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Promoting Social Involvement to Increase the Graduation Rate of At-Risk Students

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

Kenya Waters Miller

MA, Barry University, 2004

BS, University of Miami, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

Graduating from high school is a step in preparing students for positive life outcomes, enabling them to participate in the economy and to engage in civic life. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff regarding cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. Astin's student involvement theory served as the framework for this study. The research questions addressed how administrators, teachers, and student support staff perceived how programs at an urban high school in a southeastern state influenced the graduation rate of at-risk students. Semistructured interviews were used to gather data using a purposeful sample of 11 participants who were employed at the high school during school years from 2016–2019. Data were coded using open, axial, and descriptive coding strategies and analyzed for common themes about cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities. Key findings from this case study were that most of the administrators, teachers, and student support staff reported that, in some form, cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities improved student behavior and motivation, met the unique needs of students until high school graduation, and promoted social involvement. The study may contribute to positive social change by providing recommendations to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students at urban high schools by encouraging students to participate in cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities. Cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities fostered a learning environment that helped keep at-risk students in school through graduation, setting them on course for greater earning potential as adults.

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Dedication

I dedicate this degree to my mother, Lashan Fagan, and my maternal grandparents, Charlie and Mary Julia Williams. Although they are not with me physically, they will always be with me spiritually. Their love, support, and daily prayers motivated me to fulfill every dream. I know they are celebrating together in heaven! I also dedicate this degree to my children, Kayla and Kenyon, who gave me a reason to work hard and persevere through every obstacle and hardship. To my sisters, Geneva, Julia, and Denea, who never gave up on me when I wanted to throw in the towel. Lastly, to my husband, Clarence Miller; he took me by the hand and held it all the way to the finish line.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Graduating from high school is a step in preparing students for positive life outcomes, empowering them to participate in the economy and engage in civic life. However, nearly one in five American high school students do not graduate from high school on time, if ever (Zaff et al., 2017). Based on a national average, high school graduates earn $8,000 more annually than high school dropouts and are far less likely to be unemployed, on government assistance, or in prison (Hughes et al., 2018).

In the United States, the school dropout rates (a percentage of the population aged 18–24) increased from 6.0% to 9.3% in 2008–2017 (Balaz & Jeck, 2019). Dropout rates can be correlated to criminal behaviors as well as early death. The probability of being incarcerated is much higher for dropouts than for any other group of individuals (Franklin & Trouard, 2016). Moreover, the cost associated with dropping out of high school may be even more detrimental among populations whose non completion rates are higher than the national average (Zaff et al., 2017). The effects of graduation rates are magnified when considering that the children of noncompleters tend experience poorer health, lower socioeconomic standards, and lower educational outcomes than children of parents who graduated from high school (Zaff et al, 2017).

Schools often implement cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities to help engage students in learning and keep students in school (Fox & Sease, 2019). Though these types of activities are often confused and used interchangeably, there is a slight difference: Cocurricular learning complements the curriculum being taught in the classroom, while extracurricular activities might not (Gettig & Fjortoft, 2020).

Extracurricular activities are activities carried out within the school or its broader community to provide guidance and supervision, as well as to add quality to a student's experience. These extracurricular activities, which are usually not directly connected to the school curriculum, include sports, clubs, fine arts, or other community-based activities (Dawes et al., 2015). For example, at an urban high school in a southeastern state, extracurricular activities offered include, but are not limited to, sports teams, band, debate club, and chess club. Meanwhile, cocurricular learning offers unique learning opportunities that support the learning that takes place inside the classroom (Kwon et al., 2020). At the study site, examples of cocurricular offerings are Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Leaders in Me, and Law Academy.

In a study examining the relationship between cocurricular learning and academic performance, Fox and Sease (2019) reported that involvement in cocurricular learning supported deep learning and improved academic performance. Fox and Sease grouped 1,137 participants into categories based on their participation in cocurricular learning. Students at the above-average range of cocurricular participation had an average GPA of 3.38, students at the average cocurricular participation range had an average GPA of 3.23, and students at the below-average cocurricular participation range had an average of 3.14 (Fox & Sease, 2019). The findings from the data collected from the present study identified ways to effectively improve high school graduation rates based on the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff concerning cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities designed to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students.

Chapter 1 includes the background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, nature, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 includes the literature review. Chapter 3 includes a description of the research method, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. Chapter 4 includes the results of this study and Chapter 5 is where the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations may be found.

Background

High school graduation rates continue to be a concern in developed countries such as the United States. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) increased accountability for teachers, schools, and school districts to raise graduation rates each year. The NCLB emphasized the importance of closing the achievement gap while increasing the graduation rate. To hold teachers accountable for student progress, federal education legislators instituted high-stakes consequences for administrators and teachers in schools in which students do not make adequate yearly progress (NCLB, 2002). This policy mandated the establishment of interventions to support a student's academic achievement, with the goal of students ultimately becoming contributing members of society (Hoover & Cozzens, 2016).

On December 10, 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), legislation that replaced NCLB (2002). ESSA authorizes federal spending to support K–12 schooling and represents the nation's commitment to equal education opportunity for all students (Darrow, 2016). System supports for low-

performing schools are an essential part of ESSA. A low-performing school has one third or more of the students failing to graduate (Darrow, 2016).

Balaz and Jeck (2019) stated that dropouts find it exceedingly difficult to find and secure stable jobs. Jobseekers without a high school diploma account for the highest unemployment rates. Completing high school is subject to many conditions, such as availability of educational infrastructure, dedicated teaching staff, public support, and a quality curriculum.

This gap in preparedness to complete high school may cause students to fall behind in the ninth grade or drop out of school entirely (Vera et al., 2016). Location plays a major part in where a student enrolls each academic year. For students, being assigned to failing schools by where they live can represent a challenge to their high school success (Kemple, 2016). This study was necessary because when students do not graduate from high school, there is a substantial cost to them, their future families, communities, and society. Suppose the graduation rate continues to decrease. The results from this study may help school leaders find ways to increase the graduation rate.

Problem Statement

The problem was that little was known about administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities designed to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students. This group of at-risk students included students who were enrolled in cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities. Among this student population, fewer than 85% of seniors at the study site, an

urban high school in a southeastern state, graduated from high school every year, and the graduation rate continued to be lower than the state's graduation rate.

Table 1

Urban High School Graduation Rates, 2016–2019

Graduation year	Number of graduates	Southeastern state urban high school	District	State
2016	179	72%	71.6%	78.8%
2017	177	68%	77.1%	79.4%
2018	174	76%	78.5%	80.6%
2019	169	80.9%	79.4%	82%

Note. Data from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2019).

As represented in Table 1, the graduation rate of an urban high school in a southeastern state was 72% in 2016, 68% in 2017, 76% in 2018, and 80.9% in 2019 (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). In comparison, the overall high school graduation rate in the district was 71.6% in 2016, 77.1% in 2017, 78.5% in 2018, and 79.4% in 2019 (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). At the state level, the graduation rate was 78.8% in 2016, 79.4% in 2017, 80.6% in 2018, and 82% in 2019 (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2019). These data underscore the need to understand how administrators, teachers, and student support staff at an urban high school in a southeastern state perceive cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities designed to foster social involvement, maximize learning opportunities, and motivate students to graduate from high school.

U.S. graduation rates remain low when compared to those of other countries, especially for disadvantaged students (Bloom et al., 2020). Unfortunately, existing causal research provided limited guidance for improving this situation, in part because few interventions were implemented in a manner that was amenable to rigorous evaluation, and in part because ambitious, transformative interventions are hard to implement at scale (Bloom et al., 2020). It is estimated that there are more than 5,000 persistently failing schools in the United States, interfering with more than 2.5 million children's rights to an education on equal terms. These schools consistently record low performance on standardized tests, high dropout rates, and low graduation rates and serve disproportionately large populations of disadvantaged children (McCallister, 2021).

Assumptions about what students should learn are another flaw of conventional educational practices (McCallister, 2021). The modern school curriculum is organized to teach basic literacy, numeracy, and content from a narrow band of subjects. While these curriculum aims were adequate in the 20th century, life in today's rapidly changing, digitally connected, globalized world demands new forms of learning—so-called 21st-century learning skills or global competencies (McCallister, 2021). In addition to basic literacy and numeracy, children need to learn how to process, manage, and analyze vast bodies of information; to use constantly evolving forms of information communication technology; to self-regulate in response to new social situations; to be socially aware; to think critically and creatively; to know how to solve problems and think innovatively in challenging situations; to apply persistence and self-determination in learning and solving problems; and to communicate with others across multiple cultures and languages from

all corners of the globe (McCallister, 2021). The McCallister model, or Learning Cultures, empowers learners to develop by setting personal learning goals and self-selecting curriculum activities. The methods are designed around three primary aims: (a) to provide learners with fundamental freedoms of thought, movement, expression and association as an existential medium to support self-expression and self-regulation; (b) to promote personal intentionality and self-determination in the service of formal learning and intellective development; and (c) to foster full and free forms of association, and through social interaction, to harness the capacity of shared intentionality and cooperative problem solving (McCallister, 2021).

Student involvement is essential in predicting and preventing high school dropouts and improving student outcomes (Fraysier et al., 2020).

Student involvement is used interchangeably with the term "student engagement." While "student involvement" focuses on behavioral aspects of participation, "student engagement" adds emotional and cognitive dimensions to participation (Saidi, 2020). It is not just about providing platforms and channels for participation, but also about empowering students to develop interest in participating and in understanding the practical ways and means of participation (Saidi, 2020).

In the United States, the stratification of earnings and employment rates by educational attainment is among the most dramatic in the developed world: The unemployment rate is 4.6% for individuals with a postsecondary degree, 9.1% for those with only a high school degree, and 14.3% for those with less than a high school degree (Fraysier et al., 2020). Secondary and postsecondary dropouts are problems in the United

States, particularly for students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, males, and minority students. The rising demand for educated workers and the significant financial impact of unrealized credits created by high college dropout rates highlight the need for dropout prevention and intervention at the postsecondary level (Fraysier et al., 2020). Student engagement is used to describe the long-term processes of completion and withdrawal/dropout as cycle of nonparticipation, increasing academic difficulties, and emotional withdrawal (Fraysier et al., 2020).

Recently, researchers have identified engagement as a crucial component of academic success from elementary through high school and into postsecondary education. Student engagement has emerged as a significant predictor of high school dropout, with data from early elementary school predicting high school dropout or completion (Fraysier et al., 2020). School districts increasingly monitor student engagement, and engagement data are being incorporated into interventions for multitiered support systems in public school. With the growing focus on student engagement as a point of intervention, combined with the need of schools to focus not just on on-time graduation but also postsecondary enrollment and attainment, more research is needed to understand the utility of measuring student engagement and what specific outcomes student engagement predicts (Fraysier et al., 2020). One of the reasons that engagement has attracted so much attention in dropout prevention and intervention is that it is alterable, unlike other variables related to academic achievement such as SES and previous test scores, and it has direct ties to student performance and success. In

addition, studies support using engagement indicators for screening purposes for at-risk students (Fraysier et al., 2020).

Accountability systems and sanctions for low-performing schools are available to encourage the improvement of schools throughout the nation. The accountability pressures that teachers and leaders face may lead well-intentioned educators to engage in strategic reporting and operational practices to increase test scores, graduation rates, and other indicators of student success (Edwards & Mindrila, 2018). Moreover, students who complete high school with a traditional diploma experience improved outcomes compared to those students who drop out or those students who complete high school by means of passing the General Education Development (GED) tests (Smerillo et al., 2018). Without a high school diploma, young people are less likely to vote, volunteer in their communities, or be employed, and they are more likely to be arrested or earn a low income (Zaff et al., 2017). This statement describes the internal struggle with which well-meaning educators contend when faced with accountability pressures to graduate students.

Educational leaders can choose from available initiatives that benefit some students, guarantee positive reviews and evaluations for school staff, and improve public perceptions. However, the core values of educators may be threatened as graduation targets increase through unprincipled reporting practices or actions that threaten rigor and high expectations for students (Edwards & Mindrila, 2018). As a fundamental component of accountability systems, graduation rates often are viewed as a measure of the effectiveness of a school or district. Comparisons are made across schools, school

districts, and states, often without an understanding of the variations of student populations and calculation methodology differences across districts and states (Edwards & Mindrila, 2018). Hoover and Cozzens (2016) argued that there is a dropout crisis in the United States. The dropout crisis could result in a loss of close to $3 trillion in tax income in the United States over a decade if it continues. Each person who fails to graduate costs the United States an estimated $292,000 more than the average high school graduate over a lifetime because of lower taxable income (Zaff et al., 2017).

The expected graduation rate of at-risk students was not being met at an urban high school in a southeastern state. The at-risk students were enrolled in cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities that promoted engagement and involvement; however, no increase had been seen in the graduation rate. Administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rates of at-risk students were unclear. The low number of seniors who graduated from an urban high school in a southeastern state between the academic years from 2016 to 2019 indicated a school-wide problem. The low graduation rate posed a problem for the school, prompting more involvement from school district personnel as well as state-appointed interventionists. The school leaders experienced having to operate schools with decreased funds needed for instructional materials, and the immediate community suffered because of the increased number of unemployed and undertrained students attempting to enter the workforce.

The graduation rate in this school decreased as the state adopted new educational standards and curriculum. In addition, the College and Career Ready Performance Index

(CCRPI) indicated substantial problems in student readiness and was a clear sign that the district's mission was not being met at the school. In this qualitative study, I explored administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rates of at-risk students. This research was needed because the study's findings are now available for administrators and staff to use to address a gap in practice. Findings spurred a conversation about which programs educational leaders and staff in this urban high school in a southeastern state can implement to support improved graduation rates and decreased dropout rates through social involvement opportunities and by helping students understand any perceived limitations on their ability to leverage such programs successfully.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their impact on social involvement and the graduation rates of at-risk students. I interviewed administrators, teachers, and student support staff at the high school to identify personal and professional perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities that increased the graduation rate of at-risk students. The findings from the data collected within the study identified ways to address the low graduation rate of high school students through increased cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and identified any administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions that hindered such efforts.

Research Questions

A high school in a small urban district in a southeastern state had less than 85% of seniors graduating from high school each year. Trend data from 2016 to 2019 for the high school showed a graduation percentage rate each year that was lower than that of the state. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rates of at-risk students. The research questions for the study were the following:

RQ1. How do administrators perceive cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students?

