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Closing the Black and Hispanic High School Graduation Gap in a Central Florida School District

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Terra Evalin Ewing

MA, Grand Canyon University, 2010

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Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Public Administration

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Abstract

To resolve the graduation gap among Black and Hispanic students in Central Florida, the development of equity-centered practices to improve high school graduation rates is essential. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of incorporating methods such as the self achievement theory, self-determination methodology, and equity educational policies in all eight of the Central Florida School District schools to improve the graduation rates of the Black and Hispanic students in the Central Florida School District as well as to develop recommendations for implementation and training across the district. All data gathered was secondary and gathered from the state and district levels during the 2015- 2019 school years. Individual data from each school were analyzed through accessing the district report cards, which gave a breakdown of how each school performed as a whole as well as the graduation percentages of each subgroup. These data were used to analyze the graduation rates for the three at-risk groups of economically disadvantaged, exceptional student education, and English as a second language learners. Results indicated that while some schools made tremendous gains in some categories, none of the eight schools met or exceeded the state goals in every category. That coupled with most students returning to in person learning from the 2021-2022 post the initial Covid-19 pandemic school years, this gap has only widened. Findings may be used by administrators for positive social change by consistently and equitably implementing the above mentioned policies and methods, thus reducing the gap among at-risk Black and Hispanic students compared to their cohort peers.

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Dedication

To Nisa and Mel, in life, we often question if something is attainable. It is.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

In the United States, educational statistics have continuously revealed a persistent high school graduation gap among Black and Hispanic students (Kena et al., 2016). This is similar to the gap among Black and Hispanic students in Florida and in the Central Florida School District (CFSD). Achievement gaps among student groups have raised concerns of inequalities, root causes of the lack of quality education, and long-term adverse effects in adulthood for Black and Hispanic students. Consistently, Black and Hispanic students continue to lag in the public schools academically, as shown in data reflecting in achievement gaps in different parts United States. However, the causal relationship in those data is not always present to reflect the root cause of those achievement gaps among Blacks and Hispanic students.

Florida's graduation rate is measured as a cohort graduation rate, which is defined as a group of students entering high school and projected to graduate within 4 years of their enrollment into ninth grade. In 2018-2019, Florida's high school graduation rate was 86.9%, but that does not mean that the other 13.1% of students are dropouts (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2018). Students are to graduate within the 4 years are classified as cohort graduates. Those who graduate any time after the projected date are not considered cohort graduates and are often considered dropouts or nongraduates. Nongraduates include students who have been retained and are still in school, are attending adult education, have received certificates of completion, or have received GED-based diplomas. In Florida's 2018-19 cohort, 3.4% of the students dropped out, and 9.6% were enrolled in school, attended adult education, earned a certificate of

completion, earned a particular diploma, earned a GED-based diploma, or withdrew to a contracted private school (FLDOE, 2018).

In Central Florida, an area most widely known for Walt Disney World, the graduation rate fluctuates between 86% to 89% consistently over the past five years (FLDOE, 2020). The drop-out rate averages at 11% (FLDOE, 2020). The graduation rate for Black students is 81.5% and 85.9% for Hispanics (FLDOE, 2020). Neither group averages over 20% for pursuing postsecondary education (FLDOE, 2018). These numbers are staggering as they are from the data collected from the 2015 to 2019 (CFSD, 2019).

Problem Statement

The problem within the CFSD is that Black and Hispanic students are graduating at a rate lower than their peers within their cohort class (Lake County Schools [LCS], 2018). The goal of this study was to analyze the graduation rates for at-risk Black and Hispanic students in the following subgroups: economically disadvantaged, English as a second language (ESL), and exceptional student education (ESE) during the 2014 to 2019 school year (SY) and recommend policies to improve the graduation rates.

Background of the Problem

The FLDOE has programs that allows districts in the State of Florida to improve the graduation rate for at- risk students. Below are some of the programs the CFSD have adopted.

The AMIkids Academic Enrichment Program is a program that allows students who have dropped out of school to reenter and earn their diploma. The program operates

under the belief that high academic performance is a result of quality teachers and effective instruction (FLDOE, 2020). The state-based program provides a blended approach to instruction that includes skills training, online learning, and teacher development (FLDOE, 2020). The instructional approach includes skills training, online learning, and teacher professional development (FLDOE, 2020).

The Best Buddies program starts in middle school but is also available to those students who are in need in high school. It serves and provides mentoring activities to intellectually challenged students to help them become integrated into the school community and to promote social inclusion (FLDOE, 2020). The students are paired with other students with and without intellectual challenges in one-to-one friendships. Through their Best Buddies friendships, students learn social skills, develop self-confidence, and possibly learn leadership skills.

Take Stock in Children is a state mentoring program that provides mentors and college scholarships for low-income students (FLDOE, 2020). In the CFSD, it aids students between the sixth and 11th grades to enhance their likelihood of college preparation. The Take Stock in Children program provides students with college and vocational-technical scholarships, volunteer mentors, student advocates, tutoring, and community support (FLDOE, 2020). Each student signs a contract agreeing to maintain good grades (2.5 minimum), to remain drug and crime free, and to meet with their mentor regularly to receive the scholarship. Each student is assigned a caring adult mentor who meets with the student at their school for 1 hour each week (FLDOE, 2020). This can be during the weekends or during lunch during the school week.

The Academic Services and Interventions division within the CFSD is comprised of several departments, including a general Academic Services and Interventions Department, Student Services Department, ESE, and other departments to assist students. However, there is still a lack of consistency of interventions of resources for all eight schools within the CFSD. The goal of this study was to assess the impact of educational equity policies and self-determined methods, when implemented consistently within the CFSD, in the improvement of the graduation rate of at-risk Black and Hispanic students.

Without college and appropriate vocational training, at-risk Black and Hispanic students are often not able to contribute gainfully to the society in which they reside. Low graduation rates impact the funding at the federal and state level (FLDOE, 2015). If a school is underachieving, an oversight committee appointed by federal officials are assigned to ensure the school's graduation rates improve (FLDOE, 2015). Currently, two high schools in CFSD are being monitored to improve graduation rates (LCS, 2020).

Although high school graduation rates have improved as a whole in the CFSD, the factors that influence high school graduation have remained the same (Ritter, 2015). According to the FLDOE (2019), Black and Hispanic students in the CFSD are disproportionally graduating at a lower rate in comparison to state goal of 91%. For Black students, the rate was 78.8%, and for Hispanic students, 89.4% (FLDOE, 2019). According to de Brey et al. (2019), contributing factors in lower graduation rates among Blacks and Hispanic students are attributed to categories of economically disadvantaged (ED), exceptional student education (ESE), English as a second language (ESL), and those who lack self-determination skills.

The gap in graduation rates among Blacks and Hispanics can lead to negative effects, such as poor health, limited employment opportunities, low wages, and poverty. In the CFSD, poverty affects Blacks and Hispanics disproportionately that do not receive a high school diploma (de Brey et al., 2019). Blacks are affected at 21.05%, Hispanics at 19.35%, and Whites at 9.72% according to the National Center of Education Statistics (de Brey et al., 2019). Unemployment also disproportionately affects Blacks and Hispanics (de Brey et al., 2019). Blacks make up 10% of unemployment while Hispanics make up 6.7% and Whites 6% (de Brey et al., 2019). That statistic changes when a high school diploma is received. In this study, the recommendations will be proposed for the policy makers consideration about how to close the graduation gap for Black and Hispanic students at-risk in the CFSD.

Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative study was to develop policy recommendations to policy makers to improve the graduation rates of at-risk Black and Hispanic students in the CFSD. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the graduation rates of at-risk Black and Hispanic students in the subgroups of ED, ESE, and ESL as well as to recommend policies for improvements.

This study has the potential to justify why schools in the CFSD with low achieving Black and Hispanic students would benefit from specific programs that provide training on self-determination skills for students to achieve academic success.

Nature of Administrative Study

The quantitative research design and methodology was relevant to this study because I compared the graduation rates among Black and Hispanic students to their cohort of peers. The data consisted of eight schools within the CFSD. Data were obtained from the school years 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019 from the CFSD as reported to the FLDOE in combination with the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR). There was a disaggregated data set containing the number of Black and Hispanic students who graduated with their cohort classes. The 4-year ACGR data included the total number of students in the graduating cohort by race as well as subgroups such as ED, ESE, and ESL. I answered the following research questions:

Research Question (RQ)1: What is the graduation rate of Black and Hispanic students who are categorized as ED, ESE, and ESL in the CFSD?

RQ2: What school policies can be recommended to improve the graduation rate for Black and Hispanic students who are categorized as ED, ESE, and ESL?

In this study, recommendations are proposed for the policy makers' consideration about how to close the graduation gap for Black and Hispanic students at-risk in the CFSD. This may include implementing policies for self-determination for students to continue and complete their high school diploma in 4 years with their cohorts.

Significance

More school districts in the United States have adopted educational equity policies such as Every Student Succeeds Act to help close the achievement gaps for

Black and Hispanic students because of the impact they present in the economic culture and the effect it has on social change (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2016). The results of this study can be used by the CFSD policy makers to promote social change within the Central Florida public schools by informing the elected school board members, school leaders, and community stakeholders of the effects between education equity policies and the high school graduation rates for Black and Hispanic students; and can be used as a reference tool for the CFSD to use moving forward in crafting policy changes to improve Black and Hispanic students' educational experience and to improve their graduation rates and promote positive social change in the CFSD communities (see LCS, 2018).

High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested, and more than 8 times as likely to be imprisoned (Fight Crime Invest in Kids, 2003). Nationally, in 2016, the dropout rate of Hispanic students aged 16 to 24   who were not enrolled in school and had not earned a high school diploma was 9.1% (National Center of Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). Black students who dropped out or were not enrolled was 5.1% for 2019 (NCES, 2019).

