisciplinary site team that supports a strong and effective AVID team with a leadership group that fosters the development of a school-wide learning community. The team will understand that collaboration is key to achieving the AVID mission. The AVID team will focus on achievement of all students. The site team should include the AVID coordinator/teacher (s), academic subject area lead teachers, an academic counselor, a site administrator, and a representative AVID student. This team will be tasked to develop and implement a site plan, document evidence to illustrate support for students' success, meet regularly to assess AVID students' needs, to assist the coordinator, and plan for

collaborative work with school professionals and routinely set site goals and to create a school culture that nurtures and supports the AVID mission.

For schools who use AVID strategies, all students that participate in the program utilize student binders, Cornell notes, and AVID-style tutorials. The AVID program also requires there to be raised expectations for all students with the goal of improving outcomes and a positive school culture while focusing on student learning and a college-going mindset.

Parker et al. (2013) conducted a focus group to study how participation in the AVID program affected students. Socio-emotional supports embedded in the curriculum as part of the AVID elective experience were reported by students as contributors to their success (Parker et al., 2013). Several themes emerged from focus groups conducted by Parker et al. (2013) regarding the AVID experience in high school: (a) supportive, family-like environment in the AVID elective, (b) students striving to improve their academic performance, and (c) organizational tools and study skills improving student academic achievement in preparedness for college. As a result of the supports, student attitudes toward education were positively affected. These indicators represent desired though not required outcomes of the AVID elective. Positive school supports that are socioemotional in nature are embedded in the AVID elective design and might explain positive outcomes associated with AVID such as high school graduation and college completion rates, particularly for minority students (Watt et al., 2011; Watt et al., 2006).

The longer a student is engaged in AVID, the more prepared they are for rigorous high school coursework and college readiness (Huerta et al., 2013). Huerta et al. (2013)

compared students who had only participated in AVID while in high school to students who were in AVID in both middle and high school. AVID graduates continued to utilize the skills they learned while in high school during college (Mendiola et al., 2010; Watt et al., 2011). Specifically, Mendiola et al., (2010) found that of 42 students studied, 54% of the students studied reported using Cornell Notes, 69% attended tutoring sessions regularly, 58% used collaborative group work in their studies, 69% used time management strategies learned, and 85% used components of an AVID binder to keep organized. These components are specifically taught as part of the AVID elective curriculum (AVID Center, 2016).

This section provided a review of the literature on AVID and program outcomes as seen at the secondary level. This section presented a review of studies conducted on growth mindset, goal orientation, and self-efficacy. Together, these studies touched on related aspects to the AVID Elementary program, where there is currently no research available with the aim of providing some research-based platform to examine the program.

Project Description

Schools use professional development opportunities to provide opportunities for educators to gain knowledge and skill to enhance their professional growth (Flynn et al., 2016). Professional development tends to be more effective when the organization takes a systematic approach to the professional development. A systemic approach tends to be more purposeful, organized and builds on previous experiences. This project is based on the need to have an ongoing professional development program that focuses on AVID

training for educators who work with secondary students. The study of college students who graduated from a rural secondary school and college instructors who teach these students in their first year of college was designed to address the needs of rural school students and how to better prepare them for college readiness. The AVID program was identified as a program that could be used to address these needs at the secondary school level. A systematic approach to professional development which focuses on AVID and imbeds this program into the organization is needed for the success of the program. Consistent implementation is the key a program's success which includes; administrative support, appropriate funding and continuous professional development for all staff.

For the implementation of the AVID program, a total of three days of professional development will be allocated for the staff. All three days of professional development will take place at the end of July in 2021. The full project is located in Appendix A.

The first of the three-day professional development sessions will focus on two specific areas: research and school-wide approach. The second session will focus on: long term planning, short term planning, and deliverables. The third session will focus on the following: alignment of AVID skills to elective and content courses, student expectations, lesson development, planning, evaluation which include reflection on essential questions/ concepts/ tasks, point of view and perspectives, and connection to standards.

All sessions will begin at 8:00 a.m. Each will begin with breakfast. During breakfast, teachers are encouraged to complete a reflection card with any questions, or recommendations to implement AVID more effectively and efficiently. The reflection

card will be placed in the AVID comment basket. The co-chairs, school leader, and lead teacher will guide the group in the opening activities. Jointly, they will provide an overview of the training, purpose, outcomes, and objectives. The participants will be selected initially based on interest and will be voluntary in nature. All school personnel will have initial entry level training; however, more focused trainings will be voluntary and highly focused. Each opening will be followed by whole group reflection using the cards that were completed during breakfast.

It is important to have administrative support for the development of the AVID trainings. The initial trainings are designed as a three-day summer institute. Ongoing training throughout the course of the school year will be developed throughout the three-day institute. The three days of training will take place at the end of July and be consecutive in nature.

Needed Resources and Existing Supports

The resources needed for this professional development will be in the form of materials and equipment. The material and equipment will be provided for each session and will be the same for each session. A laptop and Smartboard will be set-up and provided by the school. For each session, the participants will be asked to write comments on index cards to reflect on their implementation of the AVID program before the ongoing professional development. The index cards will be placed in the Reflection box. The note cards, chart paper, markers, and tape will be provided throughout the room for group activities.

The supports that will be needed will be in the form of professional support personnel. AVID professional in person support is necessary for the AVID program to be implemented. An AVID and a district staff developer will jointly lead the ongoing professional development training for AVID. The school principal and teacher leaders will serve as co-chairs for each session. Having an administrator and teacher joined will demonstrate a sense of unity. The district AVID trainer will work jointly with the school level team to conduct training. The AVID trainer at the district level is a non-partisan individual whose only agenda is to train the faculty and staff to implement the program effectively and efficiently will give a new start to the program and allow all to be equal. All certified teachers, administrators, and support staff will be required to attend the training. Financial support for professional development will be needed.