RQ2. How do teachers and student support staff perceive cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was Astin's (1984) student involvement theory. Astin's student involvement theory highlights the influence of student involvement in cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities on engagement, academic performance, and dropout rates (Astin, 1984). This theory underpinned this study and served as a basis for the research questions. The research questions for this study explored how administrators, teachers, and student support staff perceive cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. Such activities may be offered to complement student

learning, increase student engagement, and create a sense of belonging and investment in the learning process (Astin, 1984).

By understanding administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities offered at an urban high school in a southeastern state, school leaders may make more informed decisions about the types of activities offered at their school to increase student involvement, engagement, and graduation rates. Comparatively, Medlin and Faulk (2011) conducted a study on employee engagement and employee performance echoing Astin's (1985) student involvement theory, and found that high levels of employee engagement resulted in better performance, which relates to high levels of student engagement and better student academic performance. Medlin and Faulk posited that studies on employee optimism, engagement, and productivity could be compared to studies conducted in school settings on student engagement and academic performance. Administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities offered to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students affected how educators communicated with students and how they provided additional learning experiences in a successful manner.

Astin's (1984) student involvement theory served as the framework for this study. I aligned the research questions of this study with this conceptual framework and explored the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. I used the student involvement theory to develop the interview

protocol, which permitted the participants to express their personal and professional perceptions on this topic. During the analysis stage of this study, I categorized the data using open and pattern codes to identify emerging themes that aligned with Astin's (1984) paradigm. I present a more thorough explanation of this theory in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This study followed a qualitative case study approach. I chose this approach to explore administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions using semistructured interviews. Perceptions of this type occurred in an open-ended manner and represented nonmathematical descriptions. The design for this research was qualitative. A qualitative design made it possible to collect narrative data about a social phenomenon in a natural setting. It also allowed the participants to express their views and feelings about the phenomenon. The qualitative design was appropriate because it allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). A case study is an empirical inquiry into a phenomenon in its natural context (Yin, 2014). A quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this type of inquiry. Qualitative research approaches that involved applying grounded theory and phenomenology were inappropriate for this study. Instead, I used a qualitative case study design for an exploratory approach to understanding participants' perceptions through semistructured interview questions.

I conducted this study in an urban high school in a southeastern state. The study included 11 purposefully chosen participants, including administrators, teachers, and student support staff members. In this qualitative case study, my role was that of an

observer. I collected information from participants, analyzed the data, identified findings, and drew conclusions based on the data collected. I collected data using semistructured interviews with the participants. I identified emerging themes in the data that I collected related to (a) perceptions of administrators relative to cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities offered at an urban high school in a southeastern state to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students and (b) perceptions of teachers and student support staff relative to cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities offered at an urban high school in a southeastern state to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students. I provide additional details on the nature and methodology of this study in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Several terms were essential to define in the context of this study. Knowing the definition of these terms may help the reader understand the areas associated with high school graduation rates and dropout rates.

At-risk youth: Individuals 18 years of age or younger who have a higher-than-average likelihood of engaging in crime or delinquency, or experiencing personal crisis (Levinson, 2002).

Cocurricular learning: Learning that supports the curriculum taught in the classroom and is usually not assigned academic credit, is voluntary, and is not systemically evaluated (Gettig & Fjortoft, 2020).

Delinquency: Delinquency relates to deviant student behavior such as theft, violence, substance abuse, and criminality. Delinquency increases the risk of educational failure (Backman, 2017).

Dropout factors: Dropout factors such as poor attendance, misbehavior, low academic achievement, and lack of engagement negatively affect high school graduation (Hoover & Cozzens, 2016).

Dropout rate: The dropout rate is the number that represents students leaving school without a high school diploma (Robison et al., 2017).

Environmental impacts: Environmental impacts are predictors of high school dropout based on family environment (Parr & Bonitz, 2015).

Extracurricular activities: Extracurricular activities are activities carried out within the school or within the community in collaboration with the school to provide guidance and supervision, as well as to add quality to students' experience. These extracurricular activities include sports, clubs, fine arts, and other community-based activities (Dawes et al., 2015).

Graduation rate: The graduation rate is a key indicator of student success that relates to completion of a state-mandated academic program of study (Fass-Holmes, 2017).

High school graduation: The attainment of a high school diploma or its equivalence defines high school graduation (Robison et al., 2017).

Student engagement: The quality of effort that students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes (Nichter, 2021).

Student involvement: Refers to the processes, mechanisms, channels, and platforms for allowing students to actively take part in decision making in the areas of governance and management, quality assurance, and teaching and learning in higher education institutions (Saidi, 2020).

Student support staff: School employees who are hired to implement interventions to identify, monitor, and support students who are at increased risk of not completing high school (Zipoli & Merritt, 2017).

Urban high schools: Urban high schools are learning institutions where students entering ninth grade are overaged, are chronically absent, or are from low-income families and demonstrate poor behavior and poor academic performance (Burke & Hochbein, 2015).

Assumptions

For this qualitative case study, it was believed that the participants provided open and honest answers during the interviews. It was also assumed that participants who worked at an urban high school in a southeastern state between 2016 and 2019 were familiar with the graduation rate and limitations to students' engagement in social involvement opportunities that hindered their ability to graduate from high school. Although it is understood that there were factors in students' lives outside the school environment that affected their ability to graduate, it was assumed that changing factors

within the school environment also affected students' ability to graduate from high school.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study focused on perceptions of 11 participants who worked at an urban high school in a southeastern state from 2016–2019. The setting was a small urban school district in the southeastern United States. The selected participants were familiar with graduation rates at the school and had observed disconnects in social involvement opportunities that prevented at-risk students from engaging in learning and graduating from high school. The sample participants were selected because of their interest, knowledge, and involvement with students.

Delimitations are choices made by the researcher to describe the boundaries set for the study and establish an explicit scope of study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The first delimitation of this study was that research was only conducted on one urban high school campus. Second, I used purposive sampling to identify 11 participants for semistructured interviews. Although other school personnel, students, parents, and community members were all stakeholders who had valuable contributions, they were not recruited as participants for this study. Third, other school personnel were excluded because they did not necessarily have the day-to-day opportunities to influence students' learning environment that teachers have. Students do not have the authority to amend classroom instruction. So, their feedback was not appropriate for this study. Finally, parents and community members had a more tangential role in the education process and

are not likely to have the depth of understanding needed to participate in a way that would foster the desired social change.

Limitations

A potential limitation of this study was using a semistructured interview approach, and given that I was the only interviewer, bias existed. Qualitative research involves bracketing researcher biases to mitigate the potentially adverse effects of preconceptions (Patton, 2015). The first potential bias in this study was that I participated in monthly meetings with one of the potential participants. I used bracketing to address this bias, known as *phenomenological reduction*.

The second potential limitation was the small sample size, which limited the transferability of the findings. This study focused on administrators, teachers, and student support staff; the findings of the study limited transferability to other staff working at the high school in this study or other urban campuses in other locations. A third potential limitation was confidentiality, which presented problems when I was presenting findings. It was vital for me to present the findings in a manner that preserved confidentiality. To address this limitation, I created pseudonyms for the participants.

Significance

This study was significant because it helped address the low graduation rate of at-risk students at the study site from two perspectives:

1. How do administrators perceive the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities in the study location that are implemented to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students?

2. How do teachers and student support staff perceive the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities in the study location that are implemented to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students?

School leaders have the ultimate responsibility to help students increase their awareness and understanding of the interdependent and unequal world in which they live through a process of interactive learning, debate, reflection, and action (Saude et al., 2018). Helping young people graduate from high school is an essential endeavor for individuals whose lives are improved by attaining a high school diploma and for entire communities (Wilkins, 2016). Methods exist that strengthen students' motivation toward school through social involvement opportunities such as providing extracurricular activities that involve students and provide social engagement; teaching through practical learning opportunities (as opposed to theoretical knowledge sharing); and using interactive methods that require competencies that are other than academic ones (Szabo, 2018).

Leaders attributed their successes to research-based whole-school strategies that targeted at-risk students. These leaders stated that strategies that increased school outreach were (a) attendance improvement programs, (b) employment of graduation coaches, (c) efforts at improving school climate, (d) supports for students transitioning to high school, and (e) online credit recovery opportunities (Edwards & Mindrila, 2018).

To address the at-risk student population, these leaders also reported implementing programs involving (a) mentoring, (b) pregnancy prevention, (c) family engagement, and (d) life skills development (Edwards & Mindrila, 2018). Practices such

as the narrowing of the curriculum, teaching to the test, and incessant drills and practice to improve performance on standardized assessments are common (Edwards & Mindrila, 2018). Although such measures constitute reducing standards and jeopardize the value of a high school diploma, these concerns must be weighed against the cost to students if they do not attain a diploma (Edwards & Mindrila, 2018). Many students face challenges outside of school that render them disadvantaged; thus, school is potentially a place for transformation. In school, students observe achievement and attain inspiration.

Implications for positive social change include using school to prepare students for potential roles as adults and engaging education as an agent of social change to develop personal skills and to encourage higher moral awareness. Ultimately, this study may facilitate social change and foster a learning environment that helps keep at-risk students in school through graduation and setting them on course for greater earning potential as adults. In addition, findings from this study may help school administrators, teachers, and student support staff identify cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities that motivate at-risk students to graduate from high school.

Summary

The problem addressed in this study was that little was known about administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities designed to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students. Less than 85% of seniors at an urban high school in a southeastern state graduated from high school each year, and the graduation rate had been declining in recent years, even while the state graduation rate improved. The qualitative case study design aided in

understanding the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their impacts on social involvement and the graduation rates of at-risk students.

In Chapter 1, I presented two guiding research questions, relevant definitions, and the research's assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations. This study was significant in that it helped address the low graduation rate at an urban high school in a southeastern state by gathering administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning land extracurricular activities and their impacts on social involvement and the graduation rates of at-risk students. In Chapter 2, I review peer-reviewed literature that addressed potential causes of low graduation rates, at-risk students, and programs that increased the graduation rate of at-risk high school students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem was that little was known about administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities designed to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions concerning cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities implemented at an urban high school in a southeastern state to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students. Creating positive experiences for students through cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities increased the graduation rate and reduced the dropout rate in an urban high school. The high school experience was academics and a combination of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities designed to enhance a student's high school journey. In this chapter, I review literature and explore concepts related to at-risk students' graduation rates, cocurricular learning, and extracurricular activities designed for them. Astin's student involvement theory served as the framework for this study. Other topics such as high school graduation, at-risk youth, cocurricular learning, urban schools, environmental influences, dropout factors, delinquency, demographic characteristics, reading ability, student engagement, student involvement, student support staff, and teenage pregnancy were addressed by the peer-reviewed literature in this chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

I derived the literature searched for this study from scholarly books, articles from seminal journals, and documents that I found in the Walden Library databases such as

EBSCO host, the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and ProQuest Digital Dissertations and Theses, Sage Journals and Publications, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, the U.S. Department of Education, Rev Econ Stat, VADEA, Prentice-Hall, Freeman, Education Policy Analysis Archives, GovTrack, Austrian Center for Personal Development and Social Involvement, Scientific Books, the Professional Counselor, Education Next, Jossey-Bass, Pergamon, Routledge, Academic Guides, and Nova. In addition, I used Google Scholar to help identify and access relevant articles.

I limited the literature review to articles that appeared in peer-reviewed journals from 2016 through 2020. Key words used in the search included *delinquency*, *dropout rates*, *environmental factors*, *at-risk youth*, *cocurricular learning*, *extracurricular activities*, *reading ability*, *teenage pregnancy*, *high school*, *graduation rates*, *teenage pregnancy*, *student involvement theory*, *single parent*, *poverty*, and *school programs*. After examining the articles in each search, I saved, categorized, and placed the articles in a literature review matrix. Next, I used the literature review matrix for further categorization based on the methodology, potential research findings, and relevancy. Finally, I used the reference section for each article to find additional publications for this study. I used an iterative process to obtain peer-reviewed literature for this study and determined that I had achieved a point of saturation when I found recurring themes in the literature and the appearance of the same names of authors in the publications.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that supported the qualitative case study is explained in this section. The conceptual framework for this project study used a conceptual

framework derived from Alexander Astin's (1985) theory of student involvement. Astin (1985) corroborated the idea that student engagement is instrumental to academic performance. According to Astin (1985), student involvement refers to the amount of psychological and physical energy that a student devotes to the academic experience. While Astin's (1985) theory is unique to higher education, the theory of student engagement has been used to explore teacher perceptions of students' engagement, which persists through high school and college. As a result, student engagement is a complex construct with various definitions (Shernoff et al., 2016). According to Furrer and Skinner (2003), student engagement is active and flexible, but goal directed and focused on interacting with the social and physical environments. According to Newmann et al. (1992), student engagement can be defined as a student's psychological investment and effort toward understanding, learning, or mastering the skills, knowledge, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote. However, while there are several definitions of student engagement theories, the definition provided by Fredericks et al. (2004) addressed several variables that contribute to successful student engagement and did a better job in providing a meaningful definition for this particular study. According to Fredericks et al., school engagement is multidimensional and distinctly made up of three integrated dimensions: (a) cognitive, (b) behavioral, and (c) emotional. Based on the definition of student engagement, the three dimensions were used to examine existing literature that attempted to explain the interest or lack of student engagement in a hybrid learning environment as viewed from teachers' perceptive. In accordance with the conceptual framework, additional existing literature was explored to help understand and

form the basis for this case study. The literature reviewed for this study was focused on student engagement and involvement. The essential principles of student involvement theory reflect similar methods used in today's classrooms: cognitive, emotional, and physical. Daily, teachers are attempting to engage students cognitively, emotionally, and physically. Since student performance is correlated to engagement, students must put forth an effort of engagement to academically succeed (Astin, 1985).

Student engagement derived from Astin's (1985) student involvement theory, in which Astin argued that student involvement requires a continuous investment of physical and psychosocial energy. Astin (1985) also stated that the amount of development gained from being involved is commensurate with the extent of being involved. Therefore, student engagement correlates with academic success. Although Astin (1985) theorized about student engagement in higher education, the theory provides a framework for this study situated in a high school. In concurrence, Fredericks and McCloskey (2012) conducted research measuring student engagement. In this study, Fredericks and McCloskey found that regardless of the method used to measure student engagement and achievement, the more engaged the students were, the better the outcome in academic achievement, resulting in a positive correlation between student engagement and student achievement. The authors also focused on self-reporting, interviews, observations, and teacher surveys to measure student engagement. Equally important, Guvenc (2015) discussed the significance of educators motivating and using various techniques to engage students. According to Carr (2014), understanding learning characteristics and authentic and meaningful activity is critical to student engagement.