In the CFSD, the federal dropout rate increased from 11.9% during the 2016-17 school year to 12.9% during the 2017-18 school year. The 2018-19 dropout rate increased to 13.4%, which is above the state target of 9.5%(FLDOE, 2019). In the Central Florida community, students with a diploma are likely to earn 40% more income than someone without one (FLDOE, 2019). Their employability rises by 33% when a diploma is earned. Also, for advancement in their careers, the first step is a high school diploma before

going to a 2-year or 4-year institution or earning a certification in a specific field. Having a high school diploma enables Black and Hispanic students to improve their physical conditions (health) (FLDOE, 2019). It also improves their stand in the community by bettering their social status in society. This change can occur and trickle to many levels, such as being a role model for younger or older generations, community, and government, creating positive real world results.

Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders in the CFSD are those individuals or groups who have an interest or concern for the school. They are the parents, school administrators, board members, local government officials, alumni, and socio civic groups who contribute to the development of the school community and are often business owners in the community who support the schools financially. The direct impact of the involvement of stakeholders in the schools has been the difference of school programs integrating with the community, such as school sponsorship, to help fill in the gap where public school budgetary needs fall short to provide resources to public schools.

The fields of education and public policy and administration have carried out considerable research on the benefits of equity policies and their impact on student achievements (Valiandes, 2015). For example, educational equity policies provide clear and precise principles on how to approach inequality of results in public schools. The goal is to construct a more balanced society that allows the same opportunities for all students in education, not excluding their cultural backgrounds, their socioeconomics,

disabilities, or English proficiency from influencing the educational equity policies on graduation rates among Black and Hispanic students in Central Florida schools.

Summary

In the CFSD, Black and Hispanic students have consistently disproportionately lower graduation rates than their peer cohorts. Though some schools within the CFSD have had policies in place throughout the years to positively impact the graduation gap, this has not been consistent across all eight schools.

This quantitative study may provide recommendations for the implementation of policies targeting risk Black and Hispanic students. In doing so, the desired outcome is to identify if there is a cause-and-effect relationship between what is causing the gap in graduation among Black and Hispanic students graduating at a lower rate than their cohort peers and what policies can be put in place to close that gap.

In Section 2, I provide the conceptual approach for the study, which includes a discussion of self-determination theory, motivation, achievement theory, and other relevant information.

Section 2: Conceptual Approach and Background

Introduction

High school graduation rates in the United States have fluctuated over the years. Graduation rates have been linked to factors such as environmental, economic, and learning abilities. The graduation rates of Black and Hispanic students have often been attributed to economic disadvantage, exceptionalities, lack self-determination, and not having the career skills, placing them at a disadvantage with their cohort peers (Quintana et al., 2012).

In Section 2 of this quantitative study, I present the literature on the educational policies on the graduation rates in Central Florida schools. The benefits of closing the equity achievement gaps between Black and Hispanic students compared to Florida's goal of a 91% graduation rate for all students. This goal can be accomplished by students determining for themselves to achieve a high school diploma. The self-determination theory is the psychological framework for understanding self-motivation (Ryan &Deci, 2019). It was developed by psychologists Ryan and Deci to help improve the graduation rates for students at risk of not graduating. It began as research on intrinsic motivation, or internal desire to do something for your own benefit. In the education system, there are policies in place for teachers to implement; however, if the students do not have the will, the desire, or the determination to prosper alongside their peers, their success has already met their demise. The rationale for using the self-determination theory in this study was to understand that unless there has been onboarding from the student, no matter the approach, policy, or theory, the issue will remain the same, and the gap will continue to

widen, regardless of an external reward [Vinney, 2019]. Self-determination theory believes that people are directed by three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Section 2 also addresses the importance of the impact of poverty and English language proficiency and educational equity policies to promote positive social change (see Ryan & Deci, 2019). I conclude the section by sharing new insights and providing potential predictable measures of graduation rates for Black and Hispanic students, a subgroup who is at-risk of dropping out.

Concepts, Models, and Theories

In this study, I searched literature electronically through the following databases: SAGE, Walden library search engine, Google Scholar, FLDOE website, Central Florida District's Website Assessments section, and electronic copies of the Standard Operation Procedures for the eight high schools researched in CFSD, Federal Department of Education Act. The following search terms were used: *graduation rates, achievement gaps*, *Blacks and Hispanics, drop-out rates,* and *socioeconomic status.* Most articles used in this study were peer-reviewed.

In this section, I provide an overview of the conceptual framework, which includes self-determination, motivation, and achievement theory. The research addressed the prior questions that are parallel with this study in that they address the impact of poverty, disability, English language proficiency, and student-teacher ratio, which are still ongoing issues within the CFSD.

RQ1: What is the graduation rate of Black and Hispanic students who are categorized as ED, ESE , and ESL in the CFSD?

RQ2: What school policies can be recommended to improve the graduation rate for Black and Hispanic students who are categorized as ED, ESE, and ESL?

Self Determination Theory

Students who engage in academic work understand the importance of reaching the goal of graduation. Students that do not believe they are not capable of doing the work. They do not find the academic work/curriculum interesting and meaningful, and do not feel supported by their teachers, community, family, and their peers are unlikely to invest the time and energy necessary to attend, learn and succeed in school. Schools on their own cannot conjure up student motivation; however, they can create a learning environment that supports the motivation that already exists within themselves. The biggest victors of this support system are those students who are often those who are at-risk for not graduating, Black and Hispanic students.

The Central Florida school system's implementation of self-determination and engaging curriculum for Black and Hispanic students equates to an environment where students at risk can flourish in the educational environment, resulting in higher graduation rates. In a study that addressed students' relationships to parents, teachers, and classmates as potential factors that could predict academic engagement and performance, Pitzer and Skinner (2016) found that when students had quality relationships with parents, teachers, and classmate, relationships did not significantly impact academic engagement and performance. However, the student's emotional experience in the classroom was affected by low peer acceptance. This study's results also indicated that there was a significant association between peer acceptance and academic performance.

In addition, Pitzer and Skinner found that low peer acceptance was negatively associated with academic performance, self-concept, and mental health.

Technical Definition of SDT

Self-determination theory (SDT) is an approach to motivation that focuses on the psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) as inherent motivational assets that, when supported, facilitate optimal functioning and psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When students need to feel supported, the teacher acts as the social-contextual facilitator of students' need satisfaction and optimal functioning. (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Within such a framework, a teacher's motivating style is understood in terms of autonomy support versus teacher control (Wilks, 2016). Student motivation is understood in terms of need satisfaction versus need frustration. Autonomy-supportive teaching (the delivery of instruction through an interpersonal tone of support and understanding, e.g., perspective-taking, creating opportunities for initiative) enhances the students' ability to positively function in the classroom, and as it happens, it nurtures and supports students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness need satisfaction during instruction (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Therefore, the primary reason students show high energy engagement is because they first experienced an engagement-energy psychological need satisfaction from the teacher or anticipate what they have heard about the teacher from others around the campus of the school.

However, SDT is not just a theory to benefit students in their educational needs; the thought of self-determination has been applied to a variety of areas, including work, parenting, exercise, and health. Research has linked that having high self-determination

can equate to success in many different domains of life (Núñez & León, 2015). This is

why choosing SDT is important in bolstering Black and Hispanic students at low- risk of

success to help to close the gap in graduation rates in CFS.

Motivation

Motivation fostered through the SDT originated out of the work of Ryan and

Deci, who first introduced their ideas in their 1985 book. Their concept was that intrinsic

motivation plays a key role in achieving motivation.

Two Key Assumptions of the Theory

The driving force for SDT is the need for growth. For students, the assumption in

relation to SDT is that they are actively focused and working on their personal growth.

They want to work towards overcoming their challenges and be able to have new

experiences, not being afraid of the next stage they have yet to embark upon (Ryan &

Deci, 2020).

Autonomous motivation is important (Gopalan et al., 2017). Though there are

some students who are motivated to act by extrinsic motivators, such as money or prizes

for good grades or good behavior, SDT at its base focuses primarily on internal sources

of motivation, such as having knowledge of self and gaining self-independence and being

able to motivate and succeed without the assistance from others.

Differences Between Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation

Key factors in SDT that need to be present in order for students to achieve

psychological growth are the following:

Competence: Students need to achieve mastery of tasks and learn different skills Cherry (2019). This is most reflective in the gaps in the state standardized testing of Math and English and Reading assessments needed for graduation requirements among Black and Hispanic students (Aronson et al., 2013). In this study, I aimed to identify if there is a cause and effect relationship in which Black and Hispanic students of the subgroups ED, ESE, and ESL feel they are less capable of being successful in class or assessments due to outside challenges they face outside of school, which decreases their self-determination and motivation to be successful. For this, When students feel that they have the skills needed for their success, they are more likely to take actions that will help them achieve their goals.

Connection or relatedness: Students need to feel a sense of belonging and have a connection to other students, teachers, and administration on campus (Wilks, 2016). This is where teachers need to make connections with the students. They should boost the students' feeling of self-worth to help feel connected to the class. A teacher being able to connect a lesson with the student incorporating that student(s) causal factor(s) does not just allow the student(s) to have intrinsic success but also can, in turn, present causal effects/extrinsic in other classroom activities and assignments. Teachers can start building those relationships with students the first week of school through ice breaker activities where the teachers and students engage in the classroom getting-to-know-you activities.