Potential Barriers and Potential Solutions to Barriers

Potential barriers for the implementation of the AVID program could impact on the district's ability to fund the professional development or the implementation and support for the AVID program itself. Schools continuously struggle with balancing the fiscally sound budget while at the same time providing additional, non-mandated programs such as the AVID program. In times of fiscal stress, schools are forced to identify those areas to be reduced. A potential solution to this barrier is to send one district level staff developer to a professional level AVID Institute with the expectation that he/she will bring the information back to the district and provide the needed professional development out to the team. This will help to reduce the overall cost of sending all faculty and staff to costly professional development.

Another potential barrier can be the buy in from the faculty and staff to properly implement the program schoolwide. The lack of consistency in use of language, quality instructional strategies, rigorous curriculum and a strong core value belief system could potentially cause a poor implementation which could result in the non-start of the program. A potential solution to this barrier is to focus on the results of other districts during the AVID training to foster buy-in. If the faculty and staff can see the results of this program in nearby districts, they will tend to be more willing to become more invested in the learning process. Focused professional learning communities in the area of AVID will help to foster faculty and staff buy-in.

Implementation and Timetable

To describe how all the necessary steps will be organized, I created a timeline (Table 3). The steps include offering the gathering of resources, securing times to present the report, and delivering the information to stakeholders.

Table 3

Timetable

Timetable	Tasks
First week of July 2021	Gather resources for the program formative evaluation
Second week of July 2021	Administer formative evaluation to stakeholder group
Third week of July 2021	Establish a framework for presenting information to stakeholders
Fourth week of July 2021	Administer summative assessment during professional development sessions
First week of August 2021	Present findings to all stakeholder groups

The participants respond to the interview questions (Appendix A) by providing information on how they assessed the effects of the professional development on the teachers.

Roles and Responsibilities

My role was to first develop the professional development plan to implement the AVID program into a school district. Also, part of my role was to develop a formative and summative evaluation for this project. The professional development, formative evaluation and summative evaluation are found in Appendix A. Following the professional development, I will submit a written report to the school districts leadership which will include the results of both the summative and formative evaluation as well as a description and well as my reflective note that will be taken throughout the course of the professional development trainings. Following from the UTE guidelines for active engagement of the intended users (Patton, 2008), I will invite the district administrators, and all other stakeholder groups to ask questions, discuss the report, and actively engage in the process of understanding the evaluation toward implementation.

Project Evaluation Plan

The professional development project was designed to assist educators with a smooth transition for implementation of the AVID program in their school district. There are three primary stakeholder groups that could provide meaningful evaluation of the project: (a) district leaders, (b) building leaders, and (c) teachers. The district leaders are district level administration such as directors of curriculum and the superintendent of the school. Building level administrators are elementary, middle and high school principals.

Teachers are the individuals who will be engaged in delivering the instruction associated with the AVID program. I will conduct a formative program evaluation to determine the district leaders', building leaders', and teachers' perceptions of factors regarding the effectiveness of professional development designed to increase students' college readiness. The formative program evaluation design allows all stakeholders to better comprehend the strong and weak aspects of the program and the district leaders to implement the evaluation recommendations (Brady & Spencer, 2018). The evaluation is designed to ensure that the training meets the specific needs of the audience. I will use a qualitative approach to collect data from district administrators, building administrators, and teacher participants by conducting interviews. A formative program evaluation takes place during the implementation of a project and targets methods of improvement. I will use the formative evaluation method because findings are needed for the duration of the program toward improvement. The overall goals of the project evaluation are:

To determine if the designed professional development is on target to provide an understanding of college readiness with the instructional staff.

To determine if the designed professional development is on target to provide a smooth implementation of the AVID program on a district wide level.

This formative program evaluation will take place by identifying a small group of stakeholders from all three groups prior to the administration of the professional development. These individuals will have all materials that will be intended to be used in the professional development session and will be asked to review the materials and provide feedback.

It is important that the trainings are designed to meet the needs and objectives of the participants for AVID to be implemented effectively. Summative evaluations are used toward the end of a program and provide information as to whether the program was successful or unsuccessful (Cook, 2010). For this project, I will also use summative assessments to ensure that the professional development was effective. For this summative assessment, I will also use an evaluation form. This evaluation will help the faculty and staff members understand the needs for further training. The evaluation will use a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree. These evaluations are included in the project (Appendix A). The evaluations addressed topics such as were the activities during the training beneficial for helping on how to implement the AVID program; and if the activities helped to understand the role of the participant. These evaluations will also address the need for a systemic or school wide approach which includes consistency throughout the organization. At the conclusion of each session, evaluations for the session will be disseminated to all of the participants. The participants will then have an opportunity to complete the evaluation. Basic questions will be provided; however, participants will have the ability to expand on their needs moving forward. The information gathered will be used to drive further professional development opportunities. The participants will be given the opportunity to provide any suggestions that they feel could benefit the group in future professional development opportunities.

This professional development was designed to build the capacity of all staff and administrators working within the organization that is implementing AVID. Creating a

culture of focused, systemic and ongoing professional development will help to effectively develop experts in the organization which could be utilized as a support system in future professional development trainings.

Project Implications

This study looks at the needs for a focused, systemic approach to professional development during implementation of the AVID program into a rural secondary school district to support the college readiness needs of the students prior to their admittance into college.

The AVID program is a school-wide program that has the potential to support students in gaining stronger college readiness skills prior to college entry. This study identified that students who graduated from a rural school district may be at a greater disadvantage in comparison to their peers both socially and academically. The implementation of the AVID program should have a positive impact on an organization and its students when implemented correctly, providing the students with the skills needed to be college ready. This study identified that for a smooth implementation a consistent, continuous, focused and systemic professional development plan for AVID is needed. The training is designed for administration, teachers, and support staff to successfully implement the AVID program. With the system in place, there are implications for social change regarding good quality instruction and experiences which will result in better prepared college candidates. The social change could include students to be better prepared to be effective members of their community and society.

A long-term benefit of this study could include a change in the organization which would result in a more cohesive program for all students geared toward providing the students the necessary skills to be successful upon college entry. In section 3, I presented a description of the AVID program, which provides trainings for administrators, teachers and support staff. The ongoing professional development will provide support for the participants on how to effectively implement the AVID program school-wide. This section provides a detailed description of the project that was determined based on the findings of the case study research. A review of literature associated with AVID and professional development was conducted. Also, the project implementation, evaluation, and implications were discussed. In Section 4, I will present my reflections recommendations for alternative approaches, project development, importance of this work, implications, applications, and options for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the level of college readiness of rural school graduates. As a leader in secondary education focusing my career on rural education, it is important for me to investigate this area and determine what we can do to better prepare students for college. With my work experience, I believe that I am able to align my career experience and professional goals with the research that would impact rural secondary education. The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of students who graduated from a rural school district regarding preparation for college, both academically and socially?

RQ2: What do rural high school graduates who entered college wish they had learned during their high school experience such as to better prepare them for their college education, both academically and socially?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of college teachers in regard to rural students' college preparation, both academically and socially?

Project Strengths and Limitations

All research projects will have strengths and limitations. The focus in this project was on conducting reliable research within a short period of time to provide insight into the level of college readiness among students who graduated from a rural school. The research shows that the implementation of a college readiness program—namely, AVID in this case—can provide a structure of supports that would help to better prepare these students for college readiness prior to entering college. The strength of this project was based on the findings from the comparison of two participant groups. The data revealed

three themes on the issue of college readiness: (a) Theme 1: Student social connection, (b) Theme 2: Critical thinking and problem solving, and (c) Theme 3: Basic literacy skills.

The deliverable from this research study was to identify a college readiness program that would support rural secondary students prior to college and develop a series of professional development opportunities for program implementation in a rural secondary school. The professional development series is an asset is focused on professional development that is progressive and designed to support teachers and administrators throughout the implementation of the program. Additionally, a strength of this project is that the professional development program can be used as a framework for other schools wishing to implement the AVID program. Other schools can use the findings of this research to identify the need for a systemic program and as a guideline for focused professional development to assist in a smooth implementation model.

Despite the many strengths of this project, there are a few areas of limitations. The project includes the implementation of the AVID program as a college readiness platform for secondary schools. The first limitation is financial in nature. The implementation of the AVID program can be cost prohibitive. Implementation requires hiring external trainers to provide the supports for the initial implementation. Additional funding will be needed in the future as the program develops.

An additional limitation could exist with staffing. The professional development director or leadership may not be willing to focus on improving district provided professional development with a focus on college readiness. Furthermore, the local

district may not be in favor of the additional time necessary to provide the professional development program. Opperman et al. (2018) explained that often larger companies conduct a cost analysis regarding the effect of a designed professional development scenario and rule it out before any attempt based on the cost analysis. Teachers may also resist the initial change in professional development as they will be asked to volunteer to prepare and present learning experiences for the rest of the district around college readiness. Lack of support at the district leadership level may prolong the implementation process.

Limited resources may also be a challenge for implementing the AVID program. To implement this program, money will need to be allocated to funding non-district-provided professional development. The potential of limited financial resources may alter the scheduling for professional development sessions at the school under study. Additional limitations may include time and personnel to accomplish choice-based professional development planning and to accomplish this objective.

To address potential limitations of this project, district and building leadership will be essential in establishing a positive climate for change at the school. To create a positive climate for change, they will need to commit to investing the time, human resources, and financial resources to implement the policy to fidelity. The district leadership team will also need to develop a vision and mission for implementing the new policy and articulate them clearly and frequently to the professional development director and building leadership team.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The project developed as a result of this study included a focused professional development plan that can be used over time with teachers in a rural school to support a consistent approach to college readiness through the use of the AVID program. The implementation of this program could be cost prohibitive for some small rural schools; therefore, an institution may choose to select an alternative approach to implementing a college readiness program. The overall problem is that students are not college ready after graduating from secondary school. In addition to the AVID program are several alternative options. First, there are other programs similar to the AVID program that may cost less to implement. One of these programs might be substituted in place of the AVID program. Also, a secondary school could choose to develop their own set of standards and protocols exclusive of an external program to address the college readiness needs of their students. Third, students in a secondary school could be dual enrolled in their junior year in secondary school and a community college. This would help to address the level of college readiness through exposure to rigor and curriculum.

I studied the problem by surveying a small population of students and a small population of teachers. Further studies could review trend data for students' success in college after their first 2 years. The data could focus on remedial classes needed as support and data on dropout rates or changes of major. Studies could also target a broader population of teachers and students.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Throughout my educational career, I have primarily worked in a rural school setting. Over time, I have noticed that a significant amount of students had suggested they felt their secondary school experience did not completely prepare them for higher education socially or academically. This was the inspiration for this research project. As I conducted this project-based case study, I grew as a scholar, professional, and leader in education. This study provided me with the opportunity to perform at a significantly higher academic level. This opportunity has afforded me the ability to understand the level of skills and information needed to lead change in an organization. Supporting students' needs—specifically, those of students in the rural setting—has become a passion of mine and the focal point of my educational career.

Scholarship

This project has provided me with a new set of skills that help me to be more evidence-based in making educational decisions. Prior to this research, I often made decisions based on what others told me or how they felt about a particular topic. After concluding this work, my decision-making practice is more focused on using data and evidence to make decisions. I am now able to support the decisions I make with supporting evidence and documentation. This work has highlighted the need for me to make decisions based on research to further impact my practice. I have implemented this approach into my daily practice of decision making. This research has enabled me to understand the importance of conducting research and using these skills to make well-informed decisions supported by research and data. Using data to support decisions has

also become a stronger skill set of mine based on the practice of this study. Collecting data for this research required me to understand multiple data collection and analysis processes. Throughout this research, I developed the skills necessary to create a research-based program, evaluate programs, and use data to make informed decisions to create change.

Project Development and Evaluation

As a scholar-practitioner, I was able to develop a project and design a formative evaluation instrument that I believe is solid. Developing a research-based project coupled with appropriate evaluation was a learning experience that I will always appreciate. Taking the time to devise a project that would be meaningful and doable was something I took seriously.

As I synthesized the data in the final step of the data analysis process, I was able to identify and develop a project that is worthy of strong consideration for implementation in any secondary school. What was obvious to me as I read and reread the findings was the need for a systemic program that would focus on college readiness. For this program to be successful the implementation process would need a solid ongoing and continuous professional development that would keep participants engaged in the process. Ongoing training ensures that the research-based AVID program will have the intended results. Ongoing professional development would ensure that teachers would maintain and enhance the skills necessary to implement a program that is embedded in the school's culture. Further, teachers are more prone to implement and continue their interest in programs that allow them to focus more on the academic.

Equally as important as developing the professional development is ensuring that the evaluation tool addresses the intended outcomes of the training. Several evaluation tools were examined before finalizing the evaluation used for this project. The goal was to create an evaluation that assured that the objectives were met. It will be important to conduct the evaluation when the professional development is ongoing. The training will be evaluated at the end of each session. The evaluations will allow me to assess the AVID program implementation in conjunction with the training. The formative evaluation will be performed to identify problems with implementations as well as to address the needs of the teachers implementing the program. This process will confirm the quality and integrity of the program implementation, as well as identify further training needs.

Leadership and Change

Over the past 20 years, professionally I have served in significant leadership roles. I have had the opportunity to observe and learn about leadership and how to identify leaders who can effect change. This project study provided me with the opportunity to step outside my leadership roles in which I am accustomed to and think about how to navigate new areas of leadership that may have been uncomfortable to me. I was able to conduct research that I felt was meaningful and that identified real world problems at a local level. I was able to work with other educators to discuss their perceptions of college readiness and what they believe would be areas that could be improved in secondary education. This work expanded beyond secondary education and identified the need for a change in the overall system. The learning in this process was for me to be able to use

data to inform and implement a decision but also understand that some leaders are not as comfortable with driving changes as others. I have been able to apply this in my current role where I manage a team of higher-level leaders in a secondary school. Based on my experience with this project, I have learned that leadership requires the leader to understand the strengths, weaknesses, and insecurities that we all face and be able to provide the support, encouragement, and resources for others to be successful. In regards to change, I have learned that a leader needs to understand the direction and be able to provide clear expectations for change. Change can only occur when others are on board and moving in the same direction with the leadership. Clear direction, expectation, follow-up, feedback, and supports are required for the change to occur.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

As I reflect on this work, what I reflect on the most is the need to continue researching best practices in secondary education that could be implemented to help close the gap between students graduating from secondary schools and their readiness for college. This theme in not only important in rural education but throughout the entire system. Research needs to be done to understand why the gap exists and what can be done to better prepare students at younger age. Perhaps, the issue lies with the system itself which could also identify a need for higher education and secondary education to better align their curriculum and practices.

Personally, I have grown academically since beginning this program. As a scholar, I have challenged myself as a writer, critical thinker, and organizer through the readings, critiques and comments, many re-writes, and deadline obligations. I have also

gained much respect for the doctoral process and the amount of hard work, patience, and flexibility one must endure to be successful. Additionally, I learned to balance my life: family, and career in efforts of completing this degree.

My hope is that this research will assist others in understanding the need to investigate fundamental issues in equity of educational systems across the board. I believe that there is a need to better allocate resources to areas in need that could level the playing field for students. Education should not be accessible to students with advantages but it should be accessible to all students.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The overall findings of research studies lead to implications, applications, and the need for additional or further research. The result of the research showed a need for implementation of a systemic program, in rural schools, that would focus on college readiness for all students. Different programs could be used to obtain similar results if the program is done with determination, consistency, resources, support, and proper implementation. The project was a development of a series of professional development trainings that would support the implementation, understanding and identify the need for such a program.

Based on my research, I selected the AVID program as the program and designed the professional development around the program. The findings of this study could have a negative implication for the school if the professional development does not continue and remain a focus while the program is in existence. Positive results have been seen with the

implementation of the AVID program where clear, consistent expectations have been established and the initiative has been supported by administration and leadership teams.

Ongoing and focused professional development has been the key to the success of the program. It will also be important to examine how the recommended project will impact the success of the school in preparing students to be college ready prior to entry into their first year of college. Finally, reviewing the findings will assist me in the process of identifying and recommending future research as it relates to social change. Social change in this situation could involve a greater focus on student's skills needed to be considered to be college ready while students are still in their secondary education programs. Secondary education could see a shift in policy which the expectations for secondary education to better align with college expectations.

As I examined the impact of this project on social change, two things are necessary for change. First, the relationship between secondary schools and higher education needs further development. This relationship could assist secondary schools to better understand and meet the needs of their students who intend on attending college. This relationship would assist secondary educators to understand what higher education organizations are looking at as far as the skills needed to be successful. This relationship would also assist higher education institutions to understand that state and federally mandates that are in place that need to be followed. The mandates are the guidance for secondary educational programs and may or may not be in alignment with higher education practice and standards.

Secondly, secondary schools need to shift to focusing student programming that will better align with higher education practice and protocol.

Conclusion

This doctoral study was derived from research motivated by my personal career goals and experiences. The overall goal of the research was to identify students' experiences in rural secondary education settings that either did or did not prepare these students for college. Rural secondary schools, in comparison to other types of secondary schools, tend to struggle with funding that are aimed to support students as they transition to higher education. A lack of funding can result in high teacher turnover which contributes to a lack of consistency in student programming. Rural communities also struggle with teacher retention due to access and geographic location. Travel to and from work can become a deterrent for educators to stay in a position for a longer period. These turnover highlights the need for a systemic approach to college readiness specifically in the rural setting. The systemic approach needs to be implemented as a school-wide program, which would require all faculty and staff to be trained in the implementation of this program. Findings from this qualitative case study can be used to address how a school can implement the AVID program and the impact it may have on students to become better prepared for college. For the success of the implementation of a systemic, school-wide program, all faculty and staff need to actively engage in the professional development in relation to the implementation. School leaders need to have strong planning and communication skills that include clear expectations and accountability measure for the implementation to be successful.

The project created from data collected was the implementation of the AVID program and the professional development needed to successfully implement and sustain the program. Despite the small number of research participants, the data collected will be valuable in the aspect of taking a definitive look at the results and starting conversations around college readiness and best practices with institutional leaders. Referenced in section 4, limitations of the project are identified; however, the implications for social change that are apparent. Social change becomes evident in an increase of rural secondary student's preparation for college, completing college programs, obtaining better paying jobs after graduating college, and making a higher level of contribution to communities in which they reside. Ultimately, due to better paying jobs, these individuals may also require less public assistance and support. This study will assist rural schools in the process of supporting the students and better preparing them for success at the college level. I am excited about the opportunities to be a constituent of social change regarding this particular population.

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Appendix A: The Project

For the project of this study, I developed a three-day professional development program that will be used for teachers and administrators to better understand college readiness as well as to properly implement the AVID program into their school district at a system wide level. The AVID program is one of several college readiness programs, however it was selected as the model for this project based on research directly pointing to the effectiveness of the program.

The first section of this appendix displays a formative evaluation that will be provided to select members of each participant group prior to the administration of the professional development. Information obtained by this evaluation will be used to make adjustments to the professional development sessions.

The second section of this appendix displays the agenda for each session as well as the PowerPoint presentation that will be used for the three sessions. This section also provides a summative evaluation for each session which will be used to better assist the learning process for the participants of the professional development.

Participant Group Formative Assessment

Questions 1- 4 will be completed prior to the participant groups review of professional development materials:

1. What do you know about the level of college readiness of students graduating from this school district?

2. What do you know about the educational practices in place in this district to prepare students for college readiness?

3. What do you know about college readiness regarding academic preparedness?

4. What do you know about college readiness regarding a social preparedness?

5. What do you know about the AVID program?

Questions 6-10 will be completed after the participant group reviews the professional development materials.

6. What did you learn about college readiness by reviewing these materials?

7. What else would be important for participants to learn about college readiness?

8. What did you learn about the AVID program?

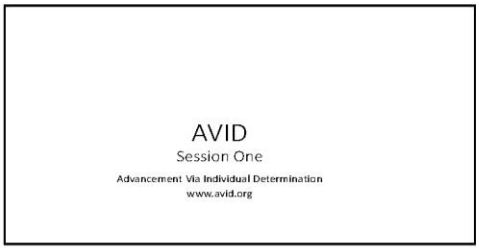
9. What did you learn about the implementation of a school wide or system wide college readiness program?

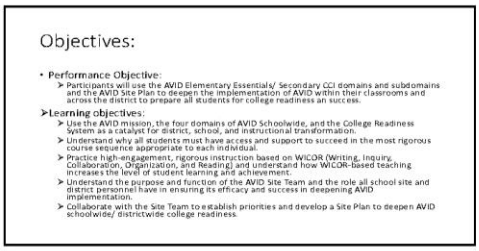
10. What else would you like to know about college readiness or the AVID program?

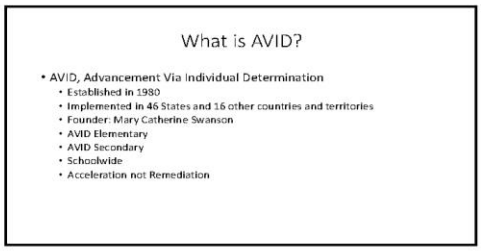
AVID Summer Institute
Session One

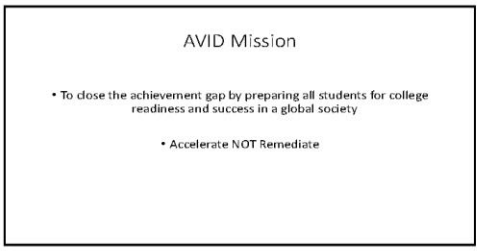
Time	Activities
8:00 - 8:30	Breakfast; Complete Reflections card (index card) with any burning questions, recommendations. Place Reflection card in AVID Comment box.
8:30 – 9: 30	The co-presenters will guide the group in the following activities: Welcome to the AVID Institute, professional development training sessions. This year we will begin ongoing training to ensure we all are implementing AVID correctly to improve the college readiness of all our students. Let's get started. Introduction/PowerPoint Slides 1-4
9:30 - 10:00	The facilitator will lead the training: Focus: AVID Mission and AVID Readiness System. Slides 5-6
10:00 - 10:15	15 Minute Break. Slide 7
10:15 - 10:45	Reflection and Discussion. Small group break out, facilitated by the presenters. Slide 8
10:45 - 12:00	Co-presenters will guide the group in the following: AVID Elementary, AVID Secondary. Slides 9-16
12:00 - 1:00	Lunch Break. Slide 17
1:00 - 1:30	Co-presenters will guide the group in the following: AVID Schoolwide, WICOR, Focused Note Taking System (CORNELL WAY). Slides 18-21
1:30 - 2:30	Co-presenters will guide the group in the following: Discussion. Slide 22
2:30 - 3:30	Closure: Slide 23-24

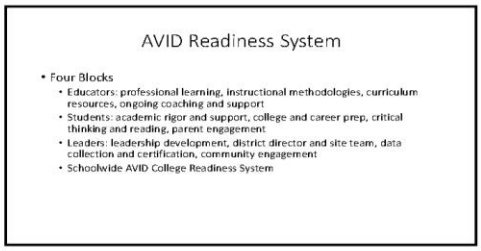
AVID Summer Institute: Session One











15 Minute Break

Reflection Time

AVID Elementary

- Provide the resources and tools for academic rigor and support: all students can be academically successful
- Feeder pattern model for system approach: Elementary to Secondary
- What is AVID Elementary
  - Combined effort of elective and core content to create schoolwide impact
  - Implement daily routine and curriculum to impact schoolwide structiures
  - Focus on WICOR (writing to learn, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading to learn) approach
  - Metacognitive method promoting best teaching practices in thinking, processing, and delivering information both by teachers and students

AVID Elementary

- Implementation
  - Schoolwide Implementation
  - Strong model transforms:
    - Instruction, systems, leadership, and culture
    - Ensures college readiness for all students
  - 4 Essentials of AE:
    - Instruction
    - Culture
    - Leadership
    - Systems

AVID Secondary

- Grade 6-12
- College readiness system designed to increase the number of students who enroll and persist in four-year colleges and Universities.
- Accelerated student learning
- Uses research based methods of effective instruction
- Provides meaningful and motivational Professional learning
- Catalyst for systemic change

AVID Secondary

- Schoolwide
  - Enhance college going culture
  - Secondary Coaching and Certification Instrument (CCI)
    - Transforming Instruction, Systems, Leadership, and Culture
    - Student Progress: self-image, academic success, leadership, role models for others
    - Common language, strategies, and benchmarks
- The AVID Elective
  - Target students in academic middle
  - Desire to attend college
  - Capable but falling short
  - First in family to attend college
  - Program: AP Courses and honors (Accelerate vs. Remediate)

AVID Secondary

- Curriculum
  - Based on rigorous standards
  - Developed by middle and high school teachers in collaboration with colleges professors
  - WICOR Methodology
  - WICOR instructional strategies
  - Scaffolded instruction

AVID Secondary

- The Site Team
  - Site leader
  - Interdisciplinary Site Team
  - Avid District Director
- AVID Tutor
  - 1:7 teacher: student tutor
  - Formal training
  - Serve as Role Model

AVID Secondary

- Implementation
  - Strong Commitment
  - Secondary Certification and Data Collection Process
- Coaching and Certification Instrument (CCI)
  - 4 Schoolwide Domains
  - Instrument Completion
    - Early School Year (goals)
    - Revisited throughout the year (study and monitor progress)
    - Revised in Spring – AVID Certification Center

AVID Secondary

- Four Domains
  1. AVID Schoolwide Instruction
     1. WICOR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading)
  2. AVID Schoolwide Systems
     1. Management of the AVID Effect
     2. Access to Rigor and Student Support
     3. Assessment of Student Progress
     4. Professional Learning
  3. AVID Schoolwide Leadership
     1. College Readiness Mission and Vision
     2. Representative Governance
     3. Strategic College Readiness Planning
  4. AVID Schoolwide Culture
     1. Rigor
     2. Community Activities and College Awareness
     3. College-Going Environment

Lunch

AVID Schoolwide
When is AVID Schoolwide?

- AVID system transforms the instruction, systems, leadership, and culture ensuring college readiness for all – AVID based on increased opportunity
  - Instruction
    - AVID Strategies System wide
    - Best instructional practices
    - 21st century tools for students
  - Systems
    - Systems in place that support:
      - Governance
      - Curriculum and Instruction
      - Data Collection and analysis
      - Professional learning
      - Student and parent outreach
    - Leadership
      - Sets the Vision and Tone that promote college readiness and high expectations for all students
    - Culture
      - Philosophy shifts when beliefs and behaviors result in an increase of students meeting college readiness requirements

WICOR

Writing to learn, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading to learn

- Proven learning support fro elementary through high school
- Incorporates teaching and learning methodologies in the following areas: Writing to learn, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading to learn
- Provides a model for educators to use scaffolded learning
- Scaffold of Social and Academic structures
  - Improving academic performance
  - Building critical reading and thinking skills for rigorous fields of study
  - Using writing as a powerful thinking and communication tool
  - Fostering collaboration among students, teachers and professionals and higher education

WICOR

- Writing
- Inquiry
- Collaboration
- Organization
- Reading

Focused Note-Taking System

- The Cornell Way: C – O – R – N – E – L – L W-A-Y
  - Increases information retention and understanding to support student success
    - Note-taking
      - Create format and organize notes
    - Note-making
      - Review and revise
      - Note key ideas
      - Exchange ideas through collaboration
    - Note-interacting
      - Link learning
      - Learning tool
    - Note reflecting
      - Written feedback
      - Address feedback
      - Your learning

Discussion

- Find a group of three to four individuals to work with
- Prompt: Discuss what you have learned about the AVID program today. What do you what to know more about? What are your personal skills that can help support the implementation of the AVID program in the district?
- What do you need to know moving forward?
- Report out to large group

AVID: Session One

- You should be able to answer the following:
  - What is AVID?
    - Mission and Vision
  - What are the four domains?
  - What are the key components of the Elementary and Secondary AVID programs?
  - What are the components of WICOR?
  - What are the components of CORNELL WAY?
- Summarize Session 1

Follow up

- Question and answer
- Preparation for Session Two
- Evaluation Form/ Feedback

Evaluation – AVID Professional Development Session One

Thank you for participating in the AVID Professional Development Training Session. Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation below. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the facilitator and help prepare for future training sessions.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:
5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

These professional development objectives were clearly stated.
Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree
5 4 3 2 1

These professional development activities were beneficial for understanding and implementing the AVID program.
Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree
5 4 3 2 1

This professional development activity allowed me to dialogue about AVID program.
Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree
5 4 3 2 1

This professional development activity helped me to better understand AVID strategies.
Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree
5 4 3 2 1

Overall, this professional development activity was a successful experience for me.
Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree
5 4 3 2 1

List on the back any suggestions you have for improving this or future professional development activity.

AVID Summer Institute

Session Two

Time	Activities
8:00 - 8:30	Breakfast; Complete Reflections card (index card) with any burning questions, recommendations. Place Reflection card in AVID Comment box.
8:30 - 9:30	The co-presenters will guide the group in the following activities: Site Team Development, Objectives. Slides 1-3
9:30 - 10:30	The facilitator will lead the training: The AVID Team, purpose Slides 4-5
10:30 - 10:45	Reflection and Discussion. Small group break out, facilitated by the presenters. Slide 6
10:45 - 11:00	15 Minute Break. Slide 7
11:00 - 11:30	Co-presenters will guide the group in the following: What does the Site Team do? Side 8
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch Break. Slide 9
12:30-2:30	Co-presenters will guide the group in the following: Work Session #1. Goals, curriculum, classroom strategies, expectations, equity. Slide 10
2:30 - 3:30	Co-presenters will guide the group in the following: Discussion. Slide 22
2:30 - 3:30	Closure: Team functions, members follow up, feedback. Slide 11-14

AVID Summer Institute: Session Two

AVID

Session Two

Advancement Via Individual Determination

www.avid.org

Session Two: Site Team Development

- Review and Discussion of Session One
- Follow up and Questions
- Agenda for Day Two
- Session Three: Implementation: Middle and High School

Objectives:

- Performance Objective:
  - Participants will use the AVID Elementary Essentials/ Secondary CCI domains and subdomains and the AVID Site Plan to deepen the implementation of AVID within their classrooms and across the district to prepare all students for college readiness an success.
- Learning objectives:
  - Use the AVID mission, the four domains of AVID Schoolwide, and the College Readiness System as a catalyst for district, school, and instructional transformation.
  - Understand why all students must have access and support to succeed in the most rigorous course sequence appropriate to each individual.
  - Practice high-engagement, rigorous instruction based on WICOR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading) and understand how WICOR-based teaching increases the level of student learning and achievement.
  - Understand the purpose and function of the AVID Site Team and the role all school site and district personnel have in ensuring its efficacy and success in deepening AVID implementation.
  - Collaborate with the Site Team to establish priorities and develop a Site Plan to deepen AVID schoolwide/ districtwide college readiness.

The AVID Site Team

- What is the AVID Site Team?
  - Voluntary team of administrators, counselors, teachers and others
  - Work to close the achievement gap and provide college readiness for all students by implementing AVID across their school site

What is the purpose of the AVID Site Team

- Interdisciplinary Site Team
  - Drives schoolwide change (AVID framework)
  - Examine effective teaching and learning practices
  - Promote collegial interaction within an individual school
  - Team members collaborate to promote and provide access to rigorous content and instruction to develop a college-going culture for all students
  - Supporting AVIDS four domains: Instruction
  - Systems
  - Leadership
  - Culture

Discussion

- Prompt: What supports and resources are needed for the four domains to be implemented schoolwide and districtwide?
- Turn and talk 10 minutes
- Report out 10 minutes

15 Minute Break

What does the Site Team do?

- Coaching and Certification Instrument (CCI) as the framework
  - Develops and implements the goals in the Site Plan and creates individual commitment statements aligned with the goals
  - Collects evidence to illustrate support for student access to, and success in, rigorous curriculum
  - Models and shares effective WICOR strategies and academic success skills across content areas
  - Analyzes school and student data in order to provide relevant professional learning at their site
  - Sets high expectations for all students, faculty, and parents in regard to student achievement and college readiness
  - Addresses equity issues/ barriers
  - Supports, at the secondary level. The need of the AVID Elective (recruitment, tutor training, student support, college readiness and awareness)

Lunch

Work Session: Generate an action plan for your Site Team (2 Hours)

- What are possible goal for the Site Team that you are on?
- How do you guarantee students are provided a rigorous curriculum?
- What would a model for effectively utilizing the WICOR strategies in the classroom look like?
- How do you set high expectations for all of the stakeholder groups?
- What does equity look like and how do you address these concerns?

How does the Site Team function?

- Site Team regularly attend the AVID Summer Institute
- Complete a Site Plan and sets goals
- Led by AVID Coordinator with support of District Director
- Meets regularly during school year to support goals; review individual commitments; address issues of access and equity
- Plan implementation of WICOR strategies in all classrooms
- Identification and recruitment of AVID students (Secondary level)
- Family outreach

Site Team Members

- Motivators
- Collaborators
- Promote high standards
- Promote a college-going culture
- Move vision forward
- Advocate for the student
- Advocate for a rigorous curriculum
- Plan, implement, reflect and celebrate

Site Team Members

AVID Elementary	AVID Secondary
Site Team Members: • AVID District Director • AVID Elementary Administrator • AVID Elementary Principal • AVID Elementary Teacher(s) **Additional Team Members:** • Elementary Counselor(s) • Instructional Specialists/Coaches • Parents/Families • College/ University • Community	**Site Team Members:** • AVID Coordinator • AVID Elective Teacher(s) • Principal • AVID Counselor(s) • Content Teachers • AVID District Director **Additional Team Members:** • Other Site Administrator(s) • Honors, AP, IB Teachers • AVID Tutors • AVID Students • Parents • College/University • Community

Follow up

- Question and answer
- Preparation for Session Three
- Evaluation Form/ Feedback

Evaluation – AVID Professional Development Session Two

Thank you for participating in the AVID Professional Development Training Session. Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation below. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the facilitator and help prepare for future training sessions.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:
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Overall, this professional development activity was a successful experience for me.
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5 4 3 2 1

List on the back any suggestions you have for improving this or future professional development activity.

AVID Summer Institute

Session Three

Time	Activities
8:00 - 8:30	Breakfast; Complete Reflections card (index card) with any burning questions, recommendations. Place Reflection card in AVID Comment box.
8:30 - 10:30	The co-presenters will guide the group in the following activities: Material Review, roles and responsibilities, team norms and outcomes, calendar setting, development of a Site Plan, and understanding mindset Slides 1-3
10:30 - 10:45	15 Minute Break. Slide 4
10:45 - 11:30	Reflection and Discussion. Small group break out, facilitated by the presenters. Slide 6
10:55 - 11:00	15 Minute Break. Slide 7
11:00 - 11:30	Co-presenters will guide the group in the following: Continuous Improvement Cycle Side 5-6
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch Break. Slide 7
12:30-1:30	Co-presenters will guide the group in the following: Work Session #1. Site Team work with Coaching Support, Development of Roles and Responsibilities, Outcomes and Norms, Calendar. Slide 8
1:30 - 1:45	15 Minute Break. Slide 9
1:45 - 2:45	Co-presenters will guide the group in the following: Work Session #2. Site Team work with Coaching Support, development of AVID Site Plan. Slide 10
2:45 - 3:00	Closure: Slide 11-13: Continuous Improvement Cycle, Take away from three days institute, time for participants to complete evaluation forms and question answer. Slides 11-13

AVID Summer Institute: Session Three

AVID
Session Three

Advancement Via Individual Determination

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AVID Site Team Material Review

- Roles and Responsibilities
  - Elementary
  - Secondary
- Site Team Outcomes and Norms
  - Performance Objectives
  - Learning Objectives
  - AVID Essential Questions
  - Professional Learning Norms
- Calendar Template
- Site Plan

Understanding Mindset

- Theory of Mindset/ Research
  - Carol Dweck: Mindset: The New Psychology of Success
    - Fixed vs. growth mindset
  - Mindsets predict motivation and achievement. (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007).
  - Growth-mindset training boosts motivation and achievement. (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007).

15 Minute Break

Continuous Improvement Cycle

Continuous Improvement Cycle

- Phases of the cycle
  - Plan
  - Do
  - Study
  - Act
- Guiding Questions for each phase

Lunch

Site Team Work Session #1

- Site Team Work with Coaching Support
  - Break into Site Teams (Building Level)
  - Review and Assign Role and Responsibilities
  - Review and Discuss Site Team Outcomes and Norms
  - Develop the Site Team Calendar

15 Minute Break

Site Team Work Session #2

- Site Team Work with Coaching Support
  - Break into Site Teams (Building Level)
  - Develop AVID Site Plan
    - Includes Action Steps and SMART Goals

Continuous Improvement Cycle

- Plan, Do, Study, Act
  - Align the Continuous Improvement Plan to the Site Team Plan
  - Next Steps

AVID: Session Three

- You should be able to discuss the functions of the Site Team
- You should be able to identify the functions of each role of the team members
- You should understand the Site Teams Outcomes and Norma
- You should have developed a Site Team Calendar
- You should have developed a Site Team Plan

Follow up

- Question and answer
- Preparation for Session Three

Evaluation – AVID Professional Development Session Three

Thank you for participating in the AVID Professional Development Training Session. Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation below. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the facilitator and help prepare for future training sessions.

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Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree
5 4 3 2 1

List on the back any suggestions you have for improving this or future professional development activity.

Appendix B: Survey Questions for Students

1. How long have you been studying at this college?
2. What are you currently studying?
3. Tell me about your high school/ secondary background?
4. Do you feel that you were properly prepared for higher education after graduating from your secondary school?
5. What areas, if any, do you feel are your weakest areas?
6. Do you see a difference between college preparation between your peers who graduated from urban, and suburban areas?
7. What experiences did you have that you feel have prepared you in your transition from a rural school education to college?
8. What challenges did you have in regards to academic preparation as you transitioned from high school to college?
9. What challenges did you have socially while transitioning to college?
10. What disadvantage or advantage do you feel you had over your peers based on your educational background?
11. What are the struggles you encountered when transitioning from your secondary school district to college, both academically and socially?
12. Were you required to take any remedial courses upon your entrance to college?
13. What remedial courses were you required to take?
14. If you took a remedial course, do you feel that if taught during your high school education you would be better prepared for college?
15. What social support does your college offer for students?
16. What content would you have found to be helpful prior to attending college?
17. What courses would you have thought to be beneficial prior to attending college?

Appendix C: Survey Questions for Teachers

1. How long have you been teaching at this college?
2. How many years have you been in the field of education?
3. Tell me about your career in education?
4. Do you feel that your students are properly prepared for higher education?
5. What areas, if any, do you feel are your students' weakest areas?
6. Do you see a difference between college preparation between students from urban, suburban, and rural areas?
7. If any, what differences do you notice regarding college readiness of students from rural schools vs. urban or suburban schools?
8. What advantages or disadvantages did you notice academically for students from rural schools?
9. What is your perception of students from rural school needing more remediation courses upon entering college?
10. What skills do students need in order to academically be ready for college?
11. What social skills do students need such as to be ready for college?
12. How does public education prepare students for college?
13. How do students from rural schools compare to their peers from urban or suburban schools in regards to preparation?
14. What courses and skills need to be included in the secondary curriculum to ensure college preparedness of students?