Carr's study examined engagement influenced by classroom factors and student characteristics. In their discussion, Medlin and Faulk (2011) concluded that engagement efforts are worth investing in for a more engaged student body, lower retention rates, and better academic performance. Christenson et al. (2012) indicated that student engagement encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral mechanisms that exemplify and cultivate enthusiasm for learning. Similarly, the goals of student engagement have evolved from dropout prevention to improved outcomes for lifelong learning. To engage students, Appleton and Lawrenz (2011) stated that teachers must be able to determine, monitor, and assess students' level of engagement. Students perceived cognitive engagement as knowledge of learning strategies, relevance to topic, influence, efficacy, the challenge of coursework, and self-control.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

This literature review addressed crucial topics such as high school graduation, urban schools, environmental influences, dropout factors, delinquency, demographic characteristics, reading ability, teenage pregnancy, cocurricular learning, and extracurricular activities. In addition, the findings from other research studies in peer-reviewed journals provided evidence of the gap in practice relative to the purpose of this qualitative study. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions concerning cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities implemented at an urban high school in a southeastern state to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students.

High School Graduation

A critical review of the broader problem related to the seriousness of dropping out of school relative to the continuous progress of the United States as a nation. Given that a primary goal of the educational policy of the United States is to graduate every student, the fact that one out of five students fails to graduate represents a significant problem to address (Robison et al., 2017). High school graduation, or the equivalent, is a prerequisite for obtaining jobs in high-demand industries, entering college, and obtaining training for employment (Robison et al., 2017). Attaining a high school diploma or equivalent is essential for youth attempting to escape from poverty and enter the middle class. The motivation to complete high school relates to the school's capability and surroundings (Robison et al., 2017).

The Education Commission of the States provides information on the graduation requirements that education commissions in each state set (Gard, 2017). Each state has a minimum graduation requirement in core subjects, including English, mathematics, social studies, science, foreign language, and electives (Gard, 2017). The Common Core and K–12 standards define the benchmarks for student achievement for each academic year and readiness benchmark levels for high school graduation (Gard, 2017). Each state differs in its graduation requirements (Gard, 2017).

A student must complete one grade per year from the freshman through the senior year to graduate on time. If a student fails to meet the requirements for promotion during the 4 years in high school, the student is not a counted graduate when the student receives a diploma (Anderson, 2016). In industrialized countries, such as the United States,

differences in verbal achievement are associated with income disparities, healthcare outcomes, high school graduation rates, job placement, and many more life milestones (Golinkoff et al., 2019).

The high school dropout problem remains a national crisis. According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 83% of public high school students graduate with a diploma within 4 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). However, nearly one in five students does not graduate from high school on time (Heppena et al., 2018). The high school graduation rate in the United States is approximately 80% for European American males, with Hispanic American and African American males continuing to lag at rates of 65% and 60%, respectively (Addo et al., 2015). Although these data are estimates, there is no dispute that ethnic-minority students lag in high school graduation rates compared to their advantaged White peers nationwide (Sanacore, 2017). Success in school is time sensitive in particular and normative ways. Nevertheless, graduation rates are standard measures that policymakers and legislators use to paint a portrait of achievement (Chase, 2018). Graduation from high school is a significant step for all students to achieve, especially in a competitive global economy.

Urban Schools

School success is problematic, particularly in urban environments. Researchers have demonstrated that urban schools and students have lower performance than their nonurban counterparts on indicators, even when accounting for the higher concentration of low-income students attending urban schools (Robison et al., 2017). Low graduation

rates among urban students of color continue to be an issue in schools across the United States (Cooper, 2018). Numerous summits and symposia since 2010 have prompted action and called attention to the need to reform urban schools in the United States (Cooper, 2018). Students in urban schools tend to have families experiencing many stressors that influence school success, and these students experience higher poverty rates and greater health and safety risks than students from higher income families (Robison et al., 2017).

Students in urban environments also have to battle shortages in the quality of education (Robison et al., 2017). These groups, including young men of color, youth in urban areas, and students from low-income families, continue to graduate at lower rates than other comparable groups (Babinski et al., 2016). Teachers in higher poverty areas, typically urban areas, often provide instruction from outdated materials in declining facilities. Teachers without proper credentials in mathematics and science are more likely to be teaching these subjects compared to teachers in schools within areas of high socioeconomic status (Robison et al., 2017).

Urban context remains an important area of study in pursuing solutions to educational failure (Robison et al., 2017). School counselor support, peer support, support in the transition from middle to high school, and whole-school interventions such as Communities in Schools have also facilitated higher graduation rates, demonstrating that support outside the home can facilitate educational success (Robison et al., 2017). However, several changes may be necessary to bring low graduation rates up in urban high schools compared to suburban high schools.

Environmental Influences

A youth's environment, reflected in family and school characteristics, is a significant predictor of school success (Robison et al., 2017). Family cohesion, positive peer association, and positive school climate reduce dropout risks among youth (Robison et al., 2017). Poverty has a solid and enduring influence on academic achievement, especially among youth who live in extreme poverty and experience poverty beginning in early childhood (Robison et al., 2017). Poverty can be very harmful to youth psychologically and socially. Additionally, it can create long-term problems for at-risk youth and their futures. Poverty further contributes to overwhelming mental health issues and academic concerns (Aschenbrener & Johnson, 2016). Retrospective findings in one study indicated that poverty is one of the most significant predictors of high school dropout, with school disengagement greater among students living in poverty (Robison et al., 2017). In addition, youth residing in low-income neighborhoods are at increased risk of high school dropout (Robison et al., 2017). Further, those youth living in poverty could be experiencing food insecurity, poor neighborhood dynamics, and inadequate healthcare, all of which may influence youths' attendance in school (Robison et al., 2017).

The strength and quality of the parent–child relationship are important factors in determining the risk of school dropout. Family structure plays an important role in academic success, and youth from intact families seem to have more family support than those from divorced or single-parent families (Robison et al., 2017). Youth from single-parent households and female-headed households often live in poverty, which is a distinct disadvantage that increases the odds of school dropout (Robison et al., 2017).

Researchers' findings have indicated that school quality and level of school funding had far less influence on student achievement than family economic background, a student's peers, and community influences (Monroe-Lax & Ko, 2017). Researchers have suggested that individual, family, community, and school factors influence student disengagement and school dropout (Larrier et al., 2016).

The proportion of births to unmarried women has increased, and research shows that children born to unmarried parents are less likely to complete high school than children born to married parents (Addo et al., 2015). Teenagers who give birth are less likely to complete high school than teenagers who defer childbearing beyond adolescence (Addo et al., 2015). Students who experienced parental separation have lower GPAs, poorer mental health, higher participation in risky activities, and a lower likelihood of graduating from high school on time than students who do not (Hussey et al., 2016). Families in the bottom 20% of the economic scale have children who are 5 times more likely to drop out of high school than children from the top 20% of the economic scale (Turner & Juntune, 2018). Environmental influences such as family relationships, economic hardships, and teenage pregnancy contribute to at-risk students' widening academic achievement gap (Addo et al., 2015; Hussey et al., 2016; Turner & Juntune, 2018).

Dropout Factors

America has a school dropout epidemic. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) reported that over one million ninth-grade students fail to graduate in 4 years (McGeea & Linb, 2017). Research and statistical data also indicated that failure to

complete high school creates high financial and social costs on both communities and individuals (McGeea & Linb, 2017). Dropping out of school occurs in secondary education. Adolescence is a period that includes a high level of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional changes. At this period, a significant decrease in engagement toward school and learning occurs as peers become students' references. Students follow their peers in communication, behavior, and decisions (Szabo, 2018).

No universal or unanimous definition describes a school dropout (Mughal & Aldridge, 2017). The meaning of school dropout is a contextual concept. Millions of pupils in the world drop out of high school every year, increasing a cycle of unemployment, poverty, violence, and crimes (Iwara & Obadire, 2018). Nationwide, nearly one-third of high school students fail to graduate with a diploma, with an average of 7,000 dropping out every day (Anderson, 2016). Dropouts and poor academic achievement relate to negative outcomes for students and society.

School dropout occurs by the interaction between individual factors, behavioral characteristics, and environmental traits (Robison et al., 2017). An examination of male and female students revealed that the likelihood of dropout is highest among aggressive students and students who associate with aggressive peers (Robison et al., 2017). Students who remain engaged in school and avoid risky behaviors are less likely to drop out of school. Attitudes about completing school and knowledge about consequences of dropping out of school influence youths; a decision to drop out of school (Robison et al., 2017). School dropouts in adulthood tend to live in poverty, receive public assistance,

and spend time in prison. Prisoners on death row tend to be school dropouts (Robison et al., 2017).

An investigation on students who drop out of high school revealed that forced absenteeism was one of the reasons students dropped out of school. Though an association exists between behavior problems and school dropout, findings show that forced absenteeism or suspension does not seem to be an effective deterrent of negative behavior (Robison et al., 2017). Students with high rates of unexcused school absences are at greater risk of poor academic performance when compared to students with excused absences (Robison et al., 2017). Truancy relates to school dropout, grade retention, low school engagement, less parental involvement, poor grades, and delinquent behavior (Robison et al., 2017). Grade retention relates to an increased risk of dropping out of school (Robison et al., 2017). Grade retention harms students' socioemotional and behavioral characteristics, altering students' motivation to complete school (Robison et al., 2017).

Retained students demonstrate poorer academic motivation and maladaptive behaviors, signaling that the potential for dropping out is more significant after retention (Robison et al., 2017). Failure to be promoted to the next grade is also an indicator of dropping out of school (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). While negative experiences are not the sole reason students drop out of school, other out-of-school factors at the personal, family, and community levels also contribute to the dropout crisis (Cooper, 2018). Students who do not finish high school face various difficulties, such as the increased risk

for unemployment or underemployment, depression or other mental health issues, and gang or other criminal activities (Aschenbrener & Johnson, 2016; Cooper, 2018).

According to the National Center of Education Statistics, in the United States, almost 7% of students drop out of high school. In addition, evaluations of on-time graduation rates revealed that approximately 30% of students fail to graduate in the traditional 4-year time frame (Kelchner et al., 2017). Among the factors associated with dropping out of high school, academic failure was the most frequent reason students dropped out of high school. Academic failure leads to repeating courses, grade retention, academic apathy, and ultimately to dropping out of school (Kelchner et al., 2017).

Delinquency

Juvenile arrests and juvenile detention decrease the probability of completing high school and increase the probability of future arrests (Weisburst, 2019). Poor attendance, delinquent behavior, and failure in course performance are early warning indicators of students being off track to graduate on time with their peers (Davis et al., 2019). Negative peer relationships, violent behavior, poverty, poor family relations, and substance use are other predictors of school dropout (Robison et al., 2017). School dropout is a predictor of criminality, though criminal behavior may be ongoing prior to a student dropping out of school (Robison et al., 2017). When a strong disconnection occurs between youth and the agents of socialization such as parents, teachers, influential community members, and peers take over socialization. If the peers are part of an antisocial cohort, then youth socialize into to deviant norms, including criminal behavior. In high school, chronic absenteeism associates with dropping out of school, poor academic achievement,

homelessness, and delinquency that increases the achievement gap for low-income students and students of color (Mireles-Rios et al., 2020). Students who are absent on average 1-2 days per month have a one-in-five chance of graduating from high school (Mireles-Rios et al., 2020). Students with moderate levels of absenteeism, from 1 to 2 weeks per semester, are at risk of not graduating (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). Although students as early as sixth grade might have risk factors, some of the strongest predictors appear to be ninth-grade indicators in areas such as attendance, course failure, and grade-point average (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). Failing to educate juveniles increases the achievement gap, adversely affecting the graduation rate.

Demographic Characteristics

Despite all the existing work in delinquency, no firm grasp of the relative influences of delinquency exist on school dropout and graduation across the domains of demographic characteristics. Gender, race, socio-economic well-being, prior school achievement, attendance, behavior, and delinquency all are factors that affect students (Robison et al., 2017). For example, a gender gap in graduation rates exists because females are more likely to graduate than their male counterparts (Hockman & LaFontaine, 2010). In addition, social risks, such as minority-language status, family income, parents' education, and family structure negatively influence students' academic performance and link to high school dropout (McKee & Caldarella, 2016).

Social risk factors could indicate students who might need support to prevent them from disengaging from school and dropping out (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). Race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status relate to the likelihood of students struggling

in school (McKee & Caldarella, 2016). Differences exist between dropouts and graduates according to socio-economic status; students with disadvantageous socio-economical background have two and a half more probabilities to dropout compared with their middle-class peers. Ethnicity correlates with student dropout; The United States has more African American students drop out from school than their European American classmates. This ratio is higher among Hispanic students (Szabo, 2018). Students with cognitive or emotional challenges have little chance to finish secondary school (Szabo, 2018). Adolescents progress at their own rate and develop their own path. Some adolescents may, while others may not, be able to apply logical operations and cognitive reasoning in school to influence decision-making positively or negatively.

Reading Ability

Students who exhibit early difficulties in the mastery of academic knowledge, concepts, and skills are at greater risk of developing behavior problems. Similarly, students with early difficulties in behavior management and self-control are at greater risk of suffering academically. Interaction between behavior management and academic achievement may reach a critical stage in high school in which students challenged in both risk areas of academic achievement and behavior issues are much more likely to drop out of school than students with problems in only one area (McKee & Caldarella, 2016).

Reading achievement in the early grades is integral to academic success and a significant predictor of future education and life outcomes (Henry et al., 2017). Third, fourth, and fifth graders proficient in reading experience less school alienation, are likely

to graduate from high school, and experience higher education and career attainment despite income level (Henry et al., 2017). The more stress children experience, the more likely they are to experience adverse academic and mental health outcomes, including poor math and reading scores, low school attendance, depression, distractibility, and other behavior problems, resulting in the reduced likelihood of their graduating from high school and attending college (Henry et al., 2017). The consequence of failing to read attracted considerable research interest, leading to the identification of solid links to a range of poor educational and life outcomes (Main et al., 2020). If students do not acquire basic reading skills before entering secondary school, they cannot read and comprehend material, will struggle to achieve academically (Main et al., 2020). Reading is a survival skill in a technology/literacy-bound culture. Individuals who struggle with reading are at elevated risks of adverse outcomes, including particular education placement, school failure, underemployment, and unemployment (Jonesa et al., 2017). Students who do not read fluently will be a more significant drain on society's resources than students who master reading.

The absence of reading skills in Grade 3 is a predictor of becoming a high school dropout. This predictor makes Grade 3 a vital grade for mastering reading and literacy skills (Whitney & Bergin, 2018). In addition, literacy skills are essential for successful navigation of school and the broader world because school achievement and interaction with the internet and social media require reading, writing, and interpretation (Whitney & Bergin, 2018).

Teenage Pregnancy

Another social issue affecting graduation is teenage pregnancy. Becoming a teenage mother generates many concerns and complications. For example, the teen mother may find progressing through high school difficult, or she may not be able to finish high school (Aschenbrener & Johnson, 2016). Additionally, teen mothers struggle academically and are at a higher risk of not graduating from high school or college than those teenagers who are not teen mothers (Aschenbrener & Johnson, 2016). As with poverty, teen pregnancy can have both short-term and long-term effects and can influence the at-risk youth biologically, educationally, and psychologically (Aschenbrener & Johnson, 2016). Teen mothers encounter difficulties as they attempt to navigate high school (Watson & Vogel, 2017). Approximately 50% of teen mothers graduated high school compared to 90% for their non-parenting peers making the odds less favorable for young mothers to complete high school (Watson & Vogel, 2017). In addition to the challenge of completing high school, two significant barriers of stigma and segregation often complicate the already daunting task of graduating while parenting (Watson & Vogel, 2017). The stigma associated with teenage motherhood is caring for a new baby, prioritizing attending school. With no separate school to attend while taking care of a child, the teenage mother may never obtain a high school diploma. In addition to the cost to society, failure to graduate from high school has social and economic implications for teenage parents (Watson & Vogel, 2017).

Cocurricular Learning

Cocurricular learning offers flexibility to speak to campus initiatives and learning goals directly. Cocurricular learning can enhance student learning (Kelly, 2020). Cocurricular learning is defined as a program or series of programs developed proactively to complement student learning, activities, or interests outside a for-credit class (Kelly, 2020). Cocurricular learning provides students with opportunities to apply their skills and engage in experiences that cannot be readily provided in a formal classroom setting. Examples of student involvement in cocurricular learning include single exposures, 1 individual course, 2-4 elective courses, 5-7 and specific events (Fritsch et al., (2016).

Rathore, Chaudhry, & Azad (2018) stated that the benefits of cocurricular learning activities are numerous, including self-confidence, communication skills, and good physical health. Consequently, students live in an environment with little understanding of ways cocurricular learning activities influence their exam performance or grades. They only give importance to their studies to achieve higher grades on exams. Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that cocurricular learning activities have positive impact on student's exam performance. Participation in cocurricular learning activities improves students' class attendance, which is vital in achieving high grades on exams. Independent sample t-tests showed that students who were involved in cocurricular learning or non-classroom activities had better grades or exam performance from those students who were not part of these activities. Activities voluntary offered by the school and are officially approved and have no extra marks or grades on the exam are considered cocurricular learning activities. Student participation in such activities

depends on the opportunities offered by the school at various levels. Experience from these activities shapes an alternative curriculum—one that helps to shape the students' behavior and is well incorporated into the school's daily program.

Extracurricular Activities

High school experience includes more than just mastering academic subjects. A combination of academics and extracurricular activities are available to enhance high school students' journey through the educational process. Students who are at-risk of dropping out of school could benefit from informal relationships with caring adults while participating in school clubs focused on engaging students with their peers. These extracurricular activities could help increase high school graduation rates. Participating in school extracurricular activities in high school provide students with a sense of belonging. Extracurricular activities offered at school might eliminate dropout factors and improve educational options available to students assigned by virtue of where they live to historically failing schools, (Kemple, 2016). In addition, the solution for this problem could be meaningful to raise graduation rates and improve the progress of communities. With many students graduating, society could have a higher number of productive citizens (Kemple, 2016).

School activities promote a sense of belongingness in students. Schools with extracurricular activities are likely to have students who are committed to their studies and students who do not drop out of school. Additionally, students with a high sense of belongingness are more likely to exhibit fewer social, emotional, and behavioral problems. For example, they are less likely to become involved in risky behavior, such as

bullying, participating in risky behaviors, or abusing alcohol and contraband substances (Hussain et al., 2018). Previous findings from research include the benefits of school belongingness for different cultural groups in the United States, showing that belongingness related to educational outcomes such as academic motivation, academic engagement, and educational aspirations (Hussain et al., 2018).

Extracurricular activities based on students' interests and needs are available to develop students' personalities, talents, and outside interests and hobbies (Soyturk & Tepekoylu, 2020). These activities can focus on students who are in a passive state in the education system, and can assist in raising active, knowledgeable, productive individuals who are aware of and can develop their interests, skills, and abilities (Soyturk & Tepekoylu, 2020). In a previous study, extra-curricular activities provided markedly improved awareness of high school students in urban areas (Hung et al, 2019).

Extracurricular activities include academic and non-academic activities such as academic clubs, arts, learning groups, culture clubs, dance and so on. Participation in extracurricular activities is necessarily related to academic success and psychosocial measures. Participation in extracurricular activities relate to students' academic achievement, increased engagement in school, and educational aspirations (Han & Kwon, 2018). Participation in extracurricular activities positively relate to cognitive and socioemotional outcomes for children and youth. Participation in extracurricular activities during elementary school has small but positive causal effects on academic ability. The effects increase for students in later grades (Carbonaro & Maloney, 2019).

Participating in extracurricular activities is a distinctive and desired aspect of students' school experiences and their value. Extracurricular activities are an essential component of students' school life and provide a means for students to balance academic and nonacademic experiences. Extracurricular activities provide varied benefits for all students. Agran et al., (2020) noted that participation in extracurricular activities is associated with enhanced academic achievement. In addition, extracurricular activities carry the unique potential to increase motivation, and reduce alienation among disadvantaged youth, and to create interest level projects (DeLuca et al., 2016) that disadvantaged youth can leverage to avoid delinquency and idleness and find a positive path to adulthood. Although extracurricular activities differ within schools, each activity has the potential to be beneficial in social enhancement for students who engage in each activity. Maintaining good grades in high school links strongly to entering and persisting through college (Meier et al., 2018).

Extracurricular activities are integrated into school activities in different countries. Extracurricular activities focus on social interactions and athletic activities; participating in extracurricular activities takes away time that students could spend on traditional academic programs (Gu et al., 2019). From sports teams to academic clubs, all kinds of extracurricular activities contribute to students' daily school involvement in dynamic ways. However, because extracurricular activities are an integral part of a school experience for students, especially high school students, researchers strive to find a correlation between student participation and academic success (Gu et al., 2019).

Summary and Conclusions

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the scholarly literature that included factors influencing students' successfully meeting requirements and graduating from high school. These factors included high school graduation, urban schools, environmental impacts, dropout factors, delinquency, demographic characteristics, reading ability, teenage pregnancy, cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities. I also included a review of the conceptual framework based on Astin's student involvement theory that served as the framework for this study.

In Chapter 3, I included details of the preliminary study research method, design, and appropriateness for this qualitative study. In addition, I provided information about the population of the study, the geographical location, sampling method, informed consent procedures, and confidentiality concerns related to conducting this study. I also presented the instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis plan, the trustworthiness of the study, and ethical concerns used to conduct this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study design was to understand administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. At the study site, fewer than 85% of the seniors graduate each year, even as state graduation rates increase. This chapter includes the research design and rationale for choosing the design. The methodology includes a description of my role as the researcher, participants, setting, selection process, instrumentation used to collect data, and data analysis plan. Included in this section is also a description of the steps taken to establish trustworthiness and ethical procedures for the protection of participants.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions for the study were the following:

RQ1. How do administrators perceive the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities at an urban high school in a southeastern state that are implemented to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students?

RQ2. How do teachers and student support staff perceive the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities at an urban high school in a southeastern state that are implemented to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students?

Qualitative Design

The design for this research was qualitative. A qualitative design made possible the collecting of narrative data about a social phenomenon in a natural setting. It also

allowed the participants to express their views and feelings about the phenomenon. Qualitative research studies examine life experiences of people in real-world conditions (Yin, 2014). The qualitative case study design was appropriate because it allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). A case study is an empirical inquiry into a phenomenon in its natural context (Yin, 2014). The case study design helps to produce descriptions of events and happenings of multiple individuals. According to Creswell and Creswell (2013), "Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time" (p. 73).

A qualitative case study design was used to understand administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. Investigators use qualitative research to explore human experiences from where they have lived (Morse et al., 1995). Researchers adopting the qualitative approach seek to understand what an experience means to a specific group of people (Caelli et al., 2003). Through a qualitative inquiry process, participants share how they make sense of their personal experiences and the central phenomenon (Caelli et al., 2003). In a qualitative inquiry, the number of participants is small but large enough to obtain valuable data (Thompson-Bagley & Walker, 1998) because data derive from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). Although qualitative case study research design was the choice for this inquiry, other types of qualitative design were available for consideration for this research study. Other options included approaches

such as ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethnography and Grounded Theory

In ethnography, one type of qualitative research, researchers seek to understand the culture of a group by immersing themselves into the group and becoming participants in the selected group (Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Then, through what can be a time-consuming process, researchers compile rich, highly detailed descriptions of the group and the group's words and actions, even gestures, over a long period of time to realize emerging patterns and themes of the group (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As in ethnography, grounded theory requires a detailed description and utilizes the researcher as a data collection instrument (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Those who conduct grounded theory research strive to find categories related to a central theme or theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I felt that ethnography would not meet the needs of this research study because I sought to refrain from becoming a part of the group's culture and inserting personal experiences and opinions during the time in which participants freely described their experiences. Furthermore, I did not select grounded theory because the research was not solely based on supporting a central theme to develop it (Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Phenomenology

Another qualitative research method is phenomenology. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research designed to assist the researcher with determining the significance

of the lived experiences of individuals by guiding the researcher to suspend their instincts connected to the experience (Giorgi, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). In a phenomenological study, the essence of the lived experience allows the reader to gain a deep understanding of the experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2013; Giorgi, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although a phenomenological study helps in examining the participants' lived experiences, a phenomenological study usually is "of intense human experience such as love, anger, betrayal, and so on" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26). Therefore, I did not select phenomenological design because the research topic was not an intense, universal topic that stimulates extreme emotions.

Narrative Inquiry

A narrative qualitative study helps in examining the life stories or life experiences of chosen individuals and collecting and generating descriptions of themes or "descriptions of events or happenings and then configuring them into a story using a plot line" (Creswell & Creswell, 2013, p. 54). Thus, a narrative study approach requires the researcher to record, describe, and construct a description of another person's life story (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). If I had chosen to study multiple cases, the less worthy the cases might have become, and the perception of the administrators', teachers', and student support staff's experiences might diminish in the interpretation of the experiences. Therefore, I did not choose a multiple case study design for this research. I did not select a narrative research design either because it would not have supported my understanding of participants' perceptions.

I did not use a quantitative approach because this research study aimed to understand administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. Therefore, a qualitative research design focused on understanding participants' experiences and how the meaning of those occurrences helps in constructing the individuals' worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, I wanted to understand common themes among administrators, teachers, and student support staff that developed from the interview process to answer the research questions of this study. Therefore, a qualitative research design was the most suitable qualitative approach.

Role of the Researcher

My primary role was that of the sole data collection instrument in this study. This role made me an observer who collected, analyzed, and presented the findings for this research. Throughout the study, I conducted myself professionally and ethically. I developed a plan to attain a working relationship with all participants and obtained the best results possible. No personal or professional relationships existed between the participants and me. I did not work at the study site and did not supervise any of the prospective participants. During the study, I refrained from being biased, injecting personal views, or being judgmental, and I focused only on the data being collected from participants.

My role was to collect data that captured the phenomenon's verbal experience and artistic expression. Data collection methods ranged from in-depth face-to-face interviews to video conference calls, to focus group discussions. Other forms of data included

observations, journals, poetry, music, and some art (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). It was my responsibility to collect the essence of shared experiences and provide a description of those experiences in a way that did not change the experience but would enable the rest of the world to have a better understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

When the researcher is the primary data collection instrument, personal biases can affect the study's trustworthiness (Parker & Henfield, 2012). Personal values and beliefs, demographic paradigms, preconceptions, cognitive bias, and ethnocentrism are elements that contribute to researcher bias (Miller & Morris, 2014). Collins and Cooper (2014) emphasized the importance of researchers taking full responsibility for the quality of the study when serving as both the collector and interpreter of the data. To manage any personal biases, I used self-reflection journals before the study began, during the interviews, and during the analysis process.

Methodology

Participant Selection

Prospective participants were administrators, teachers, and student support staff at an urban high school in a southeastern state where less than 85% of seniors graduated each year, even as the state graduation rate increased. I used purposeful sampling for this qualitative study to ensure that each participant selected was likely to provide rich information about exciting phenomena on the study site (Palinkas et al., 2013). In purposeful sampling, the selection of a sample size focuses on the purpose of the study, overarching study questions, and data collection strategy (Patton, 2015a). Purposefully

sampling was appropriate for this study because administrators, teachers, and student support staff members were most knowledgeable about programs and activities available in the high school that encouraged students to engage in cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities that increased graduation rates and reduced or eliminated risky behaviors and harmful activities that led to dropping out of school.

After receiving district approval by completing a questionnaire, which asked questions about the qualitative study conducted at the high school in the district, I used the staff directory on the web page of the school and obtained names and contact information of the prospective participants and invited 11 prospective participants, all of whom were administrators, teachers, and student support staff members who worked with at-risk students in special programs that increased the graduation rate. The selection criteria encompassed classroom teachers who worked with at-risk students, counselors, a graduation coach, a teacher who served as athletic director, and administrators employed at the high school during the years 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. During that timeframe, each participant had opportunities to observe the decrease in the graduation rate year after year and understand the trends related to the dropout rate and graduation rate as well as the services available to students. I collected the contact information for all participants in the form that they sent before their participation. I limited participants to the first administrators, teachers, and student support staff members who returned forms indicating their willingness to participate in the study.

I sent a confidential email, with a consent form attached, using my personal computer, to all individuals who met the criteria for participation. In the email, I stated

the purpose of the study, the intended goal, an invitation to participate in the study, and an outline of the activities associated with being a participant (see Appendix A). The email was created to help the potential participants decide whether to accept or decline to participate in the study. After the volunteer participants were obtained, I followed up with a phone call and scheduled a mutually agreed-upon time and location to conduct a video conference call. Those prospective participants who committed to participating provided their perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students.

Instrumentation

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. I used an interview protocol and semistructured questions that guided the interview process (see Appendix A). The data collection tool appropriate for the qualitative research method was an interview.

I collected data through semistructured interviews. The semistructured interview was the appropriate choice for this study, in that it provided descriptive data regarding perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities being rendered at a high school (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). In-depth interviewing is a technique used in qualitative research that involves predetermined open-ended questions allowing participants to discuss their understandings and ideas freely (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). Semistructured interviewing is a qualitative data collection strategy in which the

researcher asks questions about a topic using predetermined open-ended questions (Yin, 2018). I followed an interview protocol and asked prepared questions that aligned with the research questions. The interview protocol for administrators, teachers, and student support staff is presented in Appendix A. The open-ended questions permitted the participants to elaborate on responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). The interviews were audiotaped, and I reviewed the tapes to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the recorded data.

I developed the interview protocol and interview questions for the study using literature sources that increased the validity of the interview protocol and semistructured questions. I developed the instrument based on the literature, which focused on factors influencing students' successfully meeting requirements and graduating from high school. These factors included high school graduation, at-risk youth, urban schools, environmental impacts, dropout factors, delinquency, demographic characteristics, reading ability, teenage pregnancy, cocurricular learning, and extracurricular activities (Agran et al, 2020; Anderson, 2016; Cooper, 2018; Gard, 2017; Henry et al., 2017; Main et al., 2020; Monroe-Lax & Ko, 2017; Robison et al., 2017; Soyturk & Tepekoylu, 2020; Szabo, 2018).

To increase the validity of the interview protocol and semistructured questions, I asked three educational leaders who worked with at-risk students to review the interview protocol and interview questions to ensure that the instrument would permit participants to provide sufficient data to answer the study's research questions. These three educators

were not participating in the study and worked in a low socioeconomic level school district.

Administrator A was a high school principal with 22 years of experience. Her school implemented a technology program to increase dropout rates and improve graduation rates. As a result, the high school under her supervision had an average graduation rate of 97% over 3 years, from 2017 to 2019.

Administrator B was a retired curriculum director with 30 years of experience working in curriculum and instruction in a low-income, rural school district. She owned and operated an educational consulting and editing service for asynchronous and online issues.

Administrator C had 26 years of experience as a school counselor in a middle school that served low-income African American students predominantly. These three administrators reviewed the interview protocol for clarity, validity, and suitability in answering the research questions. Based on their comments and feedback, I made changes to increase the validity of the protocol.

I gathered data using semistructured interviews that I audio-recorded and transcribed for later coding and reference. The research site for this study was an urban high school in the southeastern United States. Selected employees were interviewed to understand their perception of the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities rendered to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Choosing participants, preparing them for the interview process, and collecting the data from interviews must be strategically planned in qualitative studies (Yin, 2018). Therefore, in the following subsections, I explained the process by which I recruited participants for this study, how I prepared the interview process with each participant, and how I collected and analyzed the data.

Recruitment

I selected participants for this study using purposeful sampling. Participation in this qualitative study was based on employment at an urban high school in the southeastern United States in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. I obtained Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The IRB process was to ensure data was collected ethically. Next, I secured a letter of cooperation from the superintendent of schools in the district or designee (see Appendix C). I completed the National Institute of Health (see Appendix D) for research ethics and compliance training.

I planned to invite 10-20 participants employed at the high school during the years 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. I asked the registrar who provided a list of employees employed at the high school in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. Additionally, I requested a current school list of employees to determine which employees were still employed at the high school.

After identifying the 11 participants who meet the study's criteria, I emailed potential participants and requested them to volunteer for this study. The email introduced me as the researcher, stated the study title, provided the study goals and

purpose of the study. The email included my contact information that consisted of an email address and a personal phone number that answered any questions about the study. I attached a consent form to the email and requested each participant who responded by email to state "I consent" in the body of their email.

Participation

The participants' interest, knowledge, and contact with high school seniors was valuable for this basic study. Yin (2018) stated that it is important to select participants who have sufficient information to answer the research questions. After I obtained the voluntary participants who were a part of my study, I

- scheduled a video conference call,
- confirmed the interview date and time,
- conducted the interview with each participant, and
- ensured receipt of a consent from each participant for their voluntary participation in the study.

Once I ensured written consent from selected participants acknowledging voluntary participation in the study, I contacted the participant via email and scheduled a video conference date and time for the interview. I confirmed the interview time with the participant by email three days prior to the scheduled date. I arranged these interviews during a time of day convenient for each participant and did not interfere with regular school activities and responsibilities. I anticipated that an allotted time of 30-45 minutes was sufficient to conduct each interview. Only one interview was anticipated for this

study, and no follow-up interviews was required. Before starting each interview, I reviewed the consent form and answered any participant questions.

If a participant withdrew from the interview process, I assured them that there was no negative consequence to their decision. Any written document that I acquired in response to a participant's initial voluntary consent to be part of this study was destroyed. I deleted any electronic communication from my computer within two days following a withdrawal from the study.

Data Collection

This study included procedures created to answer the research questions and accomplish the purpose of the research. The data collection process for this study was a systematic approach, as Merriam suggested in Ryazan's publication. The semistructured interviews occurred by the means of video conferences. Each participant was assigned a number for ensured data accuracy and confidentiality. In addition, I audio-record each interview.

During the interview, I used a journal to take notes on important information and recorded biases. Using a reflexive journal provided a way to record and evaluate interview data (Yazan, 2015). At the end of each interview, I prompted participants for final thoughts and provided an opportunity for them to ask me questions that needed clarification. I reminded the participants that their names did not appear in any notes or transcripts of the interview and that I used an assigned number to ensure confidentiality. After I completed the analysis process, I explained and emailed the initial findings for

their review and additional feedback. Finally, I thanked participants for their time and responses to the interview questions.

I transcribed the interviews following each occurrence. Once all interviews were completed, I organized and analyzed the collected data, sent findings to participants, solicited feedback, and wrote the findings and recommendation for the study. I saved and stored all audio and text files and placed them in a locked security box at my house where they will be kept for at least five years after the study, as Walden University requires for security. I shredded all notes, hard copies of memos, interviews, and reflective journals that I kept. Additionally, I destroyed USB drives of saved electronic files.

Data Analysis Plan

Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) indicated that data collection and analysis are continuous throughout qualitative studies. *Data analysis* is how the researcher interpret and makes sense of the collected data to answer research questions (Creswell, 2007). For this study, the primary source of data came from semistructured interviews. Following the data collection, data was analyzed to understand administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students.

Merriam (2009) stated that "the much-preferred way to analyze data is a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (p. 171). For this study, I analyzed the data generated from the interview questions to answer the research questions for this study. In qualitative studies, data brings meaning and importance to the cluster of data resulting from the data collection process. According to (Merriam, 2009, p.171) "all

qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive and comparative". Qualitative data analysis can be done manually or by Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For this study, I manually used the thematic method. Merriam (2009) indicated that assigning codes to different bits and pieces of data is a way to construct categories.

After I completed each interview, I transcribed the data from the audio recordings and analyzed the findings. I then used the information from the data and coded the data using pattern coding that organized the data, which developed categories, and that observed emerging themes. Coding the data reduces the amount of raw data to manageable sections relevant to the research questions (Vaismoradi, et al., 2016). Pattern coding techniques helped me to organize all information I collected during research and enabled me to manage the data that I collected. Pattern coding interpretations help to sort data into significant categories (Saldana, 2015). In addition, pattern coding identifies relationships among the open codes emerging across the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Through pattern coding, I combined similar concepts, which resulted in the emergence of overarching themes. After using pattern coding, I observed emerging themes.

I started by using an open coding strategy that identified patterns or themes using critical words from participants. I listened and transcribed repeated words, phrases, and experiences related to cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities, all vital constructs from the conceptual framework. First, I analyzed the interview data. Next, I used an open coding strategy to code the data, followed by axial coding. Open coding labels the data with some words, numbers, or schemes that makes sense to the researcher

and can be used to retrieved data easily (Merriam, 2009). Based on the data gathered from interviews, codes emerged. Next, I used axial data and merged and grouped patterns together to form categories. Refinements were made prior to producing final categories and subcategories (Merriam, 2009). Finally, I used a different colored marker to label the data codes that identified similar categories. Coding involves the continual refinement and abstraction from data (Lodico, et al., 2010). This was followed by using a descriptive method that assigned themes to emerging categories.

Using printed transcriptions for each participants' interview responses, I coded the data based on responses to the interview questions. I then developed open codes as I reviewed the transcripts one question and response at a time for each participant and notated repetitive words, thoughts, and responses. Codes were formed from responses that were similar among participants. Axial coding was followed by searching for similar words and phrases among the interviews. Next, categories were created by combining open and axial codes. I reviewed the emerging categories and developed themes by combining categories that generated similar meanings and results. Finally, I made conclusions from the data analysis that answered the research questions to understand administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students.

Trustworthiness

Researchers use credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative studies (Houghton et al., 2013). Trustworthiness of a study is a way to assess the rigor of the research so that the findings can be valid and

acceptable in the field of research (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Several steps were taken to ensure credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility starts with a well-structured research design process (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The establishment of credibility will rely on sound methodology within the overall study, with specific detail to data collection (Shelton, 2004). To maintain credibility, I provided a detailed analysis of the methodology and design considerations and ensure results are valid, reliable, and meaningful. Qualitative research validity, or trustworthiness, was increased by member checks and reflexivity.

Credibility is established when the results of a qualitative study are plausible from the participants' viewpoint. I used member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) when I sent the analysis findings to the participants to verify that I appropriately analyzed their responses. The review and input from participants ensured the accuracy of the interviews' analysis and created credibility for this study. I also used reflexivity procedures that increase credibility. Yin (2018) stated self-reflection processes during qualitative studies allow a researcher to observe biases and objectively assess decisions made during the study. Upon approval from the IRB, I conducted this study from _February 4, 2022__ through __March 14, 2022__ in a local high school in the southeastern United States. I conducted individual interviews with each participant that lasted from 30 to 45 minutes each. I audiotaped each interview.

Transferability

Transferability, or external validity, in qualitative research, occurs when a study may be applied to other settings or groups from the readers' perspective (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I conducted this qualitative research study that generated insights from participants' experiences, which were not intended to be transferable but helped other similar settings. I achieved transferability through detailed descriptions of the data collected through interviews and data analysis (Shelton, 2004). Transferability occurred in qualitative studies by producing results that adequately described the context of the study. To increase transferability, I used purposeful sampling and carefully selected participants to ensure the most variability possible to foster readers' ability to transfer the findings of this study to other contexts. To increase the transferability of my study, I provided a detailed discussion of the findings and results of the study.

Dependability

Dependability (the qualitative counterpart to reliability) increased as I follow the research protocols Walden IRB outlines. I used an audit trail that improved dependability in this qualitative study. The audit trail required the researcher to describe the process explicitly to possibly allow another researcher to follow and obtain similar results (Ryan-Nichols & Will, 2009). Dependability included following a step-by-step plan during each semistructured interview. Dependability is a multistep process that ensured data was collected and analyzed appropriately. Dependability documents the extent to which the study is applicable to similar studies given the same data and context (Shelton, 2004). I rechecked the transcripts of the interview for accuracy.

Confirmability

Confirmability (the qualitative counterpart to objectivity) also referred to the accuracy and neutrality of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). I achieved confirmability by recognizing personal bias regarding the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff. Confirmability was necessary to address the extent to which I was able to authenticate the study results (Shelton, 2004). I presented the participants' data in a coherent and systemized manner to make sure the data included no bias. Bias-free data imply that all the conclusions I made in the research was relative to the data the participants provided. During data collection and processing, I made accurate notes to minimize any chance of data redundancy.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures are essential to research to protect participants, ensure the findings are accurate, and the actions of a researcher are responsible (Yin, 2018). I ensured that ethical standards of research were met and that the rights of participants were protected. I completed the training the National Institute of Health offered concerning the requirements of performing and ethical study.

Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the proposal before I began this study, and I contacted potential participants after I received approval. No participant received a gift or remuneration for their voluntary participation in this study. Maintaining the confidentiality of the participants was a significant ethical concern during this study. The consent form that I provided to all participants stated clearly that their identities were kept confidential, and responses did not influence employment

negatively at the high school or in the school district. Unique identifiers concealed name and any other identifying data on interview transcripts. If a disruption occurs in an interview because of an unanticipated conflict or interruption, I stopped the interview and either resumed the interview process after a brief pause or rescheduled the interview for another date and time. I informed participants that they may withdraw from the study at any time. No adverse conflict occurred if a participant chose to be removed from the study. If interview notes or recordings were collected already, I destroyed the paperwork and electronic documents within two days.

I stored the interview and analysis management data on a flash drive for five years in a locked file cabinet. After the storage timeframe expired, I destroyed the digital and paper documentation by erasing the flash drive and shredding the documents. I intended to exemplify ethical standards for this study that presented the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff concerning cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities rendered at an urban high school in a southeastern state to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students and promoted positive social change.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described the research method and design appropriateness used to conduct this research study. I described the data collection procedures, included the sampling method and participants used to conduct this qualitative study. I presented the process of providing informed consent and procedures for informing subjects about confidentiality practices. I described the geographic location, the data collection procedures, including techniques for collecting the data, type of data, and rationale for the

data collection procedures relating to conducting this research study. I also discussed the appropriateness of the data collection methods and the methods related to conducting this qualitative study. In this process, I explained the methods, analyzed the research data, and ethical issues related to conducting and reporting this qualitative case study. In Chapter 4, I included a discussion of the collected data and an analysis. I also included detailed responses for each research question and identified themes observed in the data collection process.

Chapter 4: Results

The research problem was that little is known about administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities designed to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students. This group of at-risk students included students who were enrolled in cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities. Among this student population, fewer than 85% of seniors at the school in this study, an urban high school in a southeastern state, graduated from high school every year, and the graduation rate continued to be lower than the state's graduation rate. Cocurricular learning can enhance student learning (Kelly, 2020). Cocurricular learning is defined as a program or series of programs developed proactively to complement student learning, activities, or interests outside a for-credit class (Kelly, 2020). Extracurricular activities based on students' interests and needs are available to develop students' personalities, talents, and outside interests and hobbies (Soyturk & Tepekoylu, 2020). These activities can focus on students who are in a passive state in the education system and can assist in raising active, knowledgeable, productive individuals who are aware of and can develop their interests, skills, and abilities (Soyturk & Tepekoylu, 2020). Consequently, students live in an environment with little idea of how cocurricular learning activities have affected their exam performance or grades.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand administrators', teachers' and student support staff's perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their impact on social involvement and the graduation rates of at-risk students. I interviewed administrators, teachers, and student support staff at the

high school and identified personal and professional perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities that increased the graduation rate of at-risk students. The findings from the data collected within the study identified ways to address the low graduation rate of high school students through increased cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and identified any administrators', teachers', and student support staff's perceptions that hindered such efforts.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1. How do administrators perceive cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students?

RQ2. How do teachers and student support staff perceive cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students?

The design for this research was qualitative. A qualitative design made possible the collecting of narrative data about a social phenomenon in a natural setting. It also allowed the participants to express their views and feelings about the phenomenon. Qualitative research studies examine life experiences of people in real-world conditions (Yin, 2014). The qualitative case study design was appropriate because it allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). A case study is an empirical inquiry into a phenomenon in its natural context (Yin, 2014). The semistructured interview was the appropriate choice for this study, providing descriptive data regarding perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities being rendered at a high school (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). The semistructured interview is a

qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks questions about a topic using predetermined open-ended questions (Yin, 2018).

In the rest of Chapter 4, there is a comprehensive discussion of the findings of this qualitative case study. The chapter explains the setting, data collection and analysis methods, results, and evidence of this study's trustworthiness. This chapter also includes information about factors that impacted the study, including the fact that interviews had to be conducted virtually due to the global pandemic and participants were under a great deal of stress during that time. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Setting

The setting for this study was a high school in a small urban school district in a southeastern state. Administrators, teachers, and student support staff employed at the high school during the 2016–2019 school years were asked to participate in a 30- to 45-minute semistructured video conference interview. The high school had at-risk students who were enrolled in cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities. Among this student population, fewer than 85% of seniors at the school graduated from high school every year, and the graduation rate continued to be lower than the state's graduation rate. The low graduation rate posed a problem for the school, promoting more involvement from school district personnel as well as state-appointed interventionists. The school leaders experienced having to operate school with decreased funds needed for instructional materials.

Initially, it was planned to gather data during in-person face-to-face interviews. However, at the time of this study, the COVID-19 global pandemic forced changes to the

original data collection method and only staff and students were allowed in the building. The participants in this study, like many others around the world, were impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Increased levels of anxiety and uncertainty related to personal and professional matters tended to impact participants' participation in this study. One participant acknowledged a high level of stress during the interview, which took more than 1 hour to complete. There was another participant who originally agreed to participate but failed to appear online at the agreed-upon time. Therefore, data were collected from 11 qualifying participants, out of the original 20 participants recruited, who agreed to participate in the semistructured video conference interviews.

Demographics

There were five administrators, four teachers, and two student support staff who participated in the study. The administrators included one principal, three assistant principals, and one dean of students. The teachers included two 12th grade teachers, one elective teacher, and one 10th grade teacher. The student support staff included one freshman counselor and one graduation coach. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier to protect their identities. These unique identifiers ranged from P1 to P5 for administrator participants, P6 to P9 for teacher participants, and P10 to P11 for student support staff participants referenced in this study and saved records. During the data transcription and analysis process, any identifying information was removed to ensure confidentiality and protect participants' privacy. Table 2 shows the number of years employed between 2016 and 2019, campus level, and gender for each participant.

Table 2

Demographics of the Participants

Participant	Number of years employed between 2016 and 2019	Campus level	Gender
P1	4	Administrator	M
P2	3	Administrator	M
P3	2	Administrator	F
P4	4	Administrator	M
P5	4	Administrator	M
P6	4	Teacher	F
P7	3	Teacher	F
P8	3	Teacher	F
P9	4	Teacher	M
P10	4	Support staff	M
P11	3	Support staff	F

All participants' interviews were conducted via semistructured video conference using Zoom, a web-based video- and audio-conferencing platform. Zoom provides security features, which helped to ensure confidentiality and participants' privacy. Participants were sent a unique link to access the Zoom meeting, along with a unique password to gain entry to the meeting. All participants kept their camera on to proceed with a virtual face-to-face interview after being told the video conference's audio and video were being recorded.

Data Collection

I received approval to begin collecting data from the Walden University IRB (IRB Approval No. 01-13-22-0290238, issued on January 28, 2022, and expires on January 12, 2023). Data collection began with the first interview on February 4, 2022, and continued until March 14, 2022, when the 11th participant was interviewed. The data collection

techniques for the study involved semistructured interviews, video conferencing, reflective notes, and audio recordings. Eleven participants took part in this study. Participants consisted of five administrators, four teachers, and two support staff. Participants' experience at the research site ranged from 2 to 4 years, with all years occurring within the period 2016–2019.

Initial Contact

After receiving Walden IRB approval, I asked the registrar to provide a list of employees employed at the high school in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. Additionally, I requested a current school list of employees to determine which employees were still employed at the high school. I used the staff directory on the webpage of the school to obtain contact information for all administrators, teachers, and student support staff who met the criteria. I sent them a confidential email, with a consent form attached, using my personal computer. In the email, I stated the purpose of the study, the intended goal, an invitation to participate in the study, and an outline of activities associated with being a participant. After 3 days, I stopped seeking further participants. I contacted each participant by phone who responded to my email accepting the invitation to participate in the study. A follow-up phone call was made to schedule a mutually agreed-upon time and location to conduct a Zoom video conference call.

Interviews

Interviews were the primary source of data for learning more about the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff on cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students.

Two interview protocols were used, one for administrators and one for teachers and student support staff. The interview protocols were developed and used to guide the interviews to ensure consistency in the questions asked and the type of information gathered (Appendix A). I explained the design of the interview and the interview protocol. The protocol included an introduction to the study, interview norms, and interview questions. Participants were reminded that interviews were confidential, and they could have withdrawn consent at any time. I also reminded the participants that their names did not appear in any notes or transcripts of the interviews and that I used assigned participant numbers to ensure confidentiality. Semistructured interviews using Zoom video conferencing took place from February 4–March 14 and ranged in length from 15–30 minutes. One interview took 1 hour and 5 minutes.

Virtual interviews were scheduled to last about 30 minutes via Zoom. The actual length of each interview depended on the length of time participants that took to answer the interview questions. Actual interview lengths ranged from 15 minutes 13 seconds to 65 minutes 2 seconds. There was no evidence of fatigue from any of the participants over the course of the interviews. All the interviews were conducted in the participants' office or classroom. There was no evidence of prolonged interruption or distractions from any participant. Most interviews were conducted after work hours when participants were available. Two of the interviews were conducted in the evening, and two were conducted on the weekend. I took notes using a journal during the interview, but they were not prolific because the interviews were audio recorded.

Probing questions listed on the interview protocol were asked to gain clarity around a response or to elicit a more detailed answer from the participants. Zoom was chosen as the virtual platform to host the interviews, showing video in addition to audio. All participants chose to be interviewed showing video in addition to being audio recorded. All interviews were recorded and saved on my personal computer hard drive and then onto a USB drive. The video recordings were captured and saved to my personal computer hard drive and then onto a USB drive. This was done to ensure that data were not lost and could be retrieved. The audio recordings were saved with the video recordings on my personal computer's hard drive and on a small portable hand recorder. Recording each interview with a small portable hand recorder allowed me to fully focus on building rapport with participants and take less detailed notes during the interview process.

The entire interview process took 6 weeks for all 11 interviews, with a variance in response time from participants who consented and scheduled interviews at times that did not interfere with their work and personal commitments. The interview process was consistent among the participants, and I provided each participant with their interview transcript following their interview with me.

Journaling and Reflective Notes

During the interviews, I used a journal to take handwritten notes and used a small portable hand recorder to audio record each participant's answers to ensure accuracy. I used predetermined open-ended questions during the interview and probed for additional information for clarity. I hand transcribed the interviews following each occurrence.

Once all interviews were transcribed, I organized and analyzed the collected data. I emailed each participant a copy of their interview transcript. Participants read and verified the interview transcriptions for content accuracy, and no one responded with any discrepancies or clarifications within 48 hours. No feedback was emailed to me.

I kept reflective notes that included information about participants, feedback, and any contextual information relevant to the study. I used a Google document to record communication with prospective participants and confirmed participants. During the interview process, I used reflective notes to keep track of any responses that stood out or needed clarification or elaboration. The Zoom interview recordings were video and audio recorded. Therefore, the only incidents that I noted were those that were verbally expressed with noticeable tones of exaggeration.

Transcript Review

After the interview, I downloaded the recorded data from Zoom and uploaded the data to a transcription service. I used Rev Transcription Services (Rev.com) for the transcription of the participants' interviews. After I received the transcribed data for each participant, I copied the results and pasted them on a Google document. I used the "find and replace" function and removed the participants' names and replaced them with pseudonyms (P1, P2, P3 …, P11) for each question listed. I saved the data in a password-protected file and used the respective pseudonyms. I sent the transcribed data to each participant by email and confirmed that the transcription of their interview responses represented their views during the interview, using a process called *member checking*. Member checking through the transcript review process improves research credibility and

accuracy, as any thoughts that participants feel are not clearly expressed may be cleared and corrected as appropriate (Yin, 2017). No participants responded requiring corrections to their transcript. Out of 11 total participants, four replied validating their data, leaving the remainder of participants' transcripts to be considered validated due to their lack of responses, as instructed by the procedures listed in the informed consent section for member checking. The verified transcribed data were stored in a secure file as specified in the data plan for the study in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

I began data analysis after completing the member-checking process for the transcribed data with all of the participants. I utilized a descriptive coding strategy recommended by Saldana (2016) to assign meaning to segments of raw data collected for this study and used the emerging words from the descriptive coding for categorization and thematic analysis. The raw data transcribed and confirmed through the member-checking process presented a detailed account to understand the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff concerning cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students.

Coding drives data collection in a case study design (Saldana, 2016). Considering that case study involves in-depth, futuristic, and holistic investigation into all aspects of the case and provides industry-related data that are not anticipated by literature (Yin, 2017), this study provided detailed information on an unexplored area of knowledge to understand the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff regarding cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation

rate of at-risk students. The inductive approach is used in qualitative research to generate or broaden theory and allow themes to emerge from data (Saunders et al., 2018). I used the inductive approach as part of my analysis strategy for this study for themes to emerge.

Knowing that thematic analysis emphasizes identifying, examining, and recording meaningful patterns within data and are propelled by the systemized raw data coding process (Yin, 2017), I applied thematic analysis for this study and examined meanings and described the social reality of the 11 participants through their experiences with cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. The thematic analysis process was deployed while I analyzed textual data that supported me in developing themes to answer the study's central research questions (Saldana, 2016).

Manual coding through a systematic process framed in the descriptive coding method was used in the thematic analysis for this study (Saldana, 2016). I adopted the descriptive coding method (Saldana, 2016) assigned meanings to raw data segments, which led to the emergence of lists of words, phrases, or both for indexing and data categorization. I used Google documents that aided me in the manual coding of the participants' transcribed interview responses. The coded words and phrases combined with data triangulation that demonstrated a substantial recognition of patterns while detailed attention to similarities and differences in the pattern improved upon the study's dependability (Yin, 2017).

I selected the ground-up data analysis strategy (Yin, 2017) and generated codes from the transcribed data using the inductive analysis approach (Boyatzis, 1998). The

inductive analysis involved coding the data without attempting to make the data fit into a preexisting coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions. As in this study, a thematic analysis was considered data-driven when the codes are generated inductively (Braun et al., 2019). While I utilized thematic analysis, I strategically searched for themes depicting the phenomenon which involved a tedious process of identifying themes through readings and a sound understanding of the data (Yin, 2017).

In this study, I utilized Yin's procedure for pattern matching. Thematic analysis was the core process of pattern matching and offered an effective and reliable data approach in a qualitative study. I compared the contextual based patterns with the predicted pattern, examined the matching range, offered explanations, if necessary, to interpret the results. I developed a splitting up or categorizing common codes, phrases, and words within the participants' responses using manual coding. I applied content analysis techniques for the primary data. I first identified codes in the main content through in-depth interviews and then created categories from the identified codes. I continued with the content analysis from primary and secondary data using a pattern-matching technique followed with triangulation and explored patterns of similarity or difference among themes generated by the analysis (Yin, 2017).

The identified themes represented, recognized patterns, reasonable and practicable agendas of the researcher, commonalities, and the research question (Yin, 2017). I classified several themes using coding analysis that recognized similar patterns within several cases with codes connecting data collections and combining themes across a few methodologies such as journals, interviews, and discussions (Saldana, 2016). The

triangulation of data collection sources ensured rigor in evaluating data collected and improves the study's overall quality (Yin, 2017).

Various tones were recognized using signals that are conveyed verbally, with body language, and so on (Stake, 2010). I recorded these signals, which enhanced the development of a context-based report for a comprehensive understanding. I shared records of electronically transcribed research participants' responses with the respective participants, examined and verified the accuracy of interpretation, and assessed my reflexivity and perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The next step was to interpret the data analysis that involved comparing various themes from the data analysis generated through multiple sources (semistructured interviews and reflective notes) to compare the findings with the literature review's theoretical proposition. Yin (2017) noted that the strength of case study findings rests in their ability to be generalized to the theoretical propositions established from the literature. To this end, this study was framed by Astin's student involvement theory. The alignment of this conceptual framework to the overall findings from the case study research was essential as I interpreted the result that arrived at a deeper understanding to the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staffs' perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students.

Manual descriptive coding helped me delve deeper into the data (Cronin, 2014) with a deeper contextual understanding (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014). The descriptive manual coding method was more effective and suitable for my data analysis than computer

assisted qualitative data analysis software. This data analysis was structured following Yin's (2017) five phases of analysis-assemble, collect, interpret, disassemble, and conclude the data. The sources of data were semistructured interviews and reflective notes. This methodological triangulation enhanced the dependability of the results.

The eight coding categories were based on the conceptual framework, and the three themes gleaned from the thematic analysis and areas were listed below:

- *relationships, similar interests, and positive interactions*
    - groups
    - community
    - social connection
    - teams
    - identity
    - clubs
    - peers
    - bonding
    - group projects
    - winning team
    - sharing
    - encourage each other
    - improved working conditions
- *learning support, application, and beyond school*
    - connected to classroom

  - extends learning
  - relevant
  - students' lives
  - interests
  - projects
  - college
- *behavior and motivation*
  - want to earn rewards
  - behavior improvement
  - self-reflection
  - friendly language
  - positive
  - motivation
  - positive relationships
  - look forward
  - improved working conditions
  - want to meet goals

The eight conceptual coding categories were grounded in the study's conceptual framework developed by Astin (1985) social involvement theory. Astin (1985) corroborated the idea that student engagement was instrumental to academic performance. According to Astin (1985), student involvement referred to the amount of psychological and physical energy a student devoted to the academic experience. While

Astin's (1985) theory was unique to higher education, the theory of student engagement has been used to explore teacher perceptions of students' engagement, which persists through high school and college.

Contrasting with previous models, student engagement derived from Astin's (1985) student involvement theory in which he argued that student involvement required a continuous investment of physical and psychosocial energy. According to Newmann et al. (1992), student engagement can be defined as a student's psychological investment and effort toward understanding, learning, or mastering the skills, knowledge, or crafts academic work is intended to promote. However, while there were several definitions of student engagement theories, the definition provided by Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, (2004) looked at several variables that contributed to successful student engagement and did the better job and provided a meaningful definition to this particular study.

Presenting case study research findings can be done in different styles according to the work's purpose, the kind of analysis undertaken, and the intended readership (Boyatzis, 1998).

Table 3

Codes, Categories, and Themes

Codes	Categories	Themes
• Groups • Community • Social connection • Teams • Identity • Clubs • Peers • Bonding • Group projects • Winning team • Sharing • Encourage each other • Improved working conditions	• Relationships • Similar interests • Positive interactions	1. Cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities help promote positive group identity.
• Connected to classroom • Extends learning • Relevant • Students' lives • Interests • Projects • College	• Learning support • Application • Beyond School	2. Cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities provide opportunities to meet students' unique needs and interests in school and beyond.
• Want to earn rewards • Behavior improvement • Self-reflection • Friendly language • Positive • Motivation • Positive relationships • Look forward • Improved working conditions • Want to meet goals	• Behavior • Motivation	3. Cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities provide incentives to improve behavior and motivation.

As previously noted, each of the themes belonged to their respective conceptual category (see Table 2). The frequency of occurrence varied for several categories so that some cases presented themes that were more prominent than others. These themes were defined and discussed in detail in the results section of this paper.

During the data analysis of participants' interview transcripts, several common themes and patterns emerged. The following major themes were developed from participants' responses to the interview questions:

- Cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities help promote positive group identity.
- Cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities provide opportunities to meet students' unique needs and interests in school and beyond.
- Cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities provide incentives to improve behavior and motivation.

Theme 1: Cocurricular Learning and Extracurricular Activities Help Promote Positive Group Identity

The campus administrators were very instrumental and decided what cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities existed at the high school. The cocurricular and extracurricular activities implemented promoted social involvement and increased the graduation rate of at-risk student. Participant P1 stated that "all students participate in cocurricular learning for it is a school wide initiative, 100% participation." Participant P2 stated that "all students are eligible to participate in monthly cocurricular learning activities, however some students don't meet the requirement so monthly it may be about

80-85% participation." Participant P3 stated that "some cocurricular learning activities are mandatory, students have to choose one and participate it in regularly." Participant P5 stated that "some students have a choice in participating because some cocurricular activities are a part of their daily schedule, so about 100% participation is required." In reference to extracurricular activities participation, Participant P4 stated that "all extracurricular activities are completely voluntary so I would say participation is about 70-75% schoolwide." Participant P1 stated that "extracurricular activities participation it depends on the activity, sporting activities are always at 90-95% and clubs are at 50-55%." Participant P3 stated that "extracurricular activities participation is 90-95% because it is self-selected by the student and students select what they like and what their peers like." All participants agreed that the school puts forth maximum effort to ensure that all students are provided the opportunity to participate in one or more cocurricular learning and/or extracurricular activities so that all students experience positive group identity.

Theme 2: Cocurricular Learning and Extracurricular Activities Provide Opportunities to Meet Students' Unique Needs and Interests in School and Beyond

Collectively, the participants believed that cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities allowed students to express their unique interests and differences. Participant P2 stated that "students are different and look to participate in activities that interest them…like there is no one size fits all….some of the cocurricular learning is selected by students who wish to be a part of that group or organization in high school and in college…while extracurricular activities are selected to help students

get into college" Participant P4 stated that "Junior Reserve Officer's Training Corps (JROCT), Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and the Law Academy are all offered at our high school and students select these cocurricular learning classes because of their connection beyond high school." Participant P4 also stated that football, basketball, baseball, softball, tennis are just a few of the extracurricular activities highly selected because students can be awarded college scholarships due to their participation and skill."

Theme 3: Cocurricular Learning and Extracurricular Activities Provide Incentives to Improve Behavior and Motivation

All teachers and student support staff participants agreed that cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities decreased negative student behavior and increased positive student social interactions. Participant P6 stated that "you can't ever tell how students will behave. But for the most part students are behaving so they can attend the monthly PBIS event. The event is promoted at the beginning of each month and student understand that positive behavior will allow them to participate. Behavior overall is a little better and gets better month after month." Participant P8 stated that "high school students are the hardest to motivate. Motivation is intrinsic and I think as a school we do a nice job selecting events to motivate students to behave. Students are anxious for the monthly PBIS events and look forward to being a part of them each month. Social involvement is crucial for this age group because they are huge influencers on one another. If my friend is behaving to attend the PBIS event, then so will I so I won't be left out or frowned upon. I am writing less students up for nonsense and calling more parents

with positive reports." Participant P3 stated that "low referrals for fighting, student incivility, and profanity towards teachers and each other. Leader in Me a schoolwide cocurricular learning incentive has helped reduce these numbers." Participant P4 stated that "PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) and Leader In Me has opened student eyes to cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities they had not considered before." Participant P9 stated that "motivation is an understatement, students are motivated to be a part of an organization and to be liked. Therefore, they participate in cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities to gain attention from their teachers and peers. Students know if they don't follow the expectations of the programs they will be dismissed immediately. Therefore, students are on their best behavior and motivated and engaged when in the programs, so they won't be kicked out and miss the fun. Expectations are being on time, attending when scheduled, actively participating, being respectful to others, no cell phones, no disrespectful words towards anyone." Participant P10 stated that "my job is to mediate between the teacher and the student. However, in the past few years my small groups are decreasing so I am going into classrooms more and doing whole group teaching. Student behavior has declined because students don't want to miss out on PBIS events like pep rallies, field trips, and guest speakers. Teachers and students are pleasant and smiling when you see them walking through the halls. Students are talking to one another in a positive social manner, and they are also showing positive manners towards each other. The entire working and learning culture is positive." Participant P11 stated that "students are extremely motivated, and it is evident in their behavior in the classroom, in the building, on district assessments, and grades.

Students are really doing better and motivated after being encouraged by the guest speakers, attending field trips of their choice, the visitation of local rappers. Students are behaving. They are not coming to my office anymore needing a pep talk or a phone call to a parent. Now they come to me for what I am hired for and that is to assist them with staying on track to graduation."

Results

The results of this study were based on the thematic analysis of the data collected from interviews of school administrators, teachers, and student support staff. Participants were asked questions related to cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities to learn more about administrators', teachers', and student support staffs' perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. Individual participants were identified using alphanumeric codes in both interview transcripts and results. The thematic analysis of the data collected was performed using open and axial coding methods. This section presented results based on participants' responses to the interview questions that related to each research question. Further discussion of these themes was provided in Chapter 5. In order to address the research questions, administrators were asked three major questions and three sub questions related to cocurricular learning, extracurricular activities, implementation to promote social involvement, and graduation rate. Teachers and student support staff were asked five questions with three sub questions related to student attention, student retention, student motivation, student behavior, climate/culture, student engagement, and

availability. A disaggregation of themes related to each of the interview questions were included in the following sections.

Administrators Interview Questions

The first interview question was: What are the names of the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities being implemented to promote social involvement and increase the graduation rate of at-risk students? Theme related is social involvement.

Social Involvement

Participants agreed that a variety of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities are offered at the high school. Participant P4 stated that "PBIS and Leader in Me were implemented the same year COVID-19 hit America (2019-2020 school year) they were new, and students were interested in the two new schoolwide programs." Participant P2 stated that "JROTC, football, basketball, softball, baseball, band, soccer, wrestling, and student council has been around since the school existence. Year after year, more and more students look forward to participating in the sporting activities each year."

The second interview question was: What percentage of at-risk students participate in the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities designed to promote social involvement and increase the graduation rate? Theme related is participation rate.

Participation Rate

Participants agreed that participation rate varied depending on the program or activity. Participant P1 stated that "Leader in Me and PBIS requires a non-negotiable 100% participation, JROTC is popular with about 50-60% of the school population

participating, with the other 40-50% of the student body participates in sporting activities."

The third interview question was: What is the increase in the graduation rate since the implementation of the programs? Theme related is graduation rate.

Graduation Rate

Participants agreed that since the implementation of Leader in Me and PBIS the graduation rate has increased. Participant P1 stated that "State report card show lagging data with 2016-2017 the graduation rate dropped by 4% but went up in 2018 by 8% and in 2019 the graduation rate increased by 4% since the implementation of Leader in Me which teaches seven leadership habits and PBIS that rewards positive social behavior." Participant P5 stated that "the graduation rate in 2016 was 72%, in 2017 it dropped to 68%, went up in 2018 to 76%, and the highest it has ever been was in 2019 with a 80.9% graduation rate." Participant P3 stated that "I only hear about the data but haven't actually studied it like that. I know we celebrated the highest percentage in over a decade and that I feel was a result of the schoolwide activities like PBIS and Leader in Me that was put in place at the start of the 2019-2020 school year. When students enjoy the activities, they behave and come to school to be a part of them."

Teachers and Student Support Staff Questions

The first interview question was: Tell me how you perceive the impact of the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities offered at the high school to promote social involvement and increase the graduation rate? Theme related are student attention, student retention, and student motivation.

Student Attention

Participants agreed that when students have something to look forward to at the end of the month and it is something they are interested in and self-selected their attention to their academic, behavior, attendance is considered with high regards. Participant P9 stated that "the impact of the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities offered here at the high school has truly sparked something in the students. I must say the students who participate activities that occur each day for about 45 minutes helps keep them focused, motivated, and encouraged to pay attention and behave in class." Participant P10 stated that "students are asking more questions about opportunities being afforded to them at the school. They come by asking specific questions in order to get assistance before selecting a cocurricular class. Students are paying close attention to programs and activities that will help them go to college." Participant P11 stated that "students are staying in class and not hanging in the hall after the late bell so that nothing interferes with them attending the monthly activities."

Student Retention

Not all participants agreed that student grades are increasing. Participant P6 stated that "retention is low, and it is evident as you get into the higher grades. Even the smart kids have a hard time coming to school every day and staying involved." Participant P8 stated that "student retention is tricky, sometimes when you think they got it they don't show it on assessments. Some of the students are doing better since they participate in non-academic classes and some of them don't it just depends. We still have a lot of

students who are not participating in anything so that may be why there is not increase in student retention."

Student Motivation

Participants agreed that students are motivated to graduate on time and participate in cocurricular and extracurricular activities on their own. Participant P10 stated that "students are wanting to graduate on time. They want to complete high school in four years. They are asking about credit recovery classes to get back on track. So, yes, the environment has shifted since new cocurricular and extracurricular activities have been added or made available to all students to accommodate their schedule." Participant P11 stated that "students are highly motivated, and it is evident in their behavior in the classroom, in the building, on district assessments, and grades. The fun that occurs in the building has motivated them to participate and be a part of the change and the winning groups." Participant P9 stated that "motivation is an understatement. Students are motivated to be a part of an organization and to be liked. Therefore, they participate in cocurricular and extracurricular programs to gain attention from adults and friends. The cocurricular and extracurricular activities is a time to bond with friends and other adults who work at the school." Participant P8 stated that "motivation is intrinsic, and I think as a school we do a great job with bringing people into the school to motivate our students to come to school and stay in school and achieve higher."

The second interview question was: What are your perceptions concerning student behavior in the classroom since the implementation of the programs designed to promote social involvement and increase the graduation rate? Theme related is student behavior.

Student Behavior

Participants agreed that student behavior had improved since the implementation of PBIS and Leader In Me cocurricular learning programs. Participant P7 stated that "staff and students are pleasant and smiling when you see them walking through the halls. Students are talking to one another in a positive social manner, and they are also showing positive manners towards staff and teachers. The entire atmosphere is positive and welcoming." Participant P6 stated that "my students' behavior is great, they come in excited about the anticipation of the day, the new learning, new activities, new members, new rewards, and new recognitions." Participant P8 stated that "students are anxious about monthly PBIS events and look forward to being a part of them. So, I feel the implementation of PBIS is helping improve student behavior."

The third interview question was: Tell me your perceptions about culture/climate of the high school with regards to the implementation of programs being offered at the school. Theme related is climate and culture.

Climate and Culture

Participants agreed that the climate and culture can be described as inspiring, motivating, and academic focus. The mood is positive and vibrant with a focus on academic excellence. Participant P8 stated that "PBIS is for students are teachers because both students and teachers like to be rewarded. Teachers are rewarded for high attendance and so are the students. Before PBIS the culture was toxic and divided. That behavior trickled down to the students and it was a horrible place to work let alone teach. I am glad something was implemented before I was on my way out."

The fourth interview question was: What is your perception concerning student engagement and motivation when they participate in the programs being offered at the high school that promote social involvement to increase the graduation rate? Theme related is student engagement.

Student Engagement

Participants agreed that the increase in student engagement is evident in the increase in graduation rates for the past few years. Participant P10 stated that "students are tracking and monitoring their own learning without being told to do so. Teachers are forced to keep grades updated in the grading portal. Students are checking daily and tracking their progress." Participant P11 stated that "when students are participating in a PBIS event they are happy, excited, overjoyed just by the look on their faces. They understand the process of engaging in class keeps them out of trouble in class and engagement shows they are motivated to learn. When they are in their class and engaged and motivated, they behave, and their good behavior allows them to attend PBIS monthly events."

The fifth interview question was: When are programs that promote social involvement to increase the graduation rate available for at-risk students? Theme related is availability.

Availability

Participants agreed that cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities are available before school, during school, and afterschool. Participant P9 states that "cocurricular learning are mostly during the day at various times and extracurricular

activities are after school only." Participant P7 stated that "PBIS for students a cocurricular learning program is celebrated the last Friday of the month but monitored daily by teachers, administrators, and counselors. Leader In Me a cocurricular learning program is taught whole school once a week but practiced daily. The majority of extracurricular activities are sporting activities."

Discrepant Cases

While there were no significant discrepant cases within the study, there was uncertainty of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities express by Participant P5. The remaining interview responses from this participant was neutral. When an unsure perception emerged from a response to one of the interview questions, P5 simply stated "I don't know, or I am not sure." It was noted that the timing of the study and the COVID-19 pandemic affected the perceptions of this participant when previous experiences in a similar environment were known. The purpose of this qualitative case study design was to understand the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staffs' perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. The perceptions, known or unknown, were relevant to the findings of the study and a broader sampling of participants indicated more knowledgeable perceptions than unknowledgeable during this period. This was discussed further in suggestions for future research in Chapter 5.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Researchers use credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative studies (Houghton et al., 2013). Trustworthiness of

a study is a way to assess the rigor of the research so that the findings can be valid and acceptable in the field of research (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Several steps were taken to ensure credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility in a study can be found in confidence in the study's truth and the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and is considered the most crucial criterion (Polit & Beck, 2014). I demonstrated that the presented findings represented the phenomenon's accurate picture (Shenton, 2004). The concept of credibility is analogous to internal validity in quantitative research (Connelly, 2016). Triangulation, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checking were techniques utilized for establishing the credibility of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, I used triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking and achieved a credible study.

I informed each participant that the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Before the interview, I developed a working relationship with all the participants and obtained the best results possible. During the interview, I used probing questions or asked clarifying questions for more in-depth responses. I reread and verified the responses. Moreover, I ensured credibility in the study, allowed the participants to review findings, solicited feedback, and wrote the findings and recommendations for the study. This process allowed participants to verify their responses. I did not receive any feedback from the participants for changes. Finally, themes were developed by combining categories that generated similar meanings and results.

Transferability

Transferability, or external validity, in qualitative research, occurs when a study may be applied to other settings or groups from the readers' perspective (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). First, I ensured that all elements of my study were in alignment and that the study was replicable. To achieve transferability, I used the provided evaluation tools such as the dissertation checklist and rubric and aligned all elements of the study. Guided by the checklist and rubric, I was provided with a detailed map for other researchers to follow should they choose to study a similar phenomenon. I also made sure and wrote a detailed description of my study for other to easily replicate.

Dependability

Dependability in the research process occurs when there is a consistency of the findings over time that can be replicated by other researchers (Billups, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The importance of dependability was essential to the study's trustworthiness, as the research audience was ensured that if other researchers reviewed the data, they arrived at the same conclusion. In qualitative studies, the data collection procedures, analysis, and interpretation leading to the findings were reliable and dependable. For this study, data were collected from semistructured interviews and reflective notes. These data points were checked against each other and ensured consistency. I found no discrepant data in this study; however, had there been discrepant data, I would have analyzed it and determined the degree of inconsistency within data.

Confirmability

The last criterion established in trustworthiness of a research study was confirmability. The confirmability criterion verifies that the research findings were derived from the participants' narratives and other data sources from the study, rather than the researcher's biases, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure confirmability, I utilized design instruments that I did not manipulate, thereby being consciously aware of my position as an instrument of the research. I also used reflective notes throughout the study, recorded, and reviewed my observations and interpretations to mitigate the researcher's bias to help uphold the study's confirmability (Morse, 2015).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study design was to understand the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staffs' perceptions of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. Five administrators were interviewed and six teachers and student support staff who worked at Urban High School during the 2016-2019 school year. Data were analyzed using open coding and thematic analysis, and three themes emerged. Themes included: Cocurricular and extracurricular activities help promote positive group identity, Cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities provide opportunities to meet students' unique needs and interests in school and beyond, Cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities provide incentives to improve behavior and motivation.

All research participants agreed that cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities influenced on the graduation rate of at-risk students. Each participant gave an

account of their perception of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities. Administrators identified the distinct types of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities being offered at Urban High School that not only increased social involvement but due to the high participation rate the graduation rate increased. Teachers and student support staff identified the availability of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities at Urban High School and its positive impact on the school's climate and culture, student attention, retention, engagement, and behavior. Collectively, the participants concluded that schoolwide cocurricular programs partnered with extracurricular activities fostered the interest of at-risk students and increased the graduation rate at Urban High School.

In chapter 5, I summarized the interpretation of the study's findings and described the study's limitations to trustworthiness, recommendations for further research, the potential impact for positive social change, and conceptual implications. Lastly, I provided a conclusion to the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study design was to understand the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff regarding cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. Five administrators who worked at Urban High School and six teachers and student support staff participated in semistructured virtual interviews. Data were coded and put in themes based on participants' interview responses to the research questions. Participants' responses to interview questions provided a range of perspectives and experiences from administrators, teachers, and student support staff who had been employed at Urban High School since 2016 and had direct contact with students. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis were (a) cocurricular and extracurricular activities help promote positive group identity, (b) cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities provide opportunities to meet students' unique needs and interests in school and beyond, and (c) cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities provide incentives to improve behavior and motivation.

Interpretation of the Findings

The research questions that were developed for this study were designed to help me get insight into the perspectives of administrators, teachers, and student support staff on cocurricular learning's and extracurricular activities' influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. The research questions were as follows: How do administrators perceive cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students? How do teachers and student support staff perceive

cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students?

Theme 1: Cocurricular Learning and Extracurricular Activities Help Promote Positive Group Identity

My research study supported the concept that cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities helped promote social involvement. Extracurricular activities provided students with highly structured leisure activities that allowed them to exert control over their personal experiences and express their identities. The literature further suggested that participation increased opportunities for students to socially network and develop friendships (Argan et al., 2020). Cocurricular learning activities were an essential part of students' education. Throughout cocurricular learning activities, students learned and developed their interests and capabilities while interacting with others, developing competencies and soft skills that would prepare them for a challenging world (Roslan & Hamid, 2020). Participant P6 stated, "students are eager and anxious to participate in cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities that occur daily, weekly, and monthly." Participant P9 stated, "I love to the see the excitement on the face of my students when it is time for the PBIS activity. Leader in Me has taught them leadership and social skills that students have taken ownership of." One of the reasons that students report dropping out of school is lack of social presence. Social presence is the degree of connectedness that individuals feel when communicating through any given medium. It is therefore critical to understand how students communicate and interact socially (Bateman, 2021).

Theme 2: Cocurricular Learning and Extracurricular Activities Provide Opportunities to Meet Students' Unique Needs and Interests in School and Beyond

Research clearly showed that cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities were designed to meet the unique needs of students until high school graduation. In high school, extracurricular activities can represent a key opportunity for encouraging academically vulnerable students to develop their strengths to achieve some measure of success in school and beyond (McCabe et al., 2018). Extracurricular activities are "planned, programmed, organized activities at school, conducted outside lessons, conforming to educational aims, in line with students' interests and needs, in order to develop their personalities" (Soyturk & Tepekoylu, 2020, p. 327). Cocurricular learning activities are believed have positive influences on students such as an increase in academic performance, enhancement of social and competency skills, and assistance of youth development and employment (Roslan & Hamid, 2020). Participant P1 stated, "students who have actively participated in cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities have received full athletic and/or academic scholarships for college." Participants agreed that the cocurricular learning activities and extracurricular activities spark student interest and promote positive results.

Theme 3: Cocurricular Learning and Extracurricular Activities Provide Incentives to Improve Behavior and Motivation

One of the greatest findings in conducting this study was that the majority of the participants reported that some form of cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities improved student behavior and motivation. Positive student motivation and behavior

contributed to academic excellence and higher graduation potential. Participant P10 stated, “since the implementation of PBIS and Leader in Me students are motivated to attend class regularly, complete all class assignments, and interact with their peers in a more positive way.” Nonacademic activities of this type enabled alternative success environments for many youths who could not achieve high levels of success at school to gain confidence and to develop themselves. It has been seen that students who take part in extracurricular activities not only display fewer problematic behaviors, but also develop their communication skills, which are important social skills (Soyturk & Tepekoylu, 2020). It can be said that these activities were a factor that complemented in-class learning, which enabled environments suitable for children and youths to be raised as responsible, disciplined, independent, tolerant, critical, cooperative individuals with a capacity for risk-taking, which is related to positive academic, behavioral, and psychological benefits (Soyturk & Tepekoylu, 2020).

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to a small sample size of 5 administrators and 6 teachers and student support staff who were currently employed at the school and had been since 2016. Therefore, perspectives from participants in this study may not be reflective of a larger sample of principals, teachers, and student support staff in high schools in the same school district. Moreover, I used only the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff in a high school. Each of these limitations presents the possibility for future study, extension, and generalizability.

Recommendations

Based on the results and limitations of this study, I have concluded that school leadership may want to consider policies that encourage and/or require participation in cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities in some form for all students. Additionally, the participants in this study only included administrators, teachers, and student support staff. I recommend that further studies around this topic be conducted to include students and parents to determine whether different themes and results would emerge. Finally, further investigating the root causes for low graduation rates of at-risk students in urban schools with a greater number of participants may lead to a deeper understanding about the contextual factors that influence graduation rates.

Implications

I have always been invested in the idea of at-risk students in urban schools obtaining a cherished, consistent, and operative school experience. As shown in the review of the literature related to this study's topic and this study's findings, cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities influence high school graduation rates, especially for at-risk students at urban high schools. This study may lead to positive outcomes for children in urban school districts, administrators, teachers, and student support staff as more is known about cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities designed to benefit them. In addition, this study's findings may lead to district-wide positive social change. This study was conducted because the graduation rate is related to academic and nonacademic learning in high school. It was important to investigate the types of nonacademic learning and activities that impacted graduation rates.

Furthermore, I believed that this study would support the best interests of high school leaders with multiple years of low graduation rates and at-risk students as they work to implement schoolwide cocurricular learning to improve school culture and climate. This may lead to an increase in student attendance, motivation, retention, and behavior that might lead to higher graduation rates.

Conclusion

Data from interviews conducted with five administrators and six teachers and student support staff at a high school in a small urban school district in a southeastern state were analyzed to understand the perceptions of administrators, teachers, and student support staff on cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities and their influence on the graduation rate of at-risk students. After a thorough analysis of the data collected, I determined that administrators, teachers, and student support staff perceived that the increase in the graduation rate had a direct link to cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities being implemented. Additionally, most of the participants' responses indicated that cocurricular learning improved the high school's climate and culture by contributing to improvement in student motivation, student behavior, and the graduation rate. Future studies in the local context might focus on understanding perceptions of students and parents. The goal of this study was to promote social involvement to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Introduction
2. Clarity the purpose of my study
3. Ask participant for any questions about the consent form
4. Ask permission to record the interview
5. Record the time, place, and date of the interview in the journal
6. Identify the participant with a code before conducting the interview
7. Conduct the interview
8. Turn off the recording at the end of the interview and record the time
9. Thank the participant for being part of my study

I. Administrator Questions

1. What are the names of the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities being implemented to promote social involvement and increase the graduation rate of at-risk students?

   Please give examples….
2. How long have the above-mentioned programs been implemented at this high school?
3. What percentage of at-risk students participate in the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities designed to promote social involvement and increase the graduation rate?
4. What is the increase in the graduation rate since the implementation of the programs?

a. What data have been captured to verify the increase?

5. As a building administrator, what programs do you perceive should continue to be implemented?
    a. Why?
6. As a building administrator, what programs do you perceive should discontinue being implemented?
    a. Why?

II. Teachers and Student Support Staff Questions

1. Tell me how you perceive the impact of the cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities offered at the high school to promote social involvement and increase the graduation rate.

    Prompts:

    Student attention?

    Student retention?

    Student motivation?

    Tell me more….

2. What are your perceptions concerning student behavior in the classroom since the implementation of the programs designed to promote social involvement and increase the graduation rate?

    Prompts:

    How has it changed?

    Tell me more about…

Please give an example….

Explain what you mean by…

3. Tell me your perceptions about culture/climate of the high school with regards to the implementation of programs being offered at the school.

   Prompts:

   How has it changed?

   Tell me more about …

   Please give an example….

   Explain what you mean by…

4. What is your perception concerning student engagement and motivation when they participate in the programs being offered at the high school that promote social involvement to increase the graduation rate?

   Prompts:

   Tell me more about …

   Please give an example….

   Explain what you mean by…

5. When are programs that promote social involvement to increase the graduation rate available for at-risk students?

   Prompts

   Tell me more about…

   Please give an example….

   Explain what you mean by…

6. What cocurricular learning or extracurricular activities could be added?

   Prompts

   Give me an example…

7. What cocurricular learning or extracurricular activities should be removed?

   Tell me more…

8. What else would you add to this interview that would help me answer which programs are beneficial at the high school to increase the graduation rate of at-risk students?

Appendix B: Email Invitation to Participate in Research

Hello_____,

I am writing to invite you to take part in a research study entitled "Promoting Social Involvement to Increase the Graduation Rate of At-Risk Students." You are invited to participate in this study because you are an administrator, a teacher, or a support staff member working at Southwest High School between 2016-2019 and have experience that could help me answer the research questions of this study. I am exploring how cocurricular learning and extracurricular activities influence the graduation rate.

I am a doctoral candidate from Walden University, and I would like to meet with you to interview you about your perceptions of the programs being implemented at Southwest High School. The interview will last no longer than 30-45 minutes. I will interview by video conference calls.

If you are interested in participating, please see the Informed Consent attached and reply to this email with "I consent." After you have responded, I will reply and set up a date and time for the interview. If you need to contact me with any questions or concerns, I can be reached at kenya.miller@waldenu.edu or on my cell phone at 478-342-2253. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Kenya Miller – kenya.miller@waldenu.edu

Doctoral Candidate, Walden University

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

Dear Mrs. Kenya Miller,

The Research Review Committee recently met to review your request for research. Based on the information you submitted, the Committee has approved your request. Regarding your data request, most data being requested will be provided by the school. Any need for district provided data would need to be clarified and requested via email through the office of Research, Evaluation,
Assessment, and Accountability. The Researcher must make it clear to the individuals selected for the study that their participation is voluntary. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact my Administrative
Assistant, Lakisha Coon at 478-765-8600.

Kevin Adams
Director
Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability

484 Mulberry Street• Macon, Georgia 31201 • Office (478) 765-8711 • Fax (478) 765-8549

Appendix D: National Institutes of Health Certificate of Completion

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Kenya Miller** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants."

Date of Completion: 09/27/2018

Certification Number: 2959208

NIH National Institutes of Health
Office of Extramural Research