Autonomy: Students need to have a sense of accountability and to feel in control of their own behaviors and goals (Riley, 2016). The teachers and administrators in

schools are key drivers in helping students set their goals, especially where many may not be familiar with how to set a goal or achieve one. They should aim not to do it for them but to help students put their goals into perspective and give them steps and timelines on how to achieve them. Direct action resulting in real change plays a major part in helping students feel self-determined. In schools, this is called the positive behavior support program (Crone et al., 2015). This can be looked at as a discipline ladder, but rather it should be looked upon as positive reinforcement.

Extrinsic motivators can sometimes lower self-determination, according to Cherry (2019). Giving students external rewards for already internally motivated behavior can threaten their success. As students' behavior becomes increasingly controlled by external rewards, they begin to feel less in control of their own behavior, and self-internal motivation is diminished and over time, leaving them with no motivation at all (Hayamizu, 1997).

Positive feedback can boost self-worth and determination (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Offering unexpected positive encouragement and feedback on a person's performance on a task can increase intrinsic motivation (Gopalan, V. 2017). This type of feedback can make students feel more competent, which is one of the key needs for them to have personal growth.

Dual Process Model

The dual-process model within a SDT framework is built on a differentiated view of the social-contextual environment, of student motivation, and of student outcomes. Teachers' perceived motivating style is differentiated into the distinct processes of

perceived autonomy support and perceived teacher control, student motivation is differentiated into the distinct processes of needs satisfaction and needs frustration, and student outcomes are differentiated into those that are adaptive and optimal (e.g., engagement) and those that are maladaptive and nonoptimal (e.g., disengagement; Gopalan, V. et al., 2017). Further, these differentiated processes are not only conceptually distinct, but each has its own unique set of antecedents and causal effects. The aim of the dual-process model, at least relative to the traditional motivational mediation model, is to better explain students' experience of need frustration and nonoptimal functioning (Jang, Kim & Reeve, 2016). The dual-process model acknowledges the bright side aspects that explain the conditions under which students tend toward a semester-long goal of greater support, motivational satisfaction, and engagement but adds a new emphasis on the dark side aspects that further explain the conditions under which students tend toward a semester-long trajectory of greater control, motivational frustration, and disengagement (Jang et al., 2016).

Achievement Motivation Theory

Incorporating with the SDT, the achievement motivation theory states that every person has one of three motivators: the needs for achievement, affiliation, or power (Moore et al., 2010). The theory's basis is set on the premise of the individual setting a goal, and although they may fail to achieve their goal with the gold standard they set for themselves, the fact that they were able to set and achieve a semblance of a goal is seen as achievement (Moore et al., 2010).

Commonalities between SDT and achievement motivation theory are how they are measured in academics toward measuring and applying academic goals of the student. The success of the application of the theories are traditionally based on the student(s) meeting the individual and achievement academic goals (Anderman, 2020).

Equity Education Policy

The concept of educational equity is a barrier-free learning environment where all students, regardless of their race, class, or other personal characteristics, have the opportunity to benefit equally in order to succeed and thrive (Equity in Education [EIE], 2019). The emphasis on equity emphasizes that every educator treats every student as though they are capable of success and recognizes the individual and strengths of each student, allowing for differences in time, attention, instruction, and support to ensure that all students can succeed academically and participate responsibly in their community.

Equity education policies disrupts the current system of structures, policies, and practices that privilege those students not at risk, while discriminating against those who are at-risk. Strategies aligned with this policy ensure equity in that they dispose of biased behaviors that cause harm to specific groups. Reverse implementation of unfair policies, programs, and practices consistently result in negative outcomes for at-risk students who are disadvantaged by specific actions. They allow for negotiation, reallocating, and sometimes reimagining resources, opportunities, and supports when equal distribution of these things (one size fits all) results in inequitable outcomes that do not adequately meet specific needs and interests of all groups of students (EIE, 2019).

1080 Educational Equity Policy

1080 Educational Equity Policy (1080 EEP) is a policy that was adopted and effective October 8, 2020, in the state of Maryland, however it is also used in other states in the United States and should be a policy that is tailored to the needs of the CFSD.

The 1080 policy purpose is to achieve educational equity by establishing expectations related to the identification and elimination of disparities in education outcomes (Howard County Public School System [HCPSS], 2020). The 1080EPP embodies three emphasis of importance, academic achievement and growth, school climate and culture affecting student success, and staff capacity for educational equity 1080EPP, (2020). Some of the highlights of this policy are create and maintain a safe and supportive school climate that uplifts positive relationships and culture of belonging, regardless of social identifiers, consequences are fair, equitable, consistent, and reflective of a restorative culture. Develop parent and community partnerships to increase equitable opportunities for students and positively influence the school culture and climate.

For educators part of this policy, it will require that there are school-based diversity trainings that will work with administrators and teams to put in place school improvement goals, specifically focusing on equity goals related to school climate and culture. As well as working collaboratively with parents and community groups to increase equity and inclusion for students and staff.

At the district level, the Superintendent and board members will oversee the development of district wide objectives, activities, and track progress towards measurable targets to achieve educational equity. Superintendent and board members will track and

record progress of measurable goals to achieve educational equity. In addition, the

Superintendent and board members will obtain student, parent, and community feedback

through online communication surveys to track the progress of achieving educational

equity annually.

The Relevance of Public Organizations

Completing this quantitative study for CFS showed how full district involvement

in understanding outcomes of implementing the self-determination theory and where

improvements can be made in decreasing the graduation gap among Black and Hispanic

students with their peers. The results of the study could provide the Superintendent and

Central Florida School board with data to pursue continued implementation of an

ongoing college and career preparedness education to further the progress of the

District's ability to provide Quality Professional Learning (QPL) to all CFS students.

In the past, other programs such as the Positive Behavioral Interventions and

Supports (PBIS) which is good for focusing, are evidence-based, three-tiered identifying,

acknowledging, and encouraging positive student behaviors, rather than punishing

students for negative behaviors (Crone et al., 2015). PBIS is more of an extrinsic program

where it rewards positive behaviors where self-determination strategies have to bother

intrinsic and extrinsic factors that yield positive results and encourages an overall positive

behavior in students, not just in a learning environment (Crone et al., 2015).

As stated above, the goal of the State of Florida is to achieve a high school

graduation rate of 91% which is much higher than the rate for Black and Hispanic

students in the CFSD. Therefore, it is important to implement self-determination

strategies for Black and Hispanic students in all eight public high schools in the CFS district. This will close the gap for Black and Hispanic students not meeting the graduation requirements. These outcomes are important for being successful for Black and Hispanic students in their communities in receiving their High School diploma.

Organization Background and Context

Consistently Black and Hispanic students have performed below the 91% CFS district and Florida state benchmark. Among the eight public schools in Central Florida, Black students have graduated at an average rate between 67-87%, while Hispanic students have graduated between the ranges of 66-88% according to the end of the year data of the years researched (LCS, 2017).

In the CFS district, Black and Hispanic students from a community of high poverty, and crime, and a lack of community and parental involvement less likely to exit the K-12 system with a diploma. To counter the issues, the District has approached their equity approach of learning, which they felt was not appealing to providing quality education across the board to adopting the term Quality Professional Learning.
The challenges CFS District has been no different from any other school district in any state of the United States. The challenge of wanting to provide equity education exists in every realm. The lowest Black student high school graduation rate was 67 percent was in the District of Columbia. However, in other states where the areas of demographics are similar to that of CFS, graduation rates are below 70 percent. Those states include Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, and Wisconsin (JBHE,2020).

Definition of Terms

Economically disadvantaged: Students are ED when their ability to receive the same resources has been impaired due to diminished capital and credit opportunities as compared to other students in the same or similar living area who are not socially disadvantaged.

English language learners: Those speak English as a secondary language (ESL).

Exceptional student education: The special help given at school is called exceptional student education (ESE). The purpose of ESE is to help each student with a disability progress in school and prepare for college and career post-K-12 education. ESE services include specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of the abilities of the student.

External motivation: Rewards or gives incentives like praise, fame, or money are used as motivation for doing specific activities.

Intrinsic motivation: Refers to behavior that is driven by internal rewards. The motivation a student has to engage in behavior comes from within because it internally rewards them.

Role of DPA Researcher

This professional administrative study is focused on the eight public high schools researched in the CFSD. As an educator/teacher is how I have identified my personal role in the organization- as an employee since November 2006, ranging between 60-120 students ranging in teaching subjects such as ESL, learning strategies, reading in Grades 6 through 12.

My history and position within the organization as a potential source of bias within this study; having taught within the organization working with the subgroups in which the focus of this study is on, I have inside knowledge of some of the challenges students of Black and Hispanics backgrounds face in this study. However, no information gathered in this study will be from a personal biased view. All Information gathered is from the District and State level on a public platform. Due to the secondary information on student achievement, the need for conducting surveys was not needed. Also, in addressing the research questions, I used quantitative methods to help me eliminate any personal bias. It should be noted that the data collected to be used for this study will be primarily secondary data which was collected in advance.

All outcomes from the administrative study and its research were to identify the gaps in the graduation rates among Black and Hispanic students in the Central Florida School district and to open the door towards an understanding of putting in place policies of achieving those gaps and influencing educational equity among Blacks, Hispanics, and White students in CFS.

Summary

In this section, I documented conceptual framework which includes self-determination theory, motivation, and achievement theory as it relates to graduation gaps among Blacks and Hispanic students. In addition, this section reviewed that although students who are Black and Hispanic with exceptionalities who are receiving most of their instruction in a general classroom setting and have the same probability of

graduation as their peers, their belief of graduating with their cohort peers is at a lower level.

      In section 3, I will provide an overview of population, sample, data collection, and analysis for the purpose of doing further research for the study.

Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the impact the exposure of educational equity policies can have on high school graduation rates for at-risk Black and Hispanic students in the CFSD. Variables in this study consisted of the duration of exposure to educational equity policies, the percentage of ED students, the percentage of students with exceptionalities, and the percentage of students who spoke English as a second language. In addition, I included a variable that identified the high school graduation rates for all Black and Hispanic students within a 4-year adjusted cohort. This section includes an explanation for using quantitative analysis. I also present how data were collected, how the participants were protected, if there were any threats to validity, and the process on how data were collected and analyzed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the graduation rate of Black and Hispanic students who are categorized as ED, ESE, and ESL in the CFSD?

RQ2: What school policies can be recommended to improve the graduation rate for Black and Hispanic students who are categorized as ED, ESE, and ESL?

Sources of Data

Each year, each of the eight high schools within the CFSD must report educational data to the FLDOE. The FLDOE compiles data and publishes the results under the Florida Graduation Rates files on its website with the status of graduation for each district in the State of Florida. The state calculates and provides the ACGR for

individual schools and districts using detailed data and subgroups. Included in the data from the FLDOE website are race/ethnicity groups 2014-2015 through 2018-2019, graduation rates by district, 2014-15 through 2018-19, as well as gender per race and ethnicity and drop out data. From the state data, the district level takes the data and breaks them down by race and ethnicity as well as by graduate, cohort, and rate. A final source of evidence was the graduation rate data breakdown for the public high schools in the CFSD. Included in the data are a composite of what makes up the total graduation rate of the school per school year: total students, ED, ESL, foster, homeless, migrant, military, students with disabilities, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic, multiracial, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, White, female, and male. Though some schools within the district do not have a population of some categories, this is how the school, district, and state measure the graduation rate of each Florida public school.

Population

The population for this study involved eight public high schools within the CFSD. Total student population within the CFSD on average was 11,875 students, according to (FLDOE, 2018). All students included in this study were Black and Hispanic and met the screening criteria of ED, ESE, and ESL. The data used for this study were available from school years 2014 to 2019. Because the data used for this study were secondary, it was assumed that the data were unbiased and accurate.

Table 1 shows the 2014 to 2019 CFSD total student population

Table 1

2014-2019 CFSD Total Student Population

School	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
1	2,177	2,317	2,399	2,402	2,419
2	851	858	829	829	824
3	1,580	1,828	1,917	1,916	1,963
4	1,236	1,300	1,321	1,319	1,341
5	2,126	1,975	1,854	1,583	1,868
6	1,287	1,257	1,258	1,258	1,276
7	2,177	2,317	2,399	2,402	2,419
8	1,593	1,582	1,544	1,545	14

Table 2 shows the 2014-2015 CFSD Subgroup Student Population

Table 2

2014-2015 CFSD Subgroup Student Population

2014-2015 school	W	B	H	ED	ESE	ESL
1	837	138	182	200	125	23
2	804	180	476	451	204	19
3	661	151	193	300	120	21
4	713	26	86	311	111	0
5	989	280	735	558	220	139
6	1,107	338	485	555	257	39
7	853	458	184	333	94	43
8	767	243	211	366	165	0

Note. W= White, B= Black, and H= Hispanic. Florida Department of Education, *School Accountability Reports.*
https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1415/schl1415.cfm?dist_number=35

Table 3 shows the 2015-2016 CFSD Subgroup Student Population

Table 3

2015-2016 CFSD Subgroup Student Population

2015-2016 school	W	B	H	ED	ESE	ESL
1	893	134	198	337	131	11
2	924	217	551	526	230	34
3	635	144	0	511	115	11
4	711	11	93	538	77	0
5	1,009	311	804	1,158	230	187
6	1,034	301	453	881	255	39
7	539	5++	328	20	323	47
8	744	116	224	627	152	0

Note. W= White, B= Black, and H= Hispanic. Florida Department of Education, *School Accountability Reports.*
https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1516/schl1516.cfm?dist_number=35

Table 4 shows the 2016-2017 CFSD Subgroup Student Population

Table 4

2016-2017 CFSD Subgroup Student Population

2016-2017 school	W	B	H	ED	ESE	ESL
1	892	147	121	661	139	29
2	922	248	591	1,003	248	49
3	613	154	234	521	115	30
4	450	0	63	283	108	0
5	1,005	349	817	1198	244	171
6	963	277	423	785	260	41
7	720	447	244	1061	204	84
8	743	229	226	648	157	0

Note. W= White, B= Black, and H= Hispanic. Florida Department of Education, *School Accountability Reports.*
https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1617/schl1617.cfm?dist_number=35

Table 5 shows the 2016-2017 CFSD Subgroup Student Population

Table 5

2017-2018 CFSD Subgroup Student Population

2017-2018 school	W	B	H	ED	ESE	ESL
1	886	166	224	730	151	21
2	940	255	591	1,070	236	49
3	62	150	254	588	123	39
4	659	28	110	502	127	0
5	1,004	368	815	1,174	257	142
6	945	254	471	785	297	42
7	638	4,333	289	1,089	224	64
8	750	225	242	738	176	22

Note. W= White, B= Black, and H= Hispanic. Florida Department of Education, *School Accountability Reports.*
https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1718/schl1718.cfm?dist_number=35

Table 6 shows the 2018-2019 CFSD Subgroup Student Population

Table 6

2018-2019 CFSD Subgroup Student Population

2018-2019 school	W	B	H	ED	ESE	ESL
1	934	186	225	891	170	16
2	952	262	678	1,200	261	64
3	615	141	295	704	133	55
4	633	19	118	601	121	0
5	1,023	348	885	1,232	306	122
6	863	227	446	755	275	40
7	661	430	286	1,328	226	75
8	1,023	348	885	1,232	306	22

Note. W= White, B= Black, and H= Hispanic. Florida Department of Education, *School Accountability Reports.*
https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1819/schl1819.cfm?dist_number=35

Definition of Variables

Variables in this study included Black and Hispanic students and consisted of the duration of their exposure to educational equity policies in the CFSD. Variables were Black and Hispanic students who had been identified of being at-risk of meeting the requirements to earn a high school diploma with their cohort class. Subgroup variables such as ED, ESE, and ESL were present to show the difference and the impact that they have on graduation rates for Black and Hispanic students in the CFSD among their high school graduating cohort peers.

Data Collection

Each year, the FLDOE publishes online data on the progress of its schools in the state. These data are compiled from schools and the district from the benchmark and state directive testing mandated throughout the school year. The publication of the results contains sections including graduation rates by gender within the race/ethnicity, and graduation rates by each district in the state of Florida. It also contains status of all students in the graduation cohort each year, giving students graduating with a standard diploma, those dropping out, and those not graduating but not dropping out. In collecting data, tables are provided to allow the reader to view and also evaluate data that illustrates how Florida's education compares to other states, with the most recent graduating rates released on all states as provided by the NCES. The NCES data are freely accessible to the public to be used responsibly and for the sole purpose of statistical analysis, research, and reporting. Though these data have been used in some research, the FLDOE website

and CFS website have more detailed information. In this study, I used 4-year regulatory

ACGR data that are available in the public domain of the FLDOE website along with the

dependent and independent variables of the ED, ESE, and ESL students. The data are

accessible on the following website:

http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7584/urlt/GradRates1819.pdf.

Protections of Participants

An equity policy is a fundamental governing principle in education (FLDOE,

2021). The adoption of a school board policy requires a majority vote from the school

board members. School board meetings and voting processes comply with all provisions

of the open meetings and open records laws in the state of Florida and the CFSD. School

board policies are included in the policy manual and made available to the public through

the state website, FDOE. The superintendent, along with the elected school board

members, developed the procedure rules for the implementation of the school board

policies. I did not need permission to collect and use the data because, under the law, they

were accessible to the public. It should be noted that identifying data of students are not

available; therefore, protection of participants was not needed. In addition, institutional

review board (IRB) approval was received from Walden University August 18, 2021,

under the IRB # 08-18-21-0971916.

Data Analysis

The data sources used for this study were secondary sources. The following

research questions were answered by using the available data in public domain:

RQ1: What is the graduation rate of Black and Hispanic students who are categorized as ED, ESE, and ESL in the CFSD?

RQ2: What school policies can be recommended to improve the graduation rate for Black and Hispanic students who are categorized as ED, ESE, and ESL?

The analysis of data for the first question answered if there was an impact on graduation rates of Black and Hispanic students due to ED, ESE and ESL in the CFSD. In response to RQ2, I provided policies and methods suggested to the CFSD to be implemented across all eight high schools to successfully close the graduation gap for Black and Hispanic students among their peer cohort graduating class. In this study, I identified two policies and two methods to improve the graduation rate of Black and Hispanic students and to provide recommendations for implementation.

Validity

There was very little threat to the validity of this research as all data used had been filed with the FLDOE for public use based on schools' past performances along with archived data from the 2015 to 2019 school years. As the demographics of schools and programs change each year based on the student count and currently with the Covid-19 pandemic, additional variables and predictors could have been added that could increase the graduation gap for Black and Hispanic students as so many changes have taken place in the household within the variable of ED. The standard operating procedures guides for each school, along with graduation rates for each high school, are publicly posted on the district website. In addition, the FLDOE website is transparent in posting graduation rates per demographic group on their publicly available website. All

information in this study were secondary data researched using the CFS websites and were in the public domain; there were no student privacy data available.

Analysis and Synthesis

This study was be based on secondary data created by the CFSD. Based on the available data, steps were taken to gather data for this quantitative study. In this study, I used the following software packages: Microsoft Word, and Excel. I entered the schools graduation rates, one column for Black students and another for Hispanic students with their corresponding schools. Next, I selected the Excel Formula bar (FX) and selected the Correlation (CORREL). In Array 1, I selected the data for Black students' graduation rate for each corresponding school, and in Array 2, I followed the same process and selected "ok." This was able to give me the data of relation of graduation rates among Black and Hispanic students.

