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Factors that Impact African American High School Equivalency (HSE) Students' Pursuit of Higher Education

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Jamiyla Chandler-Melton

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2016

Abstract

Factors that Impact African American High School Equivalency (HSE)

Students' Pursuit of Higher Education

by

Jamiyla Chandler-Melton

MAEd, Ashford University, 2011

BA, CUNY School of Professional Studies, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning

Walden University

June 2016

Abstract

African Americans account for a disproportionate percentage of students who pursue college education in comparison to European Americans. Indeed, a considerable number of African American High School Equivalency (HSE) students are not enrolling in college once they earn their HSE diploma. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine 3 African American HSE students' perceptions about factors that influenced their pursuit of higher education at the selected HSE study site. These 3 students were selected for their inclusion because of their ethnicity, enrollment in the HSE program, academic underpreparedness and lack of pursuit of higher education, and strong feelings to share about the phenomenon under study. The theoretical framework was based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of human learning. The research question focused on assessing African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education. Semistructured focus group interview and individual interview data were thematically analyzed using open-coding. Findings revealed that participants believed the lack of high school credentials, family background, intrinsic motivation and educational values, sociocultural influences, teacher and peer influence, and socioeconomic factors impacted their pursuit of higher education. A professional development project was developed based on study findings to provide HSE educators with training on the HSE exam, Common Core State Standards, and best practices to enrich the academic achievement of African American HSE students at the study site. Results have implications for positive social change among African American HSE students by emphasizing the importance of higher education on educational, sociocultural, professional, and personal advancement.

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Dedication

First and foremost, I give thanks to God for the strength and blessings bestowed upon me because none of this would be possible without him. I dedicate this work to my three children: Blair, Jr., Nicholas, and Brooke. They gave me a reason to pursue scholarship and lead by example to prove to them that any goal can be accomplished when you believe, work hard, sacrifice, and never give up. Secondly, I dedicate this doctoral study to my husband, Blair Sr., who has been my partner, best friend, supporter, and biggest fan throughout this rigorous journey. I thank him from the bottom of my heart for encouraging me especially during moments when I thought about quitting.

I also dedicate this work to my entire family who expressed so much pride in my becoming a doctor. Thank you to Rosalind Kitchens-Collier, my mother, and Nehemiah Chandler, my father, for bringing me into this world. To the late Francis Allen, Jr., who mentored me during my most impressionable years as a teenage girl and showed me that I possessed the potential to be more than just another ordinary Black girl from East New York, Brooklyn, I thank you.

This doctoral study is also dedicated to my friends, sorority sisters, OES sisters, colleagues, and students who gave me standards to live up to and the wisdom to devote myself to becoming a better woman through words, actions, and higher learning. I appreciate the encouragement, inquiries about my progress, and rewarding experiences. Lastly, this work is dedicated to the African American community. To every Black man, woman, and child, I am living proof that you can make any dream a reality and the 'glass-ceiling' can be broken if you remain resilient because Black lives do matter.

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I would first like to acknowledge my committee chairpersons: Dr. Kathleen Bushman and Dr. Ella Benson. They worked diligently as a team with me for nearly three years guiding the development of my study and helping me along the most challenging part of the doctoral journey. Thank you to my University Research Reviewer, Dr. Pamela Brown, who provided expertise and feedback to ensure that my doctoral study was good quality and met Walden University standards. Last but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Joe Ann Hinrichs who worked with me as my first committee chairperson in the late Dr. Bushman's absence, and Dr. Patricia Thurmond for all her support and guidance toward the end of my doctoral journey. Successful completion of my doctoral study was a collaborative effort that involved the expertise and encouragement experienced scholars. Thanks to all of you from the bottom of my heart.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

African American students' college enrollment and completion rates are issues for policymakers who declare a commitment to close the academic achievement gap (Jackson, 2012). The educational attainment of African Americans is of utmost importance when their ability to compete academically and professionally with European Americans and even peers from around the world is taken into serious consideration. In this era of globalization, it is time for educators to make every attempt possible to narrow the academic achievement gap in the United States (Wagner, 2008). Educators addressing disparities in education should focus on the differences between African American and European American students' academic preparation, performance, and aspiration for postsecondary learning (Holland, 2011). Specifically, low socioeconomic status African American students usually do not finish secondary school, and the few who attend 4-year colleges are less likely to complete degree requirements in comparison to European Americans (Pondiscio, 2013). African American students must receive a quality education that put them in the position to become high school completers, college graduates, and working class citizens.

The lack of educational success among African American students is problematic, especially since data revealed that access to college had improved but they remain underrepresented in higher education (Brock, 2010). The academic achievement gap remains a problem despite facts and figures that showed an increase in graduation rates which confirmed that African American students have made academic progress over

recent decades (Jackson, 2012). As an educator who has served at institutions where African Americans accounted for the majority of the student population, I developed a commitment to narrow the academic achievement gap. Inquiry into what factors may influence African American learners' pursuit of college education became a deep interest.

The problem is that African American High School Equivalency (HSE) students are not continuing their education at postsecondary or vocational schools once they receive their HSE diploma. African American HSE students are less likely to pursue higher education programs compared to traditional high school graduates (Maralani, 2011). This research project examined factors that influence African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education. This study focused on African American students currently enrolled in a local HSE test preparation program located within a large metropolitan area in a Northeastern state. The purpose of this project study was to assess factors associated with the lack of pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students at the study site.

Secondary school student dropouts interested in pursuing higher education are left with one option which is to earn a HSE diploma. Passing the General Educational Development (GED) test or Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) only serves as a prerequisite to higher education because either certificate is considered a minimum requirement for admittance into postsecondary education programs (GED Compass, 2013; State University of New York, 2013, 2014). It is crucial that HSE students receive a quality education that prepares them for the future ahead because obtaining a secondary school diploma is only the beginning (Gewertz, 2011). Quality educational experiences

beyond the secondary level are meaningful for students to become successful adults, workers, and citizens (Wagner, 2008). It is important for African American HSE students to recognize that pursuing higher education can maximize their career opportunities, earning potential, socioeconomic status, and overall quality of life.

Definition of the Problem

The research problem is that African American HSE students are not pursuing college education even after earning their HSE diploma. In recent decades, there has been an increase in college enrollment and degree completion among African Americans but rates still do not compare to the number of European Americans who pursue higher education (Fry & Krogstad, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012, 2013, 2014). Earning a HSE diploma does not guarantee college aspiration or preparedness, and data showed that only about 10% of HSE recipients possess a postsecondary degree (Rose, 2013). Postsecondary education is only an attainable goal for individuals who earn a high school diploma or its equivalent (Chen, 2014). Obtaining a secondary school diploma is just not enough given the economic advantages associated with possessing a postsecondary degree (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2012; Stone, 2005). In most cases, a college degree leads to more career opportunities with a higher salary and better benefits (Peralta, 2014). College graduates are more likely to earn more income over a lifetime. Earning an education beyond the secondary level is the key to occupational, financial, and personal advancement for African American HSE students.

In the selected Northeastern state, gaps in high school graduation rates between European American and African American students exist even though there has been an

increase in graduation rates across all ethnic groups. African American learners are leaving high school prematurely as data showed that only 58.4% earned a high school diploma (SUNY, 2012). Furthermore, career and college readiness still remain low for African Americans (SUNY, 2011). Another problem concerning the education gap is that many African American students maintain lower levels of college achievement (American Council on Education, 2012). College enrollment rates for African Americans have increased over the past few years, but still remain below that of European American students (NCES, 2012). A data report by Yeado (2013) showed a rise in fall undergraduate enrollment of 8.5% for African Americans between 2009 and 2011. In terms of college completion, recent figures showed gaps are narrowing as 6-year college graduation rates rose 2% for African Americans (Roach, 2013). Consequently, degree attainment also increased among all postsecondary learners from 1990 to 2012, a mere 10% for African Americans which is insignificant compared to the 14% rise in rates for European Americans (NCES, 2013).

After researching African American students' college enrollment rates, a closer look into factors that impact African American HSE learners' pursuit of higher education became necessary. The connection between the college achievement gap and African Americans is well-documented. Experience as an educator to African American HSE students also sparked my interest to research what factors influence their pursuit of college education. Research needed to be conducted to explore why some African American HSE students choose not to go to college even after earning a secondary school diploma.

Rationale

From experience as an educator at nontraditional career colleges on the East coast, it was disconcerting to witness many students who struggled to earn a HSE diploma drop out the dual degree programs prematurely and fail to continue their education at the postsecondary level. The student population was comprised of predominantly African Americans. Prospective students targeted by admission representatives' at the most recent institution I served were mainly ethnic minorities. Based on these students' educational history and academic ability, they were categorized as having the Ability to Benefit (ATB) from a GED/Associate degree program. I was responsible for creating data reports on admission test scores. The results indicated that over two-thirds of prospective students failed the entrance exam and required tutoring services. Only about 30% of examinees passed the entrance exam the first time and received preliminary admittance to the college.

School administrators faced challenges with student retention and eventually a significant number of students dropped out prematurely having yet to earn at least a HSE diploma (J. Daniels, personal communication, November 7, 2013). Between the 2012 to 2013 and 2013 to 2014 school years, the institution's student retention rate dropped nearly 50%. Even an alumnus expressed to me her dissatisfaction with the program after learning from a resume workshop that the institution's job placement rate was only 64% (W. Percelle, personal communication, January 9, 2014). I witnessed firsthand the growing disconnect between pupils, faculty, and staff result in the gradual decline of the school's overall performance. I shared with students my educational philosophy

regarding the pathway to academic excellence and explained how they should handle unavoidable challenges.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Based on the 2014 GED program national economic snapshot, African Americans accounted for 18.4% and European Americans a mere 9.6% of U.S. citizens who do not possess a secondary school diploma (GED Testing Service, 2013). In today's global economy, secondary school completion is essential for individuals to pursue a college education, enroll in job training programs, or obtain entry-level positions (GED Compass, 2013; GED Testing Service, n.d.). Earning a HSE diploma is considered an alternative for high school dropouts who plan to go to college. The problem is that African American HSE students are not continuing their education at postsecondary or vocational schools once they receive their HSE diploma. African Americans account for about a quarter of HSE test passers and the few who do transition to college do not graduate with a degree (GED Testing Service, 2014; NCES, 2013; Pondiscio, 2013; Rose, 2013). Research also showed that HSE test-passers are more likely to enroll in college than nonpassers most often at institutions that offer 2-year programs (Guison-Dowdy, Patterson, Song, & Zhang, 2010).

Recent statistics indicated that the GED test pass rate in the Northeastern state selected for this study is only 59.4%, which is the lowest in the country compared to the national average of 72.4% (Waldman, 2013). The 2013 Annual Statistical Report on the GED test showed that of all candidates eligible to take the exam in the U.S., 26.9% were African American and 42.8% were European American. According to the report, 50% of

test takers who passed were European Americans while African Americans accounted for only 21.5% (GED Testing Service, 2014). Fewer African Americans took the GED test than European Americans and they still accounted for less than a quarter of examinees who earned a passing score. Based on these statistics, differences in performance on the GED exam exist between African Americans and European Americans.

In an effort to narrow the academic achievement gap, the New York State Department of Education (NYSED) recently introduced a new, improved computer mediated HSE exam that aligns with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (SUNY, 2013). The change went into effect on January 1, 2014 where HSE candidates are no longer required to take the GED test. Instead, school administrators nationwide have begun to implement the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) which evaluates students' skills in writing, reading, math, social studies, and science (SUNY, 2014). There are several justifiable reasons for switching from the GED test to TASC. First, TASC is more affordable and provides examinees up to two retest options at no additional cost (TASC, n.d.). Most importantly, the assessment is available in two languages (English and Spanish); two formats (written and computer based); and accommodations can be made for test takers who have hearing or vision impairments. In response to test design changes, all HSE test preparatory programs within the select Northeastern state are being restructured (NYCDOE, n.d.).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

There are a considerable number of students who are high school and college noncompleters (Verdugo, 2011). In the U.S., only seven out of 10 students graduate from

high school and go onto college or join the workforce and only half possess the skills to get jobs that pay higher than minimum wage (Wagner, 2008). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics showed a difference in public high school graduation rates among African American and European American students, 68% and 85%, respectively (NCES, 2014). The rate of African American students who enrolled in college right after high school increased to 62% between 1990 and 2012 while the percentage of European Americans decreased to 67% (NCES, 2014). However, the number of European American college enrollees still exceeded the number of African Americans. College enrollment rates between European Americans and African Americans have narrowed over the years but the gap widens when it comes to bachelor degree attainment (Fry & Krogstad, 2014).

Factors that influence high school dropout rates include family climate, community, quality of education offered at schools, and student performance (Verdugo, 2011). GED earners also encounter familial, social, and educational barriers when pursuing higher education which has an effect on college enrollment and completion rates (Nix & Michalak, 2012). High School Equivalency preparatory programs must take into consideration all factors that may have a negative influence on students' academic success. Efforts must be made on behalf of HSE test preparatory program administrators to enrich students' educational experience, performance on the exam, and college readiness. The quality of test preparation programs impact whether test-takers pass or fail the HSE exam (Ormsby, n.d.). Wagner (2008) refuted teaching to the test as the only pedagogical practice to foster student achievement and college preparedness. Test

preparation programs must offer additional support services to address students' academic, social, professional development. High School Equivalency instructors must do everything in their power to instill knowledge that enable students to succeed in college and compete in today's job market (Garvey & Grobe, 2011). The quality of teaching and learning provided to HSE students can make or break their academic success, test performance, college preparedness, and career readiness.

GED earners are critical of test preparation programs and believe that a high school diploma is more valuable (Tuck, 2012). Ou (2008) discussed the differences in labor market outcomes among high school dropouts, GED recipients, and high school graduates stating the three educational levels are not considered equivalent by employers and college recruiters. Ou determined employers and college recruiters do not consider the three educational levels equivalent. Many GED recipients who possess the academic skills to perform at the college level do not enroll in higher education programs even though the rewards will be comparable to that of high school graduates (Tyler, 2003). It is imperative that U.S. citizens today earn a college education to not only narrow the achievement gap, but also to reclaim our title as the most educated nation (Lee, 2012). This doctoral research project study will examine African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education. It is only right that efforts to close the college achievement gap include an investigation of factors that African American HSE students' believe impact their pursuit of college education.

Definitions

The terms listed below are presented in this doctoral project and provides a clearer understanding of the study.

Achievement Gap: Disparities in education related to academic performance. The term further describes the differences in how some groups of students excel educationally (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, n.d.). The academic achievement gap takes into consideration the performance of all students from levels pre-K to college (Education Week, 2011).

African American: The term ‘African American’ describes people who are American citizens of African descent (United States Census Bureau, 2012). African Americans are sometimes referred to as ‘Black Americans’ because ethnic group members have ancestry in one or both of the following Black racial groups: Sub Saharan African or Afro-Caribbean (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014).

Ethnic minority: According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2014), ethnic minority is a term used to describe groups of people within a larger population who do not share cultural or national practices with the majority. Powell and Scott (2013) stated that individuals who identify themselves as having background in one or more of the following ethnic groups are considered an ethnic minority: African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic.

General Educational Development (GED) test: An assessment for learners to demonstrate knowledge in the following academic content areas: Writing, reading, math, science, and social studies in order to meet high school diploma requirements (GED

Testing Service, n.d.). It provides students who have yet to complete secondary school to earn a HSE diploma.

Higher education: Learning that takes places after secondary school (National Resource Center for Youth Development, n.d.). This includes attending institutions identified as colleges, universities, and even career or training schools that award students a degree/certificate upon completion.

High School Equivalency (HSE) Diploma: The certificate is an alternative for students who did not complete traditional secondary school programs (New York City Department of Education, n.d.). It serves as a receipt of graduation or high school completion which is obtained by the following: (a) passing an exam for HSE, or (b) earning at least 24 credits at a degree-granting institution (New York State Higher Education Services Corporation, n.d.).

Sociocultural: Something that concerns both human interaction and shared practices (Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural factors are described as traditions, customs, practices, values, roles, and norms imposed on by society and culture that influence an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Boundless, 2014).

Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC): The new high school equivalency assessment was designed by CTB/McGraw-Hill (TASC, n.d.). The exam was first implemented in January 2014, and measures HSE candidates' academic skills in subjects aligned with Common Core State Standards.

Significance

The purpose of this project study was to investigate factors associated with the pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students currently enrolled in HSE test preparation programs. In the selected Northeastern state, the HSE exam was redesigned last year to prepare test takers for future job and college opportunities (SUNY, 2014). High school completers earn an estimated \$10,000 more annually than noncompleters, and individuals with some college credits earn about \$5,000 more than high school diploma holders (SUNY, 2014). Higher education means a higher income. In particular, African Americans who possess a high school diploma or its equivalent should pursue a college degree. Educational attainment leads to more opportunities for African Americans to become career professionals who can invest money and knowledge back into their communities (Johnson, 2005). Closing the college enrollment gap is an issue that the U.S must address sooner than later to ensure the advancement and productivity of all citizens (Kim, 2011).

In a large city within the selected Northeastern state, statistics showed an increase in high school graduation rates; however, African American students are still dropping out at an alarming rate (Fry & Krogstad, 2014). High school dropouts are considering the HSE diploma as an alternative to completing secondary school (Fulton, 2011). This means more effort has to be directed toward enriching education at HSE test preparation programs. Addressing the academic achievement gap requires that educators assess the experiences of HSE students as well since they are taking advantage of their second chance to complete high school. This population of students can attest to the quality of

education offered at HSE test preparatory programs. High School Equivalency students are also the best group of learners who can explain what factors impact academic achievement, and ultimately pursuit of college education. There is a growing demand for college educated professionals to join the workforce, but African Americans have not made considerable gains in terms of degree attainment (Kim, 2011). This is one of the reasons why African American students' lack of pursuit of higher education needs to be explored.

Guiding/Research Questions

This doctoral project study examined factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education. Inquiries about gaps in educational practice related to the identified problem were addressed in this case study which aimed to answer the following research question:

RQ. What factors influence African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education at the selected HSE test preparation program?

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this case study was to examine factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education. A qualitative methodology was selected to obtain students personal perception of factors that contribute to their pursuit of college education. It was essential to review scholarly literature related to the research problem being investigated. A search for literature that discussed why African Americans are choosing not to attend college served as the background for this research project. In this literature review section, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning is presented as

the theoretical framework for this study. This section also includes discussions on six topics: (a) sociocultural factors, academic achievement, and African Americans, (b) academic achievement gap and ethnic minorities, (c) preparation for college education, (d) African Americans and higher education, (e) African Americans, linguistics, and higher education, and (f) African American students' experiences in higher education.

The following keywords were used to narrow down my literature search: *African Americans, college entrance, college preparation, degree attainment, high school equivalency, higher education, and sociocultural theory*. The literature reviewed consisted of both peer-reviewed and scholarly articles. The majority of scholarly literature reviewed was accessed using the following Walden University library education databases: Academic Search Complete, EBSCO Host, Education Research Complete, Education Resources Information Center, PsycINFO, and SAGE Journals. Some articles referenced in this section were retrieved from Google Scholar as well.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This research project was based on the social constructivist viewpoint. Using a social constructivist approach rendered it possible to assess multiple realities from participants' perspectives (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Each individual within a cultural group perceives shared experiences differently. This philosophical view provided the opportunity to interpret personal experiences. For this project study, individual experiences directly related to the college entrance of African American HSE students were examined within a social context. The theoretical framework selected to serve as the

basis for this research study was Vygotsky's sociocultural theory because it explains how learning is greatly influenced by social interaction and cultural beliefs (Vygotsky, 1978).

Contemporary society attributes the academic achievement gap to differences in cultural practices rather than access to educational resources and opportunities (Darensbourg & Blake, 2014; Whaley & Noel, 2012). Based on Vygotsky's work, it is presumed that social capital in conjunction with cultural capital should have a positive influence on student performance and attitudes toward learning. Social capital is defined as the interrelationships and networks between people from a cultural group with shared norms and values (The World Bank, 2011). Cultural capital is described as social and economic resources that serve as either an advantage or disadvantage regarding the mobility of members within a cultural group (Light, 2005). From this perspective, social and cultural experiences shape the ways students learn and value education. The sociocultural theory was used as the framework from which to examine factors that have an impact on African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education.

Sociocultural Factors, Academic Achievement, & African Americans

Sociocultural factors specific to African American students can impact their self-worth, motivation, and academic achievement which all happen to be interconnected (Griffin, Chavous, Cogburn, Branch, & Sellers, 2012). Sociocultural factors are described as traditions, customs, practices, values, roles, and norms imposed on people by society and culture that influences an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Boundless, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural factors have an influence on the academic aspiration of African American students who fail to achieve academic goals and lack

motivation and/or interest to pursue higher education (Andrade, 2014). Social and cultural factors are considered essential to the academic achievement of African Americans students (Strayhorn, 2010). Human interaction and shared practices among African Americans have a significant influence on how they value education and perform academically (Caldwell & Obasi, 2010). Interestingly enough, some high performing African American college students are academically successful because of their ability to adjust to different sociocultural environments (Brooks, 2012). Academic achievement for African American college students is contingent upon their willingness to adapt to the demands of postsecondary learning, foster meaningful relationships with fellow members of their school-community, and demonstrate educational values.

Four-year college enrollment and completion rates vary significantly by ethnicity in which more European Americans than African Americans go to college and graduate within six years (Strick, 2012). African American students encounter several factors that impact their decision to pursue higher education. Key factors that affect African American students' college enrollment rates are household income, parent educational attainment, and ethnic/racial background (Strick, 2012). Socioeconomic status also has a significant influence on college enrollment (Gomez-Arizaga & Conejeros-Solar, 2014). Family income, parent education level and career also have an impact on why some African American students decide to delay college entrance (Wells & Lynch, 2012). College enrollment is postponed most often for financial reasons. The decision to pursue higher education depends partially on whether or not college is accessible and affordable. Furthermore, research by Jackson (2011) discussed how parental aspirations play a major

role in students' interest to pursue higher education. Results showed that African American high school students' who aspire to go to college develop an interest based on perceived parental aspiration for education (Jackson, 2011). Parental educational attainment and aspirations greatly influence African American learners' development of educational values, and ultimately their views on pursuing higher education.

Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Klingsmith (2014) conducted a qualitative study focused on the academic success of African American and Latino community college students. The researchers' used the social and cultural capital theoretical framework as the foundation. The sample included African American and Latino students currently enrolled at the 2-year institution who had a 2.5 grade point average (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). Three sources of data were triangulated: student academic records, demographic information, and focus group interviews to explore factors that African American and Latino students believed influenced their academic achievement (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). Results showed participants perceived the following factors as having an influence on their academic achievement: student-instructor relationships, family engagement, and school support services. All participants attributed their academic success in college to the possession of aspirational, familial, navigational, and social capital (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014). This implies that African American and Latino 2-year college students who are optimistic about the future, rely on support from family and community, and demonstrate the ability to move through social institutions are more likely to attend college and do well academically (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014).

Academic Achievement Gap and Ethnic Minorities

As our world economy advances students must recognize how a college education provides the opportunity to compete in the workforce, contribute to society, and attain a good quality of life (Mudge & Higgins, 2011). The significance of higher education is necessary not just for professional advancement purposes, but also to enhance an individual's knowledgebase given the lack of job security in this global economy (Keene, 2008). Bridging the achievement gap means first recognizing differences in opportunity that reflect inequities in students' socioeconomic background and school practices (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Hall Mark, 2013). Many ethnic minority students attend public schools that rely on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 Title I funds (Harris, 2012; Malone, 2009). The NCLB policy was implemented to close the academic achievement gap by ensuring that all students earn a quality education that prepares them for higher education (Jones, 2013). On the contrary, NCLB mandates standardized testing which negatively affect African American students' academic experience, achievement, and ultimately, college pursuit (Fletcher & Tienda, 2010; Larsen & Kurlaender, 2013). School reform initiatives should provide all learners with a wholesome education that prepares them for college and the workforce. The objective for educators is to close the achievement gap without considering academic performance the only determinant of student success.

Barnes and Slate (2011) conducted a multiyear study that examined archival data from the Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System. The researchers examined differences in college readiness rates between African American,

Hispanic and European American public high school graduates over a 3 year period. Data analyzed showed lower readiness rates in reading and mathematics among African Americans and Hispanics in comparison to European American students (Barnes & Slate, 2011). The researchers also identified an overall increase in college readiness rates in reading and mathematics for both African Americans and Hispanics but also for European Americans (Barnes & Slate, 2011). This is evidence that the college readiness gap remains stable despite improved performance in reading and math among ethnic minorities (Barnes & Slate, 2011). High school graduates included in the Barnes and Slate's study were not deemed ready for college level learning. This is proof that educational reforms on both national and local levels have done little to close the achievement gap by either insignificantly decreasing high school dropout rates or preparing students for college (Barnes & Slate, 2011).

A positive correlation between educational attainment and socioeconomic advancement is meaningful to African American students who understand the importance of higher education (Hansen, Heckman, & Mullen, 2004; Pallas, 2000; Whaley & Noel, 2012). It is important to recognize that disparities in college enrollment and completion among ethnic groups stem from issues that developed, and should have been addressed prior to secondary school (Page, 2013). Given educational and sociocultural barriers, African Americans among other ethnic minority learners must do what is in their power to attain a higher education (Sethna, 2011). Of all ethnic minority groups, African American students should consider academic achievement a solution to social, cultural, professional, and economical disadvantages (Barnes & Slate, 2011). African American

students need to be equipped academically, socially, and professionally in order to compete within our developing global economy.

Preparation for College Education

The fact remains that African Americans are underprepared for undergraduate level study (Williams, 2011). First, it necessary to take into account the alarming high school dropout rate of African Americans which are significantly higher compared to other ethnic groups (Tavakolian & Howell, 2012; Ward, Strambler, & Linke, 2013). A gap still exists in high school graduation rates among ethnic groups which explain why some African American students are not prepared for higher education (Tavakolian & Howell, 2012). Recent statistics showed that 65% of African Americans pursue college after high school, but they remain an underrepresented group in terms of educational attainment (Casselmann, 2014). Some researchers have argued that college access and success is believed to be more attainable now than in the past due to the affirmative action, but research has proven this to be a misconception especially in regards to admission policies (Backes, 2012; Fletcher & Tienda, 2010). According to Nichols, Kotchick, Barry, and Haskins (2010), the focus has turned to factors that contribute to African American students' educational aspiration or the lack thereof such as peer influence, family support, and community resources. Educational aspirations are shaped by family social capital and school social capital (Byun, Meece, Irvin, & Hutchins, 2012). Students develop an interest to pursue higher education based on their family structure and values, school experience, interpersonal relationships, and access to resources.

Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszyn, and Spencer Platt (2011) conducted a qualitative research study on higher education access among African American and Hispanic students who graduated from high poverty secondary schools in Texas. A phenomenological research approach was used to gain a clearer understanding of how ethnic minority learners perceive their educational experience and access to college. The investigators collected three types of data for this study: Student progress reports from the Texas Education Agency for years 2007-2009, surveys, and focus group interviews. The sample included students currently enrolled in postsecondary education programs at colleges in Texas, and freshmen made up 48% of the participants. Twenty-one participants' submitted surveys and African Americans accounted for only 33% of respondents. There were seven focus group interviews that took place during the 2008-2009 academic year with about two to six participants in attendance at each session (Reddick et al., 2011). Findings determined that participants disregarded any negative criticism about the quality of education offered at their high schools. Instead, participants reported relying on social and cultural capital which is described as support from educators, family, peers, community members, and college prep programs to access college (Reddick et al., 2011). Academic support services provided by college prep programs increase the likelihood that African American students will have greater access and success in higher education programs (Engstrom & Tinton, 2008; Sianjina, & Phillips, 2014).

Efforts to narrow the academic achievement gap usually focus attention on nurturing the scholastic development of secondary school pupils. Initiatives to increase

the college preparedness of African American students must be implemented by school officials, teachers, parents, and organizations as stakeholders possess resources that can influence change (Malone, 2009; Tierney & Garcia, 2011). Scholastic achievement is taken more seriously by ethnic minority high school students who are exposed to a variety of career opportunities and realistic responsibilities contingent with being a college student (Fletcher & Cox, 2012; Reddick et al., 2011). Programs focused on raising African American and other ethnic minority students' awareness of their educational opportunities and potential have increased college enrollment rates (Knaggs, Sondergeld, & Schardt, 2013). Partnerships between high schools and community colleges, K-16 institutions, and college summer bridge programs that provide the opportunity for African Americans students to gain experiences that prepare them for college are becoming a popular solution to narrowing the college enrollment gap (Domina & Ruzek, 2012; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Medvide & Blustein, 2010; Pretlow & Washington, 2014; Stolle-McAllister, 2011). African American high school learners benefit from support services that address academic achievement because college preparation provides students with the skills and confidence to pursue higher education.

African Americans and Higher Education

In the United States, African American students are not completing higher education programs as compared to European Americans (Richardson, 2012; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). A report by the Education Trust Advocacy organization showed that only 46% of African Americans complete their college degree requirements within 6 years in comparison to the 67% of Caucasian students (Malone, 2009). The college

enrollment gap within the U.S. justifies why the educational attainment of African Americans among other ethnic minority groups needs to be a major topic of discussion for educators and policymakers (Powell & Scott, 2013). The percentage of African American high school graduates who enter college can potentially increase if reform initiatives that address the enrollment gap factor in the influence of social and cultural capital (Freeman, 1997; Perna, 2000; Beatty, 2013). The lack of pursuit of higher education among African Americans deserve just due attention from education officials who should seek to solve the problem by implementing new, improved school reform initiatives, networking with interested stakeholders, and allocating funds toward resources that will actually narrow the academic achievement gap.

The majority of African American students who do earn a high school diploma or its equivalent begin their postsecondary education at local community colleges (Contreras, 2011; Flores & Park, 2013; The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011). African Americans among other ethnic minority group students who attend 2-year colleges believe the educational opportunities and resources available are inadequate (Keene, 2008). This has a negative impact on higher education stratification among community college attendees. Higher education is viewed as an obstacle when some African Americans who make the decision to go to college consider the personal and financial obligations (Flores & Park, 2013; Freeman, 1997; Perna, 2000; Rance-Roney, 2011). Students who enter college ill-prepared should expect their education to be more costly and in some cases lengthy as most often they will be required to take remedial courses (Diamond, 2011; Moore, 2009), especially GED recipients who are

more likely than high school graduates to possess college level literacy skills in language arts and mathematics (Hamilton, 1998; Tuck, 2012). The challenge is to gradually prepare underserved and underrepresented minority students to gain skill sets that meet institutional standards while decreasing spending on remedial schooling (Bettinger & Long, 2009; Sablan, 2014; Strayhorn, 2011). African American students have to be prepared academically, socially, and financially for college in order to take full advantage of higher education opportunities as well as handle the demands that come along with postsecondary learning.

A qualitative study by Bers and Schuetz (2014) examined minority student college attrition rates. The number of ill-prepared, first-generation, low SES, and ethnic minority high school graduates enroll in community colleges sparked the researchers interest (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). The multiphase case study investigated why more than half of Suburban Community College attendees did not complete their degree or certificate requirements and left after the 2010-2011 academic year (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). Data collected included student demographic and academic information, descriptive survey data, analysis of transcripts, and a focus group interview. There were 359 participants recruited for the study, however, only 77 surveys were collected, 20 transcripts were reviewed, and five attended the focus group interview. Bers and Schuetz (2014) findings showed that participants had different reasons for withdrawing from college prematurely. Reasons for dropping out of Suburban Community College included but were not limited to the poor quality of school resources, transfer to another college, lack of positive student-faculty relationships, and employment demands (Bers & Schuetz,

2014). Participants also expressed dissatisfaction with academic advising and financial aid services because many were uninformed that remedial courses did not count toward degree requirements (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). This implies that if students receive assistance from faculty and school support staff with degree/financial planning chances of finishing college are likely to increase.

African Americans, Linguistics, and Higher Education

Ethnic and linguistic minority students share similar experiences when deciding on what college to attend and research showed that both groups tend to choose inexpensive, less selective institutions (Bastedo & Jacquette, 2011). Beatty (2013) discussed how English learners among other minority students are subjected to comparable academic experiences because these groups are at a disadvantage linguistically. In fact, African American learners also encountered linguistic bias from educators who refuse to recognize Ebonics or Black English as a primary language (Yancy, 2011). Yancy argued that if Ebonics is considered a primary language than it is only right that African American students, like linguistic minority pupils, receive bilingual education as part of their curricula. This information concerns all students who are English Language Learners (ELLs), because English as a Second Language (ESL) courses foster the development of Standard English reading, writing, and communication skills that are essential to academic achievement (Callahan, Wilkinson, & Muller, 2010). Changes in demographics require that educational services are tailored to meet the needs of all minority students to increase college enrollment and completion rates (Moll, 2010; White & Ali-Khan, 2013).

Ali-Khan and White (2013) conducted a qualitative research study on academic discourse among ethnic minority college students to examine how culture, linguistics, and academic success are connected. The case study included four first-generation ethnic minority college students: A Native American male, African American female, Hispanic American male and Hispanic American female. Participants involved in the study were all freshman undergraduates in jeopardy of being withdrawn from the college because they had been placed on academic probation once grade point averages dropped below a 2.0 at the end of their first semester. Data was collected from interviews over the course of the following semester. The researchers found participants experienced feelings of inferiority when engaging in academic discussions with school-community members particularly in lecture halls and student meeting places (White & Ali-Khan, 2013). According to White and Ali-Khan (2013), participants' lack of appropriate academic discourse skills was the result of college underpreparedness. College prep initiatives must address the difficulty African American students' encounter when they attempt to relate culturally with peers and faculty, and the challenges they face trying to immerse themselves socially into the campus community.

White and Ali-Khan (2013) related poor academic performance among some ethnic minority college freshmen to cultural identity and language. The lack of cultural capital and exposure to academic literacy and discursive practices throughout K-12 education had a negative effect on student success at the college level (White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Oropeza, Varghese, and Kanno (2010) stated that linguistic and ethnic minorities depend on social capital to overcome challenges and dismiss labeling that

serve as barriers to higher education attainment. African American students are overwhelmed by the college experience because it involves a new way of learning, socializing, and demonstrating learner outcomes necessary to succeed academically (Fountaine, 2012; Tierney & Garcia, 2011). African American students are required to step out of their comfort zone educationally, socially, and culturally into unfamiliar territory once they enter college in order to foster their academic development and overall achievement.

African American Students' Experiences of Higher Education

African American students representation at postsecondary institutions has increased over recent years, but some still believe school climates are not warm or welcoming (Boysen, 2012; Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012). Some college teaching and learning environments are not conducive for African American students who crave a sense of belonging (Clark, Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, & Dufrene, 2012; Meeuwisse, Severiens, & Born, 2010). According to Woldoff, Wiggins, and Washington (2011), African American students are apprehensive about embarking on a collegiate journey because they are usually ill-prepared and struggle to adjust at institutions that serve predominantly European Americans. Discrimination and fear of rejection seem to follow African American college students during their pursuit of higher education (O'Hara, Gibbons, Weng, Gerrard, & Simons, 2012). Feelings of discouragement are experienced by African American doctoral students who become disheartened by the lack of support, inclusion, and encouragement from peers and faculty members (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011). In a study on library anxiety, African American college

students reportedly felt uncomfortable when seeking assistance from librarians, faculty, and European American schoolmates (Katopol, 2012). African American undergraduates must understand that success in college entails information gathering, resourcefulness, collaboration, as well as independent and cooperative learning which may require them to overcome feelings of anxiety and inferiority in order to take advantage of the academic support available.

A qualitative study by Case (2013) examined how professors utilized culturally responsive pedagogy in response to the increase of ethnic diversity on their college campus. The investigation took place at a predominantly European American private 4-year college in Indiana. Hispanics and African Americans combined accounted for 11% of the student body. Data for the study was collected through interviews and in-class observations. Eight African American and 11 Hispanic students participated in semistructured interviews. In addition, the 14 professors whom student-participants identified as helpful were also interviewed and agreed to let the researcher conduct in-class observations. The instructors who participated included both ethnic minorities and majorities from various fields of study. Results were contrary to Case (2013) belief that student-participants' would only name a handful of professors who share similar characteristics. Findings from the study showed that African American students appreciated professors whose teaching strategies enhanced learning experiences and self-confidence no matter their ethnic background or academic discipline (Case, 2013). African American college students thrive on quality education that enriches their educational experience, academic performance, and intrinsic motivation to learn above all

with little to no particular preference about the ethnicity of the instructors who serve them.

Studies by Lundberg (2014) and Simmons (2013) on the African American undergraduate educational experience found that students perceived positive student-faculty relationships as a contributing factor to their academic aspiration. Sethna (2011) claimed it is beneficial for African Americans among other ethnic minority students to receive education from faculty and staff with a similar cultural background for their emotional, mental, social, and educational well-being. African American students are most comfortable participating in peer mentoring programs and other student support organizations in which fellow ethnic minorities meet their academic needs (Simmons, 2013; Wong & Buckner, 2008). On the contrary, research by Case (2013) presented evidence that suggests students of color appreciate educators who are relatable, empathetic, encouraging, experts in their field, and culturally responsive regardless of their ethnic identity. Positive relationships with professors and academic support staff for African American college students is based on their ability to relate with them on an educational and cultural basis despite ethnic background differences.

Implications

Educational resources available to African American students are insufficient based on their underrepresentation in postsecondary institutions and lack of pursuit of higher education (Nichols et al., 2010). Learners are not solely responsible for their academic achievement and interest in higher education because educational practices

must be instilled and fostered early on. The purpose of this study was to address African American HSE students' educational, social, and cultural needs before issues related to academic success or lack thereof are able to fester. It is assumed that HSE students would not be in their current predicament if they received educational support services. Degree attainment is a realistic aspiration when teaching and learning sets the stage for students to seize all educational opportunities afforded to them.

Summary

An overview of this doctoral project study was presented in Section 1. Outlined in detail was the research problem. The purpose of this project study was to examine factors that impact the pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students.

Scholarly literature and local data reviewed assert that a college enrollment and completion gap exists with ethnic minority, specifically with African American students. African American students accounted for over 83% of high school dropouts in a large metropolitan area within the selected Northeastern state (SUNY, 2012). This implies that a significant number of African Americans do not possess the high school credentials to pursue higher education programs. In addition, African Americans did not account for a considerable percentage of HSE recipients (GED Testing Service, 2013), or college graduates (Kim, 2011). Institutions that serve HSE students should focus on restructuring academic programs and support services to increase access to higher education (Ryder & Hagedorn, 2012).

Many African Americans high school graduates who pursue higher education enter college underprepared (Barnes & Slate, 2011; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Education

received throughout grades K-12 does not consist of curricula that prepares African American learners for undergraduate-level studies (Orange & Ramalho, 2013). Academic success for African American students involve resilience on their behalf (Chaney et al., 2012), and access to social, cultural, and educational resources (Nichols et al., 2010).

Section 2 provides an in depth discussion about the methodology used for this project study. Specifically, the research design, setting, population, data collection, data analysis, and findings will be discussed. In Section 3, the project study is presented as a solution to the research problem examined. Section 4 will include a discussion on the project's strengths and limitations, scholarship, project development and evaluation, leadership and change, analysis of self as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer, potential impact on social change, recommendations and implications for future research.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to assess factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education. This section of the doctoral project study contains details about the research methodology used for this study. It provides a clear description of methods for data collection and analysis. Outlined in Section 2 is the qualitative research approach I executed. Data obtained resulted in answers and solutions to the gap in educational practices identified for the purpose of this project study.

Research Methodology and Design

A qualitative design using a case study approach was employed for this project study. A case study approach was implemented to examine the research problem of African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education. This research approach provided the opportunity to engage with participants in order to assess their opinions, perceptions, and experiences related to a specific phenomenon within a bounded system (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2009). A case study design was suitable to gain a deeper understanding of an already identified issue (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). Data were collected from African American students' at the selected HSE test preparatory program site. The focus of this project study was to gain insight into factors that African American HSE learners believe impacted their lack of pursuit of higher education.

Case study research required the investigator to be the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). Inductive reasoning or the bottom up approach to research was used to examine a phenomenon within a bounded system (Miles &

Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). In this case study, I examined African American HSE students' perception of factors that influenced their pursuit of higher education. Data collection consisted of a focus group interview and individual interviews. Stake (1995) and Yin (2009) advised using multiple data sources in case study research to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Findings from this project study are presented in narrative form using thick, rich descriptions (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

Justification

Based on the stated research purpose, a qualitative approach was appropriate for this doctoral project study. A quantitative research approach was taken into consideration but determined to be unsuitable. I did not intend to collect data to prove or disprove a hypothesis which is the objective in quantitative research (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007). A mixed-method research design that gathers both quantitative and qualitative data was also considered but deemed inappropriate (Creswell, 2009; Doyle, Brady, & Byrne, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010). The first reason is that this doctoral research project is a qualitative study and a social constructivist viewpoint served as the foundation (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Stake, 2005; Yin 1994). Secondly, I sought answers to the research problem by triangulating data collected from focus group and individual interviews to obtain a deeper understanding of the problem from the perspective of participants (Stake, 1995, 2005; Yin, 2009). Lastly, Lodico et al. (2010) and Merriam (2009) suggested that a qualitative approach is most suitable if a researcher only intends on analyzing human experience and perception rather than numeric data. For this project, a qualitative

approach was chosen because it best supported my intent to address the research problem based on participants' perceptions of their academic experiences.

Of all qualitative research approaches to choose from such as ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory; the case study approach allowed me to examine participants' perceptions of their reality regarding a specific phenomenon within a bounded system (Lodico et al., 2010; Yin 1994, 2009). Unlike a grounded theory study, this research project attempted to answer inquiry without developing a theory based on data collected (Creswell, 2009). Conducting an ethnographic study was not suitable either because I had no intention on embedding myself into the cultural group examined (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Using a phenomenological approach would also be ineffective since there was no interest in assessing a lived experience by collecting data over an extended period of time (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010). This study aimed to find the meaning of a contemporary phenomenon based on participants' views (Stake 1995, 2005). This project study examined factors that impact African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education at one program site based on participants' personal account of their experiences.

A case study was appropriate for this project study because it provided an opportunity for participants' to share perceptions of their learning experiences with the researcher. Assessing students' perception was necessary to collect data relevant to the research problem. The research approach selected was meant to obtain a deeper understanding of what factors impact participants' interest in pursuing higher education by allowing participants' voices to be heard (Yin, 1994, 2003, 2009). The case study

research design also allowed me to collect data on participants' perceptions regarding resources and support that may influence their pursuit of higher education (Yin, 1994, 2009). Study findings are expected to fill the identified gap in educational practice by improving the quality of education available to African American HSE students.

Setting and Population

The setting of this doctoral project study was a local HSE test preparation program located in a large metropolitan area within a Northeastern state. The target population for this project study was African American HSE students. Ethnic minorities accounted for the overall population enrolled at the research study site. The composition of the student body is a direct reflection of the surrounding neighborhood which is comprised of mostly ethnic minorities who reside in the metropolitan area of the selected Northeastern state. There is only one cohort per semester for the HSE test preparation program at the study site. Each semester lasts an average of 16 weeks. The class size does not exceed 20 students. Program operation hours are Monday thru Thursday from 6:15 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. to accommodate students' life demands.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. This type of strategic sampling is appropriate in qualitative research since there was no intent to generalize findings (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010). This nonprobability sampling method allowed me to select information rich cases and study participants who had the most meaningful experiences related to the phenomenon being examined (Merriam, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010). For this case study, purposeful sampling

entailed the selection of African American students currently enrolled in the HSE test preparatory program at the study site.

Participants involved in the study met the following criteria: (a) identified as African American, (b) currently enrolled HSE student, and (c) an adult at least 18 years old. The participation criteria for this study ensured that individuals selected possessed real life perspectives about factors that impact African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education. Merriam (2009) and Patton (2002) suggested deciding on an estimated sample size for a study. The approximate sample size for this case study was eight to 10 participants based on the study site's HSE test preparatory program class size which does not exceed 20 students per semester. The suggested sample size for the focus group interview was six to 10 participants (Morgan, 1997). The potential sample size was subject to change and depended on when data collected reached saturation (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Merriam, 2009). The sample size for this study was three participants. There were only three students in the HSE class for the fall 2015 semester who met all participation criteria. Two participants attended the focus group interview session, and all three participants were interviewed individually.

Measures for Ethical Protection

Ethical issues were a top priority (Merriam, 2009). Every effort was taken to protect participant rights and ensure confidentiality throughout this study. To further uphold ethical consideration, Lodico et al. (2010) suggested that measures be taken to protect participants from any physical, emotional, and psychological harm throughout the course of the project study. Prior to the data collection process, all participants received a

copy of the informed consent letter (see Appendix B) in person (Creswell, 2012).

Individuals were provided detailed information about the study, including its purpose, problem, rationale, and that participation was voluntary. All participants were at least 18 years old based on the study site's HSE program requirements and the study's selection criteria. Therefore, parental signatures were not needed for informed consent. Signed informed consent forms were obtained from all participants. This confirmed that participants were explained how their rights would be protected. Each participant was also provided my contact information should any comments, questions, or concerns arise.

Throughout the data collection process, measures were taken to protect participants' identity. All data retrieved from the focus group and individual interviews was kept confidential (Lodico et al., 2010). References to student-participants presented in the research manuscript do not disclose real names, but rather participants were assigned numeric pseudonyms. This was an effective means to secure privacy so readers will not be able to identify any individual who decided to contribute their opinions for the project study. However, research project participants' had to be willing to disclose some demographic information relevant to the study. Participants were expected to provide their full name, contact information, ethnic background, age, and number of HSE test attempts. I was the only person with access to data obtained for this case study. This was to further ensure the confidentiality of participants' information. All project study data and documents were locked in my personal safe located at home. Information saved on computer databases was password-protected.

Instrument and Materials

Interviewing participants is an intricate part of this qualitative project study (Creswell, 2009, 2012). A script was followed verbatim to guide the discussion between study-participants and I. Protocol discussed by Lodico et al. (2010) and Biklen and Bogdan (2007) recommended using protocol sheets for the semistructured focus group and one-on-one interviews. Interview protocol sheets included a script with opening and closing statements, open-ended questions, space to record participants' responses to questions, and area to write down reflection notes (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2012) and Yin (2009) suggested that when conducting case study research that the researcher should ask their interviewees what, how, and why questions. Participants' were asked five open-ended questions at the focus group interview session and 12 open-ended questions during the individual interviews (see Appendices C and D).

Data Collection

A face-to-face meeting was held with the research site's Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development to discuss the purpose of my project study, and to obtain written permission to access their educational setting. The site granted me formal permission to conduct research (see Appendix E). Upon gaining formal approval to conduct research from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB approval # 08-04-15-0301687), the Academic Advisor at the study site was contacted and asked to forward the invitation letter via email to the HSE class instructor. The HSE class instructor distributed invitation letters (see Appendix F) only to students who met all of the study's inclusion criteria. An informational meeting was held at the research site.

During the meeting, I shared the purpose of the research project and answered questions that potential participants had about the study. Details about the research study and two copies of the informed consent letter were provided to all potential participants (see Appendix B). Students who expressed interest in participating in the research study were given two paper copies of the informed consent form to sign and return to me at the site within 2 calendar days. I sent a reminder email message to potential participants regarding when informed consent letters were due as well as the date and time that the focus group interview session would be conducted (see Appendix G). Participants were expected to submit a signed copy of the informed consent letter and keep the other copy for their record.

The estimated sample size for this case study was eight to 10 participants; however, only three students at the study site met all the identified criteria for participation in this study. There was a great chance that not all students would volunteer to participate in the study. The potential sample size was subject to change based on when data collection resulted in saturation and/or no new information developed (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Merriam, 2009). I contacted the participants who submitted a signed informed consent form regarding the date, time, and location to attend focus group interview session. Only two out of three study participants attended the focus group interview session, but all were available for an individual interview. One of the participants was out of reach and absent from the program for about 5 days for undisclosed reasons.

At the conclusion of the focus group interview session, study-participants scheduled a time and date to conduct the one-on-one interviews within the next 1 to 2 business days. Focus group and individual interview were conducted at the research site in a private, quiet room during non-instructional time. Participants had been informed that the interviews should last about 45 minutes to 1 hour, and that questions asked would be open-ended. The data collection process took place over the course of 1 week. First, data from the focus group interview were collected and thoroughly analyzed. The focus group interview allowed me to collect and evaluate data that is otherwise unobservable within a social context (Merriam, 2009). I facilitated the focus group as this allowed me to take notes and listen deeply to the discussion. Then, person-to-person interviews were conducted afterwards in order to assess participants' personal views on the phenomenon under study. The focus group interview session and individual interviews were audio recorded. Individual interviews were conducted with all participants and concluded the data collection process.

Data gathered from focus group and one-on-one interviews were accurately transcribed. All data collected was carefully analyzed to identify convergence and divergence of study findings in order to draw valid conclusions (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013; Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Participants' names on the manuscript were changed to numeric pseudonyms prior to storing data on a password-protected USB drive to ensure confidentiality. All data including the password-protected USB drive are locked in a personal safe at my residence and will be retained for 5 years.

Focus Group Interview

The first data collected for this case study was obtained from the focus group interview with participants. Interviews were an essential source of evidence for this case study (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 1995, 2005; Yin, 1994, 2009). The purpose of conducting the focus group interview was to collect evidence from conversation among participants to obtain multiple prospective on the topic under study (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Lodico et al. 2010; Morgan, 1997). The focus group interview enabled me to collect data that cannot be observed which in this case is participants' perceptions about factors that African American HSE students believe influence their pursuit of higher education. The group interview allowed participants to brainstorm as new questions and ideas emerged on the research topic (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Morgan, 1997).

The focus group interview was conducted in a private, quiet room during non-instructional time at the study site two business days after the informational meeting. According to Morgan (1997), a sample size of six to 10 participants would be sufficient for the focus group interview. However, there were only three students in the entire HSE class fall 2015 semester who met all participation criteria. All three students were recruited for this study and submitted signed informed consent letters. I encountered difficulty scheduling the focus group interview around one of the participant's schedule, because she was absent for several days at the beginning of the data collection phase and all efforts to contact her failed. As a result, the focus group interview was conducted with only two of the three participants, but the third participant was later available for an individual interview session. The semistructured focus group interview was guided by a

script and protocol sheet that included five open-ended questions (see Appendix C). The focus group discussion was audiotaped and transcribed (Lodico et al., 2010). All data were stored on a password-protected USB drive in a locked personal safe at my residence and will be retained for 5 years.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews took place within 1 to 2 business days following the focus group interview session. The individual interviews with all participants were the second data source for this case study. I conducted individual face-to-face interviews to obtain participants' personal opinions, feelings, and perspectives about factors that influence African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education. The individual interviews allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study from participants that they may not have felt comfortable to share during the group interview session (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Lodico et al., 2010; Morgan, 1997). Each participant interviewed one-on-one was asked more specific questions about factors they believed impacted their pursuit of higher education. Interviewees were able to share their individual perspective without any interpersonal influence (Lodico et al., 2010).

Semistructured individual interviews with participants took place in a private, quiet room at the designated research site during non-instructional time. The interview questions aligned with the research question guided the one-on-one discussion (see Appendix D). Study participants were also asked demographic questions relevant to the phenomenon under study to provide some background information. Interviewees were asked to disclose their name, ethnicity, age, and number of HSE test attempts. All one-

on-one interviews were audio recorded for later transcription, and to verify handwritten notes. Interview sessions lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour. All data was stored on a password-protected USB drive in a locked personal safe at my residence and will be retained for five years.

Data Analysis

Data gathered for this study were carefully organized and coded for themes (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995, 2005). This case study drew valid conclusions and present meaningful recommendations based on information gathered from the focus group interview and the individual interviews (Creswell, 2012). Interviews with participants were an essential data source for this study (Hatch, 2002; Yin, 1994, 2009). Data analysis was ongoing and occurred during the data collection process to organize data in pieces rather than sorting through vast amounts of information for themes later on (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Following the focus group and individual interviews, the audio tapes were transcribed by me. I also wrote personal notes on the interview protocol sheets during the focus group and individual interview sessions that include my reflections, ideas, comments, hunches, and speculations about evidence collected (Yin, 2009). I also transcribed all data from digitally recorded interviews and accompanying personal notes. All transcriptions were transferred into a Microsoft Word document. Interview protocol sheets were used to record data collected from interviews (see Appendices C and D). Numerals were assigned to each participant to protect their identity using numeric codes.

Coding was the process I used to manage all data collected. This particular analysis technique was necessary to organize, categorize, sort, and condense data (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995, 2005). I coded data gathered using words, phrases, colors, and numbers. I had to sift and sort through vast amounts of data collected from the interviews. Transcripts were examined repeatedly throughout the data analysis process in detail and content meaningful to the study was coded. Data analysis initially was done manually prior to using a computer-based program for coding. A spreadsheet was created using Microsoft Excel to keep track of all coded data. Hatch (2002) suggested using typological analysis to systematically organize raw data according to specific topics of interest. Categories and tentative themes emerged throughout the data analysis process (Merriam, 2009).

What started out as nearly 100 codes was condensed to five major themes or nodes. The computer program chosen to manage the huge amount of data was NVivo. This particular qualitative data analysis software was utilized to efficiently store and organize all data collected for this study (Creswell, 2012). Final data analysis was performed using NVivo 10 which allowed me to analyze all the interviews using coding stripes, text search queries, coding queries, word frequency queries, word clouds, and word trees. Descriptive data were then organized further to identify patterns, themes and draw valid conclusions that may answer posed research questions (Yin, 2009). I analyzed the data by reading, rereading, checking, and rechecking content numerous times to make sure nothing relevant to the study was overlooked.

Reliability and Validity

Data obtained from both the focus group and individual interviews were triangulated for validity and reliability purposes (Creswell, 2012; Hentz, 2012). The purpose of triangulation was to identify trends or commonalities of findings from all data sources (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Hentz, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). Evaluation of results consisted of the following: Credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lodico et al., 2010). According to Creswell and Miller (2000), this means study results must precisely depict participants' perceptions. Details about data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and results should be consistent (Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Yin, 1994, 2009). Study findings should also be applicable or generalized to similar settings, populations, and cases (Creswell, 2009; Trochim, 2006). Researcher bias was avoided by using member checking and peer debriefing to determine the credibility of my study findings (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Creswell (2009) discussed the importance of using member checks to determine whether or not results match the reality of human participants' interviewed. Member checking occurred after interviews were conducted, transcribed, and narratives were written. Participants' were contacted for follow-up meetings at the research site to discuss and review study findings. Member checking provided study participants' with an opportunity to confirm or disconfirm the accuracy of the written narrative (Lodico et al., 2010). Peer debriefing sessions were scheduled with the Academic Advisor from the research site and a former colleague who possess knowledge of the academic

achievement gap. Peers consulted included both an insider and outsider ensured that I received objective feedback about study findings (Debriefing, n.d.).

Role of the Researcher

This study was conducted at a HSE preparation program within a Northeastern state. Objectivity was very important and therefore data collection took place at a site where I had never fulfilled a role either past or present. Avoiding researcher bias was essential for the validity and reliability of the study's findings (Creswell 2009, 2012; Merriam, 2009). No relationship was established between participants and me prior to the study. There was a relationship forged with the Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development, Academic Advisor, and Executive Director who granted me permission to access the site.

It is crucial to this study that readers are aware of why I was interested in examining the research problem. First, I am an African American woman who can attest to factors that may influence academic performance. Second, I have experienced firsthand the challenges African American students encounter while attempting to pursue higher education. I have witnessed the effects of the academic achievement gap as a student and educator to ethnic minority HSE students. I do acknowledge my bias which is the result of personal and professional experiences. This is why members checking and peer debriefing were performed to eliminate any prejudice or bias from the research project study (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Findings

This doctoral project study examined factors that African American HSE students believe impact their pursuit of higher education. The problem addressed is that many African American HSE students are not pursuing college education even after earning their HSE diploma. A qualitative research approach was implemented to answer the following research question: What factors influence African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education at the selected HSE test preparation program? The purpose of this project study was to investigate factors associated with the pursuit of higher education among African American students who are currently enrolled at a HSE test preparatory program in a selected Northeastern state.

Participants were purposely selected from one HSE class at the study site. There were approximately 20 students actively enrolled in the HSE program fall 2015 semester. Of which, only three students met all the participation criteria and all agreed to be involved in the study. This case study relied on data collected from a focus group interview and individual interviews, respectively, to find answers to the research question. Only two out of three participants attended the focus group interview. This is due to the fact that one participant was absent from classes several days at the beginning of the scheduled data collection phase. There were several failed attempts made trying to schedule an individual interview with one participant as a result of unforeseen circumstances, but all participants were available to participate in the individual interviews. All participants had the opportunity to share their opinions and perceptions about African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education. Data collected

reached saturation and provided me with an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was the theoretical framework upon which this project study was based to examine factors that have an influence on African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education at the study site. The theory explains how social interaction and cultural identity play a major role in the ways an individual learns and values education (Vygotsky, 1978). Throughout the data analysis process, many codes and themes emerged that provided insight into factors that African American HSE students believe impact their lack of pursuit of higher education. Although, participants shared some different perspectives about the phenomenon due to their personal background and experiences, there was a consensus on what they perceived to have an impact on the pursuit of college education. The following five major themes/nodes emerged: (1) Family Background, (2) Intrinsic Motivation & Educational Values, (3) Sociocultural Influences, (4) Teacher & Peer Influence, and (5) Socioeconomic Factors. A thick description of findings is presented below in hierarchical order based on how frequent the theme appeared in the data.

Theme #1: Family Background

The concept of family developed as a prevalent theme throughout data analysis. Results showed that family structure, composition, and background are instrumental in how attitudes about going to college among participants manifested. All three participants expressed that they were not raised in a traditional, two-parent, or nuclear household. Although, Participant 3 (P3) did share that her biological father passed away when she

was very young, and her mother and step-father of the past 20 years, raised her. The other two participants had been open and honest about being cared for from childhood to adulthood by their grandmothers and other extended family members. Participant 1 (P1) noted that he remained in constant contact with his birth parents. However, Participant 2 (P2) claimed that in living with his aunt and grandmother, he had an estranged relationship with his mom and dad. P2 also described personal feelings about his family background, stating:

I don't have my father so but I can't blame that on him. Nor...I can't blame it on neither one of my parents. I ain't have neither one of my parents. So, you know, it was just a little tougher for me.... but luckily I had my grandmother. She kept me warm. She kept me safe. She kept me fed, clean. So, pretty much, I got the same nurture as a regular parent would...

The impact that family upbringing had on participants was clearly pivotal in how educational values developed. There were differing views on how family background influenced the desire early on to go to college among participants. P1 explained that although distant from his everyday life as a youngster, both of his biological parents are college educated, and instilled in him the value of earning a higher education.

...my mom was a stickler for getting your education, you know...I mean that encouraged me to go, but they told me that the end decision was ultimately mine. Because they had already went... like my dad will tell me now, "I got my education. It's up to you to actually get yours ...but I'll support." And, my mom was the same way when she was alive.

The fact that P1 had parents who possess college degrees encouraging him along his educational journey; he felt they gave him something to aspire and live up to. Unfortunately, the same is not true for P2 and P3 who attested to not having parents with a higher education. They both could only think of a few extended family members like for example, aunts, cousins, and a god sister who attended college. Extended family members were regarded as inspirational role models for P2 who said, "...my Aunt, she's one of the few that in my family that went to college...everybody look up to her...she's like our motivation to do better. She's our success." P3 could not think of anyone in her family who attended college except for one cousin, saying, "...not a lot of people in my family actually went to college neither." When discussing feelings about family and higher education further, P2 explained why he now has a genuine interest to attend college after earning his HSE diploma, saying:

...coming from a family only just a few...went to college in my family. So, it's kinda like a rare thing. ... Imma go to college 'cause nobody in my family went to college. That was my main thing or the reason why I wanted to go to college....to be the first.....being the oldest boy...like damn near...on both halves of my family...I got to...step up...like nobody else is gon' step up so...this is on me. This is on my plate to where I gotta step up and do the right thing.

According to P2, the value of higher education is perceived differently when people near and dear to you do not have a college education themselves. He reflected on his attitude toward pursuing college growing up, saying, "...I mean I've had people tell me, 'yo, college is great,' but not coming from my family so it's kinda like, I looked at it

a little different. None of my family members went to college...why should I go to college?" None of the participants had immediate family members present during their school-age years who actively engaged in their educational journey and prepared them for college. This is even the case for P1 whose distant parents are college educated and discussed with him the importance of earning a higher education.

The pursuit of higher education was encouraged by the families of all participants except P3. Interestingly, she recalls never being extrinsically motivated to pursue a college education by anyone in her family as a child. She said, "I feel like...I never really had someone to push me, you know, into getting to go to college...I honestly feel like no one ever thought that I would be going to college. Everyone probably thought they would never see me....strive to go." As for P1 and P2, both agreed that their family members always encouraged them to go to college after earning a high school diploma. However, it was their own hasty decisions as teenagers that resulted in them dropping out.

P1 explained one of his reasons for leaving high school prematurely saying: "...my family needed my help at that particular time, and I felt that that was more important...it put me 20 years behind the ball where I wanted to be." He regrets past decisions and vows to be a role model for his daughter by earning his HSE diploma and moving onto college. P1 strongly believes that as a parent he is one of the most influential people in his child's life. P2 does not have any children but he is determined to lead by example for the younger generation in his family. He feels that he must show and prove, saying: "My little cousins graduating; 16, 17, finished school. I'm still...don't got a diploma....I can't have that. Like, I want the best and I want them to see that...I went

back to school.” P3 explained her current views on college education, stating: “I never talked about it but now that I’m enrolled into GED, I do talk to my mother about it. And, she’s surprised and I think she’s really happy about it.” She is now interested in making her mom proud by aspiring for higher education.

Parent and family educational background played a role in all participants’ interest to pursue higher education either by influencing them to follow an example, or seek to pave the way by becoming the first person in their family to earn a college degree. Every participant was able to make a connection between their lack of pursuit of higher education and family background.

Theme #2: Intrinsic Motivation & Educational Values

The interest to go to college depends greatly on participants’ intrinsic motivation towards learning. All participants made it clear that the decision to pursue higher education is a personal one. In this respect, encouragement from others including family was perceived to have a positive influence, but nothing compared to the internal desire to want to go to college. What mattered most was whether or not they actually believed that college was a realistic goal for them to attain. P1 said, “Everybody encouraged me to go to college. The slip-up was all my mistake. It was all me. I mean I always thought about it...it’s just...I didn’t always stay on the right track to necessarily follow that particular dream...or, that goal.” He came to the realization that it was the personal choices he made as a teenager which did not lead him down the path of higher learning. All participants also claimed to have lacked the self-discipline, confidence, focus, and motivation to succeed academically in high school which resulted in them dropping out.

In fact, P2 was honest when discussing how he ended up going down the wrong path as a secondary school student, saying:

If I was little bit more disciplined with myself, I honestly would've probably.... pushed a little harder for it. But through that, the lack of just number of things: My lack of motivation for my future was just like....it was up for grabs. It was just like...I wasn't there. I was young...young and ignorant.

The thought of attending college crossed the minds of P1 and P2 in high school. Participants reminisced on how growing up college aspiration would later be overshadowed by the interest to explore their individuality, develop a sense of independence, and become socially acceptable among their peers. School was not regarded as a top priority at the time. P1 confessed to being, "...one of those rebellious kids that you know, once they get a certain age, they want to do things their way," and P2 added that he was just a teenager interested in, "...having fun." None of the participants really considered the long-term effects of quitting school before earning their high school diploma. Only P3 never dreamed of pursuing higher education as a youngster, she stated:

...when I was younger I was never really like...into school...when I was younger I never really thought about going to college. It never really affected me. I never thought I would be going to college.

P3 admitted to never having liked school as a child, and even attended an alternative school for students with behavioral problems in junior high and high school. She also did not develop a value for education until adulthood. Educational experiences resulted in self-doubt where school was concerned for P2 and P3. Both participants once

pondered on whether or not they would even succeed in college given the foreseen academic challenges associated with pursuing higher education. P2 was not afraid to say:

As far as me...I was kinda iffy about going to college. I was nervous. I was scared, honestly 'cause I didn't know what to expect going to college. And I know from me being in school, I know I'm not the school-type person. So, college...I was just like my fear...honestly, it was the academic part.

All participants did agree that now as adults, they do value higher education more than ever before. College is perceived to be a necessary pursuit in order to move forward in life. They believe that earning a higher education in this present day and age is the only way to obtain a better quality of life. P1 shared how his views on the importance of education changed, declaring, "If I woulda knew 20 years ago what I know today...I probably wouldn't have done too much differently than what I'm doing now, you know what I'm saying, but I would've at least went back when I initially went to try get my GED...and stuck with it." P2 now regrets ever doubting his academic potential. He is now prepared to face the challenges that lie ahead his educational journey stating that, "...if I woulda known what I know now, probably like 6-7 years ago...I woulda stuck to it and...I woulda been there...so, this is what is motivating now to come to class."

P3 has even changed her mind about pursuing college. She is enthusiastic about getting a postsecondary degree after completing the HSE program, saying, "...well if I do get my GED...high school diploma...I would like to go to college...I would like to take up culinary arts...now, I have a different input on like college and stuff." P1 has the same plans as well and disclosed his passion for studying culinary arts and business

management in the near future. He also spoke in detail about the reasons why he is more determined now more than ever to pursue higher education. P1 has an impressionable teenage daughter who is currently in her senior year of high school. He stated:

My daughter is motivation at this point because the way it looks we will probably end up finishing at the same time. And, I want her to see that it's never too late to actually...go back and even if you fall off, get back on track and actually get it together. And, considering she's a teenager now, you know, this is the time to actually either show her...now or it's like what am I doing?...But, I know if...I get my High School Equivalency and I stop and don't go to college behind that...once I take a break, I'm never going back.

P2 plans on pursuing higher education in the near future as well. We discussed why he now thinks that getting a degree is important, he said: "everything will be different and nobody can't take that from you...As far as like, you could be knocked down, have everything taken from you...everything, close people...you get that education...that's your backbone...having that piece of paper...it's a plus." However, he was most interested in getting a union job right after completing the HSE program. According to P2, financial security and independence are of utmost importance, but he does want to go to college to at least gain the experience.

All participants presented positive attitudes when discussing how their feelings about going to college have changed since dropping out of high school. They now view higher education as a valuable asset worth pursuing. Participants' believe that higher

education is essential to advancement in life, but it must be a personal want, desire, or goal in order for them to actually pursue it.

Theme #3: Sociocultural Influences

The influence that sociocultural factors has on the value of education and interest to pursue higher education among participants is prevalent throughout the data. There was a consensus regarding the preconceived notion that as an African American they were born at a great disadvantage. According to P1 being an African American, "...means that I was already born with a lot of disadvantages as opposed to European Americans or individuals of any other race...I'm gonna have to work twice as hard." He truly believes that ethnic identity determines how hard you have to work in order to advance in all aspects of life. P2 stated that African American children, "...we go through a lot you know. We have to work a little harder than most kids, you know, depending on our situation," and P3 shared her views on the matter saying, "I feel like we... get treated differently." All participants described in their own way how they feel African Americans are subjected to discrimination. P1 agreed that African Americans have to overcome a lot more obstacles, but he also said:

I was always taught that regardless to what race you are, you can do anything and be anything that you want to be...I just have to work harder to get where I'm going.

All participants feel that to excel or succeed at anything in life, they must work much harder in comparison to other ethnicities. Nonetheless, all participants expressed a sincere sense of pride when identifying as an African American. To them, being an

African American is more than just an ethnic identity; it defines who they are as an individual. P2 expressed what being African American means to him, saying: “First off, I want to say we’re strong. We’re smart. We are gifted in our own ways from most other cultures. Despite our dysfunctions, we are talented...I mean just our ups and downs, our flaws...what everybody give our statistics to...like...stereotypes,” and P3 said, “we’re looked at very different...from everyone who’s not African American.”

Society as a whole was deemed partially responsible for discouraging participants’ academic potential. Participants were well aware of how much they cared about what everyone else in society presumes about African Americans. Stereotypes perpetuated about African Americans were considered untrue, negative, and even demeaning. The lower expectations held by wider society about what they were capable of doing or achieving as African Americans seemingly placed them at a social and cultural disadvantage. However, all participants now feel compelled to disprove negative stereotypes about African Americans by pursuing higher education. P3 claimed that she has since become inspired to earn her HSE diploma and move onto college just to prove society wrong. She said, “Well...I like when people say...like... I can’t do something. And, it makes me want to show them different.” In addition, P2 stated:

I always wanted to go for our culture because I know...if one make it, we all make it...Our culture is beautiful...that’s something to cherish, you know, to add to our culture. Like to show... we can get it, too...Despite of what they say, ‘Oh, Black people is lazy or African Americans are lazy.’ No, we’re not...It’s just a little harder for us to do things ‘cause when we do something, we get stripped

from it...we get badgered, get talked about, get shut down. They find different ways to shut us down. So like, we gotta think about all of that.

Cultural background was initially said to have little or no negative impact on participants' interest to pursue higher education. There were no particular customs, practices, or values within the African American culture that participants believed to have a negative influence on their college aspiration. Ironically, there were two topics that participants emphasized in their responses to questions about the African American culture: Death and imprisonment. P1 and P2 discussed how death and incarceration have become an epidemic within the African American culture. Death was also a topic mentioned by P3 when she was asked to describe her background. She began the conversation saying, "...my father passed away when I was younger." P2 said:

What's motivating me just within this past year probably is, I seen one or two many of my people die, one or two of my friends die, so, college...like...anything could happen anywhere but at least knowing that I'm goin' to college is getting me up out the neighborhood. It's getting out of...my comfort zone. I'm trying something new. I'm trying something different, around new people, a new environment. I...I wanna do new things. I'm tired of doing the same thing over and over, and over. I'm becoming...like...I feel crazy.

From the perspective of P1, witnessing so many members of the African American culture die and go to prison is incentive to now make conscientious decisions about the direction of his future as an adult. He commented on the matter, stating: "Seeing the amount of African Americans that lose their life on either a daily, weekly, or monthly

basis, and...when you look at their life, it's like they have accomplished nothing. I don't want to fall into that." Death and incarceration were perceived as barriers for the two male participants and their main objective in life is to avoid those pitfalls by any means necessary.

For P1 and P2, encouragement throughout their educational journeys came from members of the African American culture. P1 said, "...everybody always pushed me...to get the basic education out the way and then tackle college," and P2 stated, "Pretty much the idea of college, everybody knew that college was the best things to do after you get your high school diploma ...growing up, you know, I... wasn't really focused on school so I seen most of the people getting money...I became a product of my environment." As for P3, she did not receive extrinsic motivation from anyone about education growing up. All participants did explain how past experiences with family, friends, peers, teachers, and others have impacted their academic performance. Interpersonal relationships consisted of both negative and positive influences that affected their decision to pursue higher education, but all participants realize that going to college is possible if you really want to go.

Theme #4: Teacher & Peer Influence

Interaction with peers and teachers over the course of participants' academic experience also had a significant impact on their pursuit of higher education. All participants did accept responsibility for lacking the focus and discipline that resulted in their poor decision to drop out of high school. However, they did recognize the influence that peer pressure and teacher-student relationships had on their interest and attitude

toward learning. P1 stated: "...my teachers were great, you know, it's just once I got to be a teenager, I just went to school less and less." Extrinsic motivation did come from peers and educators who encouraged higher learning practices, but not to the same extent as negative distractions, according to P2, who said:

...just seeing everybody, you know, doing their thing, having fun, going to parties just having a good time, getting fly. That's what my mind was at. So, like, as far as school, I know it was good going there....but it was just like I felt like it just wasn't for me.

Hanging out with peers instead of going to school became more important. P1 and P2 confessed that it was a challenge to stay focused on academics when the motto among peers was that, "school is not cool." P1 discussed how he struggled with temptation from peers in high school, saying: "...you're already on the right track, and your wanting to...go to finish your high school and go to college, you know what I'm saying, but you got your...friends and your peers that you hang with on a daily basis that are like, 'Oh, we're not getting ready to go to high school. We're not getting ready to go to college. Let's just go hang out on the corner'...pushing you to do the opposite." For all participants, avoiding school came easy when going through a rebellious phase as a teenager especially for P3 who attended a school for students with behavioral issues.

Positive teacher influences left a lasting impression on P2. He could only bring to mind two teachers throughout his entire educational experience who actually engaged him in learning that was fun. P2 regarded the two middle school teachers as college

educated role models who utilized differentiated instructional methods that he felt grabbed his attention and sparked his interest. He said:

I had a few teachers that went to college and they was still young at the time. So, like my eighth-grade...two teachers: My English teacher, my Social Studies teacher. I love them to death, 'til this day I'll love 'em to death 'cause they was young...They was just the best. Like, they're way of learning, teaching was awesome. Like, even though it was they first year of learning or teaching, it was just amazing like how they just broke things down to us. Everything I could relate. They made everything so smooth.

Furthermore, P2 was the only one who had the opportunity to get a glimpse of college life. He expressed excitement recalling the time his God sister took him to visit her college campus. It was a moment he remembers because it made him curious and interested to experience college one day. The encouragement he received from his aunt and God sister also sparked his interest. He thought about what he would be missing out on if he never pursues higher education. P2 also claimed that he would be more likely to pursue higher education if programs available to him offered college tours among other preparation services.

P3 claimed that her educational experience was different because she attended secondary schools that served students with behavioral problems. She believes this placed her and fellow schoolmates at an academic disadvantage. Furthermore, P3 was not in the company of people at home or in school who were positive academic influences. She feels that teachers could have done more, stating:

I feel like...let's say if in school with, you know, African Americans and stuff, if we were pushed more and not separated, and you know, treated a certain type of way. Maybe, we would want to stay in school and higher education.

The quality of education P3 received was not enriching. In her opinion, the teachers could have done more to get students college ready. She did not approve of how many of her teachers propagated negative stereotypes about African American students. P3 believes that college counseling and mentoring may increase the likelihood of her pursuing higher education.

Each participant identified how teachers and peers influenced their educational experience. Teacher and peer influence came in the form of encouragement, discouragement, lack of support, and even peer pressure. Interactions with other people within their neighborhoods and school-communities had an impact on participants' pursuit of higher education whether positive or negative.

Theme #5: Socioeconomic Factors

Socioeconomic background and status also emerged as a theme throughout the study findings as participants' described factors that impact their pursuit of higher education. Getting an education is perceived to be the best way to obtain a better quality of life. Participants have come to learn that they must possess a HSE diploma at minimum to even compete within the job market or pursue college. P1 believes earning a higher education is the best option for those who are at an economic disadvantage, he said: "higher education opens the door for more money...better jobs, you know, better...life advantages and experiences." It is P2 who aspires to secure a job soon after

getting his HSE diploma. He hopes to someday have a career where he is making enough money to provide for his family and maybe even move out the neighborhood. P2 stated: “I wanna be able to buy my mother a crib. I wanna make sure...I could somewhat help my little cousins go through college somehow, some way...I wanna be able to take care of my family.”

Money was an issue within all participants’ households growing up. There were times when P2 remembers hustling to get money as a teenager not just to buy material things but to learn how to survive. P3 said, “...my family didn’t really have like a lot of money to put aside for me to go to college.” P1 regrets dropping out of high school to help support his family, he claimed, “Money would have to be the biggest thing...the biggest barrier for almost any African American tryna...pursue higher education.” All participants discussed how finances are a concern because a college education is costly. P2 shared how he plans on securing his future after completing the HSE program. He declared:

...once I get my diploma, I’m thinking about going into the union....get that.

Once I get that... I...want to get into the union. Once I get into the union, from there, college is game time. It’s game time ‘cause ...the union is gonna help me somewhat with going to college making sure I’m set. At least to where I could be able to ask, you know what I’m saying, they’re willing to help...They’re gon’ probably 9 out of 10 gonna help me somewhat put money towards my college.

I’m a be working...I’m a have money coming.

All participants' thought about how they would fund their college education and support themselves financially. P2 believes that making a living is top priority. On the other hand, P1 claimed to be okay financially right now but he prefers to work and go to college part-time. He also said, "...as long as I could...be able to take care of goin, you know what I'm saying, the paying...the paying for school...regardless to whether if it's a grant or if it's financial aid. As long as I can afford to pay for it, I don't got a problem with it." P3 also explained that in making the decision now to go to college it would be necessary to consider whether or not her family could afford it, saying:

...you know to go to college is all this money and stuff. So, I...I feel like maybe at the time that's probably why my mother didn't push me because she...she didn't have the money for it.

The fact that none of them have yet to earn a HSE diploma is viewed as the main barrier to pursuing higher education. Participants' do believe that higher education leads to more opportunities. Pursuing higher education is perceived as the most reasonable means to secure a professional future and improve one's quality of life. All participants feel that earning a high school diploma is mandatory in our economy, but a higher education is necessary to really advance socioeconomically.

Limitations, Scope and Delimitations, Assumptions

Limitations

There were several factors that placed limitations on this study. The limits encountered were out of my control. The first limitation was the sample size. This case study included three African American HSE students from the selected study site. There

were only three students in the HSE class that met all of the criteria for participation in this study. As a result, the ability to generalize study findings may be considered an issue. Another limitation was the size of the population from which participants had been selected. The study site offered one HSE class for the fall 2015 semester. This minimized the participant pool because there were only 20 seats available in the class. Lastly, the methods of data collection presented a limitation as well. Data were obtained from semistructured focus group and individual interviews (see Appendices C and D). It is important for further research on African American HSE students be conducted that includes questions that I did not ask as the findings may vary.

Scope and Delimitations

Factors I had control over that influenced this study were considered delimitations. There were four delimitations in this case study: (a) research problem, (b) research question, (c) target population, and (d) the selected study site. The first was the research problem because I only had intentions on studying factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education. I chose to overlook other relevant problems at the study site that were worth researching. Secondly, I deliberately focused the study around answering one particular research question regarding the lack of pursuit of college education among African American HSE students' at the study site. The third delimitation was the target population I chose to examine. Only African American HSE students were purposely selected to participate in this case study. The final delimitation was that research had only been implemented at a selected study site.

Assumptions

There were four assumptions I made prior to conducting this case study. First, I assumed that participants would be eager to share their honest opinions and personal perspective. I thought that participants would be excited to have their voices about factors that they believe impact the pursuit of higher education. Second, I made the assumption that more African American students would be enrolled in the HSE program at the study site. This led to my third assumption regarding the sample being representative of the target population. Lastly, I was under the assumption that the interview questions designed for this study would be understandable to participants, and they would be able to provide direct, articulate responses.

Conclusion

In Section 2, the research methodology for this study was presented in detail. Section 2 outlines the research methodology and design, justification, setting and population, measures for ethical protection, instrument and materials, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and role of the researcher. A qualitative research approach was selected to align with the research problem specified in Section 1. This research project study aimed to assess participants' perception of a particular phenomenon in order to gain a deeper understanding. A case study research design was considered most suitable to assess African American students' perceptions of their educational experiences in HSE test preparation programs.

The site where the research was conducted was a local HSE test preparation program in a large metropolitan area within a selected Northeastern state. Prospective

participants must identify as African American, current enrolled HSE student, and adult at least 18 years old. Every effort was taken to protect participant rights and ensure confidentiality throughout this research project study using informed consent forms and pseudonyms. Detailed information about the study were provided and signed informed consent forms obtained from participants prior to data gathering via email. To further ensure the protection of participants' privacy and confidentiality, all data collected was stored on a password-protected USB drive in a locked personal safe at my residence.

The data were collected from focus group and individual interviews. Focus group interviews were the first data collected for this case study. The second data source for this study was individual interviews with participants from the focus group. Interview protocol sheets included a script with opening and closing statements, open-ended questions, space to record participants' responses to questions, and area to write reflection notes (Creswell, 2009). The protocol sheet that guided the semistructured focus group interview included five open-ended general questions on the topic of study (see Appendix C). The protocol sheets that guided the individual interviews consisted of 12 open-ended specific questions on the topic examined (see Appendix D). The focus group interview and individual interviews were audio recorded.

All data collected for this study were processed in the following order: Organized, coded, analyzed, and interpreted. Data analysis and collection took place simultaneously to avoid having to sort through large amounts of information later on. Record sheets included my personal notes, reflections and comments from interviews. Memos were kept from the focus group interview and individual interviews. All data collected were

transcribed and transferred into Microsoft Word documents including digitally recorded interviews. Data analysis was done manually prior to using NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software to store and organize information collected. Descriptive data had been analyzed to identify patterns and themes that answer the research questions for this study.

Triangulation of evidence from all data sources was essential for validity and reliability purposes. Study results were evaluated for credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Avoiding researcher bias was necessary for the validity and reliability of study findings. I recognized my researcher bias which is the result of both educational and professional experiences. Therefore, no relationship was established with any members of the research site prior to the study other than the Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development and Academic Advisor. Member checking and peer debriefing are the techniques that were used to determine the credibility of study findings.

Study findings centered on the following five major themes: (1) Family Background, (2) Intrinsic Motivation & Educational Values, (3) Sociocultural Influences, (4) Teacher & Peer Influence, and (5) Socioeconomic Factors. Findings addressed the research question: What factors influence African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education at the selected HSE test preparation program? All participants were able to make a connection between their lack of pursuit of higher education and family background. They now view higher education as a valuable asset worth pursuing. Participants' believe that higher education is essential to advancement in life, but it must be a personal want, desire, or goal in order for them to actually pursue it. All participants

did identify how past experiences with family, friends, peers, teachers, and others have impacted their academic success. Interpersonal relationships whether negative or positive have affected their decision to pursue higher education. In addition, all participants did admit that going to college is a realistic goal if they work hard and actually apply themselves. Participants' believe that higher education leads to more opportunities. All participants' believe the main barrier to pursuing a college education is the fact that none of them have yet to earn a HSE diploma. Ultimately, they each feel that earning a high school diploma is a mandatory credential in our economy, but a higher education is necessary to really advance socially, professionally, and economically.

In Section 2, results are presented in detail outlining how the themes that emerged pertain to factors that participants' believe impact their pursuit of higher education. In Section 3, a project based on the study findings is presented. The project is a professional development program for HSE teachers. It serves as a possible solution to the research problem under study. Section 4 will include the following discussions: Project strengths and limitations, scholarship, project development and evaluation, leadership and change, analysis of self as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer, potential impact on social change, and implications for future research.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this project study was to examine factors that African American HSE students' believe impact their pursuit of higher education. Findings from data collected revealed that the following factors have an influence on African American HSE students' interest to go to college: Family background, intrinsic motivation & educational values, sociocultural influences, teacher & peer influence, and socioeconomic factors. This project was designed based on study findings in Section 2 as a solution to the research problem. It is a Professional Development (PD) program for HSE educators at the research site aimed at assessing, educating, and fostering the best educational practices to positively impact African American HSE students' achievement. In addition, the PD program consists of training for HSE administrators and teachers to ensure they are knowledgeable as well as qualified to enhance the academic experience, college preparedness, and even job readiness of their African American HSE learners.

In Section 3, the project is presented. This section includes details about the description, goals, and rationale of the project. There is also a literature review which consists of a theoretical framework and research to support the project genre. The implementation of the PD project is detailed including the potential resources and existing supports, potential barriers, proposal for implementation and timetable, and roles and responsibilities of students and others. In addition, Section 3 outlines the project evaluation, implications including social change within the local community and far-reaching.

Description and Goals

The purpose of the study was to examine factors that influence African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education. Findings from this case study revealed how family background, intrinsic motivation and educational values, sociocultural influences, teacher and peer influence, and socioeconomic factors impact African American HSE students' interest to go to college. After careful data analysis, I came to the conclusion that the best direction for the project was a PD program for HSE teachers at the study site. The audience for this PD program includes HSE administrators and teachers. The key stakeholders are HSE educators, students, families, members of the school-community, residents within the surrounding neighborhood, and organizations within the local community. The project developed serves as a proposed solution to the lack of pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students. The project focuses on the PD of HSE teachers and administrators to educate them about factors that impact African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of college education (see Appendix A). The central goal of the project is to advance HSE educators' expertise on how to better serve African American HSE students as well as effectively educate all HSE adult learners.

The project designed is a year round program to be implemented from August 2016 to August 2017. The proposed PD program for HSE teachers and administrators at the research study site includes three in-service PD days/modules, workshops, activities, discussions, literature reviews, PowerPoint presentations, training sessions, videos, guest speakers, HSE Educators Book Study Group, and certificate-bearing course titled,

Preparing Students for High School Equivalency Using the Common Core State Standards (HSE CCSS) Certificate Program (see Appendix A). One goal of the project is to assess and further HSE educators' knowledge of adult learning and factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of college education. Another goal of the PD project designed is to get HSE instructors to understand the concept of adult learning and learn how to effectively implement andragogical practices within their classroom. The final goal of the PD project is to provide HSE educators with formal training on HSE exam requirements and CCSS as well as adult secondary education. The overarching goal of the PD program for HSE educators is to improve the quality of teaching at the study site to enrich all HSE students' academic achievement and educational experience.

Rationale

This qualitative study addressed the lack of pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students. It examined factors that African American HSE students perceived as influences on their pursuit of college education. Data analysis revealed that in addition to the factors previously outlined (family background, intrinsic motivation & educational values, sociocultural influences, teacher & peer influence, and socioeconomic factors, study-participants explained that a major barrier in the way of them going to college is the fact that they did not possess a secondary school diploma. All participants expressed interest in going to college once they earn their HSE diploma because intrinsic motivation for learning is no longer an issue. They feel as adults that earning an education is essential to personal, social, and professional advancement. Participants also admitted that as adults they now value higher education and believe

successful completion of the HSE test prep program is the only way to gain the academic skills to be college ready. The project genre selected addresses the research problem by providing PD training to HSE educators on the best instructional practices for adult learners.

The project is directed at advancing HSE educators' skills, expertise, and andragogical teaching strategies. Findings from this study centered on how participants value higher education now as adults. Study-participants' perspectives about pursuing college have changed since dropping out of high school as teenagers. They all view the value of higher education from an adult's perspective now. Although HSE students are studying to earn secondary school credentials, implementing pedagogical practices will not be suitable because the majority of HSE learners are young adults (Brinkley-Etzkorn & Skolits, 2014). Adults learn differently than children, therefore, pedagogical teaching methods are considered ineffective (Chan, 2010; Chen, 2014; Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2012, 2015; Knowles, 1980, 1990, 1995; Tough, 1979). Instructional practices must be tailored to meet the educational needs of adult students particularly for institutions that serve a culturally diverse population at the secondary level and beyond in order to ensure academic success (Wlodkowski, 2011). Based on study findings, I identified the need for educational reform of the HSE program at the study site and the participation of all HSE educators in the PD program is instrumental to its success.

The PD program is designed for HSE teachers to provide them with knowledge and skills to enrich students' academic experience and achievement. According to Johnson (2014), "our students are only as good as the education and mentoring they are

provided” (Johnson, 2014, p. 360). Research by Koellner and Jacobs (2015) showed there is a positive relationship between teacher PD that is student-centered and learner achievement. A key component of successful student learning is teacher effectiveness (Hawley & Rollie, 2007). Educators are accountable for their students’ academic success. Research by Patton, Parker, and Tannehill (2015) affirmed that teacher quality can be maintained if school administrators implement innovative PD practices that are tailored to meet the specific needs of their institution. After careful consideration, the PD program for HSE educators was considered the best solution to address the lack of pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students.

The project developed consists of PD opportunities for HSE educators to receive research-based information about factors that impact African American HSE students’ pursuit of higher education, the significance of professional development on student success, and effective teaching methods for adult learners. In addition to three in-service PD days, a book study group was incorporated into the project to foster PD through academic-based discourse and collaboration among HSE educators on literature related to African American students career and college readiness (Amador, Wallin, & Amador, 2015; American Library Association, 2014; Grierson et al., 2012). Consequently, the course on HSE CCSS will be provided by the Literacy Assistance Center to train HSE educators on the best instructional practices, HSE exam content, and CCSS (Literacy Assistance Center, n.d.). All PD program initiatives are aimed at educating HSE instructors on how to meet the needs of their adult learners and implement the best instructional practices to ensure academic achievement.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this case study was to assess factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education. A project was created to address the research problem by presenting a PD program for HSE educators based on study findings. It was necessary to first review scholarly literature related to the study findings and project genre. A literature review that focused on adult learning and professional development set the foundation for my project. The following keywords and terms were used to narrow down my literature search: *Adult learning theory, adult learners, adult educators, andragogy, teacher development and student achievement, professional development, and professional development for teachers*. The literature reviewed included both peer-reviewed and scholarly articles. I accessed the majority of the scholarly literature reviewed in this section using the Walden University library education databases: Education Research Complete, Academic Research Complete, Education Resources Information Center, and SAGE Journals. Some articles referenced in this section were also retrieved from Google Scholar. This section includes discussions on following topics: (a) Adult learning, educators, & education programs, (b) teacher professional development, and (c) professional learning communities.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this project was Knowles' (1980) theory on adult learning. The adult learning theory explains the ways adults learn differently from children and why (Holton et al., 2012, 2015). The theory guided the development of this project because the principles of adult learning apply to how HSE educators will gain

knowledge from the PD program, and how they should meet the needs of their adult learners. Andragogy, the study of adult learning, is at the center of the theory which postulates that adults are self-directed and autonomous learners who require specific educational practices (Knowles, 1980). According to Knowles' andragogical model, there are six assumptions about adult learning: (a) adults like to know why they need to learn something, (b) adults like to be in control of their learning process, (c) adults bring their life experiences to the classroom, (d) adults benefit from learning that aligns with their position in society, (e) adults tend to show an interest for learning when content relates to real-life situations, and (f) adults are intrinsically motivated to learn (Holton et al., 2012, 2015; Knowles, 1990, 1995). Adult students' view their educators as facilitators of learning and traditional pedagogic teaching methods are ineffective (Chen 2014; Holton et al., 2012, 2015; Knowles, 1980, 1995). The adult learning theory served as the baseline for this PD project for HSE educators and proposes best educational practices for the HSE program at the study site (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Knowles' theory explains how and why adults learn differently than children. It provided insight into the research problem, study findings, and solutions that may remedy the lack of pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students.

Adult Learning, Educators, & Education Programs

It is without question that adults learn differently than children (Chan, 2010; Holton et al., 2012, 2015; Knowles, 1980, 1990, 1995; Tough, 1979). Adults students are self-directed and purpose-driven (Grabowsky, 2011; Klein-Collins, 2011; Knowles, 1980). Adult students feel the need to know the reason why content is worth learning.

According to Falasca (2011), adult learners seek to spend time learning content that is useful as well as applicable to real life situations. Once a student reaches adulthood, they become decision-makers of their learning process (BrckaLorenz, Rabourn, & Shoup, 2015; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Adult learners seek to work collaboratively with educators to gain knowledge (Chen, 2014). Adult educators must make the transition from teacher to facilitator of learning (Holton et al., 2012, 2015; Knowles, 1980, 1995; Tough, 1979). Teaching adult learners requires knowledge of adult learning theory and experience necessary to effectively implement andragogic instructional strategies (Chan, 2010; Finn, 2011; Henschke, 2011). Adult educators are expected to become familiar with the best educational practices to ensure their students' academic success (Harper & Ross, 2011). High School Equivalency instructors at the study site are accountable for furthering their expertise on the principles of adult learning to provide quality education to African American HSE students that result in scholastic achievement and ultimately college readiness.

Adult education programs being restructured around the adult learning theory are making changes to how their program is designed, teachers are trained, and student learning is fostered (Holton et al., 2012). Adult educators must learn how to actually put the adult learning theory to practice in order to best serve nontraditional students like for example recent HSE/GED recipients (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011; Sieben, 2011). According to an article by Petty and Thomas (2014), adult education programs on a mission to reduce attrition rates of disadvantaged students are successful once adult learner barriers such as family, work, finances, health, and motivation, just to name a

few, are carefully considered. Education administrators who focus attention on enhancing student performance must consider how the adults who serve students are learning as well (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). For this reason, PD programs for teachers should be designed with the Knowles' six assumptions about adult learning in mind.

African American Adult Learners. African American adult students thrive on education that is culturally responsive because it addresses their academic and social learning needs. Research by Metzger (2015) found that African American college students rely heavily on social support services available at their institution to handle culturally specific stressors that negatively affect their academic achievement with resilience. Students usually learn from experience that one key to academic success is resilience (Chaney, Jones, & Marsh, 2012). In addition, adult educators who serve African American students just entering adulthood and college should consider the impact that social support has on risky behaviors. Like all other student groups, African American adults like gaining knowledge and socializing with new people but maintain self-motivation for learning when academic and social support is provided by their school (Isaac, Guy, & Valentine, 2011). Maxwell and Connell (2013) conducted a qualitative study on postsecondary learning and minority students' experiences which suggested that providing culturally responsive mentoring services to African American adult students transitioning from high school to college improves student engagement, academic performance, and increases postsecondary school enrollment rates. High School Equivalency educators must uphold their responsibility to be more than just

instructors to African American adult students, but also academic coaches and mentors to reinforce the educational pipeline rate.

Adult educators must consider the experiences that African American adult learners bring to the classroom and incorporate them into the curricula to grasp students' attention, quench their innate thirst for knowledge, foster their educational values, and meet their needs (Sheared, 1999). Furthermore, HSE programs are usually more effective at preparing African American adult students among other minorities for higher education when it is designed with a bridge to college component and focuses on improving quality by training educators in adult education, learning, and curriculum development instead of just offering test prep (Broadus & Martin, 2013). African American HSE students are more likely to enroll in college if they are exposed to experiences that higher education has to offer.

Teacher Professional Development

Based on study findings in Section 2, there is a need for quality HSE teaching and learning at the research site. This PD project for HSE educators is a proposed remedy to the lack of pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students at the study site. This project was developed to train HSE educators on best practices to ensure academic achievement of African American HSE students. According to Lumpe, Czerniak, Haney, and Belyukova (2012), teacher professional development programs simply provides adult learning to educators that if research based and implemented effectively can result in student achievement. Educators are more receptive to PD and other school reform efforts that take into account their experiences, input, feedback, adult

learner needs, and content knowledge (Bottoms, Egelson, Sass, Uhn, & Southern Regional Education Board, 2013). Professional development initiatives must be designed with a focus on addressing the needs of HSE teachers as adults, professional learners, and facilitators of adult learning.

Improving student learning by way of teacher learning is the basis of professional development for educators (Creswell, 2012; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Mertler, 2013; Schmoker, 2012). Teachers can improve their instructional quality and gain experience through active participation in PD programs that focus on student learning (Beavers, 2009; Kunter et al., 2013). Some research studies on PD for teachers found that not all programs are effective or result in improved student learning (Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Santagata, Kersting, Givvin, & Stigler, 2011; Van den Bergh, Ros, & Beijaard, 2014), but Blanford (2012) stressed the need for teacher PD as a means to improve school quality. According to a research article on PD for secondary school teachers by Hansen-Thomas, Casey, and Grosso (2013), educators who actively participate in PD opportunities seek to master their practice and in doing so become more effective at fostering student development. Professional development enables educators to hone their teaching skills in an effort to better serve students (Riggsbee, Malone, & Strauss, 2012). Quality educators are professional learners who continue to advance their knowledge of the discipline because they understand that dedicating themselves to lifelong learning is the only way to remain effective teachers.

Research by Van der Heijden, Geldens, Beijaard, and Popeijus, (2015) recommend that educators accept their responsibility as change agents since they are

accountable for successful student learning. Teachers are instrumental to school change and without their active engagement approaches to improving the quality of education within an institution will be nearly impossible (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978; Petrie & McGee, 2012; Watson, 2014). According to a study on successful PD for teachers by Desimone and Garet (2015), high quality PD for educators is crucial to effective school reform and should consist of the following five key elements, “content focus, active learning, coherence, sustained duration, and collective participation.” (p.252). School administrators must realize that traditional PD programs are outdated and new, improved teacher training initiatives should be implemented that are cutting edge, inquiry based, purpose driven, ongoing, and most importantly, student centered (Arce, Bodner, & Hutchinson, 2014).

Jao and McDougall (2015) conducted a qualitative study on collaborative teacher professional development and student achievement. The research study was project based and addressed ninth-grade students’ poor performance in applied mathematics (Jao & McDougall, 2015). It examined the effectiveness of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for educators on student learning. Research involved 11 middle schools across four school districts in Ontario, Canada. Jao and McDougall (2015) implemented the Collaborative Teacher Inquiry Project over the course of three semesters. Jao and McDougall’s (2015) project study included school administrators, teachers, and curriculum developers. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit ninth-grade math teachers for the study in which participating schools were chosen by district leaders based on overall performance and students low math scores on the most recent standardized

exam (Jao & McDougall, 2015). Data was obtained from individual interviews and reflective journals that documented participants PD project experience. Researchers found that participants valued PD initiatives that provided them the opportunity to collaborate and engage in academic discourse with colleagues (Jao & McDougall, 2015). Results also showed that the Collaborative Teacher Inquiry Project allowed teachers to gain knowledge about best instructional practices to implement in their ninth-grade applied math classes. Jao and McDougall (2015) suggested that the combination of teacher PD and collaboration was most effective because members of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) were able to establish positive relationships, common goals, shared visions and commitments to improve teaching and student learning. A school-community benefits greatly when teachers collaborate professionally and socially because they are better capable of forming bonds that enrich the quality of education.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

Establishing a PLC at the HSE study site is a key to the successful implementation of the PD project. Choi and Tam's (2015) longitudinal research study on the impact of PLCs on teachers' beliefs and practices found that the establishment of a PLC is essential to teacher PD. School leaders should embed a PLC at their institution with the intent to attract teachers' participation by facilitating learning rather than using traditional teaching methods (Birkenfeld, Box, & Hoaglund, 2014). Sims and Penny (2014) conducted a qualitative study on failed PLCs and found that the most effective PLCs promote active learning, collaboration, and communication among teachers. Hughes-Hassell, Dupree, and Brasfield (2012) stated that, "PLCs establish relationships

of trust and comfort, making members feel free to share information across PLCs, to talk honestly about student needs, and to offer critical suggestions for better practice that will support all students,” (p. 35). In PLCs that practice reflective discourse, teachers are able to share ideas, resources, experiences, and new knowledge to build professional relationships on trust and communication (de Groot, Endedijk, Jaarsma, Simons, & van Beukelen, 2014). Active communication among HSE education professionals at the research site is vital to the organization of an effective PLC that particularly addresses African American HSE students’ academic achievement and pursuit of higher education.

According to an article by Adams and Vescio (2015) PLCs are networks made up of a diverse group of teacher-learners with individual needs to address so PD programs must be tailored accordingly. Professional development programs and PLCs are not one size fits all. In recent cases, PLCs have been designed with teachers’ time constraints and life demands in mind. Research by McConnell, Parker, Eberhardt, Koehler, and Lundeberg (2013) on virtual PLCs discovered that teachers preferred in-person collaboration but deemed online meeting spaces as a useful alternative. Virtual discussion platforms make it possible for teachers to maintain their professional network especially when scheduling faculty meetings becomes a barrier (Gray & Smyth, 2012). Additional research on online PD proposes that the use of technology for teacher collaboration is an effective method of communication in the digital age when structured and properly facilitated (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Evans, 2015; Holmes, 2013). Every institution is unique and PD should be customized to meet the individual needs of school-community members on site and remotely (Gamrat, Zimmerman, Dudek, & Peck, 2014).

Carpenter and Sherretz (2012) conducted a case study on PD and school partnerships. The research focused on how PD schools positively impact the leadership role of teachers at a select inner city elementary school in Southeastern United States (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012). The research site was chosen purposefully because of its participation in the PD school partnership with a local state college aimed at fostering the overall well-being of local community members academically, medically, socially, and economically (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012). All educators at the school were recruited as participants for the study. Carpenter and Sherretz (2012) collected data from semistructured interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Results showed that PLCs can promote teacher leadership through PD that provide teachers opportunities to be participative leaders within their institution (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012). Findings from Carpenter and Sherretz's (2012) study also suggested that PD school partnerships also allow teachers to be productive members of their PLCs as they demonstrate their leadership roles through collaborative learning and involvement within the local community. Providing quality education should be a collaborative endeavor that HSE program administrators, teachers, staff, and local stakeholders all take part in as a community to address African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education.

Developing a high quality PLC will entail a great deal of resilience on the behalf of teachers and cultural change within the institution contingent with school reform (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). School administrators seeking to implement PD should create a PLC to mediate teachers' resistance to change and guarantee success

(Song, 2012). A productive school culture is created by an effective PLC that is made up of educators committed to student achievement through continuous PD and collaborative efforts (Bieler, 2012). Professional learning communities thrive on connections educators make while learning, planning, working, collaborating, and brainstorming ways to enrich their students' educational experience (Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012; Stewart, 2014; Van Driel & Berry, 2012). PLCs are actually the glue that holds members of a school-community together. Collaborative efforts on behalf of program administrators, faculty, support staff, and local stakeholders at the research site will allow for the establishment of a PLC comprised of school-community members who function on one accord to improve African American HSE learners' academic success, college preparedness, and interest to pursue higher education.

Implementation

The initial meeting with HSE administrators at the study site will take place the first week in August 2016. At which time, I will present a proposal of my project that focuses on PD for HSE Educators as a solution to the lack of pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students. There will be a week allotted for me to make any changes to the project suggested by HSE administrators considered contingent to gain approval. Within a week of receiving approval to implement the project, all HSE staff will be notified about the informational meeting to discuss the new PD program. This informational session will be scheduled no later than the third week in August 2016. An overview of the project will be shared with these key stakeholders. They will be explained the purpose, rationale, goals, outcomes, agenda, implementation, and

evaluation plan of the PD program for Educators. All HSE educators will be given a copy of Pre-Professional Development (PD) Program HSE Educators Self-Assessment to submit at the conclusion of the meeting. Prior to the first in-service PD day, I will carefully review all completed self-assessments to gain insight on the knowledgebase and needs of the HSE educators participating in the program.

Day 1 of the PD program will be scheduled at the beginning of the new academic year. The first in-service PD day will commence the program. It will take place on the third Saturday in September 2016. Day 1 will focus on educating HSE educators about the research problem and study findings. This session consists of a PowerPoint presentation and team-building activities that will increase HSE educators' knowledge of factors that impact the academic achievement of their African American HSE students. A guest speaker will discuss the influence of culture and racism on African Americans students' academic success. There will also be a briefing about the HSE Educators Book Study Group. All HSE educators will also receive a personal copy of the assigned textbook. Participants will be given a formative assessment for Day 1 to submit at the end of the session.

The HSE Educators Book Study Group will be implemented during the fall 2016 semester. Participants will meet twice a month from October 2016 to December 2016. The Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development will lead the 2 hour book study group meetings every other Saturday morning. The book study group meetings will provide participants' the chance to engage in academic discourse about content from the book by Curry and Shillingsford (2015) titled, *African American Students Career and*

College Readiness: The Journey Unraveled, and foster positive professional relationships among colleagues. All participants will receive a reflective journal to document their PD experiences from the book study group and following HSE CCSS course. They will be expected to add an entry to their reflective journals after every book study group and HSE CCSS class meeting. The journals will serve as a summative assessment for this project.

Day 2 of the PD program will be scheduled at the beginning of the spring 2017 term. This session will focus on adult learning, learners, and education. It will start with a brief discussion about participants HSE Educators Book Study Group experience. Participants will view videos on adult learning, engage in group conversations, and create handouts that outline key characteristics of adult students in their HSE program. A PowerPoint presentation is included that contains information on adult learning and education for African American HSE students. Participants will learn how to locate scholarly articles and demonstrate research skills writing annotated bibliographies for the literature review activity. A briefing on the HSE CCSS course will conclude Day 2. Participants will complete a formative assessment for Day 2.

The HSE CCSS certification course titled, *Preparing Students for High School Equivalency Using the Common Core State Standards (HSE CCSS) Certificate Program* will be carried out from January 2017 to June 2017 (Literacy Assistance Center, n.d.). An instructor from the LAC will lead the 6 month HSE CCSS certificate course both in-person and via an online platform to all PD participants. All HSE educators will be required to attend the HSE CCSS training classes once a month. The classes will be held

at the study site every third Saturday of each designated month from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. The certificate program is meant to improve HSE teachers' knowledge of exam content and the best instructional strategies to ensure all HSE students achievement and college preparedness given CCSS. Participants will also be required to write an entry in their reflective journals after each HSE CCSS class meeting.

The third in-service PD day will be scheduled at the end of the academic year. It will be held on the third Saturday in July 2017. This session will educate participants about andragogical practices, lesson planning for HSE classes, and HSE CCSS curriculum development. Participants will watch a video series on andragogy before engaging in a discussion about ways they plan to implement andragogic instructional practices at the HSE program site. Participants will also work in small groups to create new HSE lesson plans. The group lesson-planning activity will require participants to demonstrate their knowledge of HSE test content, CCSS, and differentiated teaching methods. Day 3 will also include a presentation by the Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development about proposed changes to the HSE program. Participants will also have the opportunity to share and hear brief testimonies about the PD program experience. This session will conclude with final statements, Q&A session, and collection of all assessments. Participants will be given a formative assessment for Day 3. Participants will also be asked to include one last entry in their reflective journals that details their perception of the entire PD program experience.

In August 2017, there will be a debriefing meeting with HSE administrators at the study site concerning the PD program for HSE educators. We will review the formative

and summative assessments collected from participants to determine the effectiveness of the PD program. It is essential to the continuation of the PD program that participants are able to share their feedback and experiences. At this particular meeting, we will discuss the outcome of the PD program as well as any modifications and changes necessary to improve the PD for the upcoming year.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The research site has an existing PD program in place for HSE teachers. However, participation in the current PD program is not a requirement for all HSE instructors. The PD opportunities offered to HSE staff is not extensive. Professional development that concerns program policies is mandatory for all staff, but HSE educators are only offered 12 hours of academic-based PD training. I will propose that my newly developed project be implemented in lieu of the already established PD program for the 2016-2017 school year. Listed below are the potential resources and supplies needed to successfully implement this project:

Equipment and Supplies: Meeting room with tables and seating, laptop, Internet connectivity, projector, dry erase board with assorted color markers and eraser, printer, copy machine, and light refreshments.

Materials: Copies of the agendas, PowerPoint presentation slides, worksheets, trainer's notes, calendars, assessments, scholarly journal articles, handouts, CCSS manuals for ELA and Math. Each participant will also receive a copy of the book, *African American Students Career and College Readiness: The Journey*

Unraveled by Curry and Shillingsford (2015), a three-ring binder to hold all materials, and a standard one-subject notebook to use as a reflective journal.

Stationery: Copy paper, pens, pencils, stapler, highlighters, paper clips, binders, index cards, post-it notes, poster size paper, construction paper, color markers, name tags, crayons, paper bags, and other basic stationery.

There are existing resources and support for my proposed PD program available at the study site. The majority of the equipment, supplies, materials, and stationery will be provided. There is a meeting room designated for PD that is fully equipped for presentations at the site. In case a laptop is not available for use on PD days, it will be my responsibility as the project facilitator to bring my own. Additional funding for implementation of my project was declared limited. I will propose that any and all resources available for PD within the HSE department be allocated to fund my new project. This includes funding for the cost of individual copies of the textbook for the HSE Educators Book Study Group and fee for the HSE CCSS certificate program. The fee for the HSE CCSS is the most expensive resource but this should not present an issue since administrators at the study site currently refers their faculty to the LAC for PD training. Funding spent on training at LAC in the past will just be applied to cover the fee for the new course that is specifically designed for HSE educators. Any funding needed for refreshments or other materials that are out of the budget will be covered by investments and/or donations from stakeholders within the local community.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

There are several potential barriers that may interfere with the successful implementation of my proposed PD program for HSE Educators at the research site. First, I plan to gain approval from Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development for the PD program for HSE Educators, but there is no guarantee that he will endorse the idea. This may also have an effect on whether or not he will be willing to serve as the group leader for the HSE Teachers Book Study Group. The second possible barrier to the success of the suggested PD program is teachers' resistance to change. More experienced teachers are not very comfortable adapting to change (Terhart, 2013). The third potential barrier is that HSE educators may find it difficult to fully participate in all of the PD program initiatives due to time constraints and/or conflicts in scheduling. Last but not least, I considered the limited funding available for PD at the site as a barrier as well.

For every potential barrier, I will propose a solution. If for some reason the Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development does not support my proposed PD program, I plan to present the idea to the Executive Director who oversees all programs and employees at the research site. The Executive Director will be asked to forward me to the human resources department or anyone who is already in charge of PD at the site. If the Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development refuses to serve as the group leader for the book study group, he will be asked to appoint someone else from the department to serve in his place. It will be great if one of the program

administrators agrees to be in charge of the book study group meetings, but if a HSE faculty member participating in the PD program volunteers that would be just fine.

To address the possibility of staff members being reluctant to change, they will be reminded of how their role as agents of change within the school-community is beneficial not only to the students they serve, but also to their own professional advancement. If HSE teachers at the site express that participation in the PD program may be an issue due to their availability, all sessions will be purposefully scheduled on already designated PD days.

Funding available for PD at the research is declared limited. In this case, I will suggest that my proposed PD program be implemented in lieu of their existing HSE staff development program for the 2016-2017 academic year. All funds for teacher development opportunities can be reallocated to financially support the implementation of my proposed PD program. If administrators at the site do not approve, it will be necessary to seek investments from outside sources such as stakeholders within the local community and even affiliated organizations.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The timeline for the implementation plan of the professional development project is outlined in detail below:

- August 2016: The initial meeting will take place with HSE administrators prior to the start of the 2016-2017 academic year during the first week in August 2016.

An informational meeting will be held two weeks later at the study site with all HSE staff to discuss and schedule the PD program. All HSE educators will

receive a copy of the Pre-Professional Development (PD) Program HSE Educators Assessment to submit at the end of the meeting.

- September 2016: The implementation of the PD Program at the study site is scheduled to commence at the start of the new academic year. The first in-service PD day/session will take place on the third Saturday in September. The session will focus on study findings and discussions about how to meet the needs of African American HSE students.
- October 2016 to December 2016: HSE Educators Book Study Group will meet twice each month from October 2016 to December 2016. Participants will engage in discourse about literature from the book, *African American Students Career and College Readiness: The Journey Unraveled* (Curry & Shillingford, 2015).
- January 2017: The second in-service PD day/session will be scheduled at the beginning of the spring 2017 semester. It will take place on the third Saturday in January. Participants will be presented content on adult learning, learners, and educators through collaborative activities.
- January 2017 to June 2017: The HSE CCSS certificate program will take place over the next 6 months. The course will be presented by Literacy Assistance Center training is scheduled to take place on the third Saturday of every month during which time all HSE educators will actively participate in the HSE CCSS certificate program's online community.
- July 2017: The third in-service day of the PD program will be scheduled to take place at the end of the academic year. It will be held on the third Saturday in July

2017. This session will focus on effective andragogical instruction, lesson planning, and curriculum development. All participants will complete a formative assessment at the end of the session. On Day 3, participants will be asked to include one last entry in their reflective journals prior to submission. The final entry should detail their perception of the entire PD program.

- August 2017: There will be a debriefing session planned to review assessments and evaluate the project. The meeting will be held with HSE program administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders at the study site. We will discuss the outcome of the project, modifications, and necessary improvements for continuation of the PD program the following year.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

Every participant involved in the PD program has a role and responsibilities that they must fulfill. It is necessary to outline stakeholders' roles and responsibilities prior to the implementation of the program in order for it to be successful. My primary duty as the PD program facilitator will be to orchestrate all in-service sessions. I will be in charge of presenting information and equipping teacher-participants with the skills they need to enhance the quality of teaching and learning at the research site. I must be professional, assertive, and knowledgeable about PD program content in order to ensure that facilitation is effective. It will also be my job to schedule and attend all three PD sessions, maintain contact with stakeholders, work cooperatively with the Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development and LAC instructor, set-up the meeting area and

equipment for every session, distribute needed materials to participants, and collect assessments for review.

The majority of the responsibility lies in the hands of the Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development. As the HSE program administrator, the Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development will be expected to assist in the implementation of the PD program, facilitate the teacher book study meetings, presenter, and ensure the continuation of future PD initiatives at the study. He will also be in charge of tracking HSE teacher's PD hours based on attendance, guide teacher book study discussions, address participants' inquiries, observe and document changes in HSE students' academic progress, and work in conjunction with all stakeholders in particular the LAC instructor and I to successfully execute the program. The HSE CCSS instructor from LAC will be solely responsible for training all HSE educators at the study site. He/she will be paid to present the certificate-bearing course to educate HSE administrators and teachers about changes to the HSE exam and CCSS.

The HSE educators at the study site will be responsible for attending all PD initiatives. All teacher-participants will be expected to actively engage in PD trainings, presentations, meetings, and workshops. They will be responsible for signing the attendance sheets, reading assigned literature, participating constructively in activities, satisfying all HSE CCSS course requirements, and providing genuine feedback on assessments. Teachers will also be held accountable for implementing new instructional strategies within their classrooms, work cooperatively with fellow colleagues, meet all HSE students' needs, and work cooperatively with other stakeholders.

The roles and responsibilities for HSE students will be to remain open and receptive to changes that their teachers introduce in the classroom. Students will be responsible for becoming active participants within the school-community. They must also apply themselves academically and practice learning that result in student success.

Project Evaluation

Formative and summative assessments will be used to evaluate this project in order to determine what works and what does not. Project evaluation is necessary to assess the weaknesses and strengths of the PD program for HSE educators (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Looney (2011) stated that, “summative assessment is sometimes referred to as assessment of learning, and formative assessment, as assessment for learning,” (p. 7). This project includes five assessment tools to evaluate the success of the PD program based on participants’ feedback. There is a pre-program self-assessment, survey for all three in-service PD days, and reflective journal for the book study group and HSE CCSS certificate course experience (see Appendix A). Assessments will inform me about participants’ learning throughout the PD program, the project’s effectiveness, and recommendations for improving the project for future implementation.

The first formative assessment will be the Pre-Professional Development (PD) Program HSE Educators Self-Assessment (see Appendix A). Participants will complete the pre-program questionnaire at the conclusion of the informational meeting. Pre-project assessment is useful when implementing a newly developed project (Owen & Rogers, 1999; Purcell, 2014). It is necessary to assess HSE educators’ prior knowledge before the project is implemented. This will assure that the PD program is designed to

address the specific needs of participants. Formative evaluations will take place throughout the implementation of the project. Surveys will be provided to participants at the end of each PD day to be completed manually (see Appendix A). These evaluation tools will be used to determine if participants think the project initiatives are meaningful to their PD and whether or not learner outcomes are being met (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Feedback that participants provide will allow me to continuously make improvements as the project as it unfolds (Purcell, 2014).

A summative assessment will be used to evaluate outcomes of the entire project (see Appendix A). This type of assessment is useful to determine if the project goals were achieved (Black, 2012). Reflective journals will be used to evaluate participants' experiences from the book study group, HSE CCSS course, and overall PD program. Participants will be expected to add an entry to their reflective journals after every book study group and HSE CCSS class meeting. They must write a three paragraph entry that reflects their personal feedback on material covered at each meeting. On the third PD day, participants will be asked to include one last entry in their reflective journals that details feedback on the entire project. Reflective journaling can be beneficial to the professional development of novice and seasoned teachers (Gallego, 2014). This particular evaluation tool will provide participants the opportunity to document their own learning.

Content from the reflective journals will help me pinpoint adjustments that must be made to the project to ensure a more successful outcome the next it is implemented. The project developed focuses on PD for HSE educators to improve teacher quality to

address the lack of pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students at the study site. The project's goal is to advance HSE administrators and teachers expertise on how to effectively serve African American HSE students given factors that impact these particular learners' pursuit of postsecondary education. The Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development and I will carefully examine data from formative and summative assessments as well as African American HSE students' academic performance in class and on the HSE test. Project evaluation will entail comparing and contrasting information provided by participants on all assessments with study findings in Section 2. The project analysis process is necessary to determine if HSE educators at the research site are better qualified to meet the needs of their African American HSE students and whether learners actually improved academically.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

This project is based on study findings from Section 2 which revealed the underlying factor that presently has an influence on African American HSE students' pursuit of college education is the fact that they do not possess a high school education. It was clear that the African American HSE learners at the study site depend on the education available to gain the academic skills necessary to earn their HSE diploma. These learners expressed awareness that in this day and age completing the HSE program is essential to pursue college and/or secure a career that will afford them a better quality of life. Getting back on the pipeline to higher education depends greatly on the effectiveness of the HSE program. As a solution to the research problem, this project was

developed to meet the needs of African American HSE learners through PD for HSE educators to improve the quality of education at the study site.

The goal of this project was to address the lack of pursuit of college among African American HSE learners by way of PD for all HSE educators. This project involves training for HSE educators to ensure that African American HSE students are exposed to learning that not only get them HSE test-ready, but more so college and career prepared. The better the quality of teaching, the more likely African American HSE students will pass the exam and earn their diploma. This project has implications for social change because higher learning does not only benefit the student but also has a positive impact on their families, friends, peers, institutions, and local community. The quality of education at the HSE program site is fundamental to African American HSE students' success academically, professionally, and personally.

Far-Reaching

This project proposes a PD program for HSE educators alike to learn how to skillfully and effectively implement teaching strategies that promote African American HSE students' academic achievement. African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education is a problem that stems beyond the study site. Reform at HSE programs should begin with teacher training and result in student success. Professional development for HSE educators is the most effective approach to increase the likelihood that all HSE students will perform well on the exam, earn a diploma, pursue higher education, establish a professional career, and improve their quality of life. This project has implications for social change far-reaching because it serves as a framework for other

HSE programs nationally and even globally. In the larger context, this project seeks to change the way HSE programs are structured, teachers are trained, curricula are developed, services are provided, and all students' needs are met.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project study was to examine factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education at the study site. Findings showed that participants believe their family background, intrinsic motivation and educational values, sociocultural influences, teacher and peer influence, and socioeconomic factors had an influence on them going to college. The research problem was addressed by designing a project that focused on PD for HSE educators. The solution to enhancing all HSE students' academic achievement depended greatly on HSE teachers' quality and instructional methods.

In Section 2, findings were discussed in detail regarding factors that African American HSE students' believe influence their pursuit of higher education. In Section 3, the project was developed based on study findings. The project is a PD program for HSE teachers at the research site. The project serves as a possible solution to the lack of pursuit of college education among African American HSE learners through quality training for HSE instructors. Section 4 will include discussions on the project strengths and limitations, scholarship, project development and evaluation, leadership and change, analysis of self as a scholar, practitioner and project developer, project's potential impact on social change, and implications for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In Section 4, I present my reflections and conclusions on the project study. Outlined in this section are the project strengths, recommendations for remediation of limitations, scholarship, project development and evaluation. I also present details about leadership and change, analysis of self as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Section 4 concludes with a discussion on the project's potential impact on social change, implications, applications, directions for future research, and conclusion.

Project Strengths

This doctoral project study was conducted to assess factors that African American HSE students believe impact their lack of pursuit of higher education at the selected HSE program. Data collected revealed that participants believe family structure, intrinsic motivation and educational values, sociocultural influences, teacher and peer influence, and socioeconomic factors influence their pursuit of postsecondary education. In response to study findings, I developed a PD project for HSE educators as a solution to the lack of pursuit of college education among African American HSE learners at the research site. The project has several strengths in addressing the research problem studied. The goal of the PD project is to educate HSE administrators and teachers about study findings, HSE CCSS standards, and best practices to ensure African American HSE students' academic success.

The proposed project is a yearlong PD initiative for HSE educators to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning at the study site. Teacher PD is the most effective

approach to ensuring that African American HSE students are academically prepared for the HSE test and college level learning. To improve student learning, HSE educators must be knowledgeable about factors that influence student achievement and receive PD training that better qualifies them to address barriers effectively. High School Equivalency educators at the study site will be made aware of African American HSE students educational, social, financial, familial, and cultural needs. They will be provided with the tools to foster teacher-student relationships that positively influence learner achievement. I designed the project based on research that promotes teacher PD as a remedy to student learning. The project involves change for the overall school-community which includes not only HSE faculty and their students, but also families, local community members, and other invested stakeholders.

The key to effective schools is PD for teachers that include the establishment of a PLC that allows them to collaborate on best practices to enrich student achievement (Hawley & Rollie, 2007). The PD program includes activities that promote collaboration and team-building among HSE educators to develop their own PLC. Teachers will work together as a team to improve the quality of education. They will brainstorm with one another as leaders and agents of change to implement school improvement efforts. Information will be provided to PD participants on how to be more resourceful when seeking support for adult educators and directing students to resources that can enrich their educational experience. The project aims to strengthen the effectiveness of teaching at the HSE research site to address the academic achievement and ultimately the pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students. Professional development

for teachers results in successful learning for students. Education professionals who engage in PD are better trained to meet the needs of their learners.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

The project has limitations in addressing the research problem. It is based on study findings in Section 2 and focuses on increasing African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education through PD for HSE educators at the study site. First, the project is a newly proposed 1 year PD program. It may be more befitting for the PD program for HSE administrators and teachers to be implemented over an extended period of time. Another limitation of the project is that it does not consider approaches other than teacher PD as a remedy to the research problem. Participants' involved in this study outlined several perceived factors that influence their lack of pursuit of college education. Alternatives to consider when addressing the lack of academic achievement among African American HSE students' should also pertain to their family background, intrinsic motivation and educational values, sociocultural influences, teacher and peer relationships, and socioeconomic background.

One recommendation for the remediation of the limitations is to allocate more time for school change in order to make a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Another recommendation is to implement ongoing school-communitywide initiatives that foster student achievement through student involvement in addition to teacher PD. Student attrition rates are greatly diminished when the school, students, families, and communities work together to implement student centered school improvement initiatives (Ziomek-Daigle, 2010). The research problem can be addressed

differently by making African American HSE students assume more responsibility of their own learning. Measures to improve academic achievement should focus on the students themselves as agents of change within their institution and learning process (Fisette & Walton, 2015; Rock & Stepanian, 2010).

Schools that provide social, cultural, and academic support to meet the needs of African American students are better capable of successful student learning (Roscoe, 2015). Research by Hansen, Trujillo, Boland, and MacKinnon (2014) suggested that academic support services such as tutoring, advising, goal planning, counseling, and mentoring can positively impact student performance as well. Furthermore, service learning opportunities that are academic and community-based also help to narrow the achievement gap among students of color by providing them experiences that enrich their educational development (Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeier, & Benson, 2006). A bridge to college initiative may be another alternative to remediate the research problem because underrepresented student groups like African Americans who are exposed to postsecondary learning are better prepared and more likely to enroll in college (Pitre & Pitre, 2009).

Scholarship

I have come to learn from my educational experience that scholarship is about the continuous quest for knowledge. As stated by Marx (2006), “Knowledge is growing so rapidly that the person at the top cannot even pretend to know everything,” (p.13). My journey to scholarship came with first recognizing that knowledge is infinite, and I could enjoy a lifetime of learning new, exciting things. Scholarship is about the pursuit of

academic excellence. I developed a genuine interest for higher learning over the course of my academic career. I wanted to learn more, therefore, I had to do more knowledge seeking especially in regards to conducting my doctoral project study. I demonstrated an unwavering commitment to academic achievement. I learned how to advance my writing skills to reflect the work of a scholar as the language expected became more sophisticated the closer I became to scholarship. I dedicated my time to searching, reading, writing, researching, rereading, and rewriting until my study met Walden University standards. Scholarship was finally attained at the doctoral level of study. Nonetheless, I will forever seek new information, identify problems in the field of education that need solutions, and conduct research to uncover the unknown.

Project Development and Evaluation

In Section 3, the project was outlined in detail which addresses the research problem and study findings. The project developed is a PD program for HSE administrators and teachers that consist of three in-service training days, book study group, and HSE CCSS certificate course. The theoretical framework that guided the project was Knowles' adult learning theory because it explains the differences between the way children and adults learn (Chan, 2010; Holton et al., 2012, 2015; Knowles, 1980, 1990, 1995; Tough, 1979). The project genre was chosen because research on PD suggested that student success can be enhanced if teachers receive training that better qualifies them to meet the need of their students (Blanford, 2012; Creswell, 2012; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Hawley & Rollie, 2007; Patton, Parker, Tannehill, 2015). The main objective of the PD project was to improve the quality of teaching to

enrich African American HSE students' learning and pursuit of higher education at the study site.

During the step-by-step development of the project, I considered methods to evaluate the success of the PD program for HSE educators. There was a need for assessment tools to determine if project goals are met and make adjustments based on participants' feedback (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Purcell, 2014). Project evaluation will consist of formative and summative assessments. Surveys will be used for formative assessment preprogram and at the end of every in-service PD training session for participants to provide feedback about their satisfaction with the program throughout the entire implementation process. Reflective journals will be used as a summative assessment tool to evaluate what HSE educators learned from the book study group, HSE CCSS course, and overall quality of the PD program experience (Black, 2012; Gallego, 2014; Looney, 2011). Summative assessments will be collected from participants at the conclusion of the PD program. All data obtained from the assessments will inform me about the project's effectiveness, success, and recommended improvements for future PD initiatives. The project will also be evaluated based on African American HSE students' academic progress and performance.

Leadership and Change

As an educator, I recognize my position as a leader of change. Teachers are indeed agents of change within the institutions they serve (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Fullan, 2007; Van den Bergh et al., 2015; Watson, 2014). Leaders are responsible for guiding others. I had to learn how to follow before earning a position to lead both

professionally and educationally. Leadership is a role that involves a great deal of accountability, responsibility, and flexibility based on my experience leading this doctoral project study. I learned that leadership and change are contingent upon innovative thinking, planning, adjusting, and implementing initiatives until it is effective and renders successful results. A leader may also be described as a visionary. Leaders see possibilities when others view a problem as an immovable obstacle. Fullan (2007) stated that, “effective school leaders are strong educators, anchoring their work on central issues of learning and teaching and school improvement,” (p. 251). As an educational leader, I am optimistic about school change. I honestly believe that change should be ongoing for any school leader who is sincerely dedicated to enriching teacher effectiveness, student success, and overall school quality.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

This doctoral journey was without a doubt the most challenging and rewarding undertaking in my academic career. It really required me to push my limits as a knowledge seeker. I watched myself gradually develop into a scholar throughout the Doctor of Education program. It took a lot of commitment, focus, grit, resilience, and determination to remain steadfast along such a rigorous academic journey. There were moments when I assumed that I was a good writer, but learned soon enough that earning a doctoral degree required mastery level skills. The same is true of being a good researcher because every course assignment better prepared me for the doctoral project study as I learned how to seek information, sift through data, and find solutions to problems. I learned firsthand that a scholar must be a good learner. Pursuing a terminal

degree made me aware of my potential as a scholar and lifelong learner. I acquired a niche for independent learning. I take great pride in how far I have come educationally, professionally, and personally.

As a novice scholar, I recognize that my contribution to the field of education is just beginning. The doctoral experience allowed me to prove to myself that success comes to individuals who are persistent rather than perfect. I had to push myself at times to complete assignments, make edits, and revise documents given life demands as I blossomed into a scholar. Moving up the levels of higher education to reach doctoral level study consisted of taking one step to be pushed back two steps at times. I struggled to remain encouraged. From experience, I can attest that the doctoral journey is a unique one. This project study is exemplary of my perseverance. The most important lesson I learned from my doctoral experience is that I can accomplish anything that I put my mind to do. I made my childhood dream of becoming a doctor come true with hard work, persistence, discipline, diligence, and scholarship.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

It was beneficial to my development as an educator and student that I was able to apply knowledge gained from the Doctor of Education program in the field. I took advantage of every opportunity to put to use the skills learned from course content. This helped to define my role as a scholar-practitioner. According to Bailey (2014), “Scholar-practitioners have been shown to be intimately connected to the world around them, striving, by any means, to make it a better place,” (p. 56-57). As a practitioner, I learned what works and what does not work for teaching and learning to be effective. I have held

several positions as an educator over the course of my doctoral journey in which I applied textbook knowledge, professional experience, academic experience, and training to provide my learners with a quality education. The doctoral program truly taught me that practice is the routine for individuals dedicated to the pursuit of perfection. Furthermore, being a practitioner deepened my understanding of how research and practice in the field of education go hand-in-hand.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

This doctoral study required me to put my skills as a project developer to the test. I was familiar with designing a project for professional and educational purposes but not one of such magnitude. I was challenged in ways I did not expect due the project's details, complexity, length, and Walden University standards. I was rather impressed at my ability to create a project as a solution to the research problem I am very passionate about eradicating. Developing my PD project for HSE educators took a considerable amount of time. I worked in stages developing the project step-by-step. I had to hone my time management, organization, and prioritization skills in order to complete the project. I was determined to design a quality PD project so I focused primarily on ensuring that all elements of a successful project were incorporated. This entailed several edits and revisions to make certain that my doctoral project was more than acceptable to my committee chairpersons, University Research Reviewer, colleagues, and fellow education professionals. The final product is evidence of my experience as a problem solver and project developer.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

This project study addressed the education attainment of African American HSE students. Research conducted focused on the academic achievement gap at the HSE level because data showed that African American students are less likely to complete high school (Fulton, 2011; SUNY, 2012) or pursue college after obtaining secondary school credentials (GED Testing Service, 2014; Maralani, 2011; NCES, 2013; Pondiscio, 2013; Rose, 2013). Findings from this case study indicated that family background, intrinsic motivation and educational values, sociocultural factors, teacher and peer influence, and socioeconomic factors are influences in their pursuit of higher education. Based on study results, I developed a PD project that would improve HSE teacher quality to address the academic needs of African American HSE students. This project seeks to change how HSE administrators and instructors are trained and student development is cultivated at the study site. Change is intended for HSE educators, students, staff, families, and other stakeholders to collaborate and build meaningful relationships that foster academic success.

This project has potential impact on social change at the local level and far-reaching. The project suggests change to the structure and function of HSE programs to improve the educational attainment of African American HSE students. The primary concern is African American HSE learners' academic preparedness for the HSE test and college level learning at the study site and beyond. The reformation of teaching and learning practices at the study site are meant to increase the likelihood that the target population will pursue college education. The pursuit of higher education can lead to a

promising educational, professional, social, financial, and personal future (McMahon, 2009; Perna, 2005). Therefore, African American HSE students must have good reason to be confident in the quality of education available at HSE test prep programs especially being that they are taking advantage of their second chance at academic achievement.

The proposed PD project is the most suitable solution to positively change how HSE educators are trained to meet the educational needs of African American HSE students. The project reassures HSE administrators and teachers of their responsibility to ensure student learning by engaging in ongoing PD, implementing best instructional practices, and actively participating in the school-community. The hope is that African American HSE students will recognize their potential and gain the academic skills to regard factors that impact their pursuit of higher education as stepping stones instead of barriers.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

As I reflect on the importance of the work and what was learned, I am compelled to stress the importance of closing the academic achievement gap where it concerns the pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students. Findings from this study suggest that more must be done on behalf of HSE program administrators and teachers to address the educational, sociocultural, and professional needs of African American students. The research problem is rather complex because there are several underlying factors in addition to family background, intrinsic motivation, sociocultural factors, teacher and peer influence, and socioeconomic status that impact African American HSE students lack of pursuit of higher education. Results from this project

study suggest that solutions to the research problem should center on PD for HSE educators, and also recommend active student participation and overall school reform at the study site in order to positively impact African American HSE students' academic achievement. This project study implies that addressing the educational attainment of African American HSE students must be a collective effort. The project's implications for future research are important to the effectiveness and responsiveness of HSE test prep programs that serve African American students locally and far-reaching.

The project has applications that can be made to the educational field. It builds upon research on the academic achievement gap and African Americans. The results from this case study present HSE educators with research-based information on African American HSE students' perspectives about factors that impact their lack of pursuit of higher education. This project study provides insight into matters that influence African American HSE learners' lack pursuit of college and offers the possibility of PD for HSE educators to remedy disparities in student achievement. The bottom line is that schools that implement ongoing teacher PD aim to continuously meet the need of their students and focus primarily on improving the quality of teaching and learning (Beaver, 2009; Bottoms et al., 2013; Creswell, 2012; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Hawley & Rollie, 2007; Kunter et al., 2013; Patton et al., 2015). Institutions that provide PD produce educators who are more knowledgeable, skilled, trained, and effective at addressing problems that concern their teaching quality and students' underachievement. Findings from this study essentially serve as a reference point for HSE programs across the nation that are being newly developed or restructured. This work is also applicable to educators

of African American high school students who are at-risk of dropping out as some of the same issues and concepts may apply to their pursuit of postsecondary education. This project lends just due attention to the educational attainment of African American students at the high school, HSE, and potentially college level.

This research project is just one case study at one HSE program site, therefore, future research on the pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students is recommended. Future research should be conducted on a larger scale at a different HSE program or multiple sites. It would be beneficial if research consists of a larger sample size of the target population in order to gain a broader perspective and understanding of factors that impact their pursuit of college. Additionally, future research may be useful to examine the phenomenon studied using different research approaches, sampling procedures, data collection methods, and interview questions. One recommendation for future research is a longitudinal study that consists of collecting data related to the research problem over an extended period of time. Perhaps a future study could focus on the lived experiences of African American students currently enrolled in a HSE program using a phenomenological research approach. A follow up program evaluation study can be suitable to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed PD project for HSE educators at the research site after implementation. It would also be meaningful for future research to be conducted on other student groups that share similar experiences as African American HSE students, like for example, Hispanics, adult basic education students, and ethnic minorities in an effort to close the academic achievement gap.

Conclusion

This doctoral project study specifically addressed the lack of pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students. The problem was studied because research showed that African American HSE students are not pursuing postsecondary education even after earning their HSE diploma, and only a mere 10% of HSE graduates possess a college degree (GED Testing Service, 2014; NCES, 2013; Pondiscio, 2013; Rose, 2013). A qualitative case study approach was used to examine factors that African American HSE students believe impact their pursuit of higher education at a selected HSE program site. This project study is significant to the field of education because it seeks to narrow the academic achievement gap and emphasizes the importance of college degree attainment among African American HSE students. Findings from this case study revealed that in addition to the fact that participants do not possess secondary school credentials, the following five factors had a major influence on their pipeline to college: Family background, intrinsic motivation and educational values, sociocultural influences, teacher and peer influence, and socioeconomic factors. Study results guided the development of a quality project that proposes PD for HSE educators as an immediate solution to the academic underachievement and college underpreparedness of African American HSE students.

A higher education is slowly but surely becoming the basic education requirement necessary to secure a promising educational, professional, financial, social, and personal future in the 21st century. According to Strong (2007), “the U.S. economy has enabled the college degree to act as a mechanism that maintains or advances one’s social class and

therefore one's power," (p. 52). The higher your education, the more likely you are to lead a prosperous life. Educated individuals possess skills and knowledge that puts them in a better position to contribute to the productivity of society which benefits everyone. African American HSE students may recognize the value of earning a higher education, but depend greatly on the quality of education available at HSE test prep programs as reinforcement while they rebuild their academic career. Furthermore, African American HSE students have every right to reap the benefits and opportunities afforded to individuals who attain a college degree, and quality HSE educators are key stakeholders in their educational journey to higher education. The ultimate goal is to produce college educated African Americans who spread the value of higher education throughout their families, cultures, schools, and communities.

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Appendix A: The Project

**Professional Development (PD) Program for High School
Equivalency (HSE) Educators**



Project Developer/Facilitator:

Jamiyla Chandler-Melton, M.A.Ed.

Walden University Doctoral Student

Project Purpose & Rationale

This project is a Professional Development (PD) program for HSE educators that was developed based on study findings. The purpose of the study was to examine factors that impact African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education. Findings from the case study revealed that study participants' family background, intrinsic motivation and educational values, sociocultural influences, teacher and peer influence, and socioeconomic factors have an influence on their pursuit of higher education. All participants claimed to be interested in going to college after earning the HSE diploma. As adults, they all realize that earning an education is essential to personal, social, and professional advancement. All participants feel that as adults they now value college education. They also believe that how well they do academically at the HSE test prep program in some ways predetermines their college readiness. After careful data analysis, I developed the PD program for HSE educators as a proposed solution to the lack of pursuit of higher education among African American HSE students at the study site. The key stakeholders for this project are HSE educators, students, families, members of the school-community, residents within the surrounding neighborhood, and organizations within the local community.

The overarching goal of the project is to advance HSE educators' expertise on how to serve African American HSE students as well as effectively educate all HSE adult learners. It is a year round program to be implemented from August 2016 to August 2017. This proposed PD program for HSE educators consists of three in-service PD days/modules, workshops, activities, discussions, literature reviews, PowerPoint

presentations, training sessions, videos, guest speakers, certificate-bearing course on HSE Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and teacher book study group. The project is directed at advancing HSE educators' skills, expertise, and andragogical teaching strategies. All staff development opportunities will educate HSE educators on how to meet the needs of their adult learners and implement the best instructional practices to ensure student success. This PD program for HSE educators is designed to address the quality of teaching in order to enhance all students' achievement at the study site.

Goals

The main objective of the PD program for HSE educators is to improve the quality of teaching to enrich all HSE students learning and achievement. Outlined below are the goals of the project:

- a) To assess and further HSE educators' knowledge of factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of college education and adult learning.
- b) To ensure that HSE teachers and administrators understand the concept of adult learning and learn how to effectively implement andragogical practices within their classroom.
- c) To provide HSE educators with formal training on HSE CCSS and adult secondary education.

Outcomes

The PD program for HSE educators was designed to be outcome-based. It is essential to the quality of the PD program that all participants receive a valuable educational and professional experience. The outcomes of the project are the following:

- a) HSE educators possess adequate knowledge of factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education and adult learning.
- b) HSE educators demonstrate an understanding of adult learning concepts by implementing effective andragogical practices within their classroom.
- c) HSE educators possess certification in HSE CCSS and knowledge of adult secondary education.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The timeline for the implementation plan of the professional development project is outlined in detail below:

- August 2016: The initial meeting will take place with HSE administrators prior to the start of the 2016-2017 academic year during the first week in August 2016. An informational meeting will be held two weeks later at the study site with all HSE staff to discuss and schedule the PD program. All HSE educators will receive a copy of the Pre-Professional Development (PD) Program HSE Educators Assessment to submit at the end of the meeting.
- September 2016: The implementation of the PD Program at the study site is scheduled to commence at the start of the new academic year. The first in-service PD day/session will take place on the third Saturday in September. The session will focus on study findings and discussions about how to meet the needs of African American HSE students.
- October 2016 to December 2016: HSE Educators Book Study Group will meet twice each month from October 2016 to December 2016. Participants will engage

in discourse about literature from the book, *African American Students Career and College Readiness: The Journey Unraveled* (Curry & Shillingford, 2015).

- January 2017: The second in-service PD day/session will be scheduled at the beginning of the spring 2017 semester. It will take place on the third Saturday in January. Participants will be presented content on adult learning, learners, and educators through collaborative activities.
- January 2017 to June 2017: The HSE CCSS certificate program will take place over the next 6 months. The course will be presented by Literacy Assistance Center training is scheduled to take place on the third Saturday of every month during which time all HSE educators will actively participate in the HSE CCSS certificate program's online community.
- July 2017: The third in-service day of the PD program will be scheduled to take place at the end of the academic year. It will be held on the third Saturday in July 2017. This session will focus on effective andragogical instruction, lesson planning, and curriculum development. All participants will complete a formative assessment at the end of the session. On Day 3, reflective journals will be collected from all participants. On Day 3, participants will be asked to include one last entry in their reflective journals prior to submission. The final entry should detail their perception of the entire PD program.
- August 2017: There will be a debriefing session planned to review assessments and evaluate the project. The meeting will be held with HSE program administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders at the study site. We will discuss

the outcome of the project, modifications, and necessary improvements for continuation of the PD program the following year.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Listed below are the potential resources and supplies needed to successfully implement this project:

Equipment and Supplies: Meeting room with tables and seating, laptop, Internet connectivity, projector, dry erase board with assorted color markers and eraser, printer, copy machine, and light refreshments.

Materials: Copies of the agendas, PowerPoint presentation slides, worksheets, trainer's notes, calendars, assessments, scholarly journal articles, handouts, CCSS manuals for ELA and Math. Each participant will also receive a copy of the book, *African American Students Career and College Readiness: The Journey Unraveled by Curry and Shillingsford* (2015), a three-ring binder to hold all materials, and a standard one-subject notebook to use as a reflective journal.

Stationery: Copy paper, pens, pencils, stapler, highlighters, paper clips, binders, index cards, post-it notes, poster size paper, construction paper, color markers, name tags, crayons, paper bags, and other basic stationery.

Project Evaluation Plan

Formative and summative assessments will be used to evaluate this project in order to determine what works and what does not. This project includes five assessment tools to evaluate the success of the PD program based on participants' feedback: A pre-program self-assessment, survey for all three in-service PD days, and reflective journal.

Participants will complete the pre-program questionnaire at the conclusion of the informational meeting. Formative evaluations will take place throughout the implementation of the project. Surveys will be provided to participants at the end of each PD day. These evaluation tools will be used to determine if participants think the project initiatives are meaningful to their PD and whether or not learner outcomes are being met.

Reflective journals will be used to assess participants' experiences of the book study group, HSE CCSS course, and overall PD program. All participants will write a three paragraph entry that reflects their personal feedback on material covered at each meeting. On the third PD day, participants will be asked to include one last entry in their reflective journals that details feedback on the entire project. This type of summative assessment tool will provide participants the opportunity to document their own learning. Content from the reflective journals will help me determine exactly what adjustments must be made to the project to ensure a more successful outcome when used in the future.

Agenda & Materials

Pre-Professional Development (PD) Program HSE Educators Self-Assessment

Participants Name: _____ Date: _____

Please take the time to complete this assessment prior to the Professional Development (PD) Program for HSE Educators. Assessments must be submitted on the Day 1 of the PD program. Read each statement below and circle a response on a 1 to 5 Likert scale, where: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I possess at minimum a bachelor's degree.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I possess a degree/certification in the field of education.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have at least 5+ years of experience teaching adult education.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am aware of the changes to the HSE exam or TASC test and tailor curricula to ensure test-takers earn a passing score.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am familiar with the academic achievement gap.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I present teaching and learning practices that are culturally responsive.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I actively participate in professional development opportunities/trainings.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I make connections between content material taught in the classroom and students life experiences.	1	2	3	4	5

9. Differentiated instructional methods are implemented in my HSE classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I work with all HSE students in my classroom on an individual basis.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am familiar with the adult learning theory and apply its principles when teaching HSE students.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I treat HSE students like adults who are self-directed, decision-makers of their own learning.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I present instruction that fosters college and career readiness skills.	1	2	3	4	5
14. To my knowledge, every student was evaluated for academic ability upon enrollment in the HSE program.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Student assessments are both formative and summative to evaluate HSE learners' abilities, progress, and performance.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) were created to tailor curricula and instruction around each HSE students' needs.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Students were provided information about resources available within the local community that are academic, social, medical, and career-based.	1	2	3	4	5
19. The HSE curricula are aligned with TASC exam and focuses on literacy in ELA and mathematics.	1	2	3	4	5

20. Professional development (PD) is	1	2	3	4	5
necessary to improve student achievement.					

Professional Development Program for HSE Educators (Day 1)**Session 1: Study Findings on Factors that Impact African American HSE Students****Pursuit of Higher Education****September 2016****8:00 AM-3:30 PM****Agenda**

- 8:00-8:30 Continental breakfast and Registration
- Participants will sign the attendance sheet, take a name tag, enjoy a light breakfast, and take a seat.
- 8:30-9:00 Welcome: Introductions and Opening Statements
- 9:00- 9:15 Overview of the entire PD Program for HSE Educators
- Discuss the purpose, goals, outcomes, rationale, and implementation plan. Every participant will receive a three-ring binder to keep all their PD program materials organized.
- 9:15-10:15 Icebreaker Workshop: *“Who Do I Serve?”*
- This group activity will serve as the baseline upon which to build HSE teachers knowledge of how to effectively meet the academic needs of all their HSE students.
- 10:15-10:30 Morning break
- 10:30-12:00 PowerPoint Presentation #1: Study findings and discussion
- Presentation on study findings and academic discourse on factors that impact African American HSE students pursuit of higher education
- 12:00-1:00 Lunch break

- 1:00-2:00 Guest Speaker #1: Dr. Maryann Woods-Murphy, Ed.D.
- Dr. Woods-Murphy is an expert on the African American educational experience. She has served African American students among other ethnic minorities at the high school level for years. Dr. Woods-Murphy work demonstrates her efforts to spread awareness to educators among other stakeholders about the impact of culture and racism on African American students. She will be speaking on the topic, *African American Students: Culture, Racism, & the Academic Achievement Gap*. There will be a 10 minute Q&A session to address any questions that participants may have for the guest speaker.
- 2:00-2:15 Networking break
- Participants will have the opportunity to discuss and share their thoughts on the factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of college education with colleagues while enjoying some light refreshments.
- 2:15-3:00 Briefing about the HSE Teachers Book Study Group
- A brief introduction and group discussions about the book, *African American Students Career and College Readiness: The Journey Unraveled* will take place (Curry & Shillingford, 2015). All PD participants will receive a copy of the book. The entire group will discuss the content of the literature selected for the book study group with a brief Q &A session between participants and the facilitator.

- Participants will form groups of five. Groups will be instructed to spark a discussion that addresses each of the following questions: (a) Do you think that this book is an essential reference for educators of HSE students?, (b) what chapter(s) do you feel are the most relevant to your classroom needs based on the title?, and (c) what issues do you face within your HSE school-community that content in this literature may not address?

3:00-3:30 Adjournment

- Conclusion and closing statements
- Discuss the agenda for Day 2
- Distribute and collect the formative assessments for Day 1

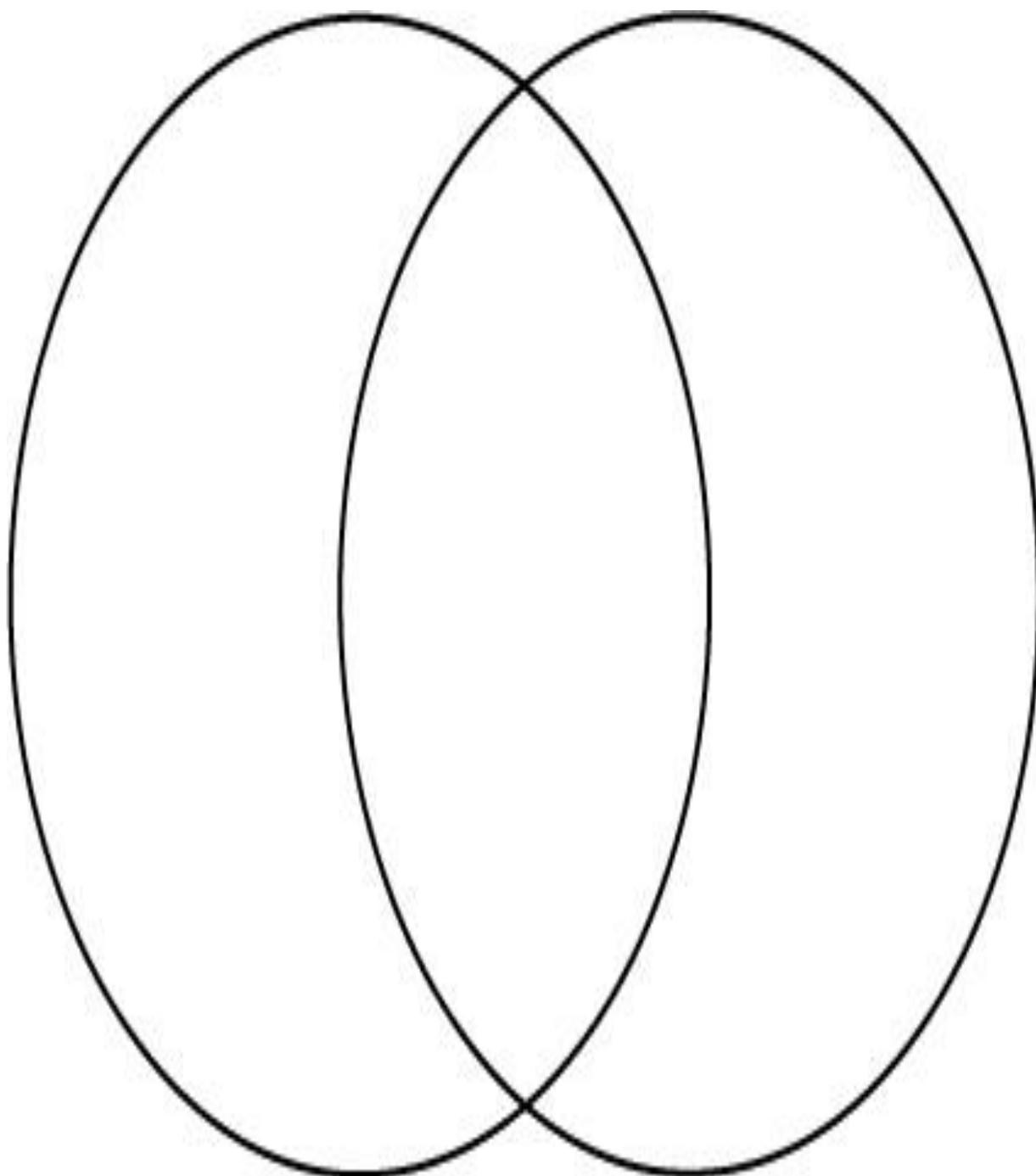
Day 1 Trainer's Notes & Materials

Icebreaker Activity: "Who do I Serve?"

Trainer's Notes: Participants will be provided a blank sheet of white copy paper, crayons, and a pen. They will be asked to draw an illustration of what their average HSE student looks like. After about 10 minutes, the facilitator will request that participants add quote clouds to the picture with thoughts they believe students think are challenges to their academic success. Approximately 10 minutes into the workshop session, everyone will be asked to count off numbers one through four to form groups. Individuals will be expected to introduce themselves to one another while providing a very brief explanation of their illustration. Once settled and seated as a group, they each should say, "Hello, everyone. My name is _____. My job title is _____ and this is who I serve." Each group will be given a sheet with a venn-diagram write down the differences and similarities they can identified between their illustrations. Every group will have the opportunity to have an assigned speaker come to the floor and share with the entire PD group their results. The facilitator will recreate a larger venn-diagram display on the dry erase board. As a whole, all PD participants will perform a cross comparison using each group's results to come to a general consensus about the student populations they serve. A brief discussion will follow that raises HSE educators' awareness of the types of learners they teach.

Materials Needed: For this exercise, each group member will need a blank sheet of copy paper, crayons, and a pen. The group will also need one copy of the venn-diagram below.

The facilitator will require a dry erase board and markers to draw the larger venn-diagram to display for the entire group.

Icebreaker Activity Venn-Diagram

PowerPoint Presentation #1: Study findings and discussion

Trainer's Notes: Please use the slides as both talking and reference points throughout the presentation. The facilitator is free to expand and even elaborate on the content presented as long as it aligns with the topic of focus.

Materials Needed: All participants will be provided a copy of the PowerPoint Presentation Slides for Day 1. They each will be given a pen and highlighter for note taking. The facilitator will need the following supplies: Laptop with Internet connectivity, projector, copy of the PowerPoint presentation including trainer's notes, dry erase board and markers, paper, and a pen. The slides embedded below will guide this PowerPoint presentation.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)
PROGRAM FOR HIGH SCHOOL
EQUIVALENCY (HSE) EDUCATORS

Day 1- Session 1
Presentation #1: Study Findings on Factors that
Impact African American HSE Students Pursuit of
Higher Education

Project Developer/Facilitator:
 Jamiyla Chandler-Melton, M.A.Ed.
 Walden University Doctoral Student



WHAT IS THE RESEARCH PROBLEM?

African American High School Equivalency students are less likely to pursue higher education programs compared to traditional high school graduates and they are not continuing their education at postsecondary or vocational schools once they receive their HSE diploma (Maralani, 2011).

Earning a HSE diploma does not guarantee college aspiration or preparedness, and data shows that only about 10% of HSE recipients possess a postsecondary degree (Rose, 2013).

African American students' college enrollment and completion rates are issues for policymakers to address who declare a commitment to close the academic achievement gap, and should focus on disparities in academic success, performance, aspiration, and preparation for higher learning (Holland, 2011; Jackson, 2012).

JUST SOLVE THE
PROBLEM

RATIONALE

- **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level:**
 - Recent GED statistics indicate that the GED test pass rate in the Northeastern state selected for this study is only 59.4%, which is the lowest in the country compared to the national average of 72.4% (Waldman, 2013).
 - In an attempt to narrow the academic achievement gap, the New York State Department of Education (NYSED) recently introduced a new, improved computer-mediated HSE exam that aligns with Common Core State Standards on January 1, 2014 (SUNY, 2013, 2014).
 - African Americans only make up about 25% of HSE test passers and the few who do pursue postsecondary education do not graduate with a college degree (GED Testing Service, 2014; NCES, 2013; Pondiscio, 2013; Rose, 2013).
- **Evidence of the Problem from Professional Literature:**
 - In the U.S., only seven out of 10 students graduate from high school and go onto college or join the workforce and only half possess the skills to get jobs that pay higher than minimum wage (Wagner, 2008).
 - The rate of African American students who enrolled in college right after high school had increased to 62% between 1990 and 2012 while the percentage of White Americans decreased to 67% (NCES, 2014). College enrollment rates between White Americans and African Americans have narrowed over the years but the gap widens when it comes to bachelor degree attainment (Fry & Krogetad, 2014).
 - Ou (2008) discussed the differences in labor market outcomes among high school dropouts, GED recipients, and high school graduates stating the three educational levels are not considered equivalent by employers and college recruiters.

R **e** **a** **s** **o** **n** **s**
v **s** **a**
E **x** **c** **u** **s** **e**

SIGNIFICANCE



- There is a growing demand for college-educated professionals to join the workforce, but African Americans have not made considerable gains in terms of degree attainment (Kim, 2011).
- High school completers earn an estimated \$10,000 more annually than noncompleters, and individuals with some college credits earn about \$5,000 more than high school diploma holders (SUNY, 2014).
- Educational attainment leads to more opportunities for African Americans to become career professionals who can invest money and knowledge back into their communities (Johnson, 2005).

RESEARCH QUESTION

- The purpose of the doctoral project study was to examine factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education were addressed. The case study answered the following research question:
 - RQ. What factors influence African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education at the select HSE test preparation program?



STUDY FINDINGS

- Findings from the case study revealed that the following factors had an impact on African American HSE students pursuit of college education:
 1. Family background
 2. Intrinsic motivation & educational values
 3. Sociocultural influences
 4. Teacher & peer influence
 5. Socioeconomic factors
- Based on careful analysis of data collected, the main obstacle in the way of participants' pursuit of higher education right now is the fact that they do not possess a HSE diploma.



PROJECT: THE PD PROGRAM FOR HSE EDUCATORS

- The purpose of this PD program is to assess, educate, and foster the best educational practices for HSE educators to positively impact African American HSE and all adult students' academic achievement.
- This PD program for HSE Educators was designed to be outcome-based. It is essential to the quality of the PD program that all participants receive a valuable education and gain professional experience.
- Addressing factors that impact African American HSE students pursuit of college education requires HSE administrators and teachers understand the educational experiences of HSE students. High School Equivalency educators must be well trained to serve African American HSE learners who are taking advantage of another chance to earn a secondary school diploma.



GOALS/OUTCOMES OF THE PD PROGRAM FOR HSE EDUCATORS

Goals of the project:

- a) To assess and further HSE educators' knowledge of factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of college education and adult learning.
- b) To ensure that HSE teachers and administrators understand the concept of adult learning and learn how to effectively implement andragogical practices within their classroom.
- c) To provide HSE educators with formal training on HSE CCSS and adult secondary education.

Outcomes of the project:

- a) HSE educators possess adequate knowledge of factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education and adult learning.
- b) HSE educators demonstrate an understanding of adult learning concepts by implementing effective andragogical practices within their classroom.
- c) HSE educators possess certification in HSE CCSS and knowledge of adult secondary education.



QUESTIONS & COMMENTS



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Guest Speaker #1: Dr. Maryann Woods-Murphy, Ed.D.

- ❖ African American Students: Culture, Racism, & the Academic Achievement Gap
 - What every African American high school student wants you to know?
 - Racism in education: Does it still exist?
 - Diversity in your classroom? What to do?
 - Addressing the academic achievement gap for African American students must involve:
 - A clear understanding of the problem
 - Commitment to finding a solution to meet learners needs inside and outside the classroom
 - Initiatives that factor in the influence that interaction with family, friends, teachers, and peers have on student achievement.
 - Promoting cultural awareness is essential to fostering positive relationships with a diverse community
 - Effectiveness means resourcefulness
 - Teachers should be familiar with resources and services available within the local community that can be a support to their students.

Materials Needed: Each PD participant will be given a copy of the guest speaker notes.

In addition, they will all be provided a few index cards and a pen to write down any questions or comments that come to mind during the presentation. The guest speaker will be provided a laptop with Internet connectivity, projector, dry erase board and markers, a copy of the trainer's and speaker's notes, paper, and a pen.

Briefing: HSE Teachers Book Study Group

Trainer's Notes: A brief introduction and group discussions about the literature for the HSE Teacher Book Study Group will take place. All PD participants will receive a copy of the book, *African American Students Career and College Readiness: The Journey Unraveled* to own (Curry & Shillingford, 2015). Participants will be asked to count off numbers one through five to form groups. Each group will have about 15 minutes to skim through the book to get a general idea of its content. There will be a group leader elected by its members who will facilitate their discussion. He/she will be provided a sheet of copy paper and pen to record their group's consensus on a few discussion questions about the textbook. Group members will be asked to spark a conversation that addresses each of the following questions:

- a) Do you think that this book is an essential reference for educators of HSE students?
- b) What chapter(s) do you feel are the most relevant to your classroom needs based on the title? Please list them below.
- c) What issues do you face within your HSE school-community that content in this literature may not address?

After approximately 10 minutes, each group leader will be given a chance to share their responses to the discussion questions. As an entire group, we will further discuss the content of the literature selected for the book study group with a brief Q & A session between participants and the facilitator.

Materials Needed: There must be a copy of the textbook, *African American Students Career and College Readiness: The Journey Unraveled*, for all PD participants to own (Curry & Shillingford, 2015). For the group activity, the group leader will need a sheet of paper and a pen to write down responses to the posed questions. The facilitator will need a dry erase board and marker to write down the questions that the groups must address during their conversation about the content of the book.

Professional Development (PD) Program for HSE Educators

Formative Feedback Form (Day 1)

Participants Name: _____ Date: _____

A) Please take the time to fill out and submit the questionnaire below to provide feedback on how helpful you found the professional development sessions. Read each statement below and circle a response on a 1 to 3 Likert scale, where: (1) not helpful, (2) somewhat helpful, and (3) very helpful.

	1-Not helpful	2-Somewhat helpful	3-Very helpful
1. Collaboration with colleagues	1	2	3
2. Quality of facilitation	1	2	3
3. Overview of the entire PD program	1	2	3
4. Briefing about the book study group	1	2	3
5. PowerPoint presentation	1	2	3
6. Academic discourse	1	2	3
7. Q&A sessions	1	2	3
8. Content/Information presented	1	2	3
9. Guest speaker	1	2	3
10. Overall experience	1	2	3

B) Please use the space provided below to share your opinions and/or suggestions regarding the PD program.

HSE Educators Book Study Group

The HSE Educators Book Study Group will meet twice a month from October 2016 to December 2016. All PD program participants are expected to attend all the meetings at which the Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development will serve as the book study group leader. The meetings will take place every other Saturday morning (biweekly) beginning on October 8, 2016 except for the Saturday of the Thanksgiving holiday vacation in November. Participants will meet for about two hours in a quiet room at the study site. The last book study meeting will held on the third Saturday in December. The following materials will be needed for every HSE Educators Book Study Group meeting: Individual copies of the book, *African American Students Career and College Readiness: The Journey Unraveled* (Curry & Shillingford, 2015), copy paper, pens, dry erase board and markers, highlighters, index cards, book study group calendar, reflective journals, and light refreshments. Below is a proposed agenda for the book study group meetings:

- 9:00-9:30 All HSE teachers will meet in a quiet room designated for PD at the research site. At the initial meeting, all PD participants will reintroduce themselves and discuss the format of the book study group. Every meeting afterwards, participants will converse openly about previously assigned readings while enjoying some light refreshments.
- 9:30-9:45 There will be 15 minutes set aside to distribute needed materials, take attendance, discuss the book study group calendar and scheduling, and

even address any concerns that participants may pose prior to the book study discussion.

- 9:45-10:45 The following questions will prompt discussions on assigned chapter readings for every book study group meeting:
- What new information did you learn from the assigned readings for this meeting?
 - Did content read give to a new perspective or understanding of how to better serve African American students? If so, explain.
 - How do you plan to address matters discussed in the assigned readings to meet the needs of African American HSE students in your classroom?
 - Did you identify any conflict or connections between literature content, prior knowledge of African American students, and your personal teaching disposition or philosophy? If so, elaborate.
- 10:45-11:00 The last 15 minutes of each meeting will be designated for book group members to share closing remarks/statements. The group leader will remind everyone to write at least a three paragraph entry in their reflective journals about content covered at the meeting.

HSE Educators Book Study Group Calendar

Outlined below is the calendar for the HSE Educators Book Study Group on the book, *African American Students Career and College Readiness: The Journey Unraveled* (Curry & Shillingford, 2015).

- I. Meeting #1: Initial Meeting:
 - a. Introductions and overview of the literature
 - b. Participants will be divided into small groups if necessary
 - c. Discussion about the scheduling of assigned chapter readings and future book study meetings.
- II. Meeting #2:
 - a. Chapter 1-African American and Career and College Readiness
 - b. Chapter 2-Education and Race Case Law and Legislation: The Impact on the Career and College Readiness of African American Students
 - c. Chapter 3-Making a Way Out of No Way: A Contextualized History of African Americans in Higher Education
 - d. Chapter 4-Holland Codes and STEM Careers: Cultural Values and Individual Interest in Career Development for African American Students
- III. Meeting #3:
 - a. Chapter 5-Talent Development as Career Development and College Readiness in Gifted African American Youth
 - b. Chapter 6-Rigor, Course Choice, and Educational Excellence: Positioning African American Students for Future Success
 - c. Chapter 7-Supporting the Transition of African American Students with Specific Learning Disabilities into Post-Secondary Education
- IV. Meeting #4:
 - a. Chapter 8-African American Students and Financial Literacy
 - b. Chapter 9-Employability Skills and Career Development
 - c. Chapter 10-African American First-Generation College Students

- V. Meeting #5:
 - a. Chapter 11-Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Relevance in Modern Education
 - b. Chapter 12-African American Students at PWIs
 - c. Chapter 13-Engaging in Discourse of Policy Analysis and Curriculum that Addresses Poverty and Race: Democracy through Collective Impact Models
- VI. Meeting #6: Final Meeting
 - a. Chapter 14-African American Males: A Career and College Readiness Crisis
 - b. Chapter 15-African American Athletes and Higher Education
 - c. Chapter 16-African American Students Navigating Higher Education Through a Wellness Approach

Professional Development Program for HSE Educators (Day 2)

Session 2: Adult Learning, Learners, & Educators

January 2017

8:00 AM-3:30 PM

Agenda

- 8:00-8:30 Continental breakfast and Sign-in
- Participants will sign the attendance sheet, enjoy a light breakfast, and take a seat.
- 8:30- 9:00 Reflect on Day 1 PD session, discuss the HSE Teacher Book Study Group experience, and agenda for Day 2.
- 9:00-10:45 Videos & an Academic Discussion
- Video clip *The Adult Learner Story* by the American Institute for Research, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqKvlf5HpzA>
 - Video clip *How to Make Adult Students More Successful* by Michael A. Shea, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQ_cbZLyrIE
 - Video clip *Motivating Adult Learners* by Ashley Odom, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aee4ONWZFj0>
- Following the videos presentations, there will be a group activity for participants to engage in academic discourse about adult learning. Small groups will be formed to promote collaboration among HSE educators as they work together to create original handouts that outline key characteristics of adult learners at the HSE site.
- 10:45-11:00 Morning break

11:00-12:00 PowerPoint Presentation #2: Adult Learning, Educators & Education for African American HSE Students.

- Presentation on adult learning theory and practice for HSE educators to effectively meet the needs of African American HSE students.

12:00-1:00 Lunch break

1:00-2:15 Literature Review Activity

There will be a demonstration on how to conduct a literature search for scholarly articles online. Participants will watch the facilitator perform a step-by-step presentation on how to use *Google Scholar* and other online library databases to find current research in the field. The literature review activity will follow which consists of an annotated bibliography assignment on selected scholarly articles.

- Teacher Professional Development:
 - Article #1: “*Conceptualizing Teacher Professional Learning*” (Opfer & Pedder, 2011).
 - Article #2: “*Scaling Up Professional Development in an Era of Common State Standards*” (Smith et al., 2013).
 - Article #3: “*Professional Learning Communities: Practices for Successful Implementation*” (Calabrese, Linder, & Post, 2012).
 - Article #4: “*Positioning Adult Educators in Discourses of Professional Development*” (Edwards & Nicoll, 2011).
- Adult Learning Theory:

- Article #5: “*Teaching Nontraditional Adult Students: Adult Learning Theories in Practice*” (Chen, 2014).
- Article #6: “*Youths Transitioning as Adult Learners*” (Davis, 2014).
- Article #7: “*Meeting the Challenge: Teaching Strategies for Adult Learners*” (Goddu, 2012).
- Article #8: “*Barriers to Adult Learning: Bridging the Gap*” (Falasca, 2011).

2:15-2:30 Networking break

- Participants will have the opportunity to discuss and share their thoughts on the adult learning theory as it applies to student learning and their own professional development over light refreshments.

2:30-3:00 HSE Exam & Common Core State Standards Overview

- All participants will be provided the URL address to access CCSS ELA and Math documents for future reference.
http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/
- The instructor from LAC will provide a brief introduction about the new course offered titled, *Preparing Students for High School Equivalency Using the Common Core State Standards (HSE CCSS) Certificate Program*. He/she will talk about what HSE educators can expect from the course, scheduling of training, and course content.

Participants will receive information about the length of the HSE
CCSS certificate program is six-month and topic to be covered.

3:00-3:30

Adjournment

- Conclusion and closing statements
- Discuss the agenda for Day 3
- Distribute and collect the formative assessments for Day 2

Day 2 Trainer's Notes & Materials

Videos & an Academic Discussion

Trainer's Notes: The group will be divided into small groups of four at the conclusion of the videos presentation. Each group will take a few minutes to discuss their individual point of views about adult learning concepts. Then, the groups will be told to assign a recorder and speaker. They will be asked to create a handout that includes a definition of adult learning and lists key characteristics of adult learners. Group members will brainstorm before agreeing upon a shared perspective for the task. Every group will be provided poster size sheets of paper, markers, pens, highlighters, and other writing supplies. After about 15 minutes, assigned speakers will take turns presenting their group's handout to the entire group. During the last 10 minutes, participants will reflect on knowledge they gained about adult learning and how it serves as a framework to meet the needs of their HSE students.

Materials Needed: The facilitator will need the following supplies: Laptop with Internet connectivity, projector, dry erase board and markers, paper, and a pen. Participants will need poster size paper, pens, markers, highlighter, and other stationery for the group activity.

PowerPoint Presentation #2: Adult Learning, Educators, & Education for African American HSE Students

Trainer's Notes: Please use the slides as both talking and reference points throughout the presentation. The facilitator is free to expand and even elaborate on the content presented as long as it aligns with the topic of focus.

Materials Needed: All participants will be provided a copy of the PowerPoint Presentation slides for Day 2. They each will be given a pen and highlighter for note taking. The facilitator will need the following supplies: Laptop with Internet connectivity, projector, copy of the PowerPoint presentation including trainer's notes, dry erase board and markers, paper, and a pen. The slides embedded below will guide this PowerPoint presentation.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)
PROGRAM FOR HIGH SCHOOL
EQUIVALENCY (HSE) EDUCATORS

Day 2- Session 2
Presentation #2: Adult Learning, Educators, &
Education for African American HSE Students

Project Developer/Facilitator:
 Jamiyla Chandler-Melton, M.A.Ed.
 Walden University Doctoral Student



ADULT LEARNING FOR HSE EDUCATORS

- The adult learning theory explains how and why adults learn differently than children, and how educators must make the switch from traditional teacher to facilitator (Chen 2014; Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2012, 2015; Knowles, 1980, 1995).
- According to Knowles' andragogical model, there are six assumptions about adult learning (Holton et al., 2012, 2015; Knowles, 1990, 1995):
 - (a) adults like to know why they need to learn something
 - (b) adults like to be in control of their learning process,
 - (c) adults bring their life experiences to the classroom,
 - (d) adults benefit from learning that aligns with their position in society,
 - (e) adults tend to show an interest for learning when content relates to real life situations, and
 - (f) adults are intrinsically motivated to learn



ADULT LEARNING FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN HSE STUDENTS

- African American HSE students are adults:
 - Treat them like adults.
 - Teach them like adult
 - Respect the roles and responsibilities they have to fulfill outside of the classroom.
 - Show them that you value their experiences by incorporating them into lessons.
 - Allow them to make decisions about their learning process.
 - Create curricula that makes a connection between course content and real life situations.
 - Learning should be meaningful, relatable, and relevant to their social context.



Adult
Education

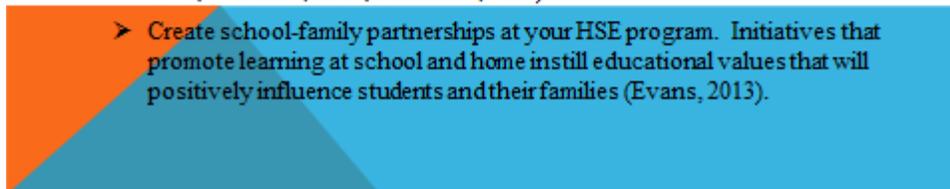


FAMILY AS THE FOUNDATION

- Family support is one of the most influential factors in African American HSE students pursuit of higher education and overall academic achievement.
- As adult learners, African American HSE students aspire for higher education with the hope of one day getting in a better position educationally and professionally to take care of their families.
 - HSE educators must take into account that most African American HSE students have adult responsibilities such as family and work which they perceive to be top priorities when compared to education (Fairchild, 2003).
- Support from family and school encourages higher learning because it provides the capital adult students need once they make the decision to go back to school or embark on a new educational journey (Chartrand, 1992; Fairchild, 2003; Marsman, 2014).



- Create school-family partnerships at your HSE program. Initiatives that promote learning at school and home instill educational values that will positively influence students and their families (Evans, 2013).



SELF-MOTIVATED LEARNERS

- African American HSE students become intrinsically motivated to learn and develop a greater value for education once they reach adulthood.
 - As adult learners, these particular student are self-directed and self-motivated (Knowles, 1980, 1995). They have already to some extent developed their educational values based on past experiences.
 - Consider differentiated teaching methods to implement in the classroom that meets the needs of all HSE learners and sparks their interest for learning.
 - Remember that HSE students come from various backgrounds. It takes a qualified HSE educator who has experience working with diverse student populations to tend to the different academic needs of their adult learners.
 - HSE educators should possess the professional experience and knowledge of adult learning and best teaching strategies that result in success in class and on the exam.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: HSE EDUCATORS AS ADULT LEARNERS

- What can HSE educators do to improve their teaching quality?
 - Active participation in PD programs will provide the training teachers need to meet their adult students academic needs (Kunter et al., 2013; Holton et al., 2012, 2015; Koellner & Jacobs, 2015).
- Teacher professional development is learning for educators that provides them the opportunity to:
 - Advance professionally
 - Address problems affecting their institution
 - Effectively teach students
 - Gain skills and qualifications
 - Advance knowledge in the field of education
 - Become familiar with best instructional practices
 - Model lifelong learning



TEACHER RESOURCEFULNESS, EFFECTIVENESS, & HSE STUDENT SUCCESS

- According to Owede (2014), “Resourcefulness is the effective identification, selection, procurement, and use of teaching/learning resources to enhance achievement, a benchmark for assessing teacher effectiveness,” (p. 152).
 - Effective teachers are resourceful (Smith & Byrum, 2013).
 - Teacher resourcefulness renders greater student success because there is access to a wider network of support (Berry & Gravelle, 2013).
 - Resourceful educators search for and make use of available support and/or services that will assist them in providing their students a quality education (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Owede, 2014; Smith & Byrum, 2013).
- African American HSE students are a disadvantaged group of learners who could learn something about resourcefulness from their teachers. Resourceful students are more capable of navigating around barriers in the way of their pursuit of higher education.
- Are you aware of the resources that are available to adult education professionals and students?



LINKS TO ADULT EDUCATION RESOURCES

- Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS), <http://lincs.ed.gov/>
- American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, <http://www.aaace.org/>
- Commission on Adult Basic Education, <http://www.coabe.org/>
- Community Partnerships for Adult Learning, <http://lincs.ed.gov/programs/community-partnerships-for-adult-learning>
- Employment and Training Administration (U.S. Department of Labor), https://www.doleta.gov/programs/eta_default.cfm
- GED (General Educational Development) Testing Service, <http://www.gedtestingservice.com/ged-testing-service>
- International Association for Continuing Education and Training, <http://www.iacet.org/>
- LiteracyLink, <http://litlink.iacet.org/>



ADDITIONAL LINKS TO ADULT EDUCATION RESOURCES

- National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium, <http://www.naepdc.org/>
- National Center for Family Literacy, <http://www.familieslearning.org/>
- The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, <http://www.ncsall.net/>
- NYS Education Department, Adult Education Programs and Policy, <http://www.access.nysed.gov/aep/welcome-adult-education-programs-and-policy-aep>
- Literacy Assistance Center, <http://www.lacnyc.org/>
- New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy, <http://www.nyccaliteracy.org/>
- New York Association for Continuing/Community Education, <http://www.nyacce.org/>



RESOURCES



QUESTIONS & COMMENTS



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Literature Review Activity:

Trainer's Notes: The facilitator will perform a demonstration on how to conduct a literature search for scholarly articles online. Participants will watch the step-by-step presentation on how to use *Google Scholar* and other online library databases to find current research in the field. They will learn how to locate and download articles. Shortly afterwards, the facilitator will display a list of articles available for the literature review activity on the projector. There will be eight scholarly articles listed: four articles on teacher professional development and four articles on adult learning. Participants will be asked to choose two scholarly articles to use for the activity; one for each topic. Copies of the articles will be numbered and laid out on a table for participants to select on their own. They each will be provided two copies of the Literature Review Activity Worksheet to complete the annotated bibliographies for both articles. The facilitator will instruct participants to take 25 minutes to read their articles. Then, participants will use the worksheets to write up the annotated bibliographies. This activity will allow participants to exercise their research skills. It will require participants to demonstrate their ability to find literature, determine if a source is reputable, synthesize information, identify the outcomes/results of a research study, and use correct APA citation.

Materials Needed: Participants will pick one scholarly article from each topic. Below is a list of the articles available to use for the literature review activity:

Teacher Professional Development: *Conceptualizing Teacher Professional Learning* (Opfer & Pedder, 2011), *Scaling Up Professional Development in an Era of Common State Standards*" (Smith et al., 2013), *Professional Learning Communities: Practices for*

Successful Implementation (Calabrese, Linder, & Post, 2012), and *Positioning Adult Educators in Discourses of Professional Development* (Edwards & Nicoll, 2011). *Adult Learning Theory: Teaching Nontraditional Adult Students: Adult Learning Theories in Practice* (Chen, 2014), *Youths Transitioning as Adult Learners* (Davis, 2014), *Meeting the Challenge: Teaching Strategies for Adult Learners* (Goddu, 2012), and *Barriers to Adult Learning: Bridging the Gap* (Falasca, 2011).

All participants will also be provided two copies of the Literature Review Activity Worksheets, a pen, and highlighter for note taking. The facilitator will need the following supplies: Laptop with Internet connectivity, projector, dry erase board and markers, copies of all scholarly articles, paper, and a pen.

HSE Exam & Common Core State Standards Overview:

Trainer's Notes: The facilitator will provide participants with the URL address to access CCSS ELA and Math documents in their spare time. The information will be displayed on the projector for them to write down. Then, the facilitator will introduce the instructor from the LAC to the PD group. He/she will provide a brief introduction about the new course offered titled, *Preparing Students for High School Equivalency Using the Common Core State Standards (HSE CCSS) Certificate Program*. This short presentation will include details about what HSE educators can expect from the course, scheduling of training, and course content. Participants will be made aware that the HSE CCSS certificate program is 6 months and the following topics will be covered: Introduction, reading, writing, social studies, science, and math I & II (LAC, n.d.).

Materials Needed: The facilitator will need a laptop with Internet connectivity, projector, dry erase board and markers, paper, and a pen. Participants will need paper and any writing utensil for note taking.

Professional Development (PD) Program for HSE Educators

Formative Feedback Form (Day 2)

Participants Name: _____ Date: _____

A) Please take the time to fill out and submit the questionnaire below to provide feedback on how helpful you found the professional development sessions. Read each statement below and circle a response on a 1 to 3 Likert scale, where: (1) not helpful, (2) somewhat helpful, and (3) very helpful.

	1-Not helpful	2- Somewhat helpful	3-Very helpful
1. Academic discourse	1	2	3
2. Literature review activity	1	2	3
3. Videos viewed	1	2	3
4. Collaboration with colleagues	1	2	3
5. PowerPoint Presentation	1	2	3
6. Content/Information presented	1	2	3
7. Quality of facilitation	1	2	3
8. Overview of HSE CCSS course	1	2	3
9. Links to additional resources and support	1	2	3
10. Overall experience	1	2	3

B) Please use the space provided below to share your opinions and/or suggestions regarding the PD program.

Professional Development Program for HSE Educators (Day 3)
Session 3: Andragogical Teaching Strategies, Lesson Planning, & Curriculum
Development
July 2017
8:00 AM-3:30 PM
Agenda

- 8:00-8:30 Continental breakfast and Sign-in
- Participants will sign the attendance sheet, take a name tag, enjoy a light breakfast, and take a seat.
- 8:30- 9:00 Reflect on PD sessions from Day 1 and 2, share feedback on the HSE Educators Book Study Group and HSE CCSS course, and discuss items on the agenda for Day 3.
- 9:00-10:15 Watch & Learn about Andragogy
- Video clip *1 Andragogy - The Adult Learner* by TAMUC DrDawg, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RssPiq3-XKM>
 - Video clip *2 Andragogy - Characteristics of the Adult Learner* by TAMUC DrDawg, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HUNcCks7A>
 - Video clip *3 Andragogy - Strategies for Instruction* by TAMUC DrDawg, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSBswXPYXTs>
 - Video clip *4 Andragogy vs Pedagogy A Comparison of Learners* by TAMUC DrDawg, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cBAkgK_s5g

- Video clip *5 Andragogy vs Pedagogy A Comparison of Process* by TAMUC DrDawg,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSupWyxNIN0>

After viewing the video series on andragogy, participants will engage in a group discussion and activity. Academic discourse will be guided by questions that pertain to implementation of andragogical practices in the HSE classroom.

10:15-10:30 Morning break

10:30-12:00 Group Lesson-Planning Activity

- Participants will work collaboratively in groups to create new lesson plans for their HSE students. This activity will require participants to apply their knowledge of HSE exam content, CCSS, and andragogical teaching methods. The completed Group Lesson-Planning Activity Worksheets will serve as a reference point for participants when creating HSE lesson plans in the future. At the conclusion of this activity, participants will engage in an open discussion about the lesson plans designed by their colleagues.

12:00-1:00 Lunch break

1:00-2:00 HSE Administrator Plans for Change

- The Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development will present plans to reform the HSE program at the study site to participants. All participants will receive a copy of the handout HSE

Administrators Plans for Change. There will be a brief Q&A session at the end of this segment for participants' inquiries about proposed changes to be addressed.

2:00-2:15 Networking break

- Participants will have the opportunity to discuss and share their thoughts on the best instructional practices for HSE learners and how professional development has honed their teaching skills over light refreshments.

2:15-2:45 Testimonials

The facilitator will designate this time for participants to share brief testimonials about their overall experience in the PD program for HSE educators.

2:45-3:30 Adjournment: Wrap-up and final statements

- Q&A session
- Final reflective journal entry
 - Participants will write a final entry in their reflective journals.
The entry should be a detailed summary about their entire experience participating in the PD program for HSE educators.
- Distribute and collect Day 3 formative assessment. Collect all reflective journals.

Day 3 Trainer's Notes & Materials

Watch & Learn about Andragogy

Trainer's Notes: After the video series presentation on andragogy, the group will be divided into smaller groups of five. The facilitator will instruct each group to engage in a discussion that addresses the following questions:

- a) How do you plan to implement recommended andragogical instructional strategies to meet the academic needs of African American HSE students?
- b) Based on your professional experience, what teaching methods do you think are most effective to better prepare African American HSE students academically to perform well on the HSE exam and at the college level?
- c) What challenges do you anticipate to face when implementing new teaching strategies in your HSE classroom? How do you intend to address resistance to change from students?

After about 15 minutes, the entire PD group will reconvene. An open discussion will take place so the whole group can come to a consensus about which teaching methods are most effective to meet the need of adult students. All participants will work collaboratively and brainstorm recommendations for andragogical teaching methods to implement in their HSE classrooms. The facilitator will compile a list on the dry erase board of the top five andragogical strategies participants suggest will enhance HSE student learning. The list will be used for the group lesson-planning activity that follows.

Materials Needed: The facilitator will need the following supplies: Laptop with Internet connectivity, projector, dry erase board and markers, paper, and a pen. Participants will need paper, pens, markers, highlighter, and other stationery.

Group Lesson-Planning Activity

Trainer's Notes: The facilitator will write the items from the list on index cards. The five index cards will be folded and placed in a paper bag. In the meantime, participants will be randomly divided into five groups. The facilitator will write the following HSE test content on index cards and place them in a separate paper bag: Writing, reading, math, social studies, and science. Once all materials are properly arranged and participants are settled, instructions for the activity will be provided. Groups will receive a copy of the Group Lesson-Planning Activity Worksheet and CCSS manuals. One person from each group will pick an index card from each paper bag. Each group will have selected a different instructional strategy and subject area to use for their lesson plan. Group members will work cooperatively to create a lesson plan that demonstrates their team-building skills, teaching experience, and ability to foster HSE student learning. This activity will require participants to develop new lessons plans for HSE classes that use differentiated teaching methods to address the academic needs of adult learners. The facilitator will collect completed lesson plans from the groups at the conclusion of the activity. Copies of all lesson plans will be provided to participants to use for future reference. The entire group will engage in an open discussion and share feedback on the lesson plans created by their fellow colleagues.

Materials Needed: The facilitator will need the following supplies: Laptop with Internet connectivity, projector, dry erase board and markers, paper, pen, paper bags, and index cards. Each group will need a Group Lesson-Planning Activity Worksheet, copies of CCSS manuals for ELA and math, paper, pens, and other stationery.

Group Lesson-Planning Activity Worksheet

Instructor(s): _____

Content/Subject: _____

Instructional Method: _____

Common Core State Standard(s) Addressed:

Lesson Objective(s):

Learner Outcomes:

Materials Needed:

HSE Administrators Plans for Change

Trainer's Notes: The facilitator will instruct participants to settle down and have a seat when returning from the lunch break. All materials will be distributed to participants. The facilitator will then give Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development the floor. The discussion about proposed changes to the HSE program will conclude with a Q&A session. Any questions and comments participants pose about reform to the HSE will be addressed.

Materials Needed: Participants will receive a copy of the HSE Administrators Plans for Change Handout. They each will also be provided a few index cards and a pen to write down any questions or comments that come to mind during the presentation. The Director of Adult Education and Workforce Development will be provided a laptop with Internet connectivity, projector, dry erase board and markers, a copy of the HSE Administrators Plans for Change Handout, paper, and a pen.

HSE Administrators Plans for Change Handout

❖ Outlined below are proposed changes for HSE teachers' professional and curriculum development at the study site.

1. Establish a Professional Learning Community (PLC)

- Building a PLC for HSE educators is essential to the successful implementation of HSE program reform that is focused on enhancing student learning by way of teacher professional development (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012; Watson, 2012).
- Implement an ongoing PD program for HSE educators.
- Schedule biweekly faculty meetings to allow members of the PLC to collaborate on a regular basis.
- Require HSE teachers to complete the HSE CCSS certificate training program.
- Modify teacher performance evaluations.
- Render PD training mandatory for both novice and seasoned HSE teachers.
- Foster relationships among HSE faculty through collaboration and team-building activities.
- Partner with stakeholders from the local community to build relationships that can enrich the quality of education available to HSE students.



2. Develop a new HSE curriculum

- Design a new curriculum to meet the needs of adult HSE students with particular attention on African American HSE students.
- Consider information from the PD program for HSE educators when developing a new HSE curriculum for the 2017-2018 academic year.



- Apply knowledge gained from the HSE CCSS course to develop a curriculum that will academically prepare African American HSE student for the HSE exam and college level learning.
- Incorporate andragogic teaching methods into the curriculum to enhance the educational experience of adult HSE students.
- Require HSE learners to be responsible for their own learning by incorporating self-assessments into the student evaluation plan.
- Offer academic advising, tutoring, counseling, college prep, job training, and other support services to increase African American HSE students' access to higher education.

Professional Development (PD) Program for HSE Educators

Formative Feedback Form (Day 3)

Participants Name: _____ Date: _____

A) Please take the time to fill out and submit the questionnaire below to provide feedback on how helpful you found the professional development sessions. Read each statement below and circle a response on a 1 to 3 Likert scale, where: (1) not helpful, (2) somewhat helpful, and (3) very helpful.

	1-Not helpful	2- Somewhat helpful	3-Very helpful
1. Academic discourse	1	2	3
2. Group lesson-planning activity	1	2	3
3. HSE administrators proposal for change handout	1	2	3
4. Collaboration with colleagues	1	2	3
5. Testimonials from participants	1	2	3
6. Content/Information presented	1	2	3
7. Quality of facilitation	1	2	3
8. Q&A session	1	2	3
9. Videos viewed	1	2	3
10. Overall experience	1	2	3

B) Please use the space provided below to share your opinions and/or suggestions regarding the PD program.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Letter

You are invited to take part in a research study about factors that influence the educational experience and interest in higher education among African American High School Equivalency (HSE) students. The researcher is inviting African American students currently enrolled in a HSE test preparation program who are at least 18 years old to participate in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Jamiyla Chandler-Melton, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine factors that impact African American High School Equivalency students’ pursuit of higher education.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a focus group and individual interview session each expected to last from 45 minutes to one hour that will be audio recorded.
- Participate in a members check session with the researcher to review the transcription of your interview sessions for verification purposes. This will entail a discussion about initial findings to ensure the data presented accurately reflects your thoughts and feelings.

Study participants will be provided a copy of the interview questions prior to the focus group and individual interviews. Here are some sample questions:

- What are your thoughts about pursuit of higher education? Why or why not?
- What does being African American mean to you?
- What factors could have supported your pursuit of higher education?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at the school/preparation program will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves minimal risks. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. This study has the potential to benefit the educational experience of HSE students.

Payment:

There will be no payment, thank you gifts, or reimbursements provided for your participation in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. Participants are expected to keep all information shared during the focus group interview session confidential as well. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by the researcher. She will keep all data collected throughout the research study locked away in a personal safe located at her residence on a password-protected USB drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via mobile phone [REDACTED]. If you have questions about your right as a research participant, you are welcome to contact the Walden representative who can discuss these with you by phone (001-612-312-1210) or email atirb@waldenu.edu. The Walden University's approval number for this study is **08-04-15-0301687** and it expires on **August 3, 2016**.

I will provide you with two copies of this form. Please sign and return one and keep the other copy for your record.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Protocol, Questions, and Reflection Notes

My name is Jamiyla Chandler-Melton. I am conducting a research study titled, “*Factors that Impact African American High School Equivalency (HSE) Students’ Pursuit of Higher Education.*” I am inviting African American HSE students to participate in the study. I hope the data I collect will help to improve ethnic minorities’ pursuit of higher education. I will be asking you several questions about your educational experiences and cultural beliefs and values as they relate to pursuing higher education.

First, there is no right or wrong answers to the questions addressed during this group discussion. I am only interested in understanding factors that African American HSE students believe influence their pursuit of higher education. Second, you should not feel obligated to agree or disagree with anyone in the room. I encourage you to share your honest feelings, opinions, and perceptions because I want to obtain different perspectives on the topic of discussion. There are _____ people participating in this group interview. Therefore, it is expected that everyone will have a different view to share on the matter. Third, please feel comfortable sharing both positive and negative opinions. I am not endorsing one specific way of thinking about African Americans and higher education. I just want to better understand factors that influence African American HSE students’ pursuit of higher education. Fourth, I ask that you speak one at a time because I need to hear everyone’s views. Please show each other respect during this group interview. Lastly, when it is your turn to respond to a question, please state your first name so that when I transcribe the audiotape later I will know who is speaking. For example, you should say, “This is Mary.” Or, “This is John speaking.”

This group interview session will be audio recorded and should take about an hour. I will be facilitating this group interview. Please be assured that all information will be used for the purpose of this study and remain confidential. No one other than the researcher will ever have access to the audiotape or any other data collected. Your identity will be kept confidential throughout the transcript and research manuscript in which real names will be replaced by numeric pseudonyms. You all will later be asked to review the findings of the study for the purpose of member checking. If you have any questions during the interview please feel free to ask them. At any time you can choose not to answer a question. You can also choose to leave the interview at any time for whatever reason. Before I begin, do you have any questions?

Research question to be addressed in the study:

RQ. What factors influence African American HSE students' lack of pursuit of higher education at the study site?

Facilitator Name: _____ Date: _____

Time: _____ Location: _____

Interviewees/Participants in Attendance:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Group Interview Question	Responses	Interviewer Notes
1. What are your thoughts about pursuit of higher education? Why or why not?		
2. How do you believe educational experiences have impacted your pursuit of higher education?		
3. In what ways has interaction with teachers, peers, and family influenced your pursuit of higher education?		
4. Are there other factors that influenced your pursuit of higher education? If so, tell me more.		

5. What do you believe may increase the likelihood that you will pursue higher education after earning your HSE diploma?		
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Thank you everyone again for agreeing to participate in the study. Your cooperation and participation in this group interview session is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix D: Individual Interview Protocol, Questions, and Reflection Notes

My name is Jamiyla Chandler-Melton. I am conducting a research study titled, “*Factors that Impact African American High School Equivalency (HSE) Students’ Pursuit of Higher Education.*” I am inviting African American HSE students to participate in the study. I hope that the data that I collect will help to improve ethnic minorities’ pursuit of higher education. I will be asking you several questions about your educational experiences and cultural beliefs and values as they relate to pursuing higher education.

This one-on-one interview will be audio recorded and should take about 45 minutes to one hour. Please be assured that all information will remain confidential. No one other than me will have access to the audiotape or any other data collected. Your identity will be kept confidential throughout the transcript and research manuscript in which real names will be replaced by numeric pseudonyms. You will be later asked to review the findings of the study for the purpose of member checking. If you have any questions during the interview please feel free to ask them. At any time you can choose not to answer a question. You can also choose to discontinue the interview at any time. Before I begin, do you have any questions?

Research question to be addressed in the study:

RQ. What factors influence African American HSE students’ lack of pursuit of higher education at the study site?

Interviewee Name: _____ Interviewee Ethnicity: _____

Interviewee Age: _____ # of HSE test attempts: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Location: _____

Interview Question	Response	Interviewer Notes
1. Tell me about your background		
2. How do you ethnically identify yourself?		
3. What does being African American mean to you?		

4. Growing up what were your family members, teachers, peers, and personal attitudes about going to college?		
5. Growing up did you have college educated African American role models?		
6. Growing up did you think about going to college? Why or why not?		
7. Were there traditions, customs, practices, values that influenced your attitude towards college?		
8. Did you talk to your family about going to college? What was their reaction?		
9. Have other family members attended college?		
10. Can you describe any cultural factors or values that have impacted your decision to pursue higher education?		
11. What factors could have supported your pursuit of higher education?		
12. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about pursuit of higher education?		

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in the study. Your cooperation and participation is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]

Appendix F: Invitation Letter

Factors that Influence African American High School Equivalency (HSE)
Students' Pursuit of Higher Education

To Whom It May Concern:

Jamiyla Chandler-Melton, a doctoral candidate attending Walden University, will be conducting a research study as part of the program requirements for her doctoral degree in Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning, and she would like to invite you to participate in this study. She is studying factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education.

If you wish to participate in the study an informational meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 7, 2015. At this meeting, Jamiyla Chandler-Melton will provide information about the study. If you choose to participate in the study, you will participate in a focus group interview and individual interview that should last 45 minutes to one hour. All interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription. All interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription. Participation is confidential. You do not have to participate in this study. If you agree to participate and for whatever reason you decide to no longer be involved you can quit at any point.

At the informational meeting you will be provided with two copies of an Informed Consent Form that details your rights and protections as a participant. You will be asked to sign and return one copy of the form to Jamiyla Chandler-Melton.

If you have questions, please contact Jamiyla Chandler-Melton at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(list academic advisor signature and contact information)

Appendix G: Reminder Email Message

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Jamiyla Chandler-Melton. I am a doctoral candidate attending Walden University. I am conducting a research study on factors that impact African American HSE students' pursuit of higher education. Thank you for attending the presentation of the study yesterday.

Please remember that if you would like to participate in the study take the time to read, sign, and return the informed consent letters. You will participate in a focus group interview and individual interview that should last 45 minutes to one hour. All interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription. Participation is confidential. You do not have to participate in this study. If you agree to participate and for whatever reason you decide to no longer be involved you can quit at any point.

Informed consent letters from participants are due tomorrow (insert date). If you are interested in participating in the study, please be sure to sign and return one copy of the informed consent letter to me and keep the other for your record. The focus group interview session will take place within the following 1 to 2 days on (insert date) at the study site after instructional time. If you have questions, please contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jamiyla Chandler-Melton

Jamiyla Chandler-Melton

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