

Western Kentucky University

TopSCHOLAR®

Dissertations

Graduate School

8-2023

College for What . . . How Middle School Students from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds Perceived Post-Secondary Education

Michelle Patrick

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/diss>



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#), [Elementary Education and Teaching Commons](#), and the [Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

COLLEGE FOR WHAT...HOW MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM LOW
SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS PERCEIVED POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education

Department of Education
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

By
Michelle E. Patrick

August, 2023

COLLEGE FOR WHAT...HOW MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS PERCEIVED POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Date Recommended June 30, 2023

Nick Brake

Digitally signed by Nick Brake
Date: 2023.07.10 20:59:20 -05'00'

Nicholas Brake, Chair

Gary W. Houchens

Digitally signed by Gary W. Houchens
Date: 2023.07.11 08:41:12 -05'00'

Gary Houchens, Chair

Daniel Super

Digitally signed by Daniel Super
Date: 2023.07.11 08:50:01 -05'00'

Daniel Super

Ranjit T. Koodali Digitally signed by Ranjit T. Koodali
Date: 2023.07.18 14:18:13 -05'00'

Assoc. Provost, Rsrch & Grad Edu Date

ABSTRACT

COLLEGE FOR WHAT...HOW MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS PERCEIVED POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

This study examines the attitudes and perceptions of middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds about attending post-secondary institutions. As research continues to explore the experiences of traditional high school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and students' attendance into post-secondary institutions, research concerning middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds preparedness for college attendance has been limited. Using a phenomenological research design to obtain the study's results from fifteen students and thirteen parent interviews provided insight into the "lived experience" of the students' and parents' attitudes and perceptions regarding college attendance. The study found that regardless of the parents' and students' "lived experience," participants believed attending college was still obtainable. It concludes by stating those barriers that have historically hindered college attendance for traditional high school students and first-generation college students are also causing the same restrictions for middle school students. The research suggests that much is still needed to promote college attendance for middle students and that educators and families must start much earlier than the ninth grade. The study also suggests middle school students need exposure to rigorous coursework and career education to direct a middle school student's career path.

Keywords: middle school, and career awareness

I dedicate this dissertation to my late parents and my sisters,
Monica Renee and Tabitha Elizabeth

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to take this time to express my deepest gratitude to my family and friends, that God has sent throughout my life to help mold me into the human being I am today.

First and foremost, I want to start with two teachers, Miss Smith, a Presbyterian kindergarten teacher who found me, a "black child," to be very special in the 1960s and would allow me to finger paint quite often, and Mrs. Helen Smith, who was an outstanding fourth-grade teacher whose dedication and compassion for her students inspired me to become a teacher .

I want to acknowledge and thank two special school friends, Ms. Rita Warfield and Ms. Deborah T. Burns. These women have kept me going through some personal and challenging times by telling me to keep moving forward to reach "our" goal.

I want to acknowledge three exceptional colleagues I consider mentors: Ms. Susie Dillard, Ms. Veronica Wright, and Dr. Eugene Kelly. These individuals have constantly challenged and guided me throughout my career.

I want to acknowledge and offer my sincerest thanks to Dr. Bonnie Marshall. Her constant support by asking me this simple question, "Are you working?", and her handholding throughout this process which has been invaluable, and I am forever grateful for her support.

I want also to acknowledge my outstanding and incredible committee. Thank you, Dr. Brake, Dr. Houchens, and Dr. Super, for your supervision and unwavering guidance and support throughout the entire process. Your expertise, insight, and comments were important to the shaping of my research in a meaningful way. I want to thank Mr. Ben Johnson, Ms. Joann James, and Ms. Annie Heigler for providing access to students, parents, and facilities.

Finally, I want to thank my grandmother the late Mrs. Mattie Jackson who always talked to my sisters and me about the importance of education and was very proud to tell anyone who

would stand and listen about her three granddaughters who had earned college degrees.

I offer my sincerest thanks to everyone!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT..... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

TABLE OF CONTENTS vii

LIST OF TABLES xiii

LIST OF FIGURES xiv

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION..... 1

Introduction..... 1

Background of the Problem 1

Problem Statement 2

Purpose of the Study 4

Research Questions 5

Overview of Research Design 6

Significance of the Study 7

Definition of Terms..... 8

Assumptions and Limitation of the Study 9

Summary 10

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW 12

Search Strategy 13

| | |
|---|----|
| Historical Context of Middle School Reform..... | 13 |
| The Contemporary Context of the Middle School Concept | 17 |
| Conceptual Framework for the Study..... | 19 |
| Factors that Hinder College Attendance | 23 |
| Parent/Teacher/Child Relationships..... | 28 |
| Student Support..... | 33 |
| Summary..... | 39 |
| CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY | 41 |
| Research Design..... | 42 |
| The Phenomenological Method | 43 |
| Role of the Researcher | 43 |
| Researcher’s Background | 44 |
| Population and Sample | 45 |
| Demographics Related to Participant Selection..... | 46 |
| Participant Identification..... | 47 |
| Research Questions..... | 48 |
| Procedures..... | 49 |
| Open-Ended Questionnaire..... | 50 |
| Interviews..... | 51 |
| Artifact Review | 52 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Trustworthiness | 52 |
| Data Analysis | 53 |
| Limitations | 54 |
| Conclusion | 55 |
| CHAPTER IV: RESULTS | 57 |
| Introduction..... | 57 |
| Participants Description | 57 |
| Central Research Question..... | 61 |
| Data Collection | 61 |
| Data/Theme Analysis | 62 |
| Research Question One..... | 64 |
| Student Survey Question 1.1..... | 65 |
| Student Survey Question 1.2..... | 66 |
| Student Survey Question 1.3..... | 67 |
| Student Survey Question 1.4 and Student Survey Question 1.5..... | 68 |
| Student Survey Question 1.9..... | 70 |
| Parent Survey Question 1..... | 72 |
| Parent Survey Question 8..... | 73 |
| Parent Survey Question 11..... | 75 |
| Research Question Two | 76 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Student Survey Question 2.1 and Student Survey Question 2.2..... | 78 |
| Student Survey Question 2.3 and Student Survey Question 2.4..... | 81 |
| Student Survey Question 2.5 and Student Survey Question 2.6..... | 83 |
| Student Survey Question 2.7..... | 84 |
| Student Survey Question 2.8 and Student Survey Question 2.9..... | 85 |
| Student Survey Question 2.10..... | 86 |
| Student Survey Question 2.11..... | 87 |
| Parent Survey Question 2..... | 88 |
| Parent Survey Question 3..... | 90 |
| Parent Survey Question 4..... | 91 |
| Parent Survey Question 5..... | 92 |
| Parent Survey Question 6..... | 93 |
| Parent Survey Question 7..... | 95 |
| Parent Survey Question 9..... | 96 |
| Parent Survey Question 10..... | 96 |
| Research Question Three | 98 |
| Student Survey Question 3.1..... | 100 |
| Student Survey Question 3.2..... | 100 |
| Student Survey Question 3.3..... | 101 |
| Student Survey Question 3.4..... | 102 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Student Survey Question 3.5..... | 102 |
| Student Survey Question 3.6..... | 103 |
| Student Survey Questions 3.7..... | 104 |
| Student Survey Question 3.8..... | 105 |
| RQ3 Sub-theme 3a..... | 106 |
| RQ3 Sub-theme 3b..... | 111 |
| Student Survey Question 1.6..... | 117 |
| Student Survey Question 1.7 and Student Survey Question 1.8..... | 118 |
| Conclusion | 120 |
| CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION..... | 122 |
| Introduction..... | 122 |
| Summary of Findings..... | 123 |
| Discussion..... | 124 |
| Research Question 1 | 125 |
| Research Question 2 | 127 |
| Research Question 3 | 130 |
| Leadership Implications..... | 132 |
| Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research..... | 138 |
| Conclusion | 139 |
| REFERENCES | 143 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Appendix A: Interview Script | 154 |
| Appendix B: Student Research Interview Recording Sheets..... | 155 |
| Appendix C: Arlin-Hill Student Attitude Surveys | 157 |
| Appendix D: Parent Research Interview Protocol and Materials | 159 |
| Appendix E: Letter of Introduction..... | 163 |
| Appendix F: Consent Letter from Organization | 165 |
| Appendix G: Consent/Assent Letter | 166 |
| APPENDIX H: WKU/ IRB Approval Letter | 168 |
| APPENDIX I: IRB Stamped Approval Consent Document (Focus Group)..... | 170 |
| APPENDIX J: IRB Stamped Informed Consent Document..... | 172 |
| APPENDIX K: IRB Stamped Informed Assent Document..... | 174 |

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Student Participants’ Gender..... 58

Table 2. Participants’ Educational Level..... 58

Table 3. Parent/Guardian-to-Student Relationship 58

Table 4. Parent Participants Highest Level of Education 59

Table 5. Race/Ethnicity of Student Participants 60

Table 6. Race/Ethnicity of Parent Participants 60

Table 7. Research Question One 64

Table 8. Parents’ Survey Responses..... 70

Table 9. Parents’ Survey Response 71

Table 10. Research Question Two..... 76

Table 11. Research Question Three 98

Table 12. Arlin-Hills Attitudes Toward Teachers..... 107

Table 13. Arlin-Hills Attitudes Towards Teachers 108

Table 14. Arlin-Hills Attitudes Toward School..... 111

Table 15. Arlin-Hills Attitudes Towards School 112

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Expectancy-Value Model..... 20

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In this phenomenological research study, the researcher used Expectancy-Value Theory to explore the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of middle school students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds who wanted to obtain a post-secondary education. While research has explored the experiences of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and post-secondary participation, research on middle school students' attitudes toward attending a post-secondary institution is limited.

Background of the Problem

In 1997 Kentucky legislators examined how their constituents were faring economically, socially, and educationally (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2017, p. 5). After reviewing the data and to better understand the complexities of why Kentuckians were not living financially at or above the national average, the Kentucky lawmakers adopted legislation setting a new education agenda for the state. They established a goal of raising the post-secondary graduation rate from 45% to 60%. Data analyses further revealed to the legislators that to strengthen the state's economy, improve the quality of life for its citizens, and create greater individual prosperity, more Kentucky residents needed to take advantage of post-secondary opportunities. Consequently, the legislators established the Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997 (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2017). Legislators believed that providing the Council of Post-Secondary Education the authority to implement much-needed changes, such as improving college readiness and enrollment, producing more certificates and degrees aligned with the workforce needs, and increasing collaborative efforts to increase middle and elementary schools with early college awareness activities, this would result

in increased graduation rates and college attainment in Kentucky (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2017).

Problem Statement

As of 2017, there are more than 40 licensed public and independent colleges and universities that grant unique degrees in various areas and careers (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2017, p. 4). Also, Kentucky has established nationally ranked graduate and professional programs throughout the Commonwealth (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2017). These graduate and professional programs generate new knowledge and advanced research that provides career training for students of every age and income level. With Kentucky having this abundance of education opportunities, why do many Kentuckians view obtaining a postsecondary degree as unattainable? How can our current educational system help more Kentucky students access and utilize all the available educational opportunities that could potentially strengthen the commonwealth's economy, improve the quality of life of its citizens, and create greater individual prosperity?

Research from the policy report of American College of Testing has shown that several factors have impacted many of the efforts to increase college attainment (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). One factor is how the educational systems throughout the country have been too traditional in their approach to assisting students with making decisions about postsecondary degree attainment.

Kayla Patrick, a policy analyst on P-12 at The Education Trust (2020), proposed that educational disparities and unequal access are driven almost entirely by tracking within schools in Kentucky (p. 2). Patrick (2020) also stated, "Advanced Coursework opportunities can place students on the path toward college and career success" (p. 2). One by-product of the tracking

system is that many “unidentified and talented” students are denied opportunities to obtain information and preparation that would put them on a “college going” track. Only high school students who show a high aptitude for academic achievement are selected by educators to explore opportunities associated with attending institutions of higher education (Tracy & Robbins, 2006, p. 4). This type of selection is based on how students perform in specific courses such as reading, mathematics, and the sciences (Bushaw, 2007, p. 191).

The research revealed that when students are picked as being “college material” based on academic achievement, another cadre of students who have demonstrated less academic proficiency is “deselected.” The deselected method used in the high schools excludes potential college students as well as future graduates from post-secondary institutions (Bushaw, 2007).

A third factor that contributes to low college attendance rates is the idea that four-year college programs are for everyone. Accepting this one size fits all idea eliminates a vast number of students who may exhibit an interest or talent in a particular career, which requires an associate’s degree from a junior college or a technical school.

While reviewing the factors above that may contribute to a lack of increases in college attendance, the research shows a direct disconnect between expected post-secondary statewide outcomes and current actions of educators who are not creating the results needed to achieve the goal of increasing the post-secondary graduation rate of 60% (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2017, p. 5). Research done by the Council on Post-Secondary Education (2017) as stated from the Stronger by Degrees (2017) report suggested colleges can increase their graduation rates by improving their diversity efforts, promoting inclusiveness on their college campuses, and providing academic support that produces successful outcomes for all students (p. 12). The Council on Post-Secondary Education (2017) also suggested that

colleges and universities must make instruction more relevant, rigorous, and engaging (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2017, p. 12). The final suggestion from the Council on Post-Secondary Education is a great need to improve college advising and steer students into degree programs (2017, p. 12). Implementing those suggested findings from the Council on Post-Secondary Education research will aid those state legislatures and educators in taking a deeper look at how early to introduce students to college and career preparation programs.

Purpose of the Study

According to works of Robert Balfanz (2009), there is a heightened interest in achievement, intervention in learning, career, and college preparedness for early childhood education and high school giving less attention to upper elementary and middle school students in those areas of interest.

Statistical data in 2008 from the American College of Testing (ACT) indicated that only two out of ten eighth graders, regardless of their socioeconomic status, are ready for college coursework. Also, 2009 data suggested that students who are significantly off target for college and career readiness in eighth grade are far less likely to become ready for college-level work during high school (ACT, 2009, p. 4).

These findings suggest that more attention must be given not only during high school but before high school. Especially in upper elementary grades and middle school, students with low SES should be specifically targeted for college and career readiness before they reach high school (ACT, 2009). By exposing middle school-aged students to college and career readiness, students may experience more success in high school and be more motivated to attend college and graduate from post-secondary institution.

This study examined factors that influence low socioeconomic middle school students'

attitudes and perceptions toward attending and graduating from a post-secondary institution. This study explored the impact of student tracking practices, college preparatory experiences and activities, teacher biases, parental/family influences, positive reinforcements, and socioeconomic factors on decisions middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds make about college attendance.

Research Questions

Pascarella et al. (2004) studied the college attainment and graduation rates of First Generational College Students (FGCS). Their study provided insight regarding what barriers impede the decisions and choices high school students make that support or deter them from obtaining a degree from a post-secondary institution. The presence of variables, such as self-motivation, lack of parental and educator reinforcement, and financial stability, was a reoccurring factor that hindered the completion of a post-secondary degree.

For this study, the researcher examined how those same or new variables may impact the attitudes and perceptions of low socioeconomic middle school students as they begin to make decisions about attending a post-secondary institution. Three questions will guide the research to address the essential question, "To what extent do attitudes, perceptions, and experiences impact low socioeconomic middle school students' attitude toward attending a post-secondary institution?" The following three questions below will be used to guide the research:

1. What positive or negative experiences in middle school might shape a low-SES student's attitude toward post-secondary education?
2. What are the most important school influences that impact how middle school students from a low socioeconomic background articulate their desire to go to college?
3. What non-academic factors related to college attainment/enrollment might help middle

school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds choose to attend a post-secondary institution instead of entering the workforce immediately after high school?

Overview of Research Design

The methodology used to conduct this study is qualitative, using a phenomenological approach that utilizes the Expectancy-Value Theory as the framework. Portions of the Arlin-Hill Survey and the Eccles Expectancy-Value model were used to investigate attitudes and perceptions of fifteen middle school-aged students. Using the Arlin-Hill Survey and Eccles' Expectancy Value model, research data were collected from parents and students using semi-structured interviews containing open-ended questions and questions that provided descriptive data. The middle school students selected consist of five sixth graders, five seventh graders, and five eighth graders. Also, these middle school students attended various community centers (i.e., Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Cabbage Patch, etc.) and church-affiliated after-school education programs in the western, central, and southeastern parts of Jefferson County, Kentucky. These 15 targeted students were currently enrolled in comprehensive educational programs. The comprehensive educational program does not include students who are enrolled in Jefferson County Public Schools' Special Education or Advanced Program Courses. All student participants are similar in economic backgrounds; they all qualify for the free and reduced lunch program.

Parents/guardians of these student participants were invited to participate in one-on-one interviews designed to ascertain information about the influence of family on decisions students from low socioeconomic backgrounds make about attaining a post-secondary education. Information will be sought on parents'/guardians' highest level of education, conversations with their children about higher education, financing higher education, college preparation

coursework, grades, and applying for college.

Significance of the Study

Middle school students are brutally honest and are ready to share their opinions on fairness, society, and what they believe school should be. Middle school students, like all other students who come to an educational institution, do not come to school with the intent of failing and according to Pickhardt's (2011) findings, "[t]hey look for opportunities to succeed" (p. 2).

According to Bushaw's findings (2007), when middle school students are asked, "What do they think about their preparation for high school and college attendance?" The students would reply with a reflective attitude that demonstrated self-assurance and positivity that they are academically ready and that they will attend college (p. 193).

Bushaw (2007) also cited, "[N]inety-two percent of the middle school students that were interviewed believed that they would be attending college after graduation from high school" (p. 191). Realistically these young people should believe they are academically prepared, and they can go to college. However, as many educators know, certain factors like social capital, family background, and residence may impact a young person's opportunity for success (Simmons, 2019, p. 53).

Post-secondary education attendance and graduation are crucial to providing individuals with success during adulthood. Those who attend college and graduate realize it took preparation and planning during their high school experience. Since it is evident that planning and preparation are vital, the notion of encouraging college attainment and graduation must start earlier than high school. Therefore, the researcher asked the question, "To what extent do the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds impact their attitudes toward attending a post-secondary institution?"

This study provides knowledge for local school districts, educators, and legislators to design realistic and specific programs that foster and support positive educational experiences in middle school. Among the positive educational experiences will be programs and activities which promote attending a post-secondary institution. This study will also prompt additional research in adolescent college and career planning that will propel middle school students toward post-secondary education. This study will reveal how crucial parental and outside influences (e.g., monetary friends and teacher restraints, role of student selection and grading) impact the perceptions and attitudes of middle school students toward post-secondary education.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to assist the reader understand the topic and the theme of this study.

Academic Sorting: Educational systems sort children into schools based on a combination of criteria, including their residential location, parental preference, and—in many contexts—their attributes (including measures of their academic skills, maturity, and other cognitive, cultural, and socio-emotional characteristics) (National Institutes of Health, 2017).

American College of Testing (ACT): A standardized test used for college admissions in the United States (www.act.org).

Autonomy: The quality or state of being self-governing (www.merriam-webster.com).

Cultural Relevant Teaching: Using students' customs, characteristics, experience, and perspectives as tools for better classroom instruction (edweek.org, 2017).

Dual Credit: A student is enrolled in a course which allows them to earn high school and college credit simultaneously (education.ky.gov).

Dual Credit Courses: College classes where student grades are recorded on a college transcript.

Credits are earned at a post-secondary institution (education.ky.gov).

Emotional Intelligence: The ability to recognize, understand and manage our own emotions (www.ihhip.com, 1995).

Expectancy-Value Theory: Postulates that motivation for a given behavior or action is determined by two factors: (i) expectancy, i.e., how probable it is that a wanted (instrumental) outcome is achieved through the behavior or action; (ii) value, i.e., how much the individual values the desired outcome (ScienceDirect.com, 2017).

Phenological Research: An approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group (www.blogs.baruch.cuny.edu, 2017).

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT): A standardized test design to measure basic critical reading, math, and writing skills (www.scholarships.com, 2019).

Soft Skills: Soft skills are non-technical skills that describe how a person work and interact with others (www.theforage.com, 2022).

Tracking: A system in which students are divided into classes based on their overall achievement (www.publicschoolreview.com, 2020).

The Whole Child: Ensuring each child, in each school, in each community is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged (www.wholechildeducation.org, 2022).

Assumptions and Limitation of the Study

One major assumption of this study is that our present educational system grants all students of Kentucky equal access to educational opportunities that prepare them for post-secondary education. A second assumption of this study is that children from low socioeconomic status want to attend a four-year institution of higher education. Evidence suggests that certain factors that impact first generation college attendees and high school students may also play a

significant role in the decisions middle school students make concerning college attainment and graduation (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 273). If this is the case, the question must be raised, “What factors affect low socioeconomic middle school students’ attitudes and decision-making toward attending a post-secondary institution?”

Due to the lack of research currently conducted on how low socioeconomic middle school students perceive post-secondary education, the presence of certain limitations may emerge. A limitation of any study is to first acknowledge that there is no perfect research design and there are always trade-offs, according to Patton (2002, p. 223). The next limitation is that participants within the selection process may fail to complete the required surveys and questionnaires. Another study limitation is the possibility of the student sample size being too small to draw dependable conclusions and interpretations of lived experiences of middle school student from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The final limitation of this study is the researcher’s ability to establish a level of trust that deters honest communication between participants and the researcher.

In short, the assumptions and the limitations of the study must be discussed to avoid undermining the value of the research. Furthermore, conducting this study by addressing these assumptions and limitations will hopefully ensure the likelihood of increasing college attendance and graduation rates of middle school students in Kentucky and the nation.

Summary

This research examines what factors create barriers for middle school students that impede their decision-making to choose and attend a post-secondary institution by examining their attitudes and perceptions based on educational experiences. Other research on college retention focuses primarily on high school and first-generation college students, not middle

school. The research results will inform stakeholders such as administrators, legislators, community supporters, parents, about the urgency of starting early in the recruitment process of middle school students to attend a post-secondary institution.

There are four more chapters after this chapter. Chapter II is the literature review that discusses the factors that shape middle school students' decisions about attending a post-secondary institution, beginning with the historical context of the middle school concept and ending with the direct and indirect student support beyond academics. In Chapter III, the emphasis is on the research design and details of how the study was conducted. The last chapters will concentrate on the actual research completed for this study. The research results are in Chapter IV, followed by Chapter V, which interprets those findings.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

There are extensive research studies and books on topics concerning college attainment of high school students who are traditional and non-traditional first-generation college students. According to Robert King, President of the Council on Post-Secondary Education (2017), these studies were conducted by federal and state governments and independent and university researchers exploring ways to improve economic prosperity for their citizens by providing post-secondary opportunities (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2017, p. 1). Kentucky is one of those many states that are guided by the strategic agenda of post-secondary and Adult Education (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2017, p. 3). Some of the studies document how many state colleges and universities craft their recruitment policies, raise the graduation rates, and expand their professional program to attract students to specific post-secondary institutions. Although these studies provide some awareness about improving the retention rates and graduation of high school students into a post-secondary institution, there is still a need to conduct research on middle school students and their attitudes about attending college (www.afterschoolalliance.org).

The aim of this literature review is to provide information about factors that shape the decisions middle school students make attending a post-secondary institution. The first section of the review will focus on the historical context of middle school reform and the rationale for changing from the junior high school experience to the middle school concept.

In addition to the historical context, this section will include the contemporary context and the theoretical framework using empirical studies to support those ideas. The second section will address the factors that hinder college attendance focusing on educational experiences, academic prowess, course requirements, and tracking. The third section will address

parent/teacher/student relationships as factors which impact decision-making toward post-secondary attendance. The final section will focus on direct and indirect student support, student engagement beyond academics, and the summary.

Search Strategy

The search strategy began as a result of the researcher becoming increasingly aware of how late low socioeconomic students decide to attend a post-secondary institution and how career awareness plays a vital role in planning college attainment (Hanover Research, 2012, p. 13).

This literature review was established by using keywords that guided the researcher's database searches. The keywords included *middle school, career exploration, career awareness and planning, college attainment, middle school, first-generation college student, parent/teacher motivation and relationship, educational experiences, course requirements, academic prowess, and tracking*. Databases used to gather search information were JSTOR, ProQuest, ERIC, EBSCOHOST, and Google Scholar. Print sources used included peer-reviewed journals, books, government reports, state statistical reports, and dissertations. Over 300 sources dating from the late 1990s until 2021 were used to gather relevant material for this study.

Due to the lack of research conducted on middle schoolers' decisions about college attendance, older sources were included to provide the reader with history and perspective of the study's stability.

Historical Context of Middle School Reform

In the early 1960s, educators (e.g., college presidents) and politicians became greatly concerned about high school students' lack preparation for college and the increasing number of immigrants burdening the primary school enrollment in metropolitan areas (Juvonen et al.,

2004). To those with influence over the education system (e.g., legislators, college presidents, and local school boards), there came an outcry for “change” within the educational system. The lack of preparation of high school students to attend college and overcrowded primary schools were the two primary factors viewed as catalysts from which the creation of the junior high school concept was established (Juvonen et al., 2004). Many concerns appeared, like the massive influx of immigrants caused living conditions that promoted ghettoization and the fear of immigrants changing the American values, along with the industrialization in need of a workforce that needed to be educated to perform those factory duties and keeping students from dropping out of school. The abovementioned concerns created havoc within the education system, and college presidents demanded that college preparedness should start before the ninth grade (Juvonen et al., 2004). In contrast, some politicians believed students needed better preparation for the workforce and factories (Juvonen et al., 2004). It is fair to state that there was continued dissatisfaction with how students were being educated then and even today, as well as concerns for meeting the need for economic and societal changes (Juvonen et al., 2004).

In 1963, in a speech at Cornell University, William Alexander stated, “Junior high school still resembled the high school model, which focuses primarily on content instead of exploratory and departmentalization rather than integration and scheduling.” These observations given in the speech were the focal points that led the movement to change the junior high school model (Hass & Wiles, 1965). The push for changing the existing junior high school model was due to the model’s lack of responsiveness towards the needs of young adolescents. Support for changing the current junior high school model catapulted innovations, which emerged into implementing the “middle school concept” (Alexander & George, 1981).

Statistics from National Center for Education Statistics (2003) reveal there are 98,000

schools in the United States. Of these 98,000 schools, 9 million middle school-aged children are presently served (www.nces.ed.gov, p. 1). The middle school programs in these schools are often blamed as the cause of alienation, disengagement, and low achievement in students (Juvonen et al., 2012). Equally important, some educators like Klein (2002) and Schmidt (2000) have called the middle school concept the “Bermuda Triangle” or the middle school curriculum as an “intellectual wasteland” of the public schools because this age group exhibits a wide spread of aggressive behaviors and regressive academic performance (Juvonen et al., 2004, p. 25). These descriptions of the middle school concepts may be somewhat accurate. However, the middle school concept has been studied and reformed over time, with the intent of making the necessary changes to reduce alienation, decrease disengagement, and improve academic achievement.

Alexander and George (1981) discussed how the middle school should function: “The middle school methodology should be concerned about the problems of the here and now and the student and to not just build on those programs of earlier childhood and the programs of secondary education” (p. 4). These educators believe middle school should not be conceived as a passive link in the education chain that resides under the college and university but should be viewed as a dynamic force in improving education. Juvonen et al. (2004) stated this new philosophy of Alexander and George on how middle schools should work emphasizes the students’ interest and not the problems of the here and now.

As research would have it, educators like Alexander and George (1981) and the researcher Lipsitz author of the *Growing up Forgotten* (1980) began expressing their concerns about the lack of attention to young adolescents. It was not until the 1980s that Lipsitz stated, “That the middle school age group was underserved and that there was disturbing statistic regarding the group’s vulnerability” (p. 83). The disturbing statistic that Lipsitz (1980) referred

to is the increase of drug abuse and alcohol consumption around the age of twelve. Followed by a 10% increase of precarious sexual behavior of children between the ages of 10 - 14 years old from 1964 until 1975, and finally an increased number of mental health admission of teens under the age of 15 (p. 3). As researchers continued to identify these age groups as vulnerable individuals who are prone to drug use and dangerous sexual behavior, their opinions soon gained the attention of the public and policymakers throughout the country. With the focus now being on middle school-aged students, many critics called for the middle school ideology to care about the “whole child.”

The “whole child” approach as defined by ASCD is the assurance that each child in each community is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. This sets the standard for comprehensive, sustainable school improvement and provides for long-term student success (ascd.org, p. 1). The “whole child” concept is a combination of two approaches beginning as early with the educational philosophers John Dewey, the Father of Pragmatic Education, who championed the notion that children learn by doing, and Maria Montessori whose approach fostered not only cognitive skills but also socio and emotional growth (lenfantmonterssori.org., p. 1). The whole child philosophy is grounded in the notion that communities must address all the six dimensions of children’s well-being to practice a healthy lifestyle. The six tenets are: (a) Physical and Mental Health, (b) Quality Early Education and Development, (c) Social-Emotional Development, (d) Spiritual Foundation and Strength, (e) Safe and Nurturing Environment, and (f) Economic Stability ([https://wholechild.org/about us/our history](https://wholechild.org/about-us/our-history)).

With the concept of the “whole child” in mind, educators, policymakers, and parents immediately began to examine the need to make the necessary changes about this period of life of a middle school-aged student’s transition and the impact on the proposed changes in the

student's emotional attitude. Researchers observed that 7th graders who transition to junior high as opposed to students who transition to middle school from 5th grade and then onto high school had significantly lower self-esteem and the most negative attitude toward school (Lipsitz & West, 2006). Here again, researchers stated these children were burdened with a decline in motivation and a poor perception of their academic abilities and achievement in school (Lipsitz & West, 2006). After carefully reviewing prior research results, the researcher deduced that the middle school students' negative attitude toward school, poor perception of their academic abilities, and achievement of middle-aged students derived from the poorly fit nature of the transitions from elementary to middle school (Juvonen et al., 2004).

The Contemporary Context of the Middle School Concept

Today there is still a lack of attention to the developmental needs and the environmental changes as children in this age group (11-14 years old) transitions from elementary to middle school.

To change the students' perceptions of school and to positively match the developmental needs and environment changes during this transition, educators explored new ideas and innovations to strengthen and support the middle school concept. One of the first approaches developed and instituted in the mid-1990s was the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) concept. John Comer (2004), founder of the Comer Developmental Schools, stated, "The contrast between a child's experiences at home and those in school deeply affect the psychosocial development and that this, in turn, shapes academic achievement" (p. 109). Comer noted when children have strong social emotional skills, they are better able to cope with challenges, which improve their academic achievement (www.cfchildren.org, 2022).

As the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) approaches continued to gain success and

support, additional researchers such as Weissburg and Shriver (2011) established a developmental program helping students to identify, label, express, manage, and assess the intensity of feelings, delaying gratification, controlling impulses, and reducing emotion for the purpose of making healthy choices. Along with the progression of emotional competencies, various schools embraced, implemented, and combined programs that established an organization called the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The CASEL organization was comprised of researchers, educators, and child advocates who worked tirelessly developing projects and programs, which focused on preventing drug use and violence in schools by promoting healthy choices and responsible behavior in school and within the community. The CASEL movement helped bring about legislative changes from Congress through the HR2437 Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2011, which promoted and enhanced teacher training and grant funding for social-emotional learning (edutopia). Since the introduction of the social-emotional learning movement, new research, theses, and books have been written to support this concept.

In the late 1990s, Daniel Goleman wrote the popular book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. In this book, Goleman argued, “Character matters and more significantly, the skills that build character can be taught” (2005, p. 28). This new belief helped to expedite innovative initiatives and educational standards in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) that affect schools nationally and worldwide today. With the presence of educational standards supporting the principles of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) program, educators, child advocates, and other experts in the field of child development were able to explain the relevancy of specific skills being taught. While examining the emotional competencies standards, the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program prepared students for career and college awareness.

These standards focused on self-discipline, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, social responsibility, and global awareness. The emergence of these additional skills in the middle school setting was viewed as an opportunity to deter the disparaging statistic that 60% to 70% of the students in middle schools are disengaged (Jovonen et al., 2004). As a result of the data, middle school experts can now successfully conduct legitimate research, which focuses on the need to understand middle school students' interests, academic skills, and weaknesses to purposely provide and generate available resources for career awareness and college planning at the middle school level (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005).

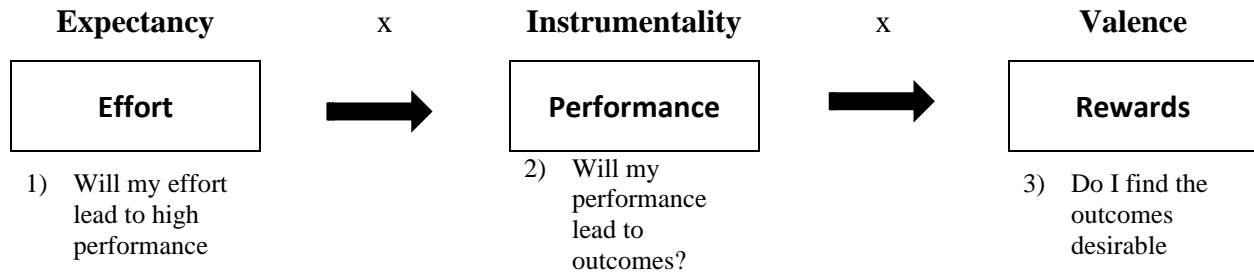
Conceptual Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the Expectancy-Value Theory. Two researchers in the 1940s, Kurt Lewin and John Atkinson, conceptualized Expectancy-Value Model and then the theory became a more widely known in the mid-1960s (www.leadership-center.com). Lewin and Atkinson believed that motivation is affected by individual expectations combined with needs and values. The joining of students' expectations and the value that students place on a goal is often called the Expectancy-Value Model of motivation. The expectancy theory of motivation explains why an individual chooses to act out a specific behavior instead of another (www.leadership-center.com). The model explains an individual's decision-making process and accounts individuals' choices despite the amount of effort it takes to achieve that goal (Parijat et al., 2014, p. 4). Likewise, Wigfield and Eccles (1992) stated, "Theorists argue that individuals' choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they will do on the activity and the extent to which they value the activity" (p. 68). The formula used to explain this model of Expectancy-Value theory is:

$$\text{Motivation} = \text{Expectancy} \times \text{Instrumentality} \times \text{Valence}$$

Figure 1

Expectancy-Value Model



Given the explanation above on Expectancy-Value Theory, this literature review will highlight how middle school students develop those beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions toward attending a post-secondary institution focusing on factors that play a significant role in their decision-making. According to Pichardt (2011), “Middle school students look for opportunities to succeed” (p. 2). Bushaw, whose research predates Prichardt’s, laid the groundwork for thinking about middle school students’ intentions:

Like all other students, Middle school students come to an educational institution with the intent of being successful. When these students are asked, “What do they think about their preparation for high school and college attendance?” The students would reply with a reflective attitude that demonstrates self-assurance and positivity that they are academically ready and that they will attend college. (2007, p. 193).

Bushaw (2007) also maintained, “[N]inety-two percent of the middle school students when interviewed they would be attending college after graduation from high school” (p. 191).

Realistically these young people should believe they are academically prepared, and they can go to college. However, as some educators know certain factors like social capital, family background, and residence may impact a young person’s opportunity for success.

Post-secondary education attendance and graduation are crucial to providing individuals with financial success during adulthood. Those who attend college and graduate realize that it took preparation and planning during their school experience. Since it is evident that planning and preparation are vital, the notion of encouraging college attainment and graduation must start earlier than high school. Therefore, the question that should be asked in this study is: To what extent do the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds impact their attitudes toward attending a post-secondary institution?

In 1983, a longitudinal study conducted by Eccles et al. focused on the motivational and familial factors in early adolescence that predicted future college attendance and the educational pathways that link the beliefs and plans for their later decision regarding college attendance. The study revealed the following significant predictors that affect college attendance: (a) encouragement from parents; (b) family's income; and (c) the mother's education level (p. 70). Another outcome from the study suggested that improving educational experiences for adolescents, including favorable parental attitudes toward college, could help with college planning. In addition to suggesting that parental attitude could help middle school students toward their college planning, Eccles et al. (2004) proposed that the early adolescence years are an important time for developing plans for higher education and a time that young people need encouragement from their parents.

Initially, Eccles et al.'s (2004) results primarily focused on the impact of students' encouragement from parents, the parents' level of education, and their parents' income; however, as the study probed deeper into the results, it became apparent that selected prerequisite courses in middle school like algebra, a foreign language, and biology were viewed as gatekeeper courses because they were not offered to all students to ensure college attainment. These

prerequisite courses before high school supported the college track and college attainment. Having only some eighth graders taking these courses and excluding other eighth graders can sometimes be a deterrent to college attainment. The Eccles et al. (2004) study suggested that having only some eighth graders taking these courses and excluding other eighth graders can sometimes be a deterrent to college attainment. Eccles et al. also revealed the need to develop intervention programs that are geared for students and their parents. Eccles et al. proposed that the creation of intervention programs is needed to pique students' interest on college options, post-secondary education planning, and exploration of the long-term effects of choosing education options for middle school students that will propel them toward post-secondary education.

Moon and Callahan (1999) also conducted a study which focused on gifted and high achieving middle school students' attitudes toward school. This study explored the attitudes of these students by asking the following two questions: (a) Can the study reliably discriminate between gifted middle school students and other middle school students based on their attitudes toward school? and (b) Can researchers reliably discriminate between high achieving, average achieving, and low achieving students (determined by achievement data) based on attitudes towards school (p. 60)?

Moon and Callahan (1999) explored the attitudes of middle school students by grade level, by achievement levels in reading and mathematics, and by student ability (e.g., gifted and regular) levels. The results from the study revealed that within grade levels the sixth graders' results were significantly different statistically from other the grade levels of the middle school students. Also, the high achieving sixth graders showed that their attitude results were lower than the seventh graders'. When examining the data regarding achievement level, high average

students regardless of grade level showed significantly higher results in attitudes and achievement toward schools. Moon and Callahan's study found that "in general middle school students do not hold a very positive attitude towards school and the achievement does not play a significant role in their decision" (1999, p. 70). Moon and Callahan also proposed that these feelings derive from the lack of positive experiences while in school and that educators are more concerned with dispensing information rather than allowing for exploration in learning (p. 70).

While reflecting on these studies by Eccles et al. (2004) and Moon and Callahan (1999), there is a wide range of factors which impact the planning and decisions for considering college attainment. Both studies support the presence of parental involvement, as well as parental encouragement which played a vital role in middle school students' decisions to attend college. They also suggest that early adolescence is critical for developing plans and having a vision for post-secondary education. The studies' findings also acknowledge certain factors that are potential barriers which impede college attendance stemmed from students not having the support to recognize their potential, not knowing their interests, academic deficiencies, and other instructional and institutional factors (e.g., financial burdens, tracking, course offerings).

Factors that Hinder College Attendance

Napoleon Hill, an American author of self-help literature, best known for writing books that focused on achieving success once said, "What the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve" (Hill, n.d.).

The above quotation has inspired many individuals and probably helped individuals make decisions that have an impact on their future. Students starting from middle school to high school begin to ponder the idea of attending college, and when asked by friends, parents, and educators if they plan to attend college, their responses derive from their beliefs, aspirations, and barriers

that may impede college attainment. Much has been written on college attainment and access, and the research suggests the lack of access is due to resources, academic preparation, financial support, and issues involving family support (Perna & Jones, 2013).

The research conducted by Morton et al. (2018) focused on barriers that impede student success in hopes to attain a post-secondary education. Morton et al. (2018) found that student concerns about college attainment were universal, and when interviewing students from rural and urban settings, they both expressed concerns about their academic preparation and knowledge of the college application, including information related to financial aid and scholarships. Morton et al. (2018) stated, “[T]hat the perspectives that students have is in the belief that their schools lacked adequate resources for them to succeed in college (i.e., Advanced placement courses, access to counselors)” (p. 163). Morton et al. (2018) also stated that the students’ beliefs stemmed from the lack of academic challenges in high school and the proposed college rigor that goes beyond their abilities of meeting those academic standards due to their preparation and achievement (p. 163).

When looking at educational experiences, in this case, moving from high school to college level work is crucial, and students must master the basic skills of reading, math, and content knowledge in core academic subjects. Simmons (2019) supported the significance of basic skills and content knowledge to further college success. Simmons (2019) also stated that it is equally important to acquire academic skills such as thinking, problem-solving, writing, and research skills that can be used across subject areas that will allow students to engage in college level work (p. 73). Students who have these skills are successful as they maneuver through the demands of their new environment both academically and socially.

Besides basic skills, content knowledge, and academic skills in thinking, problem

solving, and writing, other educational researchers looked at academic grades and assessment (e.g., ACT's and SAT's) as predictors for college retention. One such research study that looked at academic grades and assessment was conducted by Hoffman and Lowitz (2005), who found high school grades were a viable predictor for college persistence (p. 13). However, when it comes to assessment such as SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and ACT (American College Testing), the researchers were conflicted with its importance to college persistence. In the study conducted by Tracey and Robbins (2006), the results, which focused on composite scores of American College Testing (ACT), indicated that students with a substantial higher score performed better in college and had a greater chance of college retention and graduation (p. 13).

In addition to examining the lack of educational resources (e.g., advanced placement and dual credit courses) and assessment scores as barriers to college attainment, “tracking” is an additional barrier to students. Many times, underserved students are denied opportunities to enroll in advanced placement courses due to the lack of financial funding in the schools which they attend. Hence, these students are tracked in lower-level classes which puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to adequately being prepared to attend a post-secondary institution.

Ordinarily, teachers and counselors determine what classes students should take, but historically, tracking was used out of a growing response to immigrant children who had a limited understanding of the English language coming to the public school system. However, this one concept called “tracking” was intentionally designed to do good, but what actually happened was that tracking helped to create a form of internal segregation within the American public school system (Barrington, 2020). In 2017, Legette asserted that “tracking” is endemic in all schools and can perpetuate disparities (p. 1).

According to the findings of Oaks (1980), students who enter a tracking system remain in

those systems throughout their academics (p. 10). She further asserted that their abilities are not reevaluated to determine whether academic changes need to be made (p. 10). Hence the inattention to reevaluation leaves students in an educational setting that leaves very little room for high level and more challenging courses. Currently, tracking is especially used in high school to provide different levels of difficulty for certain courses. These courses happen to be identified as basic, honors, and college preparatory.

Unfortunately, tracking begins as early as the sixth grade when students are just beginning middle school by dividing students according to ability and or subjects. This type of tracking acknowledges students who are above average and have substantial academic gains in their subject area. This type of tracking also reveals that these students tend to learn quickly, and they are challenged according to their ability level (Barrington, 2020, p. 2). In contrast, when students are divided by academic ability, these schools risk the possibility of students labeling themselves as being inferior to upper track classmates. This can sometimes lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, as students experience low self-esteem, which can lead to a reduction in academic success and performance. Likewise, when tracking is used in accordance with its purpose (e.g., ability grouping and subjects), it helps to ensure that students learn at their own ability as well as addressing self-esteem issues that sometimes comes with placing low achieving students in the classroom with high achieving students (Barrington, 2020, p. 2). More importantly, when students are placed in a low-level track, it is virtually impossible to move those students into high level courses. This is the result of students being taught by different educational approaches and having different educational experiences. Barrington (2020) asserted that teachers of low-achieving students have low expectations of their students and unfortunately these teachers do not provide the challenges and the drive to push these students to improve

themselves (p. 4).

Legette (2017) purported that students in a high-level track might possess the ability and drive to succeed without extra enrichment (p. 6). Barrington (2020) believed that tracking should be an instructional concept that promotes academic success (p. 3).

The tracking concept has some benefits; more importantly, when tracking is not used in the proper way, it can encourage segregation within the local school. This can occur when minority and low-income students are found in low tracking courses, whereas high level courses are dominated by students who come from higher socioeconomic households.

Barrington (2020) who cited Jeannie Oakes author of the *Industrial Schooling*, reported that upper income students received more educational opportunities, while lower income students were funneled into vocational programs and were given limited educational opportunities when it did not reflect their academic abilities (p. 3).

In short, the tracking method offers some pluses and minuses. In fact, students and teachers may benefit from academic grouping, which leads to educational effectiveness. Tracking would become more favorable if educational systems would reevaluate this concept on a regular basis, recognizing that children regardless of their ability tend to learn at different rates. Legette (2017) also conceded that intelligence is not based on income, and teachers need to modify their curriculum to address student's learning style (p. 7). Respectfully, no student should miss out on opportunities to learn that will lead to inequities. Legette (2017) finally stated that all students need to be challenged and encouraged to improve and grow academically (p. 7).

Acknowledging, that educational experiences (e.g., academic grades, courses, and resources) are crucial in determining college success for students. Some educators believe the recruitment process should go beyond academics, while other educators suggest developing

college readiness programs that involve adolescent development (Ng et al., 2014, p. 689). As explained by Savitz-Romer and Bouffard (2012),

The foundation of a developmental approach to college access rests on three core principles: developmental stages matter, young people can and should be active agent in the process and going to college is an interconnected process related to social and emotional, and cognitive development as well as social context. (p. 992)

Parent/Teacher/Child Relationships

The 32nd President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, once said, “We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.” This quotation came from a notable speech given in 1940 at the University of Pennsylvania, when President Roosevelt was signaling his dream to educators and the nation: the dream to create a perfect future for children through education.

Eighty-two years later, educators throughout the country are still wrestling with the delivery of a quality education for all children, while parents too want to secure a future for their children by means of a quality education.

Overall, parents want the best education for their child; however, when it comes to seeking college attainment for their child, parents have problems moving through the complexities of obtaining a post-secondary education. This lack of knowledge can become a barrier for some students, especially when students are confronted with parental attitudes that suggest one can be successful without a college degree and that the parent does not see the value of an extended education (Simmons, 2019). These beliefs and attitudes toward education have become a generational situation, which may have manifested itself in a parent’s negative experiences. Simmons (2019) also stated that not all parents or families encounter the same

knowledge base or experiences with higher education that can transfer to their children (p. 58). Noting that all parents and families do not have the same knowledge regarding college attainment is not a hinderance to students, as proposed by Simmons (2019, p. 58). Simmons concluded that parents and grandparents, in fact, can promote and reinforce the importance of higher education in their home without attaining a college degree (2019, p. 59).

Acknowledging that parental attitudes and having a lack of knowledge about college attainment may be hinderances to college attainment; some students are also faced with a lack of financial support for college. Schneider et al. (2003) stated that most parents today expect their child to attend college (p. 72). However, parents must feel assured by their child that the allocations of their resources will be used to ensure attainment and graduation. According to Schneider (2003) parents weigh in on their child's academic performance and spend time discussing college plans and financial strategies with their child before taking on that educational expense (p. 72). Parents concentrate on their child's academic performance by observing the enrollment of specific courses, especially those courses that are challenging. This observation often leads parents to believe that their child is serious about learning, which may determine their level of financial commitment, as stated by Schneider (2003, p. 72). Schneider (2003) further suggested that vigorous courses taken in high school can also be viewed as an indicator of the student's academic dedication and ability to persevere in achieving long-term educational goals (p. 73).

Another financial investment worry for parents is their child's academic grades. Schneider asserted that teachers' grading promotes the risk of inaccuracies due to grade inflation and assigning grades for reasons other than academic performance (2003, p. 73). Schneider claims the grades rely only on teacher-awarded grades as an indication of college attainment, and

graduation is the parent's concern regarding their child's academic grades (2003, p. 73). In summary, some parents perceive the giving of grades is essential and a fair assessment of their child's ability to perform without difficulty in an educational setting.

After examining a parent's financial investment based on grades and coursework, it is important to note that parents with more financial means than those with lesser financial means are willing to commit financial resources to ensure college attendance for their child. Schneider (2003) pointed out the value that parents place on college degrees irrespective of income; they prefer to support and create opportunities for their child's learning (p. 77).

Another emphasis placed on college attainment by parents is utilizing the three parenting practices (e.g., autonomy support, monitoring, and warmth). These parental practices can be instrumental in promoting and reinforcing the importance of attaining a college degree by parents. The parental practices (autonomy support, monitoring, and warmth) are critical during the period of adolescence and on to adulthood (Melby et al., 2008, p. 1531). According to Hill and Wang (2015), students who are the recipients of these parenting practices (autonomy support, monitoring, and warmth) yielded results that promote higher educational expectations (p. 225). Also, students are more likely to take advantage of opportunities they pursue and develop their own interest and identity (Hill & Wang, 2015, p. 225).

In Hill and Wang's (2015) study, the results reveal that parental autonomy support provides opportunities for youth to make choices, engage in decision-making, and develop solutions to problem independently (p. 225). Also, when parental monitoring is enforced, according to the Hill and Wang study, children are more likely to have higher levels of academic achievement. In addition to monitoring, parental warmth reflects a compelling relationship between the parent and child which helps students to develop aspirations that promote

achievement (Eccles, 2004 p. 226). As Hill and Wang (2015) delved deeper into their findings, the results found these parenting practices play a critical role on college enrollment due to the positive impact associated with aspirations and goal (p. 232). More importantly, Juang and Silbereisen stated that parental “warmth” was directly related to aspirations because it provides an emotional foundation for youth that increases their sense of self-efficacy and beliefs in their abilities (2020, p. 232). Parental warmth not only supports aspirations but, through engagement and grade point average, also helps youth to achieve their post-secondary goals (Hill & Wang, 2015, p. 232).

It has been shown that these parental practices are essential in helping youth to develop their aspirations and to see the meaning of their value and work in school. Thus, creating a mental niche in which students can explore their interest and assist in developing goals toward enrolling in college post high school (Hill & Wang, 2015, p. 233).

Albeit parents play a crucial role in helping their child explore their interest, while aiding them financially and emotionally in their decision-making, teachers have an impact as well. The teacher and student relationships are very impactful and can determine the level of achievement and how students feel about their overall schooling. Teachers who promote student involvement by including students in the classroom decision-making process and co-create educational goals are more likely to achieve academically, according to Steinberg and McCray (2012, p. 1). Cook-Sather (2002) also suggested that by keeping adolescents engaged in their education is to include them in decision-making (p. 1). Research suggests that strong relationships between the teacher and the student is fundamental to creating a college going culture. Adults (in this case teachers) whom students identified as someone they can trust are more likely to enroll in course work that is challenging and essential to their college success. In the study conducted by Steinberg and

McCray (2012), when students were asked about their perception of life in middle school, the student results focused primarily on teacher and student relationships and their effect on their academic achievement. What derived from Steinberg and McCray's (2012) study was that students wanted and /or desired a personal relationship with their teachers (p. 2). Steinberg and McCray (2012) also reported the students wanted teachers who are caring, who would listen to them, and were concerned about their academic success (p. 2). Steinberg and McCray (2012) finally reported that the students wanted to feel respected and supported in a safe and secure learning environment, which allowed them to learn to their fullest potential (p. 2).

The teacher and student caring relationship, as mentioned above, helps students view their self-worth in an educational setting. As explained by Simmons (2019), helping students see their worth in a classroom climate that is positive and safe, where student feel that they belong and are given equitable support transcends the students' belief in their educational experiences (p. 78). Teachers who promote a classroom climate that is positive and challenging tend to be rich in informational resources (Simmons, 2019, p. 78). This type of environment is designed to assist students on their journey toward learning and the furtherance of education post high school (Simmons, 2019, p. 79). In addition to teachers promoting a positive classroom climate, it is imperative for teachers to advocate for a curriculum that allows students to see themselves reflected in that curriculum. Curriculum that is culturally relevant demonstrates to students that they can master subject being taught, when so often students are face with stereotypes that make them feel as though they do not belong in academic spaces because of the lack of representation within those classes (Hart, 2020, p. 21). Culturally relevant teaching and learning, according to Ortiz et al. (2019), suggests that student's perceptions, experiences, and understanding of their identity shapes their learning (p. 321). As teachers develop culturally relevant pedagogy and

having students in supportive climates, which promote a sense of community, students are more likely to have positive academic outcomes which increase motivation and attitudes among students and especially those disadvantage youth (Battistich et al., 1995, p. 652). Likewise, the EdTrust (2020) report entitled “Shut Out” centered their attention on why children of color are underrepresented in Advanced Placement and Dual Credit programs needed for post-secondary education (p. 23). When examining this lack of student attendance in these classes the justification for absence is rooted in the relationship or lack thereof between student and teachers. The report suggested that the reason for this absence is due to the following: (1) tracking begins in early grades, which hinders participation; (2) educator (e.g., teachers, counselors, and administrators) bias and mindsets often limit student access; and (3) classroom climates that promote a sense of belonging that is positive and welcoming to children of color and low income are often not found in schools (p. 20).

Hence, the parent-student and teacher-student relationship can sometimes be a hinderance for college attainment because adults (e.g., parents, teachers, and administrators) fail to see the talent that a student brings into the classroom. Teachers need to examine their biases and make changes to policies and practices to improve student learning experiences and their environment. Therefore, by examining one’s biases and making changes in policies and practices, teachers improve the student’s educational experiences for academic success.

Student Support

“Those who have benefitted from college attainment know that there is much more to do to help students achieve their college goal” (Putnam, 2015, p. 272). Robert Putnam, a renowned author of fourteen books and the Malkin Professor of Public Policy at Harvard, once believed that if a student worked hard and obtained a good education based on family and community,

they could become successful. However, he soon found out in his research that there are more constraints for children who are less privileged due to the failure of addressing barriers that impede success (2015, p. 344).

Putnam (2015) also stated that enrolling in college is one thing, but earning a degree is quite another (p. 301). Individual students trying to obtain that degree need support programs in place starting in high school and onto that admittance and completion of a college degree. When examining student support, Aidman and Malerba (2017) suggested that college access programs and services both school and community based are most effective when they are comprehensive, including both academic and non-academic support and enrichment programs (p. 988). Aidman and Malerba (2017) further stated that the programs should raise college aspirations and knowledge by incorporating consistent and supportive relationships with caring adults (p. 998). Aidman and Malerba (2017) also suggested specific components needed for student support services to enhance college attainment outcomes, including financial aid planning and family engagement for decision-making (p. 998). Aidman and Malerba (2017) cited Sokatch stating that the support programs should be culturally responsive and provide families with the tools to navigate the process of focusing on financial aid planning (p. 998). In addition, Aidman and Malerba cited Sokatch by stating that collecting and using data to assess progress is essential in making an informed decision (p. 998).

The connection between what student support programs should offer and what has been discussed previously regarding relationships and educational experiences tend to line up considerably to assist students in achieving their aspirations toward successfully obtaining a college degree. According to the Department of Education (2016), student support services are basically related to improving outcomes, such as peer tutoring, labs, workshop counseling, and

resources (p. 39). Also, the Department of Education's (2016) findings suggested that viable student support programs should invest financially in the community schools, locate better trained and more experienced teachers, and equal the number of counselors to address the needs of their student population in their local schools (p. 36).

Other student support programs looked at university entrance/admission policies that accept and advise students courses based on test results. It is the belief if a student fails to obtain an adequate score those scores predict that the student will not be successful in college level courses (Schneider, 2003, p. 61). Some college community programs are using adaptive computer placement testing instead and provide students with additional instruction from coaches and mentors (Evans & Henry, 2015, p. 48).

The inclusion of a coaching and mentoring component in a student support program within the college community is intended to help students identify and develop strategies to overcome both academic and "real-life" barriers. The Department of Education (2016) has provided evidence that reveals individualized mentoring and coaching are different from academic advising because having a mentoring and coaching component in student support program increases the odds that student will remain in college (p. 159).

There is also the idea of having on-campus support programs for students. The concept of such a program is to support academic performance and social development. Students who participate in programs such as this can obtain and increase a student's sense of campus community and a connection to the institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 48). An example of one on-campus program is "Summer Bridge." The Summer Bridge program eases student's transition to college and helps the student to develop academic skills and social resources to succeed. The program can also improve persistence and completion for the

participants (p. 48).

A final student support program, which deals with food and housing insecurities that impacts students' success, is the Federal Emergency Aid Program. This college community program, according to Sackett et al. (2015), connects students with federal and microgrant when necessary (p. 48).

The Obama Administration worked to improve access for higher education, as well as help students complete their degrees by providing programs that directly and indirectly impact their lives. The Obama Administration focused on making college more affordable and accessible to more low-income students through reforms that increase financial assistance to students as well as colleges. Policy makers and institutions of higher education play a vital role in supporting programs that expand access to an affordable, high-quality education that includes low-socioeconomic students (King et al., 2016, p.14).

As students seek opportunities for higher education to fulfill their dreams, local communities and colleges must do more to get students of low-income and color prepared for college, enroll in quality institutions, and graduate (King et al., 2016 p. 4).

Extracurricular activities should be viewed as a valuable complement to students beyond academic performance. In recent studies, researchers have suggested that there are many benefits from having students participate in community and school sponsored extracurricular activities. According to the findings of Barbara Schneider (2003), students who are more likely to attend college participated in school sponsored extracurricular activities such as interscholastic sports, performing art groups, honor societies, academic clubs, or school publication (p. 65). Putnam (2015) suggested that the participation in such activities significantly improves a student prospect of attending a four-year college by a margin of approximately eight percent (p. 260).

Extracurricular activities provide students with “soft skills” and character. These skills promote leadership which in turn has prompted individuals to receive high wages in managerial positions (Putnam, 2015, p. 282). Researchers believe that soft skills that originate from extracurricular activities are just as important as hard skills as stated by Putnam (2015, p. 284). Putnam (2015) goes on to say that employer value non-cognitive traits such as work habits and the ability to work with others are even more important to students from disadvantaged families (p. 263). Having students to participate in extracurricular activities matters and is believed to promote upward mobility for students. When looking closely at the participation of low-income students in extracurricular activities, researchers found that low-income students have limited access to opportunities and involvement in activities due to cost and location. According to Putnam (2015), low-income students are three times less likely to participate in sports and club activities (p. 264). Putnam (2015) further stated since 1997-2012 the “extracurricular gap” has risen because these activities are so expensive and many of the church and community organizations are offering programs that would accommodate low-income families.

Adolescents should participate in activities outside of the school to help them develop social skills as discussed by Schneider (2003). Schneider (2003) contended that participating in certain activities helps to build a student’s portfolio that looks favorable in their college application (p. 67). Schneider concluded by stating that as students participate in community service clubs, it indicates to others an interest in civic and social concerns (2003, p. 67).

In closing, extracurricular activity participation matters for upward mobility. Budget cutting and the shifting priorities of American schools are the main reason that extracurricular opportunities are increasingly preserved for the more affluent young people (Putnam, 2015, p. 293).

Although there have been different theoretical frameworks to study college access and attainment of low-income students, this study will use the theoretical framework which focuses primarily on the Expectancy-Value Theory.

In the past, researchers have used a developmental approach like in the study of Savitz-Romer and Bouffard. Savitz-Romer and Bouffard (2012) suggested that adolescent development was the main component missing from the college conversation about readiness (p. 31). Also, Savitz-Romer and Bouffard (2012) pointed out that too often college preparation programs focus on academic achievement, college knowledge, and financial literacy and support but neglect strategies to support the development of personal resources and capacities that build college going identities (p. 31).

In addition to the developmental approach other researchers like Arnold et al., as cited by Aidman and Malerba (2017), used the ecological system theory to address college readiness (p. 992). Aidman and Malerba (2017) cited that Arnold et al.'s ecological approach focused on multiple integrated interactions of people, organizations, system, culture, and time (p. 993). According to Aidman and Malerba (2017) the ecological approach is founded on the belief that to understand human development one must consider all the reciprocal interactions and the interrelated ecological systems in which development occurs overtime (p. 993). Even though these two approaches have merit, and they measure both academic performance and noncognitive factors; the Expectancy-Value Theory approach for this study addresses how motivation is affected by a student's expectations, needs, and values. Examining attitudes and perceptions, along with factors that contribute to student choices, the Expectancy-Value approach will explain the motivation behind student's choice to make decisions to obtain their goal.

The empirical studies featured in this research all possess a common thread that is central

to explaining how attitudes, perceptions, and contributing factors bring about an awareness of college attainment and graduation rates. The studies cited in this review examined significant predictors that affect college attendance along with parental encouragement and its impact on decision-making. Also, the studies examine middle school students' negative and/or positive attitudes toward school experiences and academic achievement. All in all, the research studies used for this literature review promote the presence of parental involvement and support the idea that early adolescence is a crucial age for developing a vision for post-secondary education.

Summary

Presently more research is needed to address college attainment as early as middle school through viable programs that place this student population on track for post-secondary education. The problem that states, local schools, colleges, and universities face is launching programs that fail to include middle school students in their efforts to promote college attainment and graduation.

Currently, the focus is on recruiting high school students and failing to recognize that the recruitment process needs to begin much earlier to ensure that high school students have critical information before making decisions regarding college admittance.

State legislatures, colleges, and universities provide programs that improve retention rates and graduation by expanding professional programs to attract students to post-secondary institutions. In addition to developing professional programs to attract students to post-secondary institutions, local school districts must enforce academic rigor, offer advanced placement courses, and provide support services to all students in the middle school setting. It is equally important that schools include various community organizations and churches in their arsenal of awareness to increase after-school programs that promote college attainment.

With scores of independent colleges and universities that grant distinctive degrees in various careers, citizens of Kentucky fail to take advantage of the educational opportunities needed to improve their financial situation and quality of life (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2017, p. 6). Be that it may, this was a genuine concern for state legislatures throughout the Commonwealth, and legislators took action to change the trajectory of college attainment by addressing factors that give pause to college enrollment.

When addressing these factors, researchers found the three most common barriers that impact a student's decision to attend college. The first barrier is how local high schools take a traditional approach to student preparedness, which fails to assist students in decision-making. The second barrier is the presence of "tracking" in local schools, which limits opportunities for some students to participate in high-level courses that will prepare them for college coursework. The third barrier is local schools' lack of promoting two-year degrees versus four-year college degrees that may appeal to students interested in vocational opportunities.

However, college attainment and graduation have solely focused on high school and first-generation students. This literature review aims to explain how other barriers such as educational experiences, lack of parental support, and financial instabilities have impeded college attendance among high school students. This research will provide additional information to middle school administrators, researchers, and state legislatures on the importance of beginning earlier by including middle school students in higher education awareness, career exploration, and career-relevant instruction. The goal of this study is to provide information to local school leaders and policy makers on the rationale for promoting legislation that will obtain financial resources for career and college preparedness in middle schools.

An overview of the methodology used for this study can be found in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This study explores the attitudes and perceptions of middle school students from low socioeconomic background in grades sixth through eighth towards college attendance. Current research on college attendance has predominately focused on barriers such as educational experiences, lack of parental support, and financial instability that impede high school students and first-generation college students (FGCS) from considering a college education; however, there is little research that addresses whether those same barriers may negatively impact the decisions of middle school students about seriously considering college attendance.

Merolla (2013) suggested that socioeconomic background characteristics such as family income, parents' education, family structure, and home environment affect educational transitions throughout a students' educational career; however, the effects of these factors often decrease as students' progress through their education (p. 898). Merolla also suggested the impact of these factors decreases when students gain a concrete understanding of what college enrollment entails (2013).

This research study provides additional information to middle school administrators and researchers who are interested in student engagement in higher education, career exploration, and career-relevant instruction. The findings from the study will help to support local school leaders and policy makers with promoting legislation and financial resources for career and college preparedness in middle schools.

The essential research question that guides this study is, "What factors affect low socioeconomic middle school students' attitudes and decision-making toward attending a post-secondary institution?" Based on the formation of the essential research question, a qualitative data analysis will be conducted utilizing a phenomenological research design.

Research Design

In this study, the factors that influence the decisions of low socioeconomic middle school students' attitudes and perceptions toward applying for, attending, and graduating from a post-secondary institution were investigated. The purpose of the investigation is to obtain a full understanding of how personal experiences in their homes, schools, and relationships impact their decision-making as it relates to college attendance.

A phenomenological research design was conducted with students from low-income backgrounds using a narrative analysis to impart the results from the sample population. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), a phenomenological research design seeks to explore, describe, and analyzes the meaning of an individual's lived experience. This type of research design is known for trying to identify how different individuals perceived different experiences. Both Patton (2002) and Yin (2016) argued that with qualitative research designs, individuals' lived experiences come from how those experiences are described, perceived, judged, remembered, made sense of, and talked about with others.

Information from the Eccles Expectancy-Value Model helped to shape some of the researcher's approach to data gathering. This model supports the idea that certain beliefs are shaped over time by our experiences. These beliefs such as cultural norms (e.g., parental attitudes towards education, financial inconsistencies, leaving friends) and stereotypes (e.g., gender, and ethnicities) play a role in our values, identities, and goal achievement.

The conceptual model will show the related concepts such as the historical context of middle school reform, and the relationships between parents-teachers-students with emphasis on student support and engagement act as catalysts that impact a student's decision to attend

college. The utilization of this model provided direction for the research questionnaire, interviews, and data collection.

The Phenomenological Method

In implementing a phenomenological research approach, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested, “It is essential for the researcher to formalize questions that focuses on ‘what’ and ‘how’” (p. 130). These questions should be broad in their efforts, which leads to gathering data that provides an understanding of the sample population’s common experiences. In addition to creating questions which lead to gathering data, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested the researcher should fully describe how the participants viewed the phenomenon without including the researcher’s own experiences (p. 130). Creswell and Poth (2018) maintained the researcher needs to decide how and in what way his or her personal understanding will be introduced into the study (p. 130). The method used in this study to collect and secure data is done to maintain accuracy of the data analysis and to effectively collect data throughout the interviewing process.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a phenomenological study as defined by Giorgi (2009) “is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts” (p. 124). In this role the researcher is concerned about the “lived experiences of the people involved, or who were involved, with the issue that is being researched” (Maypole & Davies, 2001, p. 44).

The researcher for this study is the investigator who exercised professional responsibility by executing a study design that posed no risks to participants, utilized a volunteer participation approach via signed consent forms, implemented a system to protect participants confidentiality, and provided opportunities to address participant concerns. The researcher used individual face-

to-face and small group interviews to collect data on perceptions and attitudes. The researcher used unstructured interview techniques to gather a wide range of information from participants related to their perceptions and attitudes about applying for, attending, and graduating from college.

The researcher's goal was primarily to construct open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their attitudes, perceptions, and experiences via interviews and questionnaires. Interview methodology and questionnaires adhered to credible, dependable, and transferable standards of qualitative research.

Researcher's Background

An important component of qualitative research is the data gathering method used throughout the interviewing process. Bentz and Shapiro (1998, p. 96) and Kensit (2000, p. 104) assert that the researcher must allow the data to emerge. In other words, during the interviewing process, the researcher should not force a reaction or responses from the questions but allow the participant to communicate lived experiences.

The researcher's professional career stemmed from being a teacher and an assistant principal in various local middle schools for 20 years; this researcher worked with thousands of middle schoolers on career planning and the high school selection process program called Teacher-based Guidance. The Teacher-based Guidance (TBG) program entails working with middle school students on social and emotional issues and exposing this age group to high school programs that will place them on technical school or college track programs for post-secondary education. The Teacher-based Guidance (TBG) meetings held one hour daily, provided a setting that allowed for a mutual conversation between the teacher and students. Students were

encouraged to share their perspectives concerning career planning and their social and emotional needs.

In addition to advising and counseling middle school students, the researcher supervised teachers while serving as an assistant principal. The researcher's role as an assistant principal was one that involved conferencing with teachers on curricular and instructional issues, as well as promoting positive classroom management strategies to ensure the delivery of rigorous and relevant instruction.

Skills developed as a teacher and an assistant principal assisted the researcher with selecting an appropriate site that is free of distractions, arranging comfortable seating and lighting, explaining the purpose and the procedure to be followed, asking permission to record responses, designing questionnaires and evaluative instruments, establishing interview schedules that are sensitive to the age and development of participant, posing open-ended questions, listening to responses, asking clarifying questions, recording responses accurately, and safeguarding the gathered data in a secure location.

The researcher recorded and collected all permission forms and records of individual and group interviews. The researcher in addition ensured that all recorded interviews were transcribed within 24 hours and made sure that written notes are reviewed and placed in a secure location prior to the end of the day. Implementing these practices caused the researcher to exercise discipline necessary for effective data gathering, ensure accuracy of content, and reduce lag time in completing the research.

Population and Sample

Selecting the participants for the proposed sampling is essential to the study. Seidman (2006) maintained that the purpose of an in-depth interview study is to understand the experience

of those who are being interviewed (p. 51). The researcher understood this because in the phenomenological approach the hypothesis is not being tested nor generalized. The phenomenological approach is designed to present the lived experience of the targeted participants in such a way that it grabs the readers by generating a deeper understanding of the issues at hand.

Demographics Related to Participant Selection

To gather a deeper understanding of target participants, the researcher must share the backgrounds of where the participants reside as it impacts the decisions that are made. In this study, the sampling population resided in Jefferson County, Kentucky, also known as Metro Louisville. Metro Louisville is divided into 26 districts and, according to the 2019 census report, has a population of approximately 617,638. The 26 districts are gerrymandered in such a way that many of the neighborhoods overlap into other districts. This research will focus on districts one through five.

Neighborhoods within the five districts selected for this study have distinct commonalities, such as high levels of poverty and low levels of college attainment. The selected five districts consist of neighborhoods known as Shively (South Louisville); Newburg (Southeastern Louisville), California, Algonquin, and Russell (Central Louisville); and Portland, Parkland, Park DuValle, Chickasaw, and Shawnee (West Louisville). Of the 617,638 individuals who live in Metro Louisville/Jefferson County, 16.6 percent live in poverty. In all the five districts, the poverty rate ranges from 18 to 40 percent of individuals earn less than ten thousand dollars a year (towncharts.com, 2019).

Data from the 2019 Town Charts indicate that West Louisville has a population of 62,923. Central Louisville's population is 31,671. South Louisville has a population of 15,741. The

Southeastern Louisville population consists of 20,636 residents.

In addition to high poverty, data from TownCharts (2019) indicated that the average high school graduation rate is 88.9 percent. The same data source indicates that the college graduation rate for residents with a bachelor's degree is less than 30 percent.

The level of poverty and college graduation rates were the impetus for the researcher's interest in examining attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of student participants residing in the five identified districts in Metro Louisville.

While the students for this study resided in the five Metro Louisville districts with the largest percentages of low-income families and lowest percentages of college graduates, they attended schools throughout the 26 metro districts. Students residing in the identified districts often participated in programs within the high poverty districts aimed at enhancing academic skills. Even though the researcher resides in the suburbs of Metro Louisville and has no affiliation with the proposed community centers and churches selected for this study, it is essential to note that using these facilities will eliminate researchers' bias while promoting the creditability of the research.

Participant Identification

The study's sample is comprised of 15 middle school-aged students and their parents. The researcher selected participants from the consent forms that were distributed by the center coordinator. All interviews were conducted in various community centers and churches that reside in Metro Louisville. These student participants were currently enrolled in comprehensive educational programs. This means that no student participant was enrolled in Special Education or Advanced Placement Programs. All participants were members of similar economic backgrounds as determined by being recipients of the free and reduced lunch program.

Prior to implementing the actual research, formal letters were mailed to directors of 25 community centers and church affiliated sponsored after school education programs. The letter's goal was to request participation and inform the targeted population. Each director provided background information regarding the facilities' missions, goals, visions, and history. They were also asked to provide a rationale for their afterschool academic program to ensure appropriateness of the program for the study.

Once the participants and the various locations were identified and confirmed, the researcher and the directors of the program discussed data collection, data analysis, and the intended outcomes of the study. Later, the researcher, directors, student participants, and parents discussed the purpose of the study. The researcher also informed the participants about a gift card to a local restaurant as a token of appreciation for participating in the study.

Students' parents, guardians, or caregivers were required to submit signed permission forms to participate in the study. Permission to participate forms and demographic information about each student were coded and stored in a locked cabinet and maintained in the researcher's home office.

Research Questions

The central research question that will support this study is: "To what extent do attitudes, perceptions, and experiences decisions of Middle School Students from low socioeconomic background to attend a Postsecondary Institution?" The following three questions below will be used to guide the research:

RQ1: What positive or negative experiences in middle school might cause a student from a low socioeconomic background to decide not to attend a post-secondary institution?

RQ2: What are the most important influences that impact how middle school students from a low socioeconomic background articulate their desire going to college?

RQ3: What non-academic factors related to college attainment might help middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds choose to attend at a post-secondary institution instead of entering the workforce immediately after high school?

Procedures

The Belmont Report (1976), published by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, “identifies basic ethical principles and guidelines that address ethical issues arising from the conduct of research with human subjects” (2016, March 11). The report cautions the researcher to “do no harm” to the subjects used in their research. The researcher must take into consideration the three following basic ethical principles of research is to: (a) have respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. Then, the researcher must institute these ethical principles to ensure that all practices are embedded in the study before submitting to the local Institutional Review Board.

The study proposal was shared with the researcher’s committee. Afterward, the researcher completed the modules associated with Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) to obtain verification. After obtaining approval from the research committee and obtaining verification from CITI, the proposed study was submitted to the local Institutional Review Board of Western Kentucky University for final approval. Immediately following the approval from the Institutional Review Board, an introductory letter was sent to the center’s coordinator to obtain student and parent participants. Each student and parent who was identified for the study was sent a consent and assent form to be signed before the actual interview. All data collected

through questionnaires and in-depth interviews will be administered over a six-week period. Initial telephone calls and face-to-face interviews were used to initiate the process.

Open-Ended Questionnaire

The open-ended questions designed for the interview session were approved by the committee prior to initial contact with the participants. The theme of the open-ended questions concentrated around the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of the identified middle school students from low socioeconomic status about participation in higher education.

The selection process used to identify the participants was determined by the results from the questionnaire. The economic status was weighted heavily in the selection process. The researcher coded data items, refined interviews and field notes, and transcribed audio recordings daily after each session. The data were labelled and stored in a secure location daily to decrease the possibility of loss of information due to human error. The participants, middle school aged students and parents/guardians/caregiver, completed a questionnaire and participated in an unstructured interview session for questionnaire and interview forms (see Appendix A). These sessions were conducted during the designated times and days agreed upon with the participants.

A three, four, and five-point Likert scale was used for parents and the targeted student participant group. The scale included questions related to ethnicity, economic status, levels of education, and attitudes and perceptions of college attainment. The parent surveys focused on the parents' highest level of education, reinforcement, their ethnicity, and economic status. The student questionnaire focused on attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of the identified middle school aged students from low socioeconomic status. The researcher used the format and portions of the Arlin-Hill Attitude Survey to conduct the research and ensure credibility and validity of the study.

Interviews

Seidman (2006) asserted the open-ended question's major task during the interview is to build upon the participant's responses to obtain the goal of reconstructing the experiences within the study's topic (p. 15). To perform this type of interview the researcher must allow the participant to explore the experience through dialogue and questioning. The researcher began the study by writing interview questions that addressed the lived experience of the participants.

The researcher contacted potential participants by telephone, email, or the United States Postal Service. Initial conversations requested participants to complete a questionnaire. The results from the questionnaire guided the final selections process for the initial face-to-face interviews.

Locke (1989) purported, "[T]he adequacy of a research method depends on the purpose of the research and the questions being asked" (p. 11). Nevertheless, the questions developed for the research consist of portions of the Arlin-Hill Attitude Survey along with questions from various research studies that addresses middle school students, the College Board, and First-Generation College Students (FGCS) to give reliability and integrity to the study. All appendices for interviewing questions used for the study are listed at the end of the study.

Relying on the three ethical principles of research: (a) have respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice as a guide to develop interview questions, the interviewer ensured the interview questions meet the criteria of research protocol. Qualitative research protocol requires the researcher to have respect for the participants. The researcher made sure that the appropriate protocols have been implemented.

During the interviewing process clear instructions were given to the participants to complete the questionnaire. While instructions were given verbally, a copy of the instructions

were also available for the participant to read silently. The participants were allowed time during the interviewing process to ask questions for clarity. After the questionnaire was collected, the results from the questionnaire were coded and placed in a secure location for those participants identified for the study.

Artifact Review

The use of triangulation increases the credibility and validity of the study's findings. Lincoln and Guba (1989) advocated, "Prolonged engagement in the field and triangulation of data sources, methods, and investigators establish credibility" (p. 337). The researcher as the investigator ensures trustworthiness of the study by using methods such as interviews, observation, and collecting documents from the various participants and the community directors that provide information about policies and procedures of the after-school programs selected for study.

Trustworthiness

The study's trustworthiness is contingent on the researcher knowing that the study is credible based on establishing four guiding principles to achieve the same reliability that can be used in a quantitative study. To evaluate the findings of a qualitative study, the study must address the following: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Along with using those guiding principles and utilizing multiple data sources and methods that promote triangulation, the researcher has a greater chance of obtaining trustworthiness. The researcher will take crucial steps to ensure a position of being ethically engaged during the supervision of the study. The researcher will ensure that the participants are the focus. Making the participants the focus, the researcher understands that this is key to producing credible findings. The previously mentioned standards for the researcher are essential to developing a working

relationship with the participants and the study's trustworthiness. The researcher used the above principles, sources, and methods that ensured future replication.

Data Analysis

Preparing and organizing data is a fundamental component of data analysis in qualitative research. Even though the qualitative researcher utilizes different approaches to obtain the desired results, it is helpful for the researcher to know what analysis strategy will be used within the study.

Patton (2002) stated, “[T]he data generated by qualitative methods are voluminous” (p. 210). Acknowledging that data collection can be huge and overwhelming, the researcher must reduce data into meaningful segments, themes, categories, charts, tables, and graphs.

Out of several approaches to explain the data analysis for this research, the most appropriate use is a narrative theme, which is less structured as discussed by van Manen. van Manen (2014) suggested that (a) the questions that guide the study are critical and if the questions lack clarity and power, the questions will fail for the lack of reflective focus; and (b) the lack of experiential details, concreteness, vividness, and lived thoroughness the analysis will fail for lack of substance (p. 297). With clear and concise questions used to obtain the preferred results, the researcher must use various data sources to place emphasis on questions to gain an understanding of themes occurring from the participants' response.

Creswell and Poth (2018) further pointed out that analyzing the data for themes, using different approaches to examine the information, and considering the guides for reflection should yield an explicit structure of the meaning of a lived experience (p. 254). The researcher must search for themes that exhibit focus, and simplification of ideas and descriptions of lived experiences.

As an outcome from the information above, the results of data collection of this study are presented using the narrative analysis method. This method assisted the researcher in understanding events that occurred in the lives of the participants, which addressed how the participants form meaning to those events. The narrative analysis method can assist the researcher in making sense of the past, which can create meaning from that information. This method uses stories and life experiences to express how values and belief act as a guide for interpretation. Using the narrative analysis approach, the data can be derived from interviews, documents, and personal accounts of an event to explain the lived experience.

Since this field of research is relatively new and there are limited studies on this topic, the most immediate theoretical framework is Moon and Callahan's study. Moon and Callahan's (1999) research focused on middle school students' attitudes toward school. Moon and Callahan's study used longitudinal data analysis which focused on

- (a) comparing gifted and regular middle school student's attitudes toward school;
- (b) middle school student's declining interest in schools according to grade levels;
- (c) middle school students' achievement levels in math and reading. (p. 62)

Moon and Callahan present the theory to encompass an attitudinal element within the research (p. 62).

Limitations

According to Patton (2002), "There is no perfect research design. There are always trade-offs" (p. 223). Nevertheless, the researcher must discuss the limitations to avoid undermining the value of the research. Using phenomenological research design, the researcher investigated the human being's everyday experience without having preconceived assumptions about the phenomenon. Any preconceived assumptions lead the researcher down a pathway that promotes

bias. Bias in the study can alter one's beliefs or values. It is crucial that one set aside those prejudices. In the study, the researcher took extra precautions to ensure the nonresponsive reaction to statements and conclusions exhibited during the interviewing process. Another limitation is the inordinate amount of time and how labor-intensive it is to conduct research. While conducting the study, the researcher found that parents had difficulty understanding the educational and assessment terms. Also, the researcher found that using focus groups to gather data altered the interviewing process if parents showed signs of resistance to participating in focus groups with individuals with whom they were not familiar. In addition, students also delayed the interviewing process by failing to return completed forms needed to conduct the interviews.

The sample size is another limitation of a phenomenological study. On one hand, if the sample size is too large, it limits an in-depth analysis of what is being examined. On the other hand, a small sample size allows the researcher to examine in-depth similarities and differences of the participant's responses. The researcher believes that sample size limits the quantity of the responses to the research question; thus, challenging the generalizability of the responses.

A final limitation is the amount of data retrieved and analyzed. Data retrieval and analysis involves reading and eliminating insignificant data that fosters an incomplete conclusion that alters additional research on the topic.

While conducting the data analysis, the researcher separated data into pertinent and impertinent data. Then, the researcher arranged pertinent data into themes that describe the participants' lived experiences.

Conclusion

The methodology chapter included the following information to ensure that the reader has

a clear understanding of study's purpose. The chapter consisted of research design, research questions, analysis of the study, role of the researcher, description of the participant population, demographic information about the city, timelines, missions, goals, visions of recruitment sites, data analysis, and challenges that may impact the validity of the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

The study's purpose was to examine factors that influence low socioeconomic middle school student's attitudes and perceptions toward attending and graduating from post-secondary institutions. The researcher interviewed 15 middle school students about their college preparatory experiences, including their experiences with selective tracking practices, parental influences, and teacher biases that may also impede or impact life-long decision toward college attendance. The researcher also interviewed parents of the participants to better understand how parents shape their child's perceptions of college attendance.

This chapter includes a summary of participants' responses and the theme that emerged from the participants' experiences and responses collected during the interviewing sessions, relative to study's central research question. The first chapter of this research project introduces background information pertinent to the study.

Participants Description

The participants in this study consisted of 13 parents and 15 students who resided in the five targeted districts with higher percentages of low-income families in Metro Louisville in Jefferson County. The students attended after-school educational programs in community centers and local churches within their residential neighborhoods for additional educational support.

Fifteen students (nine males and six females) from the three middle school grade levels (five-Eighth Graders, seven-Seventh Graders, and three-Sixth Graders) and 13 parents (one father, seven mothers, four grandmothers, and one aunt) participated. As seen in the gender delineation of parent and guardian participants, females were the dominant gender represented among parents/guardians with a female to male ratio of 12 to 1.

Mothers, grandmothers, and an aunt discussed many of their desires for their middle school student relatives who participated in the study (see Table 1, Table 2, Table 3).

Table 1

Student Participants' Gender

| Gender | <i>f</i> | Percent |
|-----------------------|----------|---------|
| Male | 9 | 60.00 |
| Female | 6 | 40.00 |
| Total of Participants | 15 | 100.00 |

Note: *f* = frequency

Table 2

Participants' Educational Level

| Grade Level | <i>f</i> | Percent |
|---------------|----------|---------|
| Sixth Grade | 3 | 20.00 |
| Seventh Grade | 7 | 47.00 |
| Eighth Grade | 5 | 33.00 |
| Total | 15 | 100.00 |

Note: *f* = frequency

Table 3

Parent/Guardian-to-Student Relationship

| Relationship to Student | <i>f</i> | Percent |
|-------------------------|----------|---------|
| Mother | 7 | 50.00 |
| Father | 1 | 0.8 |
| Grandmother | 4 | 30.00 |

| | | |
|-------|----|--------|
| Aunt | 1 | 0.8 |
| Total | 13 | 100.00 |

Note: f = frequency

During the initial interviewing session, which focused on the demographics of the parents/guardians, the researcher noticed that four of the 13 parents/guardians were somewhat hesitant when asked the question regarding their highest level of educational attainment and graduation date from high school. The data reflected that 31%, or 4 of 13, parents/guardians graduated from high school. Twenty-three percent, or 3 of 13, of the parent/guardian participants have earned baccalaureate degrees. Although these parent participants earned baccalaureate degrees, they still resided in areas of poverty. Factors that contribute to their current residency are financial restraints, employability based on skills, and their comfort level residing in areas of familiarity. In short, having a college degree moved these parents to a higher level of poverty-not out of poverty.

Table 4

Parent Participants Highest Level of Education

| Highest Level of Education | f | Percent |
|----------------------------|-----|---------|
| High School | 4 | 31.00 |
| College Freshman | 1 | 8.00 |
| College Sophomore | 2 | 15.4 |
| 4-Year College Graduate | 3 | 23.01 |
| Graduate School | 3 | 23.01 |
| Total | 13 | 100 |

Note: f = frequency

When the researcher addressed the racial demographics of participants, parents/guardians and students identified themselves as African American; however, when asked about their ethnicity, one student identified himself as Latino. The student who identified himself as Latino had a physical appearance which would allow him to be perceived as Latino. However, his mother clearly identified him as African American. Therefore, the researcher considered all students to be African American.

Table 5

Race/Ethnicity of Student Participants

| Race/Ethnicity | <i>f</i> | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|----------|---------|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 0 | 00.00 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 0 | 00.00 |
| Latino American | 0 | 00.00 |
| White/Caucasian | 0 | 00.00 |
| Black /African American | 15 | 100.00 |
| Multiple Ethnicity/Other | 0 | 00.00 |
| Total | 15 | 100.00 |

Note: *f* = frequency

Table 6

Race/Ethnicity of Parent Participants

| Race/Ethnicity | <i>f</i> | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|----------|---------|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 0 | 00.00 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 0 | 00.00 |
| Latino American | 0 | 00.00 |

| | | |
|--------------------------|----|--------|
| White/Caucasian | 0 | 00.00 |
| Black /African American | 13 | 100.00 |
| Multiple Ethnicity/Other | 0 | 00.00 |
| <hr/> | | |
| Total | 13 | 100.00 |
| <hr/> | | |

Note: f = frequency

Although the researcher was looking for a racially diverse group of individuals to participate in this study, 100% of the parent and student sample was people of color who resided in the identified zip codes and who were utilizing after school academic, social, nutritional, and cultural services available in their community centers and churches.

Central Research Question

The central research question for this study was: “To what extent do attitudes, perceptions, and experiences impact low socioeconomic middle school students’ attitudes toward attending post-secondary institution?” The central question is followed by three guiding research questions designed to obtain additional information from students and parents/guardians. The three guiding research question are:

RQ1. What positive or negative experiences in middle school might shape a low SES student’s attitude toward post-secondary education?

RQ2. What are the most important influences that impact how middle school students from low SES background articulate their desire to go to college?

RQ3. What non-academic factors related to college attainment/enrollment might help middle school students from low SES backgrounds choose to attend a post-secondary institution instead of entering the workforce immediately after high school?

Data Collection

Fifteen middle school students and 13 parents/guardians were asked to complete a questionnaire requesting demographic information, followed by an unstructured interview with the researcher.

The 15 student participants also responded to two components of the Arlin-Hills Attitudinal survey, which focused on the school setting and students' perception of their teachers (see Appendix D). Other segments of the interviewing session involved student participants addressing the guiding research questions from research studies that addressed middle school students, the College Board, and First-Generation College Students (FGCS).

The researcher completed all necessary steps according to Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Western Kentucky University to acquire approval to begin the study. All participants (students, parents, and guardians) participated in a 45- to 60-minute semi-structured interview with open-ended questions (see Appendix C). The open-ended questions for the adults focused on the highest level of education, academics, and positive reinforcement, and the student interview questions examined attitudes, perceptions, and educational and personal experiences toward school and their teachers.

The researcher used the phenomenological method of collecting data by listening and engaging with non-judgmental prompting that allowed participants to speak freely.

Data/Theme Analysis

Students who believe they can be successful usually believe so because they do not possess a mindset that is “fixed,” as stated by Carol Dweck, author of *Mindset* (2006). Those with a “fixed” mindset are certain to rely on other individuals to determine their success and accomplishment.

According to Claire McCathy (2019), senior faculty editor of the Harvard Health Medical

Publishing, “Parents who believe their child is capable to succeed promotes opportunities for their child to be resilient, independent, build on social skills along with sharing empathy, that they are self-regulating, and encourage creativity and curiosity” (www.harvardhealth.org, p. 1).

Middle school students are at a critical junction in their development as they transition from children to young adults. According to Steinberg and McCray (2012), middle school students become increasingly aware of their own learning, self-image, and relationships with others. As they begin to explore the possibility of attending college, it becomes essential for adults to help by addressing middle schoolers’ motivation, concerns, and interest in college attendance (p. 2).

The researcher used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to ascertain data results and themes guided by a phenomenological method. Creswell (2012) stated, “[A] phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of concept or phenomenon” (p. 76). Using the interpretive phenomenology approach, the researcher focused on the responses from the interviews of the students, parents, and guardians to understand and interpret what the individuals were experiencing in their daily lives related to college attendance goals for their middle schoolers. The themes that emerged from the study results emphasized factors that played a significant role in the decision-making of middle school students' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs toward attending a post-secondary institution.

The data analysis was organized and presented based on the responses from a series of interviewing questions completed by the students, parents, and guardians. Common themes emerged that were relevant to the three guiding research questions. In this study, replies to the research questions and themes are reported first by the students’ responses and followed by

parents' and guardians' responses. After the quoted responses are summaries and comparisons of students' and parents/guardians' responses.

Research Question One: What positive or negative experiences in middle school might shape a low SES students' attitude toward post-secondary education?

RQ1 Theme 1: Conversations about college occur inconsistently within middle schools and home about post-secondary education.

The results from Table 7 display what adults in a school setting discussed with middle school students regarding college attendance, their interaction with teachers, and academic course preparation according to student participants. The responses from the interviewing questions 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5 and 1.9 are included below:

Table 7

Research Question One

| Student Responses to RQ One | <i>f</i> | | | Percentage | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|
| | Affirmative Responses with Comments | Negative Responses with Comments | Total | Affirmative Responses with Comments | Negative Responses with Comments | Total |
| 1.1 What do adults in your school say about college? | 5 | 10 | 15 | 33.00 | 67.00 | 100.00 |
| 1.2 What do they say personally and what do they say to your whole class? | 5 | 10 | 15 | 33.00 | 67.00 | 100.00 |
| 1.3 Do you hear adults in your school talk to other students about attending college? | 9 | 6 | 15 | 60.00 | 40.00 | 100.00 |
| 1.4 How do the adults in your middle | 8 | 7 | 15 | 53.00 | 47.00 | 100.00 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|-------|--------|--------|
| school encourage you to take challenging courses? | | | | | | |
| 1.5 What do the adults at your school say to you about which course you should choose? | 0 | 15 | 15 | 0.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 |
| 1.6 Do you get to choose what kinds of classes you should take at your school? | 1 | 14 | 15 | 7.00 | 93.00 | 100.00 |
| 1.7 Do you ever notice the adults in your middle school treating students differently based on the kinds of classes they take? If so, how? | 3 | 12 | 15 | 20.00 | 80.00 | 100.00 |
| 1.8 Do you feel students in the regular program have the same opportunities and support as those in the AP Program? If so, how? | 11 | 4 | 15 | 73.00 | 27.00 | 100.00 |
| 1.9 Has any adult at your middle school discouraged you from attending college? If so, what did they say? | 0 | 15 | 15 | 0.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Note: f = frequency

Student Survey Question 1.1 What do adults in your school say about college?

When the researcher asked students, “What do adults in your school say about college?”, 67% of those students responded with affirmative comment. Below are responses from three of

the eighth graders.

Student D4 said,

They ask me if I want to go.” And, I said, “yes.” “They also say it’s not a necessity to go, but it is a good thing.

Student S5 said,

Clearly, that college is important, because it’s going to help in the future with social skills and also to help you get jobs. And they say that most jobs they have pays well from going to college.

Student S5 also said,

They would recommend it. Most teachers said they went to college and not only was a great experience, but it’s just important for you to go to college because there’s many positive benefits from it.

Another Student D5 said,

Now we are doing IOP (Adolescent Intervention Outpatient Program). So basically, that is (the program) getting us ready for things we want to do in college. It’s like things that you’re interested in, and you pick three things, and these are your hobby that you do. Then they give you a whole bunch of careers that you can do. Then they give you information on the pay and the hours you would be working.

Student Survey Question 1.2: “What do they say to you individually, and what do they say to your whole class?”

When the researcher asked students, “What the adults said to you individually or the whole class about attending college,” 67% responded with various negative comments.

These three students shared the following negative responses about personal and whole class conversation about college.

A sixth grader student A4 said,

Uh, we haven't talked about college yet. But we are talking about high school.

They (meaning teachers) personally say the type of high school to choose and talk about your grades.

Two seventh graders shared these responses. Student A3 said,

They really don't say much about going to college because I am only in the seventh grade. They may ask a question, like who is all going to college? I said, "me." "I do want to go to college because I want to play football. Or if that doesn't go right, I will just do math or deal with technology. But they usually don't ask about college. I don't know about eighth grade I haven't gone to that stage. But right now, they don't really talk about college.

Another seventh grader, student C2, closed with this response,

Not really. The only thing they [teachers] really say is, 'It is a better advantage for you to go to college and it will help you in the future.'

Student Survey Question 1.3: Do you hear adults in your school talk to other students about attending college?

The results of survey question 1.3 revealed that 60% of the 15 students said they had heard adults talk to other students about going to college but not directly to them. However, only three of the 15 had something additional to say about what they had heard. The two eighth graders and one seventh grader shared the following.

Student S5 said,

Yes, we have a class on it. I wouldn't say a class on college, but we have a class on business and stuff, and they pride themselves on colleges, like a really important factor of most of the jobs in that business class.

Student D5 responded by saying,

Some people do because their parents request them to talk about college and careers.

The seventh grader A3 shared the following,

Yeah. My teachers talk to some of my classmates about college. Some [my classmates] of them will go and some won't, but it all depends.

From the first three questions, the researcher found that students felt the conversations with adults about post-secondary education focused more on the adults' experiences in college rather than discussing students attending post-secondary institutions. Further conversations with the students, especially the lower grades, revealed that middle school teachers had more discussions about selecting and preparing for high school than about college attendance.

In middle schools across Jefferson County, school personnel place more emphasis on selecting the appropriate high school than on college attainment. The researcher found that the majority of the students had very little exposure to career preparedness that would lead to college attainment based on the student's discussion. Only 5% of the students had exposure to a career readiness program.

Student Survey Question 1.4: How do the adults in your middle school encourage you to take challenging courses? And, Student Survey Question 1.5: What do the adults at your school say to you about which course you should choose?

Survey questions number 1.4, and 1.5 focused on how adults encourage students to take

challenging courses and what courses the student should take. When asked about taking difficult classes (Advanced and Honors Program), 53% of the students said they were encouraged by an adult to take them. However, with survey question 1.5, when asked about what courses they should choose, 100% of the students said that they are never giving the choice in selecting their courses. When prompted to give additional responses, three eighth graders shared this:

Student A5 said,

Some teachers say, it might be challenging but I believe you can do it. They encourage me to face my fears and complete the challenge and go through the course. Sometimes they stand by my side and help me out with some things that I don't understand. But we get through it.

Another eighth grader identified as D4 said,

They're always there to help you. If you need it and they always like to encourage you. Giving a little bit of a push and if you are struggling, they're always there to help and guide you along the way.

The final comment from the eighth grader identified as S5 said,

Um. Well, there's a letter they give out to certain students on certain subjects that they see those students will do well and they give a message to their parent that they kind of try to guide them in this best class for those students. Then they also have this little paper they give out in the beginning of the year with the classes they think are important and why they're important.

The responses from the three students revealed that they are encouraged and provided support as needed by the adults in their schools.

Student Survey Question 1.9: Has any adult at your middle school discourage you from attending college? If so, what did they say?

The final question in this section, numbered 1.9 asked students if any adults discouraged them from attending college. All the students provided a “no” response to this question. An interesting comment regarding this question came from Student A3.

Student A3 said,

No, no, not at all. The adults after school are always encouraging us to keep moving and if you do go to college, Hooray! If you don’t go find something you like to do.

The researcher must acknowledge that talks are occurring between students and adults but not to the level that creates a greater awareness of their college potential. A 2010 PDK-Gallup poll found that 75 percent of Americans believe that college attendance is an absolute necessity for success in today’s world (p. 1). With that being said, why are some students encouraged and challenged, while others feel they are not? According to Steinberg and McCray (2012) “[M]iddle school students are developmentally ready for academically challenging work, and they are also becoming aware of the social aspect of learning” (p. 7).

Table 8

Parents’ Survey Responses

| Survey Questions | <i>f</i> | | | | Percent | | | |
|--|----------|----|----|-------|---------|-------|----|--------|
| | Yes | No | DK | Total | Yes | No | DK | Total |
| 1. Do you talk to your child about attending college? | 12 | 1 | | 13 | 92.00 | 8.00 | | 100.00 |
| 2. Are you aware that there is financial support for your child to attend college? | 11 | 2 | | 13 | 84.00 | 15.00 | | 100.00 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|--------|-------|--------|------|--------|
| 3. Have you and your child talked about financial options for college attendance? | 6 | 7 | 13 | 46.00 | 54.00 | 100.00 | | |
| 4. Do you know how to access financial support for your child to attend college? | 8 | 5 | 13 | 61.00 | 38.00 | 100.00 | | |
| 5. Have you made any financial plans for your child to attend college? | 6 | 6 | 1 | 13 | 46.00 | 46.00 | 8.00 | 100.00 |
| 6. Have you made any academic plans for your child to attend college? | 5 | 8 | 13 | 38.00 | 61.00 | 100.00 | | |
| 7. Is your child presently attending or participating in any college preparedness program? | 2 | 11 | 13 | 15.00 | 84.00 | 100.00 | | |
| 8. Do you believe your child is prepared to be a successful college student? | 8 | 5 | 13 | 61.00 | 38.00 | 100.00 | | |
| 9. Are there any college graduates in your immediately family? | 13 | 0 | 13 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 | | |
| 10. Does your child interact with any college attendees or graduates? | 9 | 4 | 13 | 69.00 | 31.00 | 100.00 | | |

Note: *f* = frequency

DK= Do not know

Table 9

Parents' Survey Response

| Survey Question | Almost Never | Once or Twice | Weekly or More | Monthly | Every Few Months | Total |
|---|--------------|---------------|----------------|---------|------------------|--------|
| In the past year, how often have you discussed college with your child? | 8.00 | 8.00 | 23.00 | 38.00 | 23.00 | 100.00 |

Parent Survey Question 1: Do you talk to your child about attending college?

In Table 8, for survey question one, the responses indicated that 92% of the parents/guardians did talk to their child about attending college, but when the researcher applied the follow-up question, the parents/guardians provided additional information about reasons they talked to the child about attending college.

Parent D5 made the following statement which stated,

She needs to make a good career out of her life to be what she wants to be. It's very important for her to follow her own goals in life, because where she came from and what she been through. She never had that positive role model.

While addressing the same question Parent A3 responded by stating the following to her child:

I told him it's an opportunity to get out of the city. You don't have to stay in the state of Kentucky to go to college. I said, get out and see the world, not go wild, but to get your education, but I want you to see the world. I want you to experience something. That is what I keep trying to tell all my kids.

Another response for the same question when discussed with the focus group Parent D4 said,

We talk about the option of college because I have a teen that is kind of in between-- but may not be quite ready for the rigors of college So, we talk about college, and we talk about our [the parents] experiences in college. Telling them [our children] that they are more than capable of going to college and doing well and that we want them to select a college where they feel it's their place. We talk about it quite often.

The last parent response on question one from Parent SP5 was:

I definitely talk to *** about attending college. And I talk about being ready for college right now, because being in middle school I think it's important for her to know that this is part of getting ready. In getting ready, there were certain things that were important that she had to pay attention to and to make sure that her grades are intact.

Parent Survey Question 8: Do you believe your child is prepared to be a successful college student?

In question eight, the researcher focused on whether parents believed that their child is prepared to be successful college student. In the follow-up, the researcher asked for evidence to support their response. Eight out of the 13 parents said “yes,” making it 61% of the parents believe that their child would be a successful college student. The responses from the parents to support their beliefs varied from study habits to strategic academic planning. In the conversation with parent/guardian D1, she said:

He [is] on the path to being there.” She goes on to say, “He is talking, and we are trying to work with him on his study habits and making good choices to allow him to be a good college student.

Parent/ Guardian A1 stated,

It is his academic grades and his attitude.

Parent/Guardian C2 said,

I'm sorry [laughs] he is very intelligent. He keeps up with his grades and he gets upset if he makes less than a “B.” And I make sure he stays focused on his class work before we do anything else.

The responses from the focus group indicated that the student participants are very focused and take their studies seriously. Parent/Guardian D4 from the focus group stated,

I would say my eighth grader is very self-determined and self-motivated. She wants to do well for herself, and she wants to make her parents proud. She is really good with getting her work done.

Parent/Guardian SP5 stated,

Yes, because her child was academically sound.

All eight of the parent/guardian participants believed their child would be successful in college. This confidence apparently stemmed from their own personal experiences of watching their child grow academically over the years and acknowledging what makes a successful college student based on their preparedness and college experience.

Considering some of the positive comments that emerged from the parents'/guardians' interviews, they believed their child would be successful in college. However, there were also five parents/guardians who did not believe their child would not be successful in college. These parents/guardians held Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI) as the culprit for creating academic deficiencies for their child during the Covid-19 pandemic. Another parent blamed the No Child Left Behind Act. Parent C1 said,

I figured the child left behind is hurting our children. Like last year, I wanted him held behind due to his grades and the level he was on. And they [the school district] passed him anyway. Now he's struggling.

Parents/guardians reported that although they advocated for their child's academic success in their local school district, their efforts were hampered by events outside of their control. These parents/guardians reported that the lack of face-to-face instruction and federal

policy created academic limitations for their child's success. The parent believed that the No Child Left Behind act prohibited her child from being retained even though he had not mastered the skills necessary for promotion. However, this was the parent's interpretation of the No Child Left Behind Act and not the actual intent of the legislation.

Parent Survey Question 11: In the past year, how often have you discussed college with your child?

Survey question number eleven focused on how often the parents/guardians discussed college with their child. The results shown in Table 9 revealed that many of the parents had discussed college with their child on a weekly, monthly, and every few months basis. Only one parent indicated that college attainment was almost never discussed. The highest percentage of parents discussing college attendance with their child was the monthly average of 38%, followed by weekly and every few months at an average of 23%. The conversation that one parent had with the researcher was intentional and to the point. Parent A3 stated that she talks to her child weekly. In her own words Parent A3 said,

Mine is weekly and I even keep talking to my 24-year-old about going to college. You are never too old. Don't ever say you are too old to go to college because you are not. I am all for education.

Every parent/guardian addressed the question; however, Parent A3 summed it up by saying, "I am for education." The researcher concluded from talking to each parent/guardian and listening to their experiences that these individuals want their child to succeed, and they look for assistance within their community to help their child to achieve their goals in life.

Research Question Two: What are the most important influences that impact how middle school students from low SES backgrounds articulate their desires to go to college?

RQ2 Theme 2: The lack of academic preparation, career awareness, financial support, college tours, interaction with college students, and self-awareness in middle school does not eliminate the desire of students to attend college.

Rigorous academic programs such as Advanced Placement, Gifted and Talented, and pre-college courses are available for the advancement of students attending college. Chatterji et al. (2021) cited that historically, enrollment in advanced coursework opportunities have a positive impact on admission decisions and in many instances students who have taken these courses has the potential to boost the student’s GPA and their chances of college admission (p. 8).

This study’s research question number two explores factors that influence and impact that middle school students’ desire to attend college. In this section, the research examines middle school students’ feelings, apprehension toward college preparedness, and self-discovery concerning careers and college attendance.

During the interview session, the researcher became increasingly aware that follow-up questions were needed to obtain feedback for the study. Sometimes the researcher would use cues to ascertain information from students who would only give a "yes" or "no" response.

Table 10

Research Question Two

| Student Responses to RQ Two | <i>f</i> | | | Percent | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|
| | Affirmative Responses with Comments | Negative Responses with Comments | Total | Affirmative Responses with Comments | Negative Responses with Comments | Total |
| 2.1 In what ways do you feel the classes you are taking in | 7 | 8 | 15 | 46.00 | 54.00 | 100.00 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|----|----|-------|--------|--------|
| your middle school are preparing you for college? | | | | | | |
| 2.2 Do you ever worry that your classes are not preparing your well for college? Why? | 0 | 15 | 15 | 00.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 |
| 2.3 Are you involved in any advanced placement or pre-college courses at your middle school? If so, what programs and why did you choose to participate in those classes? | 2 | 13 | 15 | 13.00 | 86.00 | 100.00 |
| 2.4 Are you attending any pre-college programs or college preparedness programs within your community after-school or on the weekend? Is so, what program are you attending? | 1 | 14 | 15 | 7.00 | 93.00 | 100.00 |
| 2.5 Are you involved in any career preparedness or career awareness program or courses at your middle school? If so, name the program? | 4 | 11 | 14 | 26.00 | 74.00 | 100.00 |
| 2.6 What do you think of those career programs? And why did you choose to take those courses or programs? | 1 | 14 | 15 | 6.00 | 94.00 | 100.00 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|-------|-------|--------|
| 2.7 What would you have to do to pursue one of those careers? | 10 | 5 | 15 | 67.00 | 33.00 | 100.00 |
| 2.8 Are you attending any pre-college programs at your middle school to help you go to college? If so, what is the name of the program? | 1 | 14 | 15 | 7.00 | 93.00 | 100.00 |
| 2.9 What are you learning about yourself from participating in a pre-college program? | 1 | 14 | 15 | 7.00 | 93.00 | 100.00 |
| 2.10 Have you participated in college tour or college fairs? If so, where did you go and with who did you go and when did you participate with this tour program? | 4 | 11 | 15 | 26.00 | 74.00 | 100.00 |
| 2.11 What factors cause you to decide to participate in a college tour and fair offerings? | 4 | 11 | 15 | 26.00 | 74.00 | 100.00 |

Note: f = frequency

Student Survey Question 2.1: In what ways do you feel the classes you are taking in your middle school are preparing you for college? And, Student Survey Question 2.2: Do you ever worry that your classes are not preparing you well for college? Why?

In questions 2.1 and 2.2, the researcher asked students if they felt the classes prepared them for college and if they worried that those classes were not preparing them. Table 10 shows

that 54% of them said “no.” Three out of the eight students said “no” and responded in the following manner.

A sixth-grade student identified as C3 said the following:

None of my classes are useful for what I’m going to do in college. They have nothing to do with this.

Two seventh graders responded by saying the following:

Student A4 said,

I don’t think none of my classes are preparing me for college, but I think they are preparing me for high school.

Student A5 responded this way:

Well not necessarily because there’s certain things that you know that we haven’t talked about. Teachers don’t really talk about college in middle school. Well not my school, but I feel like if we ask questions about middle school projects, or you know math or science stuff. I feel they’ll give us these answers because they had experiences as an adult. But they never really tell us because we don’t ask questions and stuff.

Responses in the affirmative regarding these two questions are listed below. Again, three of seventh graders responded in the affirmative. Student A3 said,

I feel like right now. Math I really like...and I think it’s preparing me for college because I do want to go to college. But, yeah, they me prepare for high school and college.

Another seventh grader identified as C2 shared this:

I feel that reading and math is preparing me for college.

The final response from a seventh grader known as D1 said,

Yes, the classes are very mature.

The researcher asked the student what he meant by mature, and the student D1 said,

I meant advanced.

The last and final response for question 2.1 came from eighth grader S5:

I think they're preparing me for college by completing project and having to speak in class. Most teachers say that in college you are going to have to speak up to the professors. Sometimes you will have debates between the classmates in college.

When addressing question 2.2, 100%, or 15 out of 15 students, interviewed responded "no" to the question. They appeared to have no worries about their classes preparing them for college. They supported their responses by saying the following:

Seventh grader A4 said,

Well, uh I don't worry they are preparing me well. I just think about how I'm going to prepare myself for high school and college.

Then, seventh grader A3, shared this remark:

Not at all. The teachers give advice and says every day that we must show we get our work done and make sure we pay attention.

The two eighth graders shared their thoughts, but one eighth grader was not as confident as the other.

Student A5 said,

No, I don't worry because I am getting older. I realize that if I am not learning something, that I am supposed to. All I have to do is let somebody know or figure

it out on my own.

However, student D5 said,

Well sometimes. In my IOP [After-School Adolescence Intensive Outpatient Program] meeting the only thing we get is two out of three classes a month to talk about college.

The responses to questions 2.1 and 2.2 revealed to the researcher that the students know the need for preparation. However, as students come from various neighborhoods and attend different schools within this community, it appears that some students believe that some schools do not provide the resources needed for the next level.

Student Survey Question 2.3: Are you involved in any advanced placement or pre-college courses at your middle school? If so, what programs and why did you choose to participate in those classes? And, Student Survey Question 2.4: Are you attending any pre-college programs or college preparedness programs within your community after school or on the weekend? If so, what programs are you attending?

Questions 2.3 and 2.4 address attending pre-college courses and college preparedness programs in their schools and community. Only three students stated that they participated in such a program. In contrast, 93% of the other students surveyed said they did not know about or participate in those programs.

One seventh grader, student C2, who attended a local program called “2 Not 1” a 5013c program that provides parenting skills support to fathers, said,

Yes, I am in a precollege program.

The researcher asks the student about the community program. Student C2 told the researcher the following about the program:

I attend the 2 Not 1 Program that encourages kids to go to college and to get the motivation. The programs show them [students and parents] what you can do to go to college.

The second seventh grader said,

We talked about careers in Indiana, but now that I go to school in Louisville we are not talking about careers. I guess I had missed that class.

D5, said the following:

Yes, I am involved in the Whitney M. Scholar Program. I am also attending the Whitney M Scholar Program and the IOP career preparedness class at my school.

After reviewing the data, three students are currently participating in three pre-college preparedness programs. The three programs that the students discussed are 2 Not 1, Whitney Young Scholars, and the Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP).

These programs had varied approaches to aid students with educational information. The 2 Not 1 program is committed to developing strong families and fatherhood ties. The program teaches parents how to advocate for their child, provides leadership development, engages men and boys into a rite of passage, and offers a youth development that support educational opportunities.

The Intensive Outpatient Programs offers emotional and academic support to students through individual and group therapy in local schools. The therapy in the program is conducted by mental health professional or by a school-based counselor.

“The Whitney M. Young Scholars Educational program serves the need of academically talented and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.” The program empowers students toward academic achievement and college graduation. After further investigation, the students

who participate in the Whitney Young Scholars said that parents are required to commit to the Whitney Young Scholars program philosophy, and they must be in attendance one Saturday a month.

Student Survey Question 2.5: Are you involved in any career preparedness or career awareness program or courses at your middle school? If so, name the program? And,

Student Survey Question 2.6: What do you think of those career programs? And why did you choose to take those courses or programs?

Questions 2.5 and 2.6 address career preparedness and career awareness. The researcher asked the students if they participated in those programs, during the school day or in their community. Seventy-four percent of the students said they did not participate in career preparedness or awareness programs.

Also, when pressed, the students had no idea of such programs. The researcher had to explain the concept, but the response was still “no,” they had not participated in these programs. Three students had an opinion about career preparedness and awareness and shared the following comments with the researcher.

S5 an eighth grader said,

Yes, I’m involved in a career program. At my school the career program is called, ‘Choice.’

A seventh grader C2 said,

Can you explain what a career program is?

The researcher informed C2 that in some career programs an assessment is given to identify special skills or talents. The results may suggest that individuals are capable of being a lawyer, teacher, or an architect. Once explained, C2 said,

Make sense. But yes or no...The reason I say yes or no. It is mostly no, because I don't feel somebody else should tell me what I should do because I am good at something. I feel like I should do things that I have fun doing and something that encourages me.

Again, with question 2.6, 94% of the students could not explain what they thought about a career program, but they could discuss their aspirations.

When asked what you think about the program:

S5 stated,

I enjoyed certain units of the class more than others. I just felt some careers I just didn't really learning about, because I knew I wasn't going to be doing those in my future.

D1 said,

I think having a career program is very useful.

And finally, student D5 said,

It is really fun! It gives you different experiences, you complete the form, and the program digitally tells your career path.

Student Survey Question 2.7: What would you have to do to pursue one of those careers?

When asked student survey question 2.7, 67% of the students could discuss their aspirations toward achieving career goals. Five of the students said, no suspensions, be a leader, and get good grades. Some of the other responses focused on the following:

Two eighth graders shared the following comments.

D5, an eighth-grade student said,

You must work hard; you must study if you want to go to college. You must be a

good role model of other people. If you want to be a counselor, you must be a good role model. You must be a leader not a follower!

S5 shared the following response,

I want to become a lawyer. I need to graduate from high school. Go to college and get my degree and then go to law school.

Two seventh graders said the following:

Student D1 said,

Most likely graduate from high school and then go on to college.

Student A4 said,

I either want to be a policeman, a doctor, or a basketball player. I must go to high school and get a diploma. Then I must pass college courses and choose what career for four or five years. Then you can get to be a doctor or a basketball player.

The final, succinct comment came from a sixth grader, C3, who said,

Get a good education.

The researcher concluded from this question that the students had aspirations to be a doctor, a lawyer, a counselor, and professional sports athlete, respectively. While they had an ideal of what they aspire to be, they also lack the concrete information about college requirement to reach their goals.

Student Survey Question 2.8: Are you attending any pre-college programs at your middle school to help you go to college? If so, what is the name of the program? And, Student Survey Question 2.9: What are you learning about yourself from participating in a pre-college program?

Questions 2.8 and 2.9 asked if the students are attending pre-college programs and what they are learning about themselves from attending those programs. The researcher concluded that 93% of students were not attending pre-college programs. However, one student who participated in the Whitney Young Scholars Program believed that this program was a pre-college program. In the conversation with student D5, she responded by saying,

Right, I attended the Whitney M. Scholars Program and what I am learning is how to basically not to think that schools are hard it makes it easier. Because I first thought that going to high school was going to be the hardest thing ever. Now they [program directors] are talking about how to schedule classes and stuff. In high school you get to pick which courses you want to take so that easy now.

After reviewing the responses to questions 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, and 2.9, the researcher remembered a quotation from Simmons, “Access is a serious concern for vulnerable students” (2019, p. 75). The researcher found that student participants had ideas about the need to go to college and how to pursue a career; however, the quote that came from the sixth grader with such few words summed things up, “Get a good education!”

Overall, the researcher found that those students who participated in these programs learned that they possess high self-esteem, that they were academically prepared, and they could be successful in college. One student believed that she had witnessed social injustice within the classroom and did not like how it felt.

Student Survey Question 2.10: Have you participated in college tour or college fairs? If so, where did you go and with whom did you go and when did you participate with this tour program?

The responses for question 2.10 revealed that only 26% of the students, which is four out

of the 15, went to the University of Louisville for a college tour, while one visited Georgetown College.

Student C3 said,

I went on a college tour, but it wasn't in middle school. I went when I was in the fifth grade. I went to University of Louisville. While there I noticed there was a library where you take out books. There were people talking a lot and they were doing projects in class about their career.

Student C2 said,

I went to University of Louisville for a college tour. The 2Not1 program took me. We went last month. The tour was good, and the college was big too.” After going to the University of Louisville it influences me to go. Teachers and students were there, and they gave some examples of life lessons.

The student identified as D4 went on a college tour to Georgetown College and stated the following:

My brother is going to college next year and I went with him. My mom wants to make the best options for him, so I am learning about these things too. I am watching him apply for grants and scholarships as I apply for the right high school. My brother inspires me.

Student Survey Question 2.11: What factors cause you to decide to participate in a college tour and fair offerings?

The last question in section 2, numbered 2.11, asks the students what factors cause them to participate in college tours and fair offerings. Twenty-six percent of the students stated that the factors that caused their participation were a fieldtrip, and, in two cases, a summer enrichment

program were factors that had caused them to go on college tours.

Student D5 said,

I went last summer in July of 2021. Well, you go to do two programs either the science or the University of Louisville program. I went to do the University program because it will get you ready for college. And it was not easy. It gave you basically a deeper look at things whenever you get older and what you are going to do. There was a graduation for us at the end. We had this ceremony. I enjoyed the activities and events!

As the researcher reviewed questions 2.10 and 2.11, the responses suggest students are being exposed to college tours and fairs by non-profit organizations and parents who have other children embarking on post-secondary education. These students participated in these activities because they were exposed to programs that offered these opportunities. One student stated, “Going to college influenced me to want to attend.”

After reviewing this entire section for research question 2, the researcher found that the lack of preparedness does not prevent students from wanting to attend college. Based on the responses, students appeared to have high expectations for themselves.

According to EdTrust (2020), "Oftentimes education leaders rely on student persistence to make an assumption about student intelligence. To increase enrollment in pre-college and advanced placement courses, we need to create a positive school climate with adults who have high expectations for poor and black children" (p. 7).

Parent Survey Question 2: Are you aware that there is financial support for your child to attend college?

In survey question 2, the researcher found that 84% of the parents were aware of financial

support available for their child. When asked the follow-up question “What are those financial offerings for which you are aware?”, the parents/guardians listed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and community scholarships as financial resources of which they were aware.

Parent SP5 cited,

There are community scholarships, there are organizational scholarship and that there are program scholarships. Those are the ones that I know about and has work with throughout the years and those are the external kinds of things that I know about.

Parent D5 responded,

Yes ma’am. I am learning about financial support through the Whitney Young Scholarship Program.

Another parent from the focus group identified as D4, stated,

Yes, I have learned a lot about financial support in the past years and we are trying to prepare my senior for college. Scholarships are really what we are focused on too. So, that they (children) won’t leave college with a big loan debt. My son happens to play sports and that was part of his scholarship, and we are looking for others that he can qualify for.

All in all, the parents/guardians had some idea of how college can be attained by financial support other than applying for loans. Throughout the discussion, parents/guardians revealed that they have used the internet and word of mouth from other friends and family members to gather information about scholarships available within their community. The researcher also found that the most common response about financial support came from the parents who had obtained

money through FAFSA, scholarships, and college loans. One hundred percent of the parent stated that they did not want their child to participate in school loans that would put them in debt after graduation.

Parent Survey Question 3: Have you and your child talked about financial options for college attendance?

In the initial question and follow-up question to survey question number three, “Have you and your child talked about financial options for college attendance? If so, what did you discuss?”, the “no” response to the question was more frequent than the “yes” responses.

Table 8 shows that 54% of the parents/guardians said “no” without additional explanation as a follow-up to the question. However, 46% of the parents/guardians who said “yes” did offer further explanation to what they discuss with their child.

Parent D1 stated,

I try to stick to things that he can control like scholarships. That if he works hard and get good grades you can get money to go to school that you don't have to pay back.

During the conversation with Parent SP5, she stated the following:

Nothing other than being prepared and being academically ready and to earn scholarship. She also knows about completing the FAFSA because her sister is approaching her freshman year.

Also, Parent C2 stated that she had not personally talked to her son about financial aid, but she did say this,

I know how to access financial aid application because I went to college. I know how to apply for grants and things like that.

When Parent A3 said that she had not talked to her son about financial support, she continued by saying,

I know about him being young and that I would have do this FAFSA.

Finally, Parent A1 said,

Just FAFSA.

Parent A1 continued the discussion by saying,

I have a support team. I've had people and family going to college.

Here again, the researcher noticed that the results from the discussion revealed that parents relied on the experience of other family members and friends to help them through the financial aid process. The researcher recognizes that parents and guardians were sharing “lived experiences” about acquiring financial support.

Parent Survey Question 4: Do you know how to access financial support for your child to attend college?

For survey question number four, there was no follow-up question. The researcher found that 61% of the parents/guardians said they knew how to access financial support for their child to attend college.

The response from Parent D3 and D4 of the focus group was,

We talked about this with our children. Already they [children] know about the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship money. We are combing the different scholarship sites and his counselor has shared something with us. I've been looking for stuff so, anything we can see that he would qualify for or even come close, we start applying.

While Parent C1 stated,

Well, JCPS program downstairs has provided me with a little head start. Actually, [Mr.*****] has talked about the different programs that other people don't know about.

As the researcher reviewed the responses from question number four, eight out of the 13 parents have some idea what financial opportunities are available to them. Here again, the researcher acknowledges that the parents/guardians have "support people" to assist them in gathering information concerning financial access. This assistance is based on the support people lived experiences about own attending a post-secondary institution.

Parent Survey Question 5: Have you made any financial plans for your child to attend college?

The researcher noticed that 46% of the parents/guardians said they have made financial plans for their child to attend college and 8% said that they wanted to plan but did not know how to start the process. When reviewing these responses, the 46% of the parents/guardians who said "no" gave no additional explanation. The one parent/guardian that stated they did not know was a grandmother who was unaware of additional savings or grants available to the child.

Parent/Guardian A3 stated,

No, that is something I don't know.

Parent A1 stated, "Yes" to question, but went on further to say,

He has a saving account.

Parent SP5 stated,

Savings.

Parent D1 said,

We started looking at scholarships already and started doing some savings to help

defray some of the cost.

Parent D5 said,

Now we've just been talking about it and looking at different options. I have been online looking at different grants and the kind of grants out there. My niece has been helping me to look, so we're working on that now. Ms.*** and I have planned a college tour for girls and boys at our church. Hopefully, this year or the next year, they could get in two different colleges.

In further conversation with the parents/guardians, the researcher became increasingly aware that parents have had some personal experiences with the financial element that deters so many individuals from obtaining a college degree. The common thread, based on the parent's/guardian's experiences, was the importance of saving and seeking forms of financial assistance other than loans.

The next group of survey questions focused on academic preparation. The researcher asked the parents/guardians: 1. What academic plans they have made for their child? 2. What college preparedness programs do their child attend? and 3. Do the parents believe that their child can be a successful college student? The researcher used the follow-up questions to ascertain more than a "yes" or "no" response.

Parent Survey Question 6: Have you made any academic plans for your child to attend college?

For question number six, the follow-up questions were: 1. If they (parents) have an academic plan? 2. What are those plans? and 3. Who did the parent and child talk with to construct such a plan?

The "no" response by 61% of the parents/guardians indicated that the majority of those

interviewed did not have an academic plan for their child to attend college. However, three parents talked about the following academic program that they were aware of in the community.

Parent C1 stated,

No ma'am, but I do want him to get in Black Achievers.

Parent SP5 also made the following comment:

None of those programs, but the preparedness and interest in college, like Black Achievers. Participating in those kinds of things and the college readiness program at our church.

Another parent identified as A3 responded in this manner:

No. I didn't know you could start them as early as in middle school. I just always thought high school. And when they do start talking about college in their junior or senior year. Why don't they even talk to them about it in their freshman and sophomore year?

Those parents that said "yes" failed to name a program that their child was currently attending. However, Parent S2 said,

Yes.

Along with another parent identified as C2 that said,

Yes.

Parent C2 went further by saying,

I am currently looking at placing my son advanced placement classes to deter behavior issues.

Parent D5 referred to a program that her child is actively participating in at this time with the following comment:

Yes, Whitney Young scholars they do that. [Referring to academic preparedness]

The parents'/guardians' responses for question six were generated from questions about what they have been exposed to within the community and educational information provided by their local school district. Many of the parents/guardians were aware of the Whitney Young Scholars and Black Achievers; however, these programs are geared to increase the likelihood of students attending a post-secondary institution based upon recommendations from a school counselor, meeting a certain grade point average, and participating in a specific career-oriented group. The common thread is that parents are aware of such programs but failed to obtain access due to specific criteria that are not always available to all parents/guardians.

Parent Survey Question 7: Is your child presently attending or participating in any college preparedness program?

In question number seven, the follow-up question asks the parents specifically, what preparedness programs are their child currently attending? The parent response indicated that only 15% of the students did participant in a preparedness program.

Parent C3 said, her child was attending the Saint George program that is housed in the California community center.

Parent D5 said,

Yes.

She goes on to say that the Whitney M. Young Scholar program has proved to be very helpful. Parent D5 also stated,

They are very supportive of the kids. You know you got to come dress. Yeah, they have nothing on their heads, and you can't be laying down with a blanket. You know they are getting them ready. They are getting them ready to take the ACT

test. There is a summer program for math and engineering classes. They are getting them ready a lot.

It is fair to state that many of the parents were unaware of preparedness programs available to their child. When the researcher spoke of several programs that were within the community the parents wanted additional information about how they could enroll their child into the program. Again, the common thread that permeates through this section is that parents/guardians lack much needed information to solicit opportunities for their child.

Parent Survey Question 9: Are there any college graduates in your immediate family?

Question number nine asked about college graduate in their family with the follow-up question placing emphasis on who those individuals are and how are they related to the student participant. All (100%) of the parent/guardian participants have college graduates in their homes or families. Seventy percent of those parents have attended or completed college with a degree themselves. Those parents/guardians stated that the following role groups were college graduate in their families: sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, and themselves.

Parent Survey Question 10: Does your child interact with any college attendees or graduates?

Question ten asked if their child interacts with college graduates. Sixty-nine percent of the children interacted with college students or graduates. Nine out of the thirteen parents did allow their child to interact with a college graduate. In many cases as stated earlier these college graduates were their parents and close family members such as aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Parent C5 stated the following about interaction:

They interact with their parents. They also interact with their cousins, primarily because of their ages. They are more comfortable in their interacting with cousins.

The parents/guardians from the focus group stated that their children interacted not only with their family members, but they interact with adults outside the family circle.

D4 said the following:

I would say teachers and older cousins that they look up to, which are young adults now. So, a lot of my friends help shape her goals.

Responses from this question indicated the importance of connection between family and friends. These connections provided support to create a positive experience for the both the child and parent/guardians as they make decision concerning post-secondary attendance.

After carefully examining the responses from the parent/guardian's portion of the study, the researcher concluded that parents/guardians and their child must begin the process of making college a reality by making a list of their academic goals and what college they want to attend. Secondly, that parents/guardians and the child must have lengthy discussions on the topic of taking rigorous courses in middle and high school. Finally, the parent/guardian and the child must also focus on getting good grades to establish a strong GPA that will make the student acceptable for the desired college.

As an increasing number of middle school students are beginning to explore the possibility of attending college, it has become essential to address the motivations, concerns, and considerations of these young minds. For middle school students wanting to go to college it is vital for them to understand the steps it requires to attend higher education. Research question three explores non-academic factors related to college enrollment, which might help middle school students choose college over going to work.

Research Question Three: What non-academic factors related to college attainment/enrollment might help middle school students from low SES backgrounds choose to attend a post-secondary institution instead of entering the workforce immediately after high school?

RQ Theme 3: Encouragement and interaction from family and graduates within the community and athletic opportunities may impact the middle school student’s decision to go to college.

Table 11

Research Question Three

| Student Response to RQ Three | <i>f</i> | | | Percent | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|
| | Affirmative Responses with Comments | Negative Responses with Comments | Total | Affirmative Responses with Comments | Negative Responses with Comments | Total |
| 3.1 Are you planning to attend college after high school? If no, explain why? | 15 | 0 | 15 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 00.00 |
| 3.2 Do you have any idea how people go to college? If yes, explain. | 8 | 7 | 15 | 53.00 | 47.00 | 00.00 |
| 3.3 What do you think you must do to attend college? | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 00.00 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|-------|-------|-------|
| 3.4 Has anyone in your family attended college? Who? | 13 | 2 | 15 | 87.00 | 13.00 | 00.00 |
| 3.5 How does that influence your decision about going to college? | 14 | 1 | 15 | 93.00 | 7.00 | 00.00 |
| 3.6 Has any adult in your family or community discussed or encourage you about attending college? If so, who and what did he/she tell you? | 10 | 5 | 15 | 67.00 | 33.00 | 00.00 |
| 3.7 How much encouragement have you received outside your family about attending college? From whom and what did he/she tell you? | 6 | 9 | 15 | 40.00 | 60.00 | 00.00 |
| 3.8 What do you think might keep you from going to college? Explain your responses. | 12 | 3 | 15 | 80.00 | 20.00 | 00.00 |

Note: f = frequency

In Table 11, the researcher uses the student survey questions 3.1 and 3.2 to understand the

participants' thoughts and feelings about college attendance.

Student Survey Question 3.1: Are you planning to attend college after high school? If no, explain why?

The researcher begins this study section by asking question 3.1, which discusses the student's plan to attend college. Table 11 reveals 100% of the students said “yes,” they planned on attending college. The researcher also had the students to elaborate on their responses.

Student C3 said,

Yes. I don't know if this completely right. I guess you can apply. If you have the good grades, you can apply for a scholarship, if the panel agrees with it.

Another student identified as A1 said,

Probably, there is a slight chance. I might head to college or find me a regular job.

The response form student C2 was,

Yes, I am going to college, and I only know about having scholarship offers and sports.

The researcher noticed in conversation with these students that they aspired to attend college and know somewhat of what it may take to get them there. Student A1 gave the impression that he is still determining if it is possible; however, he had a contingency plan of getting a job.

Student Survey Question 3.2: Do you have any idea how people go to college? If yes, explain.

In question 3.2, the researcher asked the students if they had an idea of how people go to college, and 53% said they did.

Student A4 said,

I don't have an idea. But I got a feeling like once you graduated from high school, and do you get chose what college you want to go to. Because I want to go to either Louisville or Kentucky college.

Another Student, C1, said,

Yes, grades and points they have to get.

After reading each response, the researcher found that student participants had some concept of how people go to college, but no concrete evidence.

In question 3.3, the researcher attempts to gain further knowledge from the students' conversation on the process used to gain entry into college.

Student Survey Question 3.3: What do you think you must do to attend college?

Question 3.3 focused on what students must do to go to college. Eighty-seven percent of the responses were, "good grades."

Student S5 said,

You get a college application.

Student S4 said,

Not to get bad things on your record and have good grades.

Student A3 said,

Have good grade of course. If you don't have good grades, you are not going to be accepted. You got to get accepted first, before you can go to college.

Student S3 said,

Study hard and be prepared.

The researcher could tell they had thoughts about college admittance and knew what to do to attend college. The researcher watched them think about their responses and noticed that

before they responded, they were reflecting on their situation and acknowledging what it took for them to go to college.

Student Survey Question 3.4: Has anyone in your family attended college? Who?

Question 3.4 asked, “Has anyone in your family attended college?” Again, 87% of the students said that there was a family member who attended college.

Student C1 said,

Most of my family I think, and all other family members went to college and that influenced me to go to college. I think you must stay in college to move and prepare myself for the real world and see how it is.

Another student, A3, stated,

My mom is going to college right now. Because she didn’t get to go when she was young because she had me and my other two sisters.

Student S3 said,

They [his parents] said if you go to a college, you can be whatever you like. And you can start you own business. You’ll know things. You’ll know what you need to know to start your business.

From the conversation with the students, the researcher acknowledges these students are surrounded by family members who have gone to college or have graduated from college.

Attending college is apparently what these students’ parents want for them, and the students want to achieve the goal that their parents have set for them. One student told the researcher, “I want to make them proud, and I want to do better than they did.”

Student Survey Question 3.5: How does that influence your decision about going to college?

In research question 3.5., the researcher asked, “Knowing that family members have

attended college, how does that influence your decision?” Ninety-three percent of the students responded that other people’s actions influenced their decision.

Student A3 said,

It makes me want to do what momma did but better.

Student A5, an eighth grader said,

They [parents] tell me all the time to get an education. You don’t have to go to college but it’s best for you to go to college, so you’ll get a good paying job.

Another eighth-grader, D5, said,

My uncle went to college. I don’t think he was that good in math. I’m great in math. Maybe if he could go to college, then I can go too.

The students shared that knowing if another family member can attend college helped them to know that college is possible. Student D5 looked at his personal experiences and decided that if one family member was allowed to go to college, his attendance at college was feasible.

Student Survey Question 3.6: Has any adult in your family or community discussed or encourage you about attending college? If so, who and what did he/she tell you?

Question 3.6 asked if any adults in their family or community discussed or encouraged them to attend college. The number of students who answered in the affirmative was 67%. Four of the students responded as follows:

Student A5 said,

Yes, my parents talked to me about going to college. [They say we] recommend you go. They [parents] say that college isn’t for everyone.

Student D5 stated,

My nana talks to me about college. She said you are going to college, and you

need to think about what you want to do.

Student A4 said,

They haven't talked to me about attending, but they told me how college is and what you need to do.

Student S2 said,

The encouragement I get is from my football coach.

The researcher recognized that student support and encouragement came from various individuals in the home and the community. Sixty-seven percent of the students responded in the affirmative that their parents and other community members encouraged them.

Student Survey Questions 3.7: How much encouragement have you received outside your family about attending college? From whom and what did he/she tell you?

Question 3.7 asked how much encouragement students received outside their family. And, from whom and what was said. The data from the question revealed 60% of students said they did not receive encouragement from outside their family. Those students that did receive encouragement outside their family said the following:

Student D5 said,

Yes, I get encouragement from the first lady at my church. A lot of people have encouraged me ever since the third grade.

Student S2 said,

Out of 100? I would say about 70.

Student C3 said,

Not much is being said about me going to college. We don't talk about it much.

According to Choy (2001), students whose parents did not attend college are at a

disadvantage when it comes to post-secondary opportunities (p. 1). Therefore, the researcher recognizes that community stakeholders must fill in the gap for students as they offer encouragement and support whenever they can.

Student Survey Question 3.8: What do you think might keep you from going to college?

Explain your responses.

Question 3.8 was the final question in research question three: What might keep you from going to college? Eighty percent of the student's responses in this section spoke of personal, physical, and financial concerns that can impact their decision to attend college. Below are the responses.

Student A5 said,

Either my grades slip, or I get into something that will change my life forever.

You know hanging around the wrong crowd and not doing what you supposed to do. You know having fun with friends and all.

Student S2 said,

Gang violence. I say this because I see killings everywhere on the news, Instagram, and social media.

Student D1 said,

Not having extracurricular activities.

Student A4 said,

Probably not paying attention and not learning in school. Because if I don't have good grades, most of the colleges will not accept me.

Student C3 said,

Money.

When asked, what do you think would keep you from going to college? D5 said,
Never thought about it.

In this final section of the research questions, the researcher found one response that was not considered at the onset of the research—gang violence. The most common reasons individuals do not go to college have been the absence of money, extracurricular activities, and good grades. Now students are faced with the issue of gang violence, which is another factor that impedes students from believing they can attend college. The researcher knows that there are remedies for lack of money for college, not having extracurricular activities, and good grades, but how will the issue of gang violence be resolved as a factor that hampers opportunities for disadvantaged students?

The researcher reviewed all eight questions under research question 3. The researcher concluded that interaction with college attendees could positively impact middle school students' decision to attend college. Within every response, the students interviewed mentioned a parent, a family member, or a community person who has given encouragement and support.

RQ3 Sub-theme 3a: Fair, dominance, and honor may impact students' attitude toward their teachers.

The Expectancy-Value Theory guided this portion of the research. According to Loh (2019), the Expectancy-Value Theory is widely used to explain and predict student learning performance, persistence, and aspirations (p. 1). In this portion of the study, the researcher utilized portions of the Arlin-Hills survey to focus on how aspirations and motivations in a learning environment impact our decision-making toward attending a post-secondary institution.

The Arlin-Hills attitudinal survey consists of four surveys that measure student attitudes toward teachers, learning processes, language arts, and mathematics. In this study, the researcher

used two surveys to further determine factors that impact middle school students' perceptions and attitudes about college attendance.

Tables 12 and 13 address the subthemes of research question number 3. These subthemes address the students' attitudes toward teachers and school, followed by students' research questions 1.6, 1.7, and 1.8.

Table 12

Arlin-Hills Attitudes Toward Teachers

| Students Response on Attitudes Toward Teacher | No | Sometimes | Usually | Yes | Total |
|---|----|-----------|---------|-----|-------|
| 1. My teachers try new and interesting ways of teaching. | 1 | 2 | 2 | 10 | 15 |
| 2. Some of my teachers act like they are bored with teaching. | 5 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 15 |
| 3. My teachers are fair. | 6 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 15 |
| 4. My teachers praise student a lot. | 2 | 3 | 1 | 9 | 15 |
| 5. My teachers boss student around. | 6 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 15 |
| 6. My teachers talk down to students. | 12 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 15 |
| 7. I feel safe around my teachers. | 2 | 2 | 0 | 11 | 15 |
| 8. My teachers make me feel welcome at school. | 1 | 1 | 3 | 10 | 15 |
| 9. My teachers care about my feelings. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 9 | 15 |
| 10. I admire my teachers. | 0 | 8 | 1 | 6 | 15 |
| 11. My teachers enjoy laughing and joking with us. | 3 | 1 | 4 | 7 | 0 |
| 12. My teachers are friendly to students | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 15 |
| 13. My teachers trust me. | 0 | 2 | 3 | 10 | 15 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|----|----|
| 14. My teachers point out my mistakes more than my good work. | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 15 |
| 15. My teachers do a good job of helping me learn. | 0 | 0 | 2 | 13 | 15 |
| 16. My teachers talk about me going to college | 6 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 15 |

Table 13

Arlin-Hills Attitudes Towards Teachers

| Students Response on Attitudes Towards Teacher | No=0 | Sometimes=1 | Usually =2 | Yes=3 | Total | Total Possible Pts | Percentages |
|---|------|-------------|------------|-------|-------|--------------------|-------------|
| 1. My teachers try new and interesting ways of teaching. | 0 | 2 | 4 | 30 | 36 | 45 | 80.00 |
| 2. Some of my teachers act like they are bored with teaching. | 0 | 5 | 4 | 9 | 18 | 45 | 40.00 |
| 3. My teachers are fair. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 27 | 27 | 45 | 60.00 |
| 4. My teachers praise student a lot. | 0 | 3 | 4 | 27 | 39 | 45 | 87.00 |
| 5. My teachers boss student around. | 0 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 18 | 45 | 40.00 |
| 6. My teachers talk down to students. | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 45 | 11.00 |
| 7. I feel safe around my | 0 | 2 | 0 | 33 | 35 | 45 | 78.00 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|--------|
| | teachers. | | | | | | | |
| 8. | My teachers make me feel welcome at school. | 0 | 1 | 6 | 30 | 37 | 45 | 82.00 |
| 9. | My teachers care about my feelings. | 0 | 2 | 6 | 27 | 35 | 45 | 78.00 |
| 10. | I admire my teachers. | | 8 | 2 | 18 | 28 | 45 | 62.00 |
| 11. | My teachers enjoy laughing and joking with us. | 0 | 1 | 8 | 21 | 30 | 45 | 67.00 |
| 12. | My teachers are friendly to students. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 45 | 45 | 45 | 100.00 |
| 13. | My teachers trust me. | 0 | 2 | 6 | 30 | 38 | 45 | 84.00 |
| 14. | My teachers point out my mistakes more than my good work. | 0 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 21 | 45 | 21.00 |
| 15. | My teachers do a good job of helping me learn. | 0 | 0 | 4 | 39 | 43 | 45 | 96.00 |
| 16. | My teachers talk about me going to college | 0 | 3 | 1 | 15 | 19 | 45 | 42.00 |

The two surveys the researcher used were from "Attitudes Towards Teachers and Attitudes Toward School." The first survey measures teachers' likeability by focusing on aspects

of fairness, dominance, and humor. The second survey, "Attitudes Toward School," measures the aspects of learning often associated with participation, student progress, and freedom to move within the classroom.

In Table 12, which focuses on teacher likeability, 15 students were given 16 prompts. Numbers within Table 12 represent the raw score from those fifteen respondents. Table 13 reflects the percentage of students' responses as determined by the scoring methodology of the Arlin-Hills research.

The students' findings reveal that:

- 80% of the students believe their teacher tried new and interesting ways of teaching.
- 40% of the students stated that their teachers acted like they are bored with teaching.
- 60% of the students stated that their teachers are fair.
- 87% of the students stated that their teachers praised them a lot.
- 40% of the students stated that their teacher did not boss them around.
- 11% of the students stated that their teachers did not talk down to them.
- 78% of the students stated that they felt safe around their teachers.
- 82 % of the students stated that their teachers made them feel welcome.
- 78% of the students stated that their teachers cared about their feelings.
- 62% of the students stated that they admire their teachers.
- 67% of the students stated that they (their teachers) enjoyed laughing and joking with them.
- 100% of the students stated that their teachers were friendly towards them.
- 84% of the students stated that their teachers trust them.

- 21% of the students stated that their teacher pointed out their mistakes more than their good work.
- 96% of the students stated that their teachers do a good job of helping them learn.
- 42% of the students stated that teachers did talk to them about going to college.

According to the data percentages, the likeability ratings of the teacher were quite evident. Responses indicate that, overall, students assess the learning environment as one that promotes persistence and motivation. They feel safe with their teachers and believe they are treated fairly and with respect.

RQ3 Sub-theme 3b: Student engagement in meaningful learning may impact a student’s attitude toward schools.

This sub-theme utilizing Table 14 focuses on the students’ attitude toward school, followed by three student survey questions that address their feelings concerning educational opportunities at their schools.

Table 14

Arlin-Hills Attitudes Toward School

| Student Response on Attitudes Toward School | No | Sometimes | Usually | Yes | Total |
|---|----|-----------|---------|-----|-------|
| 1. We get enough time to help each other in class. | 1 | 3 | 1 | 10 | 15 |
| 2. I have to spend too much time sitting at my desk. | 6 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 15 |
| 3. We spend too much of our class period with everybody working on the same thing at the same time. | 6 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 15 |
| 4. We get enough chances to choose our own activities in class. | 4 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 15 |
| 5. We have to get permission from teachers to anything around here. | 2 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 15 |

| | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|----|----|
| 6. We have enough chances to go outside the classroom and outside the school to learn things. | 8 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 15 |
| 7. We have enough chances to help the teacher plan what we are going to do. | 3 | 4 | 1 | 7 | 15 |
| 8. Teachers do too much of the talking in class. | 5 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 15 |
| 9. We have enough chances to move around the classroom. | 10 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 15 |
| 10. I have enough chances to study together with my friends in this school. | 3 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 15 |
| 11. Too much of what I learn comes from the textbook. | 3 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 15 |
| 12. I feel as though I fit in this school. | 5 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 15 |
| 13. We have too much homework in this school. | 5 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 15 |
| 14. I get enough chances to work with others in small groups on special things that interest me. | 3 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 15 |
| 15. I have enough chances to work at my own speed. | 4 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 15 |
| 16. I enjoy school and look forward to coming every day. | 2 | 3 | 2 | 8 | 15 |
| 17. It is important to me to graduate on time with my classes. | 0 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 15 |
| 18. I need a high school diploma in order to go to college. | 1 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 15 |

Table 15

Arlin-Hills Attitudes Towards School

| Student Response on Attitudes | No=0 | Sometimes=1 | Usually=2 | Yes=3 | Total | Possible Total | Percentages |
|----------------------------------|------|-------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------------------|-------------|
|----------------------------------|------|-------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------------------|-------------|

| Toward Schools | | | | | | | Pts | |
|----------------|--|---|---|---|----|----|-----|-------|
| 1. | We get enough time to help each other in class. | 0 | 3 | 2 | 30 | 35 | 45 | 78.00 |
| 2. | I have to spend too much time sitting at my desk. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 21 | 24 | 45 | 53.00 |
| 3. | We spend too much of our class period with everybody working on the same thing at the same time. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 21 | 24 | 45 | 53.00 |
| 4. | We get enough chances to choose our own activities in class. | 0 | 5 | 4 | 13 | 22 | 45 | 49.00 |
| 5. | We have to get permission from teachers to anything around here. | 0 | 2 | 4 | 27 | 33 | 45 | 73.00 |
| 6. | We have enough chances to go outside the classroom and outside the school to learn things. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 15 | 18 | 45 | 40.00 |
| 7. | We have | 0 | 4 | 2 | 21 | 27 | 45 | 60.00 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|-------|
| | enough chances to help the teacher plan what we are going to do. | | | | | | | |
| 8. | Teachers do too much of the talking in class. | 0 | 4 | 2 | 15 | 21 | 45 | 47.00 |
| 9. | We have enough chances to move around the classroom. | 0 | 1 | 6 | 3 | 10 | 45 | 22.00 |
| 10. | I have enough chances to study together with my friends in this school. | 0 | 4 | 2 | 18 | 24 | 45 | 53.00 |
| 11. | Too much of what I learn comes from the textbook. | 0 | 2 | 4 | 18 | 24 | 45 | 53.00 |
| 12. | I feel as though I fit in this school. | 0 | 3 | 4 | 15 | 22 | 45 | 49.00 |
| 13. | We have too much homework in this school. | 0 | 2 | 4 | 18 | 24 | 45 | 53.00 |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|----|----|----|-------|
| 14. I get enough chances to work with others in small groups on special things that interest me. | 0 | 6 | 4 | 12 | 22 | 45 | 49.00 |
| 15. I have enough chances to work at my own speed. | 0 | 0 | 2 | 27 | 29 | 45 | 60.00 |
| 16. I enjoy school and look forward to coming every day. | 0 | 3 | 4 | 24 | 31 | 45 | 53.00 |
| 17. It is important to me to graduate on time with my classes. | 0 | 1 | 0 | 42 | 43 | 45 | 96.00 |
| 18. I need a high school diploma in order to go to college. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 42 | 42 | 45 | 93.00 |

Table 14 represents the raw score from those fifteen students' responses. Table 15 reflects the percentage as determined by the scoring methodology of the Arlin-Hills research.

The findings reveal that:

- 78% of the students stated they get enough time to help each other in school.
- 53% of the students stated they spent too much time sitting at their desk.

- 53% of the students stated they spent too much of their class time with everybody working on the same thing.
- 49% of the students stated, “We get enough chances to choose our own activities in class.”
- 73% of the students stated, “We have to get permission from Teachers to do anything around here.”
- 40% of the students stated, “We have enough chances to go outside the classroom and outside the school to learn things.”
- 47% of the students stated the teachers do too much of the talking in class
- 53% of the students stated, “I have enough chances to study together with my friends in this class.”
- 49% of the students stated that they feel as though they fit in the school.
- 53% of the students said, “We have too much homework in school.”
- 49% of the students stated they get enough chances to work with others in small groups on special things that interest them.
- 60% of the students stated they had enough chances to work at my own speed.
- 53% of the students stated that they enjoyed school and look forward to coming every day.
- 96% of the students stated that it is important for them to graduate on time with their class.
- 93% of the students stated that they need a high school diploma in order to go to college.

Sixteen out of the 18 Arlin-Hills Attitudinal survey prompts that measured learning characteristics (e.g., participation, student progress, and freedom to move within the classroom)

percentages failed to exceed 80%. The two prompts that measured the importance of graduating on time and obtaining a high school diploma scored 96% and 93%; these scores reflect the student's positive attitudes and perceptions about attaining a college education.

Student Survey Question 1.6: Do you get to choose what kind of classes you should take at your school?

Looking at Table 7, student survey question 1.6, the researcher focused on whether adults tell the student what courses to take. The response revealed that 93% of the students said "no," and 7% of the students did not respond to the question, even with prompting.

The response from student C1 who is an eighth grader said the following:

I only get to choose a class when we change our schedule. This time I got gym and art.

Also, when it came to the students getting to choose their classes, 86% of the students said "no" they did not get to choose.

Students A3, A1, and D5 stated the following:

Student A3 said,

Only in related arts. Right now, I am in orchestra, and I am playing the violin.

That is only the class you get to choose. Other than that, it is all the other subjects science, math, reading and history.

Another student A1 said,

No. Except orchestra and ROTC, they just put me in it. I was fine with it. I like ROTC. Orchestra I picked because I 'm very familiar with band. I haven't been in it long, but I'm very familiar with the instrument. So, I am in orchestra, and I wanted to try something different.

Another eighth grader student identified as D5 said,

No ma'am, you don't get to choose anything. I only get to choose your major and your minor.

When asked by the researcher, what is your major?

Student D5's response was,

My major is theater, and my minor is dance and my club is musical theater.

The final response came from another eighth grader identified as A5.

A5 responded by saying,

No, I didn't get to choose my classes because I got enrolled late. I did get a gaming class. But that was last grading period. Now I'm in art.

The researcher determined from the responses that one out of 15 students were allowed to choose courses. The exceptions to choosing courses was due to late enrollment and the end of the semester. However, 13 out of the 15 students did discuss that the classes they were taking, outside the core classes (e.g., Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, and Math) were electives.

Student Survey Question 1.7: Do you ever notice the adults in your middle school treating students differently based on the kinds of classes they take? If so, how? And, Student Survey Question 1.8: Do you feel students in the regular program have the same opportunities and support as those in the AP Program? If so, how?

The central issue addressed in questions 1.7 and 1.8 is whether adult interaction in school is different with students based on their program level (advanced or comprehensive). The results from these two questions appeared to reverse themselves when 73% of the students addressed question 1.8 as a "no" response, while question number 1.7 had 73% of the students saying "yes."

The responses revealed the following student A4 a seventh grader said,

No. I don't think they treat other students differently. I think they treat them all the same.

However, another seventh-grade student identified C3 said something quite different:

Not the class. But it is the color though.

When asked by the researcher what do you mean? Student C3 said the following:

So, the teacher was telling me, that there was two boys and she said they both was going to ISAP [In schools suspension program], but she [the teacher] only sent the black little boy but they both were goofing off. She only punished one little boy.

As the researcher continued to discuss this question with an eighth grader.

Student A5 said,

Well, I really don't notice anything like that. But I also feel that the teachers they all treat student equally even if some kids are you know, on different levels than other kids. They still treat each other students the same way. I feel that's how teachers should always be. But some teacher might be advanced, but they still give us the same respect as they give advance kids.

The researcher surmised that 11 out of the 13 students felt that the regular program students had the same opportunities as those in advanced placement program.

Overall, the researcher concluded from the Arlin-Hills attitudinal survey that the students had positive attitudes and perceptions about their teachers and their schools' learning environment. The students believed that their teachers were fair, friendly, welcoming, possessed a sense of humor, demonstrated trust, were interesting, offered praise, and provided a safe environment for learning. The students perceived their schools as providing them opportunities

to interact with and help each other. They also shared that school personnel converse with them about earning a diploma and graduating on time.

Conclusion

This chapter contains the results of the analysis and research questions that help to disclose common themes that support the phenomenological research design.

Thirteen parents and fifteen students were interviewed for this phenomenological approach using the Expectancy Value Model. The phenomenological approach was used to help the researcher gather data to support the idea that beliefs are shaped based on our lived experiences. The interview questions were constructed as open-ended, and the interviewing sessions were unstructured.

Three themes emerged from the student and parent/guardian interviewing sessions. These themes helped the researcher organize and explore factors that impact students' decisions to attend post-secondary institutions. The three themes that emerged along with two sub-themes were: (a) Conversations about college occurs inconsistently within middle schools and home about post-secondary education; (b) The lack of academic preparation, career awareness, financial support, college tours, interaction with college student, and self-awareness in middle school does not eliminate the possibility of college desires; and (c) The presence of encouragement and interaction from family and community graduates and athletic opportunities may impact the middle school student's decision to go to college. The two sub-themes that support RQ3 are centered on students' attitudes toward teachers and schools.

In response to the essential question, "To what extent do attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of low socioeconomic middle school students' attitude toward attending a post-secondary institution," the researcher found positive and negative impact factors. The factors that

have impeded college attendance by middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were explored and analyzed in this chapter. Factors found to impede middle school students' positive attitudes and perception about attending college include, but were not limited to, parent's/guardians' lack of knowledge about entering college, parents'/guardians' lack of support to their children related to college attendance, students' limited interaction with supportive school personnel, parents'/guardians' lack of knowledge about academic opportunities, lack of insight into college finances, gang violence, and racial injustice.

The researcher found factors that encourage student's positive attitude and perceptions about attending college included, but were not limited to, parental support, community engagement in college and career readiness programs, conversation with college attendees, teacher encouragement, exposure to high level coursework, awareness of financial resources, and college tours.

Chapter V will include a summary of results, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This qualitative study used a phenomenological research approach to explore the attitudes and perceptions of low socioeconomic middle school students toward attending post-secondary institutions. Since the 1960s, there has been an outcry for "change" within grades preschool through 12 that focused on educational content and departmentalization rather than exploratory, integration, and scheduling processes in curriculum (Juvonen et al., 2004, p. 12).

Educational content and departmentalization were the catalysts that forced more contemporary educators to strongly express the need to restructure the junior high school setting. Educators like Alexander and Gatewood from 1970s until now supported the need for changing the junior high school concept to the middle school concept. According to Schafer et al. (2016), William Alexander (1965) proposed in 1963 the name change from junior high school to middle school, while Gatewood (1972) stated, "A creative faculty and administration dedicated to discovering more effective approaches to early adolescent education are more essential for educational quality than grade level reorganization and school name changes" (p. 14).

As the middle school movement began to flourish throughout the country, education reformers began focusing on teacher training and preparation. Schafer et al. (2016) reported that Applegate (1977) encouraged colleges and university faculty to prepare teachers for teaching at the middle school level by giving them experience in the instructional practices of professors who teach them. The junior high school concept changed from merely a name change to selecting appropriate faculty and administration, providing the proper teacher training, and to making the middle school concept what it is today.

This study aimed to answer the central research question: "To what extent do attitudes,

perceptions, and experiences impact low socioeconomic middle school students' attitudes toward attending a post-secondary institution?" In addition to answering the central research question, the following three questions guided this research:

RSQ1: What positive or negative experiences in middle school might shape a low socioeconomic student's attitude toward post-secondary education?

RSQ2: What are the most important school influences that impact how middle school students from a low socioeconomic background articulate their desire to go to college?

RSQ3: What non-academic factors related to college attainment/enrollment might help middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds choose to attend a post-secondary institution instead of entering the workforce immediately after high school?

This study can help enlighten parents, teachers, and school administrators on the importance of providing opportunities for middle school students to engage in activities that promote college preparedness and career awareness. This study was conducted in three community centers and one church which housed after-school academic enrichment programs in Jefferson County, Kentucky. This chapter will discuss the findings related to the literature supporting the factors that shape low socioeconomic middle school students' decision to attend a post-secondary institution. Also included in this chapter are the implications for parents, students, school personnel and legislatures that impact the attitudes and perceptions of a middle school student. The conclusion of the chapter will focus on the study's limitations, future research, and the summary.

Summary of Findings

This study's goal was to reveal factors that impact the decision-making of low socioeconomic middle school students' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences toward attending a

post-secondary institution. Middle school students and parents from targeted neighborhoods in Metro Louisville/Jefferson County participated in the study. These participants were asked questions which centered on negative and positive experience toward college, parent and teachers influences, and non-academic factors that might help low socioeconomic middle school students to attend college instead of entering the workforce immediately after high school.

The findings suggested that conversations about college with middle school students were inconsistent in their homes and schools. Findings also suggest that a lack of academic preparation, career awareness, financial support, college-related activities (e.g., tours, college student interactions) and motivation through self-awareness did not eliminate a student's desire to go to college. Encouragement and interaction with college graduates and athletic opportunities may also impact a middle school student's decision to go to college.

Discussion

The researcher found the factors that plagued high school students' decision-making toward going to college also impact the decision-making of middle school students. Eccles et al. (1983) noted in the conclusion of their research that the presence of motivation, encouragement, and successful educational experience for students exhibited by their parents and teachers were significant predictors for the student's heighten interest in attending post-secondary institution.

This study used the expectancy-value theory as a theoretical framework linking motivation, encouragement, and successful educational experiences as predictors for college attendance. Below are reflections on the findings of the study relative to three research questions.

Research Question 1: What positive and negative experiences in middle school might shape a low SES student's attitude toward post-secondary education?

Results from the questionnaires showed that students and parents had conversations about attending college about monthly. In those conversations, most parents talked about the personal and professional advantages of pursuing a college degree. They also spoke about the experiences and opportunities that college provides.

The parents even shared their own experiences when they attended college. As the researcher continued to listen to the conversations, not one parent had any negative feelings toward obtaining a college degree, nor did any parent state that their child could be successful without a college degree. No parent negatively diminished the value of college attendance.

As explained by Simmons (2019), the lack of knowledge and negative experiences toward higher education can create barriers for parents and families who fail to see the value of college attendance, which is sometimes transferred to their child. The researcher can state, from the interviewing sessions, that every parent wanted to see their child attend college, but they also acknowledged the complexities of obtaining that degree.

Parents and students also generally believed that their educational experiences in middle school had prepared them for college. These students attended comprehensive classes; no student interviewed participated in advanced classes or gifted and talented programs. Consequently, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were not exposed to higher-level courses in middle school.

Unfortunately, the lack of exposure to higher-level classes led the researcher to believe that these students are denied opportunities to enroll in advanced placement courses in high school. This belief is substantiated by Edtrust 2020 data, which reported that Black students are

disproportionately denied access to programs in 35 of 37 states. With Kentucky being one of those states, which offer gifted and talented programs there are 35 students enrolled in it for every 100 black students who would need to be enrolled for the state to achieve fair representation (Edtrust, 2020, p. 4). Limited financial resources and the presence of tracking systems at their schools may also be leading to the lack of skills preparation for entry into a post-secondary institution.

Oaks (1980) argued that students who enter a tracking system remain in those systems throughout their academic careers. In an interview, a parent said she would request her child be placed in advanced courses because he was becoming a behavior problem and the work was not challenging in his current placement. This may be an exception to Oaks' assertion that students who start in a tracking system remain in that system. According to Barrington (2020), tracking often begins in the sixth grade, and it is done based on perceived or assessed ability levels and how quickly a student learns. Barrington also suggested the ranking of students by ability can leave them believing they are inferior and sometimes experience low self-esteem, reducing their academic performance.

When the researcher examined the student-teacher relationship for research question number one, the students revealed that their teachers did not talk much about college attendance, regardless of the grade level they were assigned. The students shared that the teachers were more focused on teaching content, preparing them for high school, and helping them select the right high school to attend. They shared that their teachers encouraged them and provided academic support as needed. No student said that they were ever discouraged by a teacher.

In the same way, the parent-child relationship is essential to the students' aspiration and interest; the teacher-student relationship is also crucial in helping students grow academically

and creating positive feeling about their overall education endeavors (Steinberg & McCray, 2012). In short, the results support the research that encouragement from adults, improving educational experiences, and parent's attitudes can impact the middle school student's attitude and decision regarding college attendance (Eccles et al., 1983).

Research Question 2: What are the most important influences that impact how middle school students from low SES background articulate their desires to go to college?

The second research question focuses on the influences that would impact the decisions of middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to attend college. From the exchanges with the students and parents, the researcher found that (a) academic preparation, (b) college tours, (c) financial support, (d) career awareness, (e) interaction with a college graduate, and (f) self-awareness had the greatest impact on the student participants' decision-making about attending a post-secondary institution. The responses from these students were quite telling.

When conversing about academic preparedness, most students were not worried about their classes not preparing them for college. However, in most cases, the students thought they were not being challenged or even placed in advanced courses. They only took the required middle school courses they needed for high school, like reading, mathematics, social studies, and science. The idea that they could enter and succeed in college without being academically prepared with rigorous coursework was a common belief among middle school students. Based on the ideas of Pichardt (2011) and Bushaw (2007), middle school students believe they will be successful and are academically prepared to go to college without knowing that other factors will hamper their decision.

The students also shared with the researcher that they were not allowed to choose their courses in middle school. According to Steinberg and McCray (2012), when teachers promote

student involvement by including the student in the decision-making and co-creation of educational goals, the students are more likely to achieve academically. Allowing students to take part in their decision-making keeps the student engaged. Teachers providing these opportunities for student engagement builds a strong relationship for trust, which is fundamental to creating a college-going culture, as explained by Cook-Sather (2002).

As the researcher discussed career readiness and college preparedness with students and parents, most students had no career readiness or college preparedness programs in their middle school. However, three students did talk about community programs that address college preparedness. The students also informed the researcher of their career aspirations. In the exchange with the students, the researcher realized that they knew what they wanted to become but had very little information about obtaining those career goals. The conversation with the students led to acknowledging that they had to attend college but did not know what they must do after getting there. Again, these parents and students believed they could do college work and would be quite successful.

When addressing how much they were influenced by college tours and knowing other individuals who have graduated from college, some students had participated in college tours in their elementary schools or with parents who took an older child to college campuses to tour. The students also informed the researcher that going on these tours and talking to individuals who have attended college helped them to decide they wanted to attend college. The United States Department of Education's (2016) findings revealed that student support programs (e.g., college prep programs, tours, workshops, tutoring, and learning labs) increase the odds that students will remain in college.

As the researcher began this conversation with the parents regarding research question

number two, it was apparent that parents believed their child could attend college. However, the parents' concerns moved quickly toward financial support. These parents talked about needing more financial resources, but they depend on their children making the academic grades needed for scholarships. Schneider et al. (2003) maintained that parents emphasize their child's academic performance as a financial strategy before taking on loans. Other parents in the discussion relied on savings they had started, along with grants, scholarships, and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to help their child attend college.

In the final conversation with the parents on research question number two, the researcher found that many students did not participate in college preparedness programs. However, there was the presence of college graduates in their families. Knowing that college preparedness programs are crucial and support cognitive, social, and emotional development, educators should look at developing college readiness programs as proposed by Ng et al. (2014).

The presence of college graduates in the student's life provides students with a role model who has completed the goal of college attainment. Relying on college graduates can also guide students by helping them to avoid negative situations and creating positive experiences for both the student and the parent.

The influences that impede a student's decision to go to college can have a lasting effect on both the parent and the student. The researcher surmises that the lack of financial awareness about college costs and academic preparation, whether college preparedness courses or career awareness programs can hinder college attainment. Parents and students must start identifying and listing their academic goals for college admittance while the child is in middle school. Parents and students must also seek an academic program that supports rigor and assists students while attending college.

Research Question 3: What non-academic factors related to college attainment/enrollment might help middle school students from low SES backgrounds choose to attend a post-secondary institution instead of entering the workforce immediately after high school?

During the student discussion about attending college after high school, the researcher listened attentively to both the students and their parents. All 15 student participants said without hesitation that they planned to go to college. They planned on gaining entry based on special skills like academics and athletic ability they possessed. The students also shared information about family members who attended college and how much those individuals inspired them. One student talked about how he wanted to exceed his parents' expectations.

When asked what an individual must do to go to college, there was an array of responses. Being a leader and not associating with the wrong crowd was at the forefront of their minds and responses. Some students discussed and shared that good grades were essential to be considered by a college for consideration for college admittance. The students shared that many of their parents encouraged college attendance, and they also talked about individuals outside their family circle, such as coaches and church leaders, who had talked with and inspired them to consider college.

When the researcher asked what would keep them from going to college, the most disturbing answer from one student was "gang violence." The students discussed more common barriers, such as lack of financial resources, academic achievement, and extracurricular activities, which provide students with "soft skills." Putnam (2015) proposed that these soft skills promote leadership and good work habits that employers value when seeking their employees.

When a student identified "gang violence" as a barrier to college attendance, the researcher realized that "gang violence" is a new barrier threatening college attendance for

disadvantaged students who want to attend college. Apparently, with gang violence being a societal issue in many neighborhoods across the nation and in some communities, the student who was interviewed was faced with whether he would live long enough to attend college. In addition to being concerned about being prepared to enter an institution of higher education, he was faced with the strain of survival in neighborhoods with high incidence of crime.

As the researcher continued to address non-cognitive factors that may impede a student's chances for college attendance, the researcher began to review students' attitudes toward their teachers and their learning environment within the school they attended by reviewing the results from the first two segments of the Arlin-Hills Attitudinal survey. The first segment addresses fairness, dominance, honor, and likeability of teachers. The second segment of the survey focuses on participation and freedom within the school building. The students believed their teachers tried interesting ways of instructing them, and they also believed their teachers made them feel welcome. The students maintained that the teachers encouraged and trusted them; however, when examining the area of promoting college access, the students gave their teachers low marks. When the student participants were specially asked, "Do teachers in your school talk to you about going to college?," the responses from the question revealed that 42% of the teachers did not talk to them about college attendance. In the second segment of the Arlin-Hills Attitudinal survey which focused on the student's attitude toward learning environment at school, the scores reflected the need to redesign how students engaged in their learning environment with their teachers. The results from the responses revealed that at no time did the scores rise above 80%. The students stated the following: there was a lack of freedom to move around the room; there were few chances to work on things that developed their interest; the learning activities did not allow them to work with others; and there was no differentiated instruction. As

the researcher listened to the students' responses, it became apparent that there was a lack of "engagement" in the learning, a criterion of the "whole child" concept. The Association for Supervision (ASCD) and Curriculum Development stated that "engagement" provides for long-term student success and is one of the five standards of the "whole child" ideology (2017). All except one participant did not see any disparities in their engagement in choice of curriculum, personal treatment, and opportunities afforded other students. One child shared that it was not in the courses she was assigned, but it was how she was treated due to her ethnicity.

After compiling and reviewing the interviewing comments from students and parents, the researcher is more convinced that addressing college attainment should start as early as middle school through programs that focus on career awareness and rigorous coursework. Beginning such programs at the middle school level would provide more opportunities for students and their families to make informed decisions that the academic and financial challenges they may face as they consider college attendance.

Leadership Implications

This study is built on existing research of Eccles et al. (2004) and Moon and Callahan (1999); both used the Expectancy-Value Theory. This theory states that motivation is influenced by one's expectations associated with needs and values and that motivation will prompt individuals to achieve a goal. The students' decision to achieve a specific goal can be explained by their views of how well they perform and how much they value activities in which they participate. This implies that educators should plan and implement learning experiences that motivate students to see how and what they are learning will impact their lives. If a goal is career and college readiness, it must be obvious to students that this goal is attainable through efforts made early in their educational process. The Expectancy-Value Theory also implies that

parents/guardians and others familiar with college attendance must be intentional about making college attendance a part of their conversations with their children.

The researcher examined those factors which play a significant role in the students' decision-making to address the essential question, "To what extent do attitudes, perceptions, and experiences impact low socioeconomic middle school students' attitude toward attending a post-secondary institution?"

Research findings suggest that parental encouragement, income, and level of education are important factors in the decision-making of a student planning to attend college. Moon et al. (1999) revealed that parental encouragement and favorable attitudes toward post-secondary institutions impacted their child's decision-making about college. It was clear from interviews in this study that all parents wanted to see their children attend college. The parents knew there were certain hurdles they had to overcome to ensure that college attainment was possible. Interviewing sessions with parents in this study focused on academic preparedness and advocacy.

When addressing the issue of academic programs supporting college preparedness and career awareness programs, parents requested additional information about academic preparedness for college. They verbalized their desires to enroll their children in college and career programs. Thus, the researcher was fortunate to assist several students from the study with enrollment in community after school and weekend programs that offered college preparedness opportunities. Parents whose children participated in those programs expressed appreciation for the programs. They believed the programs prepared their child with academic support and knowledge. The programs provided information to assist parents in maneuvering through the college awareness and attendance maze. Results from interviews with parents and guardians imply that parents of middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds need to have

access to information about college attendance and the resources needed to help their children enter and succeed in college. Transformational leaders in the local school would challenge and reward their followers for being innovative and creative in developing programs that focus on parental engagement with college and career counselors. These programs developed by the local schools would be beneficial in helping parents help their children understand the importance of early preparation for college. If school leaders would implement the suggested strategies, they would be demonstrating idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation as describe by Bass in his 1985 research.

Responses to interview questions from parents and students related to career awareness in middle schools were quite telling. The researcher subscribes to the belief that career development is a life-long process that should be initiated in the middle and elementary school settings. According to Kerka (2000), “Elementary is the threshold between high school and then between childhood and adulthood; therefore, middle school provides a better opportunity for the development of knowledge skills, attitude, and awareness that is the foundation for the next stage of life” (p. 273). The researcher learned that the parents were unaware whether their child was taking career awareness classes at their middle school and that all middle schools do not offer these classes. In fact, in the school district where the participants reside, only five out of 21 middle schools offered career awareness programs. Transformational leaders of the district would create significant change to ensure that career awareness programs are available and offered in all middle schools. The researcher is aware that introducing students to career awareness and college preparedness programs can lead to tracking middle school students into a career and a college path too early. Therefore, the transformational leader would ensure that middle school students are exposed to as many career paths as possible.

Regarding parental financial support, the parents were aware of their financial obligations and support. They did not shy away from discussing how they plan to support their child financially. The parents discussed looking into the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), grants, and savings. Those parents with sons often talked about athletic scholarships. All in all, not one parent wanted to see their child obtain a loan for college. These parents believed that if they started seeking grants and scholarships earlier, their child would avoid the dreaded school loan that tends to be a financial burden after graduation. Parents tend to be willing to spend more financially to ensure their child's chances to achieve college attendance and graduation without the burden of repaying loans. Transformational leaders would provide opportunities for parents to participate in workshops that focus on financing a college education.

Another barrier this study explored was the attitudes and academic experiences of low socioeconomic middle school students toward college attendance. Moon and Callahan (1999) addressed middle school students' attitudes by grade, achievement, and ability levels. Moon and Callahan's research concluded that regardless of grades, achievement, and ability level, middle school students generally do not have a positive attitude toward school. Also, the study determined that achievement does not play a significant role in a middle school students' decision to go to college. This study was consistent with Moon and Callahan's (1999) conclusions. However, all the middle school students emphasized teacher encouragement and their learning environment were essential to their decision. These middle school students had positive relationships with their teachers, and at no time did any student say that their teachers failed to encourage them to achieve, but when the conversation progressed to college attendance, the support for college attendance by their teachers was lacking. When the discussion led to parental encouragement about college attendance, the students shared that their parents talked

with them about attending college. In most cases, it was a priority for parents to do so. Some students even shared that they needed to obtain good grades and work toward securing a scholarship in sports. Transformational leaders understand the impact of positive discussions about attending college; therefore, transformational leaders would ensure that discussions about college attendance occurred regularly and systemically in career preparation programs.

On the topic of college preparedness programs, the researcher found that those students who participated in college preparedness programs believed they were more likely to attend college because of what they were learning in those programs. Access to college preparedness programs that include academic and non-academic support and enrichment has the propensity to raise college aspirations, as explained by Aidman and Malerba (2017).

In addition to discussing participation in college preparedness programs, the researcher changed the conversation to participating in the advanced program. Again, all the students interviewed stated that they were not in advanced program.

In summary, introducing students earlier to rigorous and challenging curricula and instruction, helping teachers to recognize their biases, exposing middle school students to advanced-level math and science courses, and having schools that encourage a sense of belonging and culturally responsive teaching result in the likelihood of greater college attendance.

In the same way, attitudes and academic experiences are crucial to the decision-making of low socioeconomic middle school students to attend a post-secondary institution; the researcher revealed results from the students' attitudes toward their teachers and their learning environment based on questions from the two sections of the Arlin-Hills Attitudinal Survey. What was divulged from this portion of the study supported the views of Steinberg and McCray, which

reported that students wanted to feel respected and supported in a safe and secure learning environment. Here again, the finding suggests that these students in the interviewing session also wanted their teachers to praise them for their accomplishments, not to be disrespected, and to be exposed to welcoming and safe classrooms. These results infer that middle school students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds also want classroom climates that are positive and safe. Having this exposure provides these students with a sense of belonging and equitable support that allows them to view their self-worth and belief that they can achieve academic success. Transformational leaders can create a positive school culture and climate by articulating a clear and affirming vision, modeling and monitoring classroom culture and climate, and providing opportunities for growth through professional development.

The current study surmises that the same factors that impact high school students' decision-making toward college also influence the decision-making of low-socioeconomic middle school students toward attending a post-secondary institution. The study's results indicate that much more must be done to introduce middle school students and their parents to the college application process and academic requirements to ensure college enrollment. Noting that only a few students obtain exposure to college preparedness and career awareness program, all middle school students should be provided opportunities and an introduction to career choices that will provide students a chance for self-discovery and a career path, which is essential for determining a career and college success.

In conclusion, the transformational leader is a catalyst who inspires, influences, and intellectually stimulates individuals within their organizational setting. The aim for this type of leader is to create equitable access for students regardless of the students' lived experiences.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The Expectancy-Value Theory using a phenomenological approach was an appropriate research method. This research method was important for gathering information from the interviewees to complete the surveys. According to Marshall and Rossman, this approach helps to identify how individuals perceive their experiences (2011). The researcher is convinced that using the phenomenological approach allowed parents/guardians and students to reflect on their lived experiences caused by a situation that impacts their motivations and goals, which are beyond their control as it pertains to their education and their children's education. Their lived experience written as a narrative by the researcher can be used to help educators provide information to parents/guardians about college preparedness that will increase college attendance.

After completing the research, the researcher acknowledges that the study had several limitations. The first limitation centered on the area of demographics. Although the researcher used targeted neighborhoods in Jefferson County with varied ethnicities to ensure participation from diverse backgrounds; only one ethnicity was represented. The researcher believes that having a more diverse group to participate in this study may provide a different point of view from students and parents/guardians when discussing educational opportunities and academic access. The presence of a more diverse group may, in fact, give more insight into college attainment. A second limitation was not surveying teachers for the study. The lack of teacher participation regarding college attendance limited the opportunity for the teachers to provide their input on why the conversation around college attendance is not happening in the middle setting. After conducting this study, the researcher felt that teachers should be included in future studies to provide input about why they may or may not talk to their students about college.

Including teachers in the study may offer a clearer understanding of why there is no conversation about college attendance in the middle school setting. The final limitation involved the time it takes to coordinate focus groups and face-to-face interview sessions with parents/guardians. Knowing the importance of completing the research in the allotted time, the researcher's coordination of identifying focus groups and face-to-face interviews took longer than expected because the participants preferred individual interviewing sessions. For future research to address the time issue, the researcher needs to limit the number of questions and reduce the number of participants interviewed for scheduling purposes. The researcher made a conscious effort to start on time to ensure respect and appreciation for the participant's time.

Despite the limitations, while conducting this study, the researcher acknowledges findings from previous studies are still significant to the body of research, with new findings to be added to the study's conclusion.

Conclusion

After carefully addressing the central question throughout this research, "To what extent do attitudes, perceptions, and experiences impact low socioeconomic middle school students' attitudes toward attending a post-secondary institution?," the researcher found that those same barriers that have historically impacted college attendance for traditional high school students and first-generation college students are deterrents to the middle school students. The researcher uncovered that their parents and teachers are the principal players influencing middle school students' decisions to attend college. Engaging students and their families to understand the value of a college education, during their middle grade years, through programs and strategies that promote academic preparation and financial assistance awareness, is critical to the students' and families' decision-making about college attendance.

In some cases, negative and positive experiences that shape low socioeconomic students' attitudes toward college, like encouragement and conversation about attending college, were lacking. Students discussed how they were encouraged about maintaining high academic achievement; however, only a few words shared the same level of encouragement about attending college. The researcher suggests teachers must help students see themselves as college students. This can be obtained through encouragement and helping students to pursue academic courses, which promote college admittance. Not only should middle school students receive the help they need for academic pursuits, but, as a result of teacher and student interaction, middle school students should be excited about the idea of attending college, and teachers/educators in these middle schools should provide educational experiences that incite a positive attitude toward learning and going to college.

Not only are encouragement and conversations about college necessary, but they are also equally important to address those influences that assist students to articulate their desires to go to college. Influences include academic and career preparedness, advanced placement programs, college tours, and interaction with other college graduates. Having middle school students exposed to these influences empowers them to focus on their strengths and what is needed to succeed in college. Attending an academic and career preparedness program that teaches practical and real-world skills is necessary for exploration and setting goals for future interest. Enrolling middle school students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses can also aid in helping students seriously consider college attendance. Taking Advanced Placement classes is one method of preparing middle school students for the high school curriculum and career and college readiness programs.

Participation in college tours and interacting with college graduates are vital influences

impacting a middle school student's desire to attend college. College tours and interacting with college graduates allowed middle school students the opportunity to learn about academic preparation and financial aid resources. According to the students interviewed in the study, interacting with other college graduates was pivotal because those interactions made it possible for them to admire those individuals who aspired for and achieved their goal of being a college graduate.

The non-academic factors related to college attainment or enrollment that may help middle students choose college attendance over going into the workforce were centered on educational opportunities. Scarce educational opportunities can cause middle school students to be concerned about their future. It is important to note that none of the students surveyed in this study believed they attended schools that had limited academic or extracurricular resources or schools that limited their access to rigorous curricula and opportunities that prepared them for high school and college. They also believed that because they could participate in electives outside the core content, their schools possessed and made available appropriate resources to provide them with knowledge and skills they needed if they wanted to attend college. Despite their belief, the researcher maintains that middle school is an excellent time for students to try new and meaningful educational opportunities during and after school. Educational opportunities that support academic preparation programs, college and career preparedness, and volunteer programs that match a student's interest can offer middle school students educational experiences, which leads to post-secondary success and college attendance.

After carefully reviewing the results from this study, the researcher believes that there is still much that needs to be done to assist middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in seeing that college is obtainable. Students, educators, and their families must see

the need to start thinking about college attainment before the ninth grade. Exposure to rigorous coursework is necessary, and offering career education is also necessary for developing skills to direct a middle school student's career path. Addressing college attendance in the middle school setting will better inform students and their families about options to eliminate barriers that commonly impact a student's decision to attend a post-secondary institution.

The researcher concluded that the extent to which attitudes, perceptions, and experiences impact low socioeconomic middle school students' attitudes toward attending a post-secondary institution is immense. The researcher also concludes that there should be an intentional focus on developing positive attitudes, perceptions, and experiences about college attendance for middle school students from low economic backgrounds.

REFERENCES

- American College of Testing. (2020). American College of Testing (ACT). Retrieved from [https:// www. act.org](https://www.act.org).
- ACT. (2008). *The forgotten middle: Ensuring that all students are on target for college and career readiness before high school*. Iowa City, IA: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ForgottenMiddle.pdf> [Google Scholar]
- ACT (2009). How Much Growth toward College Readiness is Reasonable to Expect in High School? (<https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/ReasonableGrowth.pdf>)
- ACT (2019). Scholastic Aptitude Test. Retrieved from <https://www.scholarship.com>
- Aidman, B., & Malerba, C. (2017). Assessing the effects of a community-based college preparation program on the academic performance and noncognitive factors of middle school students. *Urban Education, 52*(8), 986-1018. <https://DOI:10.177/0042085815581713>
- Alexander, W. M. (1965). The journal high school: A changing view. *National Middle School Journal, 26*(3), 20-24.
- Alexander, W. M., & George, P. S. (1981). *The exemplary middle school*. CBS College Publishing.
- Applegate, J. H. (1977). Rhetoric of middle grade teacher preparation: A look at the last ten years. *Middle School Journal, 8*(3), 5, 22–23. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41982195> [Google Scholar]
- Arlin, M. (1976). *Manual for Arlin-Hills attitudes surveys*. St. Louis, MO: Psychologists and

Educators.

Arnold, K. D., Lu, E. C., & Armstrong, K. J. (2012). The ecology of college readiness.

ASHE Higher Education Report, 38(5), 1-138.

Balfanz, R. (2009, June). Putting middle grades student on the graduation path: A policy and practice brief. *National Middle School Association*, 1-59.

Barrington, K. (2020). The public school review: the pros and cons of tracking in schools.

The Public School Review, 1-3.

Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and Performance*, N.Y. Free Press.

Battistich, V., Solomon, D., Kim, D.-I., Watson, M., & Schaps, E. (1995). Schools as communities, poverty levels of student populations, and student's attitudes, motives, and performance: A multilevel analysis. *American Education Research Journal*, 32(3), 627-658. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/116326>

Bentz, V. M., & Shapiro, J. J. (1998). *Mindful inquiry in social research*. Pine Forge.

Blogs@Baruch Site. (2013, July). Phenomenological Research. Retrieved on October 4, 2017, from <https://www.blog.baruch.cuny.edu>

Bushaw, W. J. (2007, November). From the mouth of middle schoolers: Important changes for high school and college. *Phi Delta Kappa*, 189-193.

Bushaw, W. J & Lopez, S. J. (2010). A time for change: The 42nd annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of public's attitudes toward the public schools. Phi Delta Kappa International.

Chatterji, R., Campbell, N., & Quirk, A. (2021). Closing advanced coursework equity gaps for all students. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org>

Choy, S. P. (2001). Students whose parents did not go to college: post-secondary access, persistence, and attainment. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National

Center for Education Statistics

Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing student's perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue and change in education. *Educational Researcher*, 31, 3-14.

Committee for Children. (n.d.) Social Emotional Learning. Retrieved from <https://www.cf.children.org>

Comer, J. P. (2004). *Leave no child behind: Preparing today's youth for tomorrow's world*. Yale University Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (4th Ed.). Pearson.

Creswell J. W., & Poth C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Sage Publication.

Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset The new psychology of success how we can learn to fulfill our potential*. Random House Publishing Group

Eccles, J. S., Vida, M. N., & Barber, B. (2004). The relation of early adolescents' college plans and both academic ability and task-value beliefs to subsequent college enrollment. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 24(1), 62-75.

EdTrust. (2020, January 9). *Black and Latino Students Shut out of Advanced Coursework Opportunities* [Press release]. <https://EdTrust.org>

EducationWeek. (2017). Cultural relevant teaching. Retrieved on May 29, 2023, from <https://edweek.org>

Evans, B. J., & Henry, G. T. (2015). Self-paced remediation and math placement: A randomized field experiment in a community college. [https:// www.Sciencedirect.com](https://www.Sciencedirect.com)

Expectancy Theory of Motivation. (2013, August). Retrieved from Leadership Central. <https://www.leadership.central.com/expectancytheoryofmotivation>

- Gatewood, T. E. (1970–1972). Research report: Middle school versus the junior high school. *Middle School Journal*, 1/2/3, 12–14. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23022746>
- Giorgi, A. (2009). *The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach*. Duquesne University Press
- Goleman, D. (2005). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ* (10th ed.). Random House Publishing.
- Hanover Research (2012). Effective career awareness and development programs for K-8 students. Retrieved from <https://www.hanoverresearch.com>
- Hass, G. & Wiles, K. (1965). *Readings in curriculum*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Hart, C. M. D. (2020). An honors teacher like me: Effects of access to same-race teachers on black students' advanced-track enrollment and performance. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 42(2), 163-187. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373719898470>
- Hill, N. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.goodgrades.com/author/quotes/399>. Napoleon-Hill
- Hill, N. E., & Wang, M.-T. (2015). From middle school to college: Development aspirations, promoting engagement, and indirect pathways from parent to post high school enrollment. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(2), 224-34. <https://dx.doi.org/101007/a0038367>
- Hoffman, J. L., & Lowitz, K. E., (2005). Predicting college success with high schools' grades and test scores: Limitation for minority students. *Review of Higher Education*, 28(4), 455-474.
- Institution of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Support Post-Secondary Success Invention Report: First Year Experience Courses*. What Works

- Clearinghouse. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Doc/InterventionReports/wwcfirstyear071916.pdf>
- Institute of Health and Human Potential. (1995). Emotional Intelligence. Retrieved on May 29, 2023, from <https://www.ihhp.com>
- Juang, L. P., & Silbereisen, R. K. (2002). The relationship between adolescent academic capability beliefs, parenting and school grades. *Journal of Adolescent*, 25, 3-18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1006/jado.2001.0445>
- Joel Klein' s First Day of School [Editorial]. (2002, September 5). *Joel Klein's First Day of School*, sec. A, 22.
- Juvonen, J., Le, V. N., Kaganoff, T., Augustine, C., & Constant, L. (2004). *Focus on the wonder years: Challenges facing the American middle school*. Rand Education. <https://www.rand.org/>
- Kaplan, Z. (2023). What are soft skills: definitions and examples. Retrieved from <https://theforage.com>
- Kerka, S. (2000). Middle school career education and development. Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. Retrieved from <https://www.calpro-online.org/eric/docs/pub00018.pdf>.
- Kerka, S. (2002). Teaching adults: Is it different? Myths and realities. Office of Education Research and Improvement. 21. ERIC Publication.
- Kensit, D. A. (2000). Rogerian theory: A critique of the effectiveness of pure client centered therapy. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly*, 13(4), 342-345.
- Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, Kentucky Department of Education. (2017, June). *Stronger by degrees: A Plan to Create a More Educated & Prosperous Kentucky*.

- Retrieved from <https://cpe.ky.gov/ourwork/strategicagenda.html>
- Kentucky Department of Education. (n.d.). *Dual Credit*. Retrieved on May 30, 2023, from <https://education.ky.gov>
- Kentucky Department of Education. (n.d.). Dual Credit Courses. Retrieved on May 30, 2023, from <https://education.ky.gov>
- King, J. B., Mitchell, T., McIntosh, A. & Bell-Ellwanger, J. (2016, November). *Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Key Data Highlights Focusing on Race and Ethnicity and Promising Practices*. Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development and Office of the Under Secretary United States Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/advancing-diversity-inclusion.pdf>
- L'enfant International Preschool (Ed.). (n.d.). *Authentic Montessori Learning*. L'enfant Internationalisâtes Preschool. Retrieved November 20, 2022, <https://lenfantmontessori.org>
- Legette, K. (2017). How does schools tracking affect student academic identity. *The Social Science Magazine of Duke University*, Retrieved from <https://www.bassconnectionsduke.edu>, 6-7.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba E. G. (1989). Fourth generation evaluation. Sage Publication.
- Lipsitz, J. (1980). Schools and the young adolescent. In *Growing up Forgotten* (2nd ed., pp. 83-88). Transaction.
- Lipsitz, J., & West, T. (2006). What makes a good school. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 8(1), 57-66.
- Locke, Z. (1989). Qualitative research as a form of scientific inquiry in sport and physical education. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 60(1), 1-20.

- Loh, E. K. (2019). What we know about expectancy-value theory, and how it helps to design a sustained motivating learning environment. *Elsevier*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j_system_2019.102119
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*, (5th ed.). Sage Publication
- Maypole, J., & Davies, T. G. (2001). Students' perceptions of constructivist learning in a community college America History II. *Community College Review*, 29(2), 54-80.
- McCathy, C. (2019). 5 Ways we can help our children succeed. www.health.harvard.edu
- Melby, J. N., Conger, R. D., Fang, S. A., Wickrama, K. A. S., & Conger, K. J. (2008). Adolescent family experiences and education attainment during early adulthood. *Developmental Psychology*, 44, 1519-1536. [httpL//dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0013352](http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0013352)
- Merolla, D. M. (2013). The net black advantage in educational transitions: An education career approach. *American Education Research Journal*, 50(5), 895-924.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Autonomy. *In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved May 29, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomy>
- MetLife Foundation. Supporting career and college pathways for middle school-age youth. (2011). *Afterschool Alert*, Issue brief No. 46. Retrieved from <https://afterschoolalliance.org>
- Moon, T. R., & Callahan, C. M. (1999). Middle school students' attitudes toward school. *Research in Middle Level Education Quarterly*, 22(4), 59-72.
- Morton, T. R., Ramirez, N. A., Meece, J. L., Demetriou, C., & Panter, A. T. (2018). Perceived barriers, anxieties, and fears in prospective college students from rural high schools. *The High School Journal*, 101(3), 155-176. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.07/90024241>

- National Center of Education Statistics. (2003). Fast Facts: Educational Institutions. Retrieved from <https://www.nces.ed.gov>
- National Institutes of Health. (2017). Academic sorting. Retrieved May 29, 2023, from <https://www.nih.gov>
- Ng, J., Wolf-Wendel, L., & Lombardi, K. (2014). pathways from middle school to college: Examining the impact of urban, precollege preparation program. *Education and Urban Society, 46*(6), 672-698. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124512470161>
- Oaks, J. (1980, April). Tracking and inequality within schools: Findings from a study of schooling. ERIC Publication.
- Ortiz, N., Morton, T., Mileo, M., & Roby, R. (2019). What about us? Exploring the challenges and sources of support influencing black students STEM identity development in post-secondary education. *The Journal of Negro Education, 83*(3) 311-326.
- Parijat, P., & Bagga, S. (2014). Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation - An evaluation. *International Research Journal of Business and Management, 7*(9), 1-8. www.irjbm.org
- Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education, 75*(3), 250-284.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation method. (3rd ed.). Sage Publication.
- Patrick, K. (2020, January 9). *Black and Latino Students Shut Out of Advanced Coursework Opportunities* [Press release]. <https://edtrust.org/p/51790>
- Patrick, K. (2020, January 3). Kentucky Struggles to identify black students gifted, Advanced Placement Classes. www.courier-journal.com/story/news/2020/01/03/kentucky-stuggles-

to-identify-black-students-gifted-ap-classes/2836405001/

- Perna, L. W. & Jones, A. (2013). *The state of college access and completion: Improving college success for students from underrepresented groups*. Rutledge/Taylor & Francis Press.
- Pickhardt, C. E. (2011, April 18). Adolescence and the transition to middle school. *Psychology Today*, 1-9. www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/surviving-your-childs-adolescence/201104/adolescence-and-the-transition-middle-school
- Putnam, R. D. (2015). *Our Kids: The American dream in crisis*. Simon and Schuster
- Sackett, C., Goldrick-Rab, S., & Broton, K. (2016). Addressing housing insecurity and living cost in higher education. Office of Policy and Development and Research United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Sackett, C. (2015). *Barriers to Success: Housing Insecurities of United States College Students*. U.S. Census Report (2019). United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2015). Office of Policy Development and Research. Retrieved from https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/insight/insight_2.pdf.
- Savitz-Romer, M., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). *Reading, willing, and able: A developmental approach to college access and success*. Harvard Education Press.
- Schaefer, M. B., Malu, K. F., & Yoon, B. (2016). An historical overview of the middle school movement, 1963–2015, *RMLE Online*, 39(5),127, DOI: [10.1080/19404476.2016.1165036](https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2016.1165036)
- Schmidt, W. H. (2000). *Mathematics and science in eighth grade: Findings from 8th interval mathematics and science study*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education National Center for Statistics
- Schneider, B., Kirst, M., & Hess, F. M. (2003). *Strategies for success: High school and beyond*.

- Brookings Papers on Education Policy*, (6), 55-93.
<https://www.jstor.org.org/stable/20067>
- Science Direct. (2017). Expectancy-value theory. Retrieved on May 29, 2023, from
<https://pdf.sciencedirectassets.com>
- Seidman, I. (2006). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences, (3rd ed.). Teacher College Press.
- Simmons, O. S. (2019). Challenges in college access. In O. S. Simmons (Author), *Potential on the Periphery: College Access from the Ground Up* (pp. 41-89). Rutgers University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt22p7jk9.7>
- Social and Emotional Learning: A Short History. (2011). Retrieved September 14, 2018, from
<https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-history>.
- Sokatch, A. (2006). Peer influences on the college-going decisions of low socioeconomic status urban youth. *Education and Urban Society*, 39, 128-146.
- Steinberg, M. A., & McCray, E. D. (2012). Listening to their voices: Middle schoolers' perspective of life in middle school. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(68), 1014.
Retrieved from <https://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/steinberg.pdf>
- The Belmont Report. (1976). Retrieved December 1, 2020 from
<https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulation-and-policy/Belmontreport/index.html>
- TownChart.com (2019). Retrieved September 18, 2019, from
<https://www.towncharts.com/KentuckyDemographics/>
- The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). (2022). The Whole Child. Retrieved from <https://www.wholechildeducation.org>
- The Public School Review (2020). Tracking. Retrieved from

<https://www.thepublicschoolreview.com>

Tracy, T. J. G., & Robbins, S. B., (2006). College Success. What we know about college success:

Using ACT data to inform educational issues. Retrieved from <https://www.act.org>

van Manen, M. (2014). Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenology research and writing. Rett Coast Press.

Weissberg, R. P., & Shriver, T. P. (2011). Strategies to support social emotional and behavior needs of students. [PowerPoint slides].

Wimberly, G. L., & Noeth, R. J. (2005). *College readiness begins in middle school* (Research Report No. 234738232). ACT.

Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (1992). The development of achievement task values: A theoretical analysis. *Developmental Review, 12*(3), 265-310. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0273-2297\(92\)90011-P](https://doi.org/10.1016/0273-2297(92)90011-P)

Yin, R. K. (2016). Qualitative research from start to finish. (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.

Appendix A: Interview Script

I. Welcome to the participant.

Say the following: *Thank you for coming today. My name is Michelle Patrick, and I am a student at Western Kentucky University. I would like for you to know why I am here. I am here to conduct research to find out the middle school students' perceptions toward attending and graduating from college.*

Please note that all responses are confidential. Each participant has been assigned an alphabet to hide your identity. I will begin by asking you a total of twenty-eight questions, and your answers will be recorded. I hope that you will answer each question to the best of your ability. Your accurate responses will help future research on college attendance and increasing graduation rates.

Please note that your responses will be recorded during each interview session and then transcribed. Remember, the tape-recorded sessions are confidential, and a coding method is used to transcribe the data. When you decide to respond to one of the questions, please state your alphabet and begin speaking. By stating your alphabet, you will help me ensure that your responses are recorded correctly and to assist me if I should need to follow-up with you at a later time if needed.

Let's begin!

II. Adjournment

Say the following: *Again, I would like to thank you for participating. Would you like to add or amend something that you have said before leaving? If not, thank you for attending and answering my questions.*

Appendix B: Student Research Interview Recording Sheets

| For Interviewer's Use Only | Identification Number |
|--|------------------------------|
| <p><i>Complete the following. Circle the correct response.</i></p> <p>Gender: _____ Male _____ Female</p> <p>Race/Ethnicity: _____ Caucasian _____ African American _____ Latino</p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">_____ Spanish _____ Other</p> | |

Research Question One: What positive or negative experiences in middle school might cause a student from a low socioeconomic background to decide early not attend a college? **(Do not read to the student.)**

| |
|---|
| 1.1 What do the adults in your school say to you about college? |
| 1.2 What do they say personally and what do they say to your whole class? |
| 1.3 Do you hear adults in your school talk to other students about attending college? |
| 1.4 How do the adults in your middle school encourage you to take challenging courses? (i.e., pre-algebra, a foreign language, and biology) |
| 1.5 What do the adults at your school say to you about, which course you should choose? |
| 1.6 Do you get to choose what kinds of classes you should take at your school? |
| 1.7 Do you ever notice the adults in your middle school treating students differently based on the kinds of classes they take? If so, how? |
| 1.8 Do you feel students in the regular program have the same opportunities and support as those in students in the Advanced Program? If so, how? |
| 1.9 Has any adult at your middle school discouraged you from attending college? If so, what did they say? |

Research Question Two: What are the most important influences that impact how middle school students from a low socioeconomic background articulate their desires to go to college? **(Do not read to the student.)**

| |
|--|
| 2.1 In what ways do you feel the classes you are taking in your middle school are preparing you for college? |
| 2.2 Do you ever worry that your classes are not preparing you well for college? Why? |
| 2.3 Are you involved in any advanced placement or pre-college courses at your middle school? If so, what programs and why did you choose to participate in those classes? |
| 2.4 Are you attending any pre-college programs or college preparedness program within your community after-school or on the weekend? If so, what programs are you attending? |
| 2.5 Are you involved in any career preparedness or career awareness programs or courses at your middle school? If so, name those programs. |
| 2.6 What do you think of those career programs? And why did you choose to take those courses or programs? |
| 2.7 What would you have to do to pursue one of those careers? |
| 2.8 Are you attending any pre-college programs at your middle school to help you go to college? If so, what is the name of the program? |
| 2.9 What are you learning about yourself from participating in pre-college programs? |
| 2.10 Have you participated in college tours and college fairs? If so, where did you go, with whom did you, and when did you participate with this tour program? |
| 2.11 What factors cause you to decide to participate in college tours and fairs offerings? |

Research Question Three: *What non-academic factors related to college attainment might help middle school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds choose to attend a post-secondary institution instead of entering the workforce immediately after high school.* **(Do not read to the student.)**

| |
|---|
| 3.1 Are you planning to attend college after high school? Yes ___ No ___ If no, explain why? |
| 3.2 Do you have any idea how people go to college? Yes ___ No ___ If yes, explain. |
| 3.3 What do you think you must do to attend college? |
| 3.4 Has anyone in your family attended college? Who? How does that influence your decision about going to college? |
| 3.5 Has any family member discussed with you about attending college? And, if so, who or what did he/she say? |
| 3.6 Has any adult in your family or community discussed or encouraged you about attending college? If so, who and what did he/she tell you? |
| 3.7 How much encouragement have you received outside your family about attending college? From whom and what did he/she tell you? |
| 3.8 What do you think might keep you from going to college? Explain your response. |

Appendix C: Arlin-Hill Student Attitude Surveys

Coded Alphabet _____

Arlin-Hill Student Attitude Survey

Student Interview Survey on

Attitude toward Teachers

Directions: Today you are going to have a chance to tell me how you feel about teachers on this questionnaire. This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. I want you to be able to tell me as honestly as possible how you feel about your teacher. Do not write your name on this survey.

**Put a check✓ in the column that best describes how you feel about your teacher.

| Survey Statements | <u>No</u> | <u>Sometimes</u> | <u>Usually</u> | <u>Yes</u> |
|--|-----------|------------------|----------------|------------|
| My teachers try new and interesting ways of teaching. | | | | |
| Some of my teachers act like they are bored with teaching. | | | | |
| My teachers are fair. | | | | |
| My teachers praise students a lot. | | | | |
| My teachers boss students around. | | | | |
| My teachers talk down to students. | | | | |
| I feel safe around my teachers. | | | | |
| My teachers make me feel welcome at school. | | | | |
| My teachers care about my feelings. | | | | |
| I admire my teachers. | | | | |
| My teachers enjoy laughing and joking with us. | | | | |
| My teachers are friendly to students. | | | | |
| My teachers trust me. | | | | |
| My teachers point out my mistakes more than my good work. | | | | |
| My teachers do a good job of helping me learn. | | | | |
| My teachers talk about me going to college. | | | | |

Arlin-Hill Student Attitude Survey

Student Interview Survey on

Attitudes toward School

Directions: Today you are going to have a chance to tell me how you feel about your school on this questionnaire. This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. I want you to be able to tell me as honestly as possible how you feel about your school. Do not write your name on this survey.

**Put a check✓ in the column that best describes how you feel about your teacher.

| Survey Statement | <u>No</u> | <u>Sometimes</u> | <u>Usually,</u> | <u>Yes</u> |
|---|-----------|------------------|-----------------|------------|
| We get enough time to help each other in class. | | | | |
| I have to spend too much time sitting at my desk. | | | | |
| We spend too much of our class periods with everybody working on the same thing at the same time. | | | | |
| We get enough chances to choose our own activities in class. | | | | |
| We have to get permission from teachers to do anything around here. | | | | |
| We have enough chances to go outside the classroom and outside the school to learn things. | | | | |
| We have enough chances to help the teacher plan what we are going to do. | | | | |
| Teachers do too much of the talking in class. | | | | |
| We have enough chances to move around the classroom. | | | | |
| I have enough chances to study together with my friends in this school. | | | | |
| Too much of what I learn comes from the textbook. | | | | |
| I feel as though I fit in this school. | | | | |
| We have too much homework in this school. | | | | |
| I get enough chances to work with others in small groups on special things that interest me. | | | | |
| I have enough chances to work at my own speed. | | | | |
| I enjoy school and look forward to coming every day. | | | | |
| It is important to me to graduate on time with my classes. | | | | |
| I need a high school diploma in order to go to college. | | | | |

Appendix D: Parent Research Interview Protocol and Materials

Part One

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Participation is voluntary and all responses will be kept confidential. The estimated time for completion of part one is approximately fifteen (15) minutes or less. Part two will take forty-five (45) minutes to complete. All responses will be compiled into one group analysis.

Obtaining feedback from you is vital to my research and the formulation of programs for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds that will improve college retention, student success, and graduation rates.

As you consider each item, please think about your overall attitudes toward college. Please feel free to omit any question(s) you do not feel comfortable answering. Kindly fill out the survey in ink by placing an “X” in the box that corresponds to our response.

Again, I appreciate your willingness to complete the following survey. If you have any question(s) or concerns about this survey, please feel free to contact me at this email address michelle.patrick676@topper.wku.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the WKU Office of Research at 1-270-745-6733 or research@wku.edu.

Sincerely,

Michelle E. Patrick

Western Kentucky Doctoral Candidate

DEMOGRAPHICS

FOR QUESTIONS 1-5, PLEASE MARK AN “X” IN FRONT OF THE ANSWER THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOU.

- 1. What is your gender? Female Male

- 2. Which race/ethnicity best describe you? (Please choose only one.)
 American Indian or Alaskan Native Latino American Asian/ Pacific Islander
 White/Caucasian Black or African American Multiple ethnicity/Other (please specify)

- 3. What is your relationship to the child participating in this research?
 Mother Father Grandmother Grandfather Step-mother
 Stepfather Aunt Uncle Guardian Other

- 4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 Did not attend. Elementary Grades 1-5 Middle School 6-8
 High School 9-12 1 year of College 2 years of College
 3 years of College Graduate from college Some graduate school
 Completed graduate school

- 5. What is your approximate average household income? (Please Circle)
0-24,999 25,000-49,999 50,000-74,999 75,000 and up

- 6. What year were you born? _____

FOR QUESTIONS 7-9, PLEASE MARK AN “X” IN FRONT OF THE ANSWER THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR CHILD.

- 7. What is your child’s gender? Female Male

- 8. Which race/ethnicity best describes your child? (Please choose only one)
 American Indian or Alaskan Native Latino America
 Asian/ Pacific Islander White/Caucasian
 Black or African American Multiple ethnicity/Other (please specify)

- 9. What is the current grade for your child in 2021?
 Sixth Seventh Eighth

Parent Research Interview Protocol

Part Two

In this part of the survey, we are interested in learning more about your thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards your child's preparedness for college.

FOR QUESTIONS 1-11, PLEASE PLACE A CHECK IN THE APPROPRIATE COLUMN.

| | Parent's Verbal Responses | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
|--|---------------------------|-----|----|------------|
| Do you talk to your child about attending college? Follow-up Question: What things did you say to them about attending college? | | | | |
| Are you aware that there is financial support for your child to attend college? Follow-up Question: What are those financial offerings that you are aware of? | | | | |
| Have you and your child talked about financial options for college attendance? Follow-up Question: If so, what did you discuss? | | | | |
| Do you know how to access financial support for your child to attend college? | | | | |
| Have you made any financial plans for your child to attend college? (Ex. Scholarships, Savings, Loans, and Grants) Follow-up Question: What financial plans have you made for your child? | | | | |
| Have you made any academic plans for your child to attend college? (Ex. College Prep Courses, Advanced Placement Courses, After-School College Enrichment Programs) Follow-up Question: If so, what were those plans and who did you and your child talk to? (Ex. School counselor, college recruiter, Academic college counselor) | | | | |
| Is your child presently attending or participating in any college preparedness program? Follow-up Question: If so, what are those preparedness programs? | | | | |
| Do you believe your child is prepared to be a successful college student? Follow-up Question: If so, how do you know this? And what evidence support your response? | | | | |

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| Are there any college graduates in your immediate family? Follow-up Question: If so, who are they and how are they related to your child? | | | | |
| Does your child interact with any college attendees or graduates? Follow-up Question: If so, who are they? | | | | |

| | ALMOST NEVER | ONCE OR TWICE | WEEKLY OR MORE | MONTHLY | EVERY FEW MONTHS |
|--|--------------|---------------|----------------|---------|------------------|
| In the past year, how often have you discussed college with your child? | | | | | |

Appendix E: Letter of Introduction

DATE

<Name Executive Director>

<Name of Organization>

<City and State>

Dear Mr./ Mrs. :

My name is Michelle E. Patrick, and I currently enrolled in the Doctoral Program at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your after-school program within your organization. The research study is entitled, “College for What...How Middle School Students from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds Perceive Post-Secondary Education.”

I hope that your organization will allow me to recruit three middle school students. These students can be either male or female and between the age of eleven to thirteen. They will be asked anonymously to complete the enclosed 3-page questionnaire. Besides, surveying the students, the parent or guardian of that student is also needed to complete a 2- page questionnaire. Again, all survey results from both the parent and the student are entirely anonymous.

Interested students who volunteer to participate will be given a consent form to be signed by their parent or guardian. Please note that a copy of the consent form is also enclosed. Parents of the children who volunteer will be given a consent form as well, which is also attached. All consent forms must be returned to me before the research is conducted. Students who participate will be given a ten-dollar gift card from McDonald’s once the survey process is completed.

If approval is granted, student participants will complete the survey, which entails a one-on-one interview with me in a quiet setting at your facility. The survey process should take no longer than 60 minutes. Parent participants would complete the survey at home over the phone and then a focus group

will be conducted in-person or via zoom depending on the availability of the center and with accordance of the (CDC) Center of Disease Control regulations and (WKU) Western Kentucky University Healthy on