There were also tables created using Microsoft Excel and Word that revealed in both table and chart format information regarding the schools' graduation rates and whether they had progressed, remained stagnant, or decreased within the CFSD. All data were received through the CFSD and the FLDOE public domains. Because this study was based on secondary data, it can be assumed that the data were collected with integrity, and there was no bias in data collection. It should be noted that reading information from published recordings and charts provided via the CFSD and the FLDOE were used for all data analysis.

Summary

I began this section with introducing the sources of data used in the study, which detailed ED, ESE, or ESL Black and Hispanic students' predictive measures that have been associated with determining if they will or will not graduate high school in the CFSD. In addition, I presented a discussion about the population, sample, ethical considerations, threats to validity, and the process of data collection and analysis.

All data collected for this study were secondary and public; therefore, there was no threat to validity. Ethical and confidential considerations were protected as all guidelines followed that of the CFS school board and the FLDOE guidelines and that of the IRB guidelines. In Section 4, I present evaluation and recommendations.

Section 4: Evaluation and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to develop policy recommendations for policy makers to improve the graduation rates of at-risk Black and Hispanic students in the CFSD. In this study, I evaluated the graduation rates of at-risk Black and Hispanic students in the subgroups of ED, ESE, and ESL and recommended policies and theories for improvements.

Quantitative data were used in the implementation of this study, which had been gathered from public data through the FLDOE and the CFS websites. Data were gathered through the assistance of the district's accountability team. The team gathers, edits, produces, and submits student data for reporting to the FLDOE to summarize how the district as a whole as well as each individual school within the district has performed .

The accountability team reconciles the student information to ensure that the state local reporting data are accurate in evaluations, initiatives, and mandates, including school grades, graduation rates, and assisting with school improvement plans to increase student achievement. The accountability team also supports the schools in reporting and seeking district accreditation and assisting on the school advisory and district's citizens advisory councils. All data retrieved from the websites were archived, with secondary data specifically aligned with the graduation rates of the CFSD as well as programs that are currently in place, successes, and opportunities.

Findings and Implications

The eight schools focused on in this research were schools that were numbered 1

to 8 at random. The graduation rate listed was based on an adjusted cohort of ninth grade

students and measured whether the students graduated within 4 years. Because graduation

rates are calculated at the end of the year, this measure used the prior year's graduation

rate for the current year's school and district grade calculation. The year reflected in the

charts is the year these components were used to calculate the school or district's grade.

The data were from school years 2014-2015 through school year 2018-2019.

Data were not collected, and research did not continue into the 2019-2020 school year as

the Covid-19 pandemic caused changes in school dynamics. Many schools closed for the

year, and local and state governments changed the graduation requirements. However,

during the years researched, validity of state and local guidelines was in place.

During the 2014-2015 school year, the CFSD had a 90% graduation rate goal;

however, it fell short with its high schools reaching graduation rates ranging from mid

70% to upper 80%. As noted, in Tables 7-11, Schools 5 and 6 consistently ranked highest

in all categories where other schools may have ranked higher in their Black or Hispanic

graduation rate or did not have a count for the ESL population. It is also important to note

that some information was dependent on the parent's input and their limited

comprehension or opportunities for their student. For example,, Schools 7, 3, and 4 had a

high Hispanic population but very few or no ESL students. This is for multiple reasons.

First, the CFSD did not have a fully funded ESL program. Although students may speak

another language other than English as their primary language, there was no program to

service their needs. Second, many parents wanted their student to assimilate into

American culture and did not mark that they spoke any language other than English so

that they would not be pulled out of their English speaking courses.

The tables and figures show the inconsistent graduation rates of Black and

Hispanic students, the most at-risk subgroups of not graduating, ED, ESE and ESL in

comparison to their White peer cohorts in the CFSD.

Table 7 shows the 2014-2015 CFSD High School Graduates for Black and Hispanic

Students Within the Subgroups of ED, ESE, and ESL.

Table 7

2014-2015 CFSD High School Graduates for Black and Hispanic Students Within the

Subgroups of ED, ESE, and ESL

Schools	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
Total graduates	80.6	77.2	85.4	77.5	88.6	85.6	79.4	78.3
White	79.7	80.7	87.0	75.9	89.7	84.7	77.9	77.3
Black	86.7	69.6	87.1	*	85.9	88.2	82.6	74.6
Hispanic	76.2	74.5	75.7	92.0	80.6	83.2	75.0	84.1
ESE	66.7	73.6	73.3	42.3	76.4	67.9	49.1	76.4
ED	75.9	68.6	81.3	75.0	83.7	80.7	77.5	83.7
ESL	*	53.9	*	*	46.0	81.3	*	46.0

Note. */ or blank box indicates a subgroup population fewer than 10 students represented

in that subgroup. Florida Department of Education. *School, District, and State Public*

Accountability Report.

https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1415/schl1415.cfm?dist_number=35

Figure 1 shows the 2014-2015 Black and Hispanic Students Graduation Percentage in

CFSD.

Figure 1

2014-2015 Black and Hispanic Students Graduation Percentage in CFSD
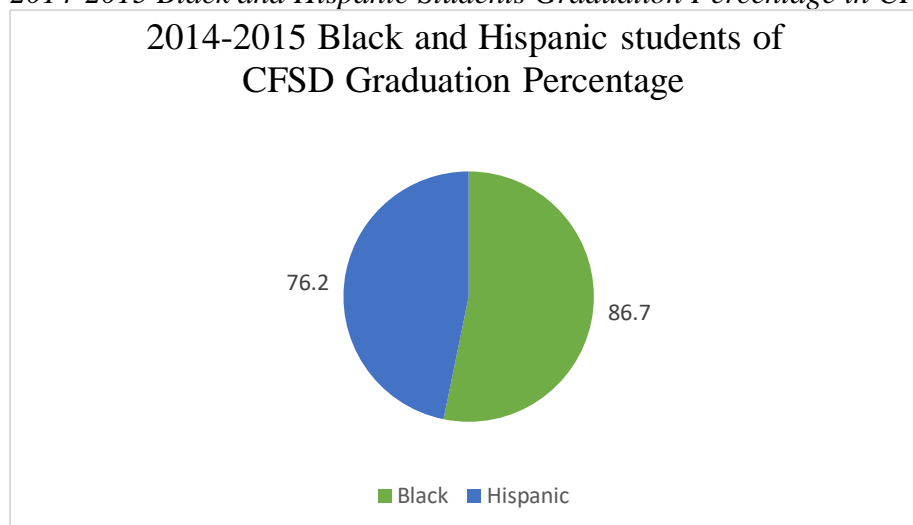
Note. Florida Department of Education. *School, District, and State Public Accountability*

Report. https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1415/schl1415.cfm?dist_number=35

During the 2014-2015 school year, none of the eight schools in the CFSD met the

graduation goal of 91% set by the state overall or in any subgroups. However, it should

be noted that schools 5 and 6 had the overall highest graduation rates. These schools

consistently had the highest graduation rates among the subgroups in this study. School 4

did not have a population of Black students that accounted for calculating the graduation

rates for that school. Therefore, it received a * as the CFSD uses in their results of

graduation rates.

Table 8 shows the 2014-2015 Correlation Analysis of Black and Hispanic Students Graduation Rate.

Table 8

2014-2015 Correlation Analysis of Black and Hispanic Students Graduation Rate

| School #	Black students	Hispanic students
1	86.7	76.2
2	86.7	74.5
3	87.1	75.7
4	*	92.0
5	85.9	80.6
6	88.2	83.2
7	82.6	75.0
8	74.6	84.1

Note. */ or blank box indicates a subgroup population fewer than 10 students represented

in that subgroup. Florida Department of Education. *School, District, and State Public*

Accountability Report.

https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1617/nclb1617.cfm?dist_schl=35_81

School 4 was not included in the analysis because schools with less than 10

students in a subgroup are not counted in district percentages. Seventy-five percent of

Hispanic students graduated from the CFSD in the 2014-2015 school year compared to

70.1% of Black students graduating from the CFSD in the 2014-2015 school year

according to the CFSD report card.

The data were analyzed to discover the correlation between Black and Hispanic

students' graduation rate. There was a negative correlation of -0.43 between Black and

Hispanic students. This means that when Black students' graduation rate increases,

Hispanic students' graduation rate decreases.

Table 9 shows the 2015-2016 CFSD High School Graduates for Black and Hispanic
Students Within the Subgroups of ED, ESE, and ESL.
Table 9

2015-2016 CFSD High School Graduates for Black and Hispanic Students Within the

Subgroups of ED, ESE, and ESL

| Schools	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
Total graduates	80.5	74.3	82.9	75.5	82.9	74.3	80.5	86.8
White	81.3	76.2	84.4	87.0	88.6	91.0	77.9	81.1
Black	76.5	71.7	80.7	71.6	80.7	71.7	76.5	*
Hispanic	82.9	70.0	79.1	68.4	79.1	70.0	82.9	81.8
ESE	60.7	69.2	53.6	53.7	53.6	69.2	60.7	62.5
ED	75.4	62.4	72.3	69.6	72.3	62.4	75.4	86.5
ESL	*	*	*	50.0	*	*	*	*

Note. */ or blank box indicates a subgroup population fewer than 10 students represented

in that subgroup. Note. Florida Department of Education. *School, District, and State*

Public Accountability Report.

https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1516/schl1516.cfm?dist_number=35

Figure 2 shows the 2015-2016 Overall, Black, and Hispanic Student Graduation Percentages**.**

Figure 2

2015-2016 Overall, Black, and Hispanic Student Graduation Percentages
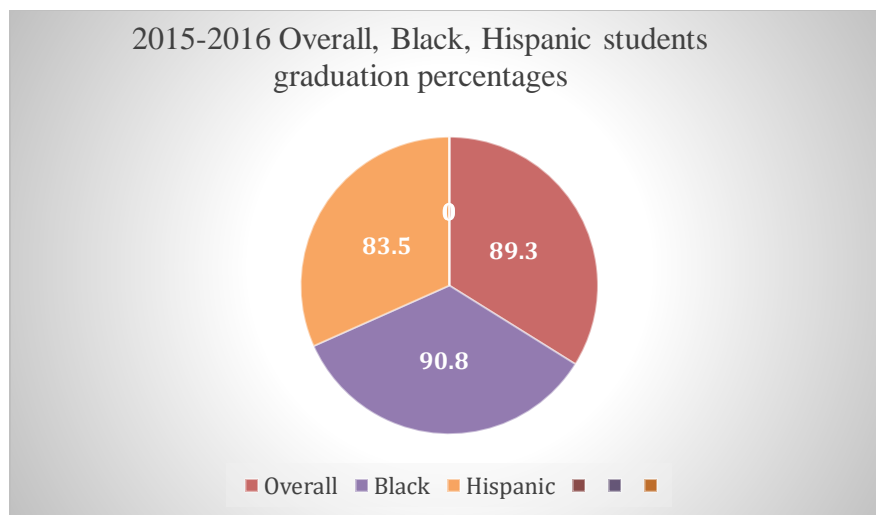
Note. Florida Department of Education. *School, District, and State Public Accountability Report.* https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1516/schl1516.cfm?dist_number=35

During the 2015-2016 school year, none of the eight schools in the CFSD made the state graduation goal of 91%. The highest overall graduation rate during the 2015-2016 school year belonged to School 8, with a 86.8% overall graduation, while Schools 3 and 4 both had 82.9% of their students graduating that school year. It is important to note that while no school made the graduation goal of 91%, School 6 made the goal among their White students.

Table 10 shows the 2015-2016 Correlation Analysis of Black and Hispanic Students

Graduation Rate.

Table 10

2015-2016 Correlation Analysis of Black and Hispanic Students Graduation Rate

School #	Black students	Hispanic students
1	76.5	82.9
2	71.7	70
3	80.7	79.1
4	*	68.4
5	71.6	79.1
6	80.7	70
7	71.7	82.9
8	76.5	81.8

Note. */ or blank box indicates a subgroup population fewer than 10 students represented

in that subgroup. Florida Department of Education. *School, District, and State Public*

Accountability Report.

https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1516/schl1516.cfm?dist_number=35

School 4 did not have a percentage of Black students because schools with less

than 10 students in a subgroup were not counted in district percentages. 80.45% of

Hispanic students graduated from the CFSD in the 2015-2016 school year compared to

76.5% of Black students graduating from the CFSD in the 2015-2016 school year

according to the CFSD district report card. The data were analyzed to find the correlation

between Black and Hispanic students' graduation rate. There is a negative correlation of -

0.41 between Black and Hispanic students. This means that when Black students'

graduation rate increased, Hispanic students' graduation rate decreased.

Table 11 shows the 2016-2017 CFSD High School Graduates for Black and Hispanic

Students Within the Subgroups of ED, ESE, and ESL.

Table 11

2016-2017 CFSD High School Graduates for Black and Hispanic Students Within the

Subgroups of ED, ESE, and ESL

Schools	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
Total graduates	80	75	83	87	93	94	67	80
White	81.3	76.2	84.4	87.0	93.9	91.0	77.9	81.4
Black	68	71	64	*	94	93	68	79
Hispanic	73	73	86	82	91	92	68	80
ESE	53	70	50	87	85	86	56	61
ED	74	66	74	86	92	82	64	74
ESL	*	*	70	*	85	86	36	*

Note. */ or blank box indicates a subgroup population fewer than 10 students represented

in that subgroup. Florida Department of Education. *School, District, and State Public*

Accountability Report. https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1617/main1617.cfm

Figure 3 shows the 2016-2017 Overall vs. Black and Hispanic Graduation Rate- No

Remedial Programs in Place.

Figure 3

2016-2017 Overall vs. Black and Hispanic Graduation Rate- No Remedial Programs in
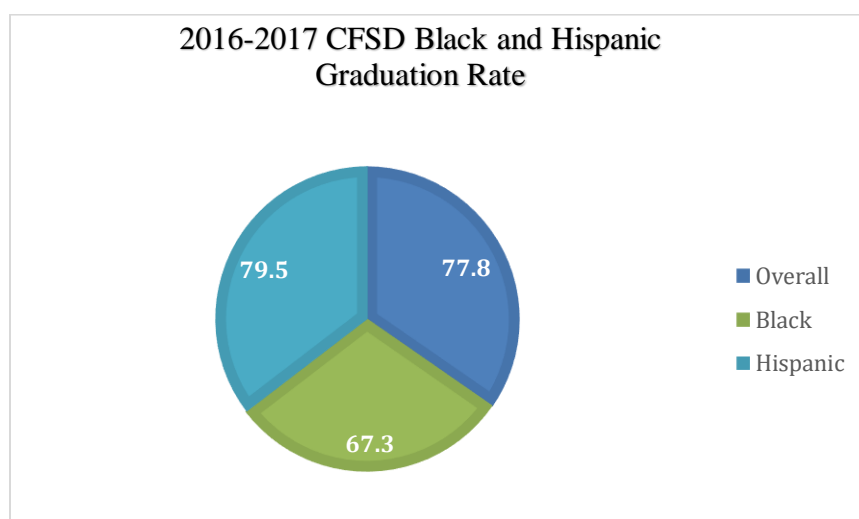
Place

Note. */ or blank box indicates a subgroup population fewer than 10 students represented

in that subgroup. Florida Department of Education. *School, District, and State Public*

Accountability Report. https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1617/main1617.cfm

During the 2016-2017 school year, the state graduation goal increased from 91%

to 93%. Schools 5 met this goal, with 93% of their students overall graduating, and

School 6 exceeded this goal, with 94% of their students graduating. It is important to note

that School 5 and 6 met the state goal of graduating their Black students at 94% and 93%.

It is also important to note that School 6 Black students surpassed White students, who

graduated at 91.0%.

Table 12 shows the 2016-2017 Correlation Analysis of Black and Hispanic Students

Graduation Rate.

Table 12

2016-2017 Correlation Analysis of Black and Hispanic Students Graduation Rate

School #	Black students	Hispanic students
1	68	73
2	71	73
3	64	86
4	*	82
5	94	91
6	93	92
7	68	68
8	79	80

Note. */ or blank box indicates a subgroup population fewer than 10 students represented

in that subgroup. Florida Department of Education. *School, District, and State Public*

Accountability Report. https://eds.fldoe.org/eds/nclbspar/year1617/main1617.cfm

79.5% of Hispanic students graduated from the CFSD in the 2016-2017 SY

compared to 67.3% of Black students graduated from the CFSD in the 2016-2017 SY

according to the CFSD District Report card. The data was analyzed to find out the

correlation between Black and Hispanic students' graduation rate. It was found that there

is a positive correlation of 0.73 between Black and Hispanic students. This means that

when Hispanic students' graduation rate increases, Black students' graduation rate

decreases.

Table 13 shows the 2017-2018 CFSD High School Graduates.

Table 13

2017-2018 CFSD High School Graduates

| Schools	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
Total Graduates	89	86	87	84	93	97	72	87
White	88	87	87	83.1	94.6	97.7	73.5	87.6
Black	95	85	86	*	93	98	70	87
Hispanic	87	84	90	88	93	96	65	87
ESE	86	80	79	84	96	94	62	76
ED	78	80	81	81	92	94	65	85
ESL	*	70	70	*	83	70	58	*

Note. */ or blank box indicates a subgroup population fewer than 10 students represented

in that subgroup. Florida Department of Education, *School, District and State Public*

Accountability Report.

https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards/Schools.html?school=0000&district=35

Figure 4 shows the 2017-2018 Comparison Graduation Equity Policies Implemented Results.

Figure 4

2017-2018 Comparison Graduation Equity Policies Implemented Results
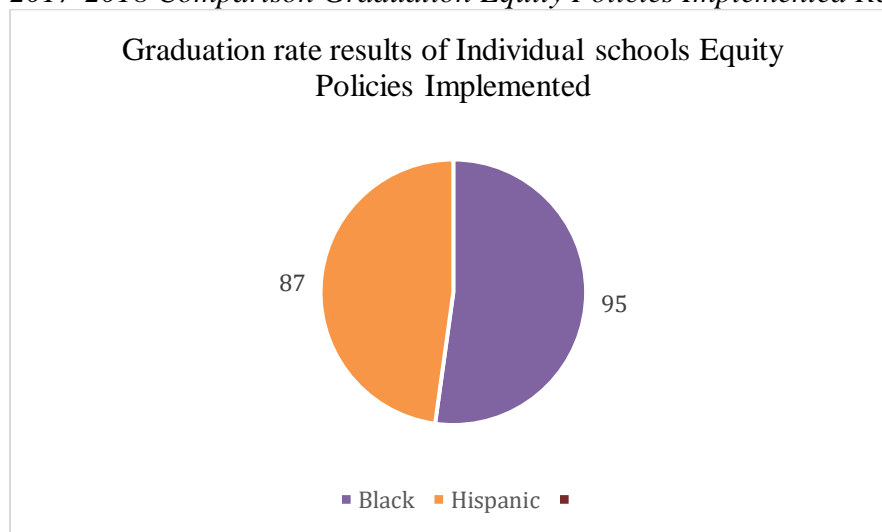
Graduation rate results of Individual schools Equity Policies Implemented

- Black ■ Hispanic ■

Note. Florida Department of Education, *School, District and State Public Accountability Report.* https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards/Schools.html?school=0000&district=35

Though the CFSD has not developed any equity policies this school year, schools 1, 5 and 6 implemented an after school program to assist students at risk (predominately Black and Hispanic. Principals of the three schools worked closely together in implementing after school tutoring with teacher volunteers and working with transportation in order to ensure students would have transportation home if they stayed after school. The result netted Black students at schools 1 and 6 graduating at a higher rate than White students and Hispanic students surpassing white students in schools 5 and 6. However, it should be noted that school 4 which is predominately Hispanic, graduated more Hispanic students at 88% than White students at 83.1%.

Table 14 shows the 2017-2018 Correlation Analysis of Black and Hispanic Students Graduation Rate.

Table 14

2017-2018 Correlation Analysis of Black and Hispanic Students Graduation Rate

School #	Black students	Hispanic students
1	95	87
2	85	84
3	86	90
4	*	88
5	93	93
6	98	96
7	70	65
8	87	87

*/ or blank box indicates a subgroup population fewer than 10 students represented in that subgroup. *Note.* Florida Department of Education, *School, District and State Public Accountability Report.*

https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards/Schools.html?school=0000&district=35

85.2% of Hispanic students graduated from the CFSD in the 2017-2018 SY compared to 80.9% of Black students graduated from the CFSD in the 2017-2018 SY according to the CFSD District Report card. Reporting below the 93% goal for graduation set by the FLDOE.

A correlation study was conducted to analyze if there was a correlation between Black and Hispanic students' graduation rate. It was found that there is a positive correlation of 0.92 between Black and Hispanic students. This means that when Hispanic students' graduation rate increases, Black students' graduation increases as well.

Table 15 shows the 2018-2019 CFSD High School Graduates.

Table 15

2018-2019 CFSD High School Graduates

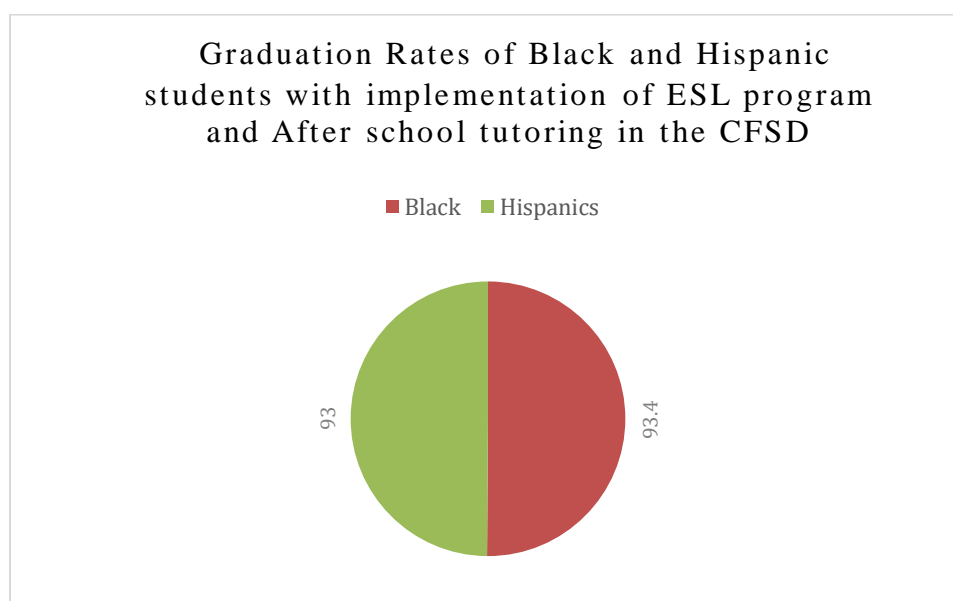| Schools	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
Total Graduates	90.6	91.1	87.4	94.1	97.8	97.2	74.7	90.9
White	90.8	90	87.2	93.2	98	97	74.3	90.7
Black	95.0	85.5	86.4	*	93.4	97.5	70.1	86.5
Hispanic	86.9	84.0	90.5	88	93.0	95.6	65.5	86.8
ESE	83.3	83.6	64.3	90.9	96.1	98.4	55.8	76.9
ED	85.7	87.4	82.8	93.3	97.3	94.1	72.3	89.6
ESL	*	91.7	84.6	*	94.6	83.3	73.7	*

Note. */ or blank box indicates a subgroup population fewer than 10 students represented in that subgroup. Florida Department of Education, *School, District and State Public Accountability Report.*

https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards/Schools.html?school=0000&district=35

Figure 5 shows the 2018-2019 Graduation Rates of Black and Hispanic Students With

Implementation of ESL Program and After School Tutoring in the CFSD.

Figure 5

2018-2019 Graduation Rates of Black and Hispanic Students With Implementation of

ESL Program and After School Tutoring in the CFSD

Graduation Rates of Black and Hispanic
students with implementation of ESL program
and After school tutoring in the CFSD

■ Black ■ Hispanics

93   93.4

Note. Florida Department of Education*, School, District and State Public Accountability*

Report. https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards/Schools.html?school=0000&district=35

　　　　Schools #4, #5, and #6 have surpassed the state graduation goal set at 93% for the

2018-2019 school year. Although it is important to note that school #4 does not have

Black students enrolled, where schools #5 &6 have both Black and Hispanic students

enrolled. It is also noteworthy that school #5 made the or surpassed the graduation goals

set by the State in each subgroup Low Social-economic, ESE, ESL as well this school

year.

The 2018-2019 school year the ESL program became State funded with classes focusing on PBS and teaching self-determination theory methods in a classroom with peers. The Hispanic graduation rate has increased by 4% while the Black student graduation rate has made a 2% increase (FLDOE, 2019). Table 16 shows the 2018-2019 Correlation Analysis of Black and Hispanic Students Graduation Rate.

Table 16

2018-2019 Correlation Analysis of Black and Hispanic Students Graduation Rate

School #	Black students	Hispanic students
1	95	86.9
2	85.5	84
3	86.4	90.5
4	0	88
5	93.4	93
6	97.5	95.6
7	70.1	65.5
8	86.5	86.8

Note. */ or blank box indicates a subgroup population fewer than 10 students represented in that subgroup. Florida Department of Education, *School, District and State Public Accountability Report.*

https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards/Schools.html?school=0000&district=35

Note. 89.4% of Hispanic students graduated from the CFSD in the 2018-2019 SY compared to 88.4% of Black students graduated from the CFSD in the 2018-2019 SY

according to the CFSD District Report card. Reporting below the 93% goal for graduation set by the FLDOE.

The purpose of analyzing the data was to identify if there was a correlation between Black and Hispanic students' graduation rate. It was found that there is a positive correlation of 0.92 between Black and Hispanic students. This means that when Hispanic students' graduation rate increases, Black students' graduation increases as well.

RQ2: What school policies can be recommended to improve the graduation rate for Black and Hispanic students who are categorized as ED, ESE, and ESL?

Implementing an equity policy that would incorporate the self- determination theory methods in all schools across the CFSD would prove to improve graduation rates in the areas of those students who are at most risk. As stated previously in section two, when students need to feel supported, the teacher acts as the social-contextual facilitator of students' need satisfaction and optimal functioning; but when controlling, the teacher acts as a social-contextual counter of these same processes Ryan & Deci (2019). Self-determination has been applied to a variety of areas in and outside of education. Research has linked that having high self-determination can equate to success in many different domains of life Núñez and León (2015). This is why choosing SDT is so important in bolstering Black and Hispanic students at low- risk of success, help to close the gap in graduation rates in CFS. The Self-determination method offers an engaging curriculum for Black and Hispanic students in a neutral environment with peers of the same

demographics where they can flourish educationally with the end result of graduating high school within the 4 year period with their cohort peers.

Policy 1080 (1080)- Operates under the understanding that educational equity is an inherent right to all students within the school system and must be a part system, policy, procedure, and practice. The 1080 must be a priority of educational equity by identifying and removing barriers and other factors that disallow access to a high quality education for all students. The 1080 understands the importance and influence of social identifiers have on student outcomes. The 1080 believes that in order for this policy to be a success, there must be a buy-in and shared responsibility among, The Superintendent and board members, employees, parents, community stakeholders, and students to work towards educational equity in closing the gap among at-risk Black and Hispanic students within prevalent subgroups of ED, ESE, and ESL.

The EIE policy which has been successfully implemented in the Orange County, California is similar to the 1080 policy as well but focuses more on the accountability piece, biases, and inconsistent outcomes of not just Black and Hispanic students of the ED, ESE, and ESL subgroups but also addressing biases and barriers which can result in students at risk not graduating such as religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age. The EIE believes that these biases along with ED, ESE, and ESL contribute directly to gaps in achievement and the end result of graduating within the 4 year time period.

The 2015-2016 school year there continued to be no equity policies in place. During this school year, school #6 began reaching out to community stake holders during

the Student Advisory Council (SAC) meetings for funding to assist with after school tutoring with students whom where at-risk for not graduating that school year. In doing so, although all schools still fell short of meeting the State graduation goal requirement of 91%, school #6 made great achievements as referenced in figure 3. In implementing an after school program to help those who were most at risk and have their classroom teachers assist, with the exception of the ESL program where the funding District wide was still not in place and the graduation rate went from 81.3% the 2014-2015 school year to 46.2% the 2015-2016 as shown in figure 3.

During the 2016-2017, school year there still lacks an equity policy for all eight schools in the CFSD. Though it is important to note that though there are some gains among school #8, schools #5 and #6 began to work together to improve their school graduation rates shown in figure 4, there were still some struggles. School #6 still struggles with being able to meet the State goals of 91% for ED and ESE students; their scores mirror one another in meeting or surpassing the State goals. Unlike school #7, which dropped 8% in their graduation, rate overall as well as virtually every category with exception of their Hispanic and ESE students that had no change compared to the previous school year. This trend continued with schools 5 and 6 outperforming the other six schools in graduating their students. However, with change in leadership in some of the other schools and changing individually equity school policies, increases in graduation rates in schools 2, 1, 8, and 4. Schools 7 and 3 made minimum gains, and schools 5 and 6 continued to outperform the State's now 93% graduation goal.

During the school year of 2017-2018, though some schools such as #5 and #6 have an overall increase in graduation rates. Also, in the rates of Black students which is also an increase for school #1 as referenced in table 4.

The rate of graduation of ESL students are illustrated in figure 7. In both figures, 6 and 7 there is a decline in the rate of graduation rates of ESL students within the CFSD. It should also be noted in figure 2, there were no ESL students that were counted in the graduation rates for the 2017-2018 school years for schools #1 and #4. In addition, please note that there was a drop for students within three schools in the CFSD, though funding was in place to serve students. Each school is running the program with limited guidance from the leadership and clear policies at the District levels.

The biggest issue with the CFSD is though there are equity policies in place, they are not consistently followed in all eight schools, nor do they address the two key issues within the eight schools: (a) Identification through measurement and (b) professional development. Not having a concise equity policy addressing those key issues will continue the fluctuation of graduation rates within the CFSD. Creating policies that will address disparities at each school, will yield results consistently that will meet or surpass the State's graduation's goals.

Strengths

The CFSD is that each school has a central reporting agency each week. As they are able to communicate with their fellow level principals and the Superintendent of the District during their weekly principal meetings to introduce, discuss, and learn of new policies, and implementations within the District and the successes and/or its failures.

These meetings are not often held in isolation but often held in the classroom of a school, so that principals are often able to see firsthand what policy works in the classroom and which one will not have success at their schools. A strength of this study is that because CFSD has progress monitoring testing throughout the school year to monitor the progress of students growth and set up interventions if needed when funding is available.

Limitations

Within this study, there were a few limitations. The years of this study 2015-2019 SY is the data in which this study was conducted. Though there is data to support the 2019-2020 and the 2020-2021 SYs, due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the shifting of how the CFSD adjusted their curriculum like many public schools during and post Covid-19, the data is skewed and inaccurate. Under orders from Florida officials, State testing was suspended, teachers were ordered to pass all students even if they did not complete much or any of schoolwork, and virtual teaching and learning became a primary option for many. This resulted in an increase of dropout rates among all students which special emphasis on Black and Hispanic students in the ED category where many became employed to help their family and was at a lower risk of contracting and dying from Covid-19. While no data was officially recorded in the state data base the 2019-2020 SY, many students did not return the following 2020-2021 SY where students had the option of in person or virtual learning. Though the CFSD met the met the state goal of 91%, it is important to note that students titled ED who were Black, and Hispanic graduated at 88% (FLDOE, 2021).

Other limitations where the lack of availability of student level data at the schools but rather could only analyze the secondary data that was provided on the public domains on the State website.

Recommendations

SDT

It is my recommendation based on this study, that all eight schools within the CFSD implement a Self-Determination (SD) course along with the 1080 or EIE policy. The course will be strongly recommended for students who are at risk for graduating with their cohort peers as an elective course to take rather than an elective such as aerobics or recreational health where students walk around the track for 51 mins. It is recommended that this class be taught at each school by at least two educators who have been trained in how to provide self-determination skills to at at-risk students. The class size must be no larger than 20 students to maintain a small classroom learning environment. Also, during Professional Development days scheduled throughout the school year, teachers should have two mandated trainings during the school year able to earn points towards their recertification. It is highly recommended that all Administration at each school attends training and is interactive with the students as well.

Educational Equity Policies

The recommendation to implement educational equity policies will be shared with the Superintendent, school board members, school principals of the eight schools within the CFSD and other stockholders. The District must be willing to fund this program for a substantial amount of time and allocate monies to its success from other programs in the

district that are not effective but have been grandfathered in. Specific curriculums must be developed which can be done in reaching out to Districts which have already had success in implementing the Self-determination theory and education equity policies in their schools. If CFSD wants to close the gap and make a positive change in the equity of the education the students receive, all faucets must be involved, and it must be taken seriously. During the school year of 2019-2020 the dropout rate increased 8% for those students who are ED and nearly 13% for those students who are labeled ESE (FLDOE, 2019). During the 2020-2021 although the data has not been released yet, school board officials have shared that this number has continued to grow. This has also been communicated with the increase in enrollment in the GED program with the CFSD Lake Technical school director summer of 2021.

Potential Implications for Positive Social Change

Studies have shown individuals with the opportunity to earn a higher income and gain access to better living conditions, healthier foods, and health care services when completing their high school diploma (ODPHP, 2021) Increased high school graduation rates will have significant positive benefits on the local economy, creating new jobs, and revenue for the Central Florida community. Crime would continue to decrease, and neighborhoods would be safer to live in. Studies have shown that individuals with the opportunity to earn a higher income and gain access to better living conditions, healthier foods, and health care services when completing their high school diploma (ODPHP, 2021).

Section 5: Dissemination Plan

CFSD introduced a shell of a self-determination class to some of the schools within the district the 2021-2022 school year. Though the class is called Self-Determination, it is only for students who are on the emotional behavior disorder spectrum and not available for all students who are at-risk or for educators who struggle with educating effectively in those classrooms. The first step in this dissemination plan is to draft an educational equity plan. The superintendent should reach out to other districts who have had success in implementing an educational equity policy and enlist their assistance in creating a plan for the CFSD, which would include school board officials, principals and assistant principals, community leaders, and student leaders. A small group of each would visit the schools, engage in a Q&A with district and school leaders from the school surveyed. In addition, self-determination training should take place in the Spring of the 2022 school year at the model school, with both leaders and teachers present within a faculty meeting, using Power Point as a presentation method and a briefing memo with notes that teachers and school and district leaders can refer back to if needed. This should be done with small groups at a time and scheduled one day every 2 weeks with a small group of no more than four observers. This would help from the classroom becoming a revolving door and perhaps allow real learning to take place in between the instruction. The second step, though in conjunction with the first, should include classroom visits. During faculty meetings that take place weekly, one meeting a month can be focused on self-determination training after the initial roll out the 2022-2023 SY (more often if needed). This training would include a department lead from each

school department. That faculty member would be responsible for training other faculty members within their department. This will include the principal and the administration with directives given solely from the superintendent for consistency across all eight schools. The next step in the plan would include a training during the summer. Faculty members (2) from each department, administration (2), and student leaders (2). All members should attend a seminar to learn more about how to be effective at bringing educational equity and self-determination into all classrooms with all faculty and administration effectively for the 2022-2023 school year. Stipends of an agreed amount should be paid to those who attend training outside of their contracted days and times. It is important to note that in order for these policies to be successful, the district must be committed to each school being involved as well as the superintendent and school board members attending the trainings at the schools during the spring of 2022, in addition to the trainings during the summer of 2022 and continuously as a learner, not a supervisor.

A final element to this plan being successful for all success for schools is for the schools themselves to speak to the students to build that relationship. Part of self-determination is to build connections. Student leadership is represented at each school. This can be done with a round table with the class president attending the meetings with the superintendent and principal meetings and then sharing that information with the monthly class of meetings; however, the student voice and forging a connection is the most important element in building self-determination, and thus improving graduation rates. Again, the equity policies must be consistent at all eight of the CFSD's schools in order for success to occur both short and long term.

The effective dissemination of the study is also dependent on the use of effective communication between the superintendent and the school leadership and the classroom leaders (teachers). This dissemination plan is not a one-time occurrence, but rather it will need to be revisited annually and continuous feedback will be regularly sought on how to continuously meet/exceed the needs of the students in the CFSD whom are at risk so that they are able to graduate high school with a diploma with their cohort peers.

Summary

This study sought to address the issue of at-risk Black and Hispanic students graduating at a lower rate than their peers in the CFSD and how to close the gap. Though there have been gains within the CFSD with at-risk Black and Hispanic student population as a whole, the growth has not been consistent within all eight schools and without equity policies in place. In addition, there have been some schools within the CFSD that have seen very little growth in the subgroups of ED, ESE, and ESL. However, it is important to note that while some schools have made tremendous gains in some categories, none of the eight schools have met or exceed the state goals in every category. That coupled with most students returning to in person learning from the 2021-2022 post the initial Covid-19 pandemic school years, this gap has only widened.

In providing the CFSD with an equity policy that would be effective in each school to improve their graduation rates, individualized to the demographics of the school is key to no child being left behind, every student succeeding, and/or advancement via individual determination. No matter the acronym adopted, the self-determination method will teach students how to gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills. That is the buy

in that must come from the teachers and school leaders. They must be willing to be leaders to all students. The students must then feel that they can be successful not just in attaining their diploma but in postsecondary life as well. When students feel as if they can be successful, those school leaders must be there to help them achieve their goals. That is the importance of having in place educational equity policies and self-determination methods. The importance of all students, at-risk Black, Hispanic, subgroups ED, ESE, and ESL leave high school with a diploma and have the opportunity to be a contributing member of society at the same rate of their cohort peers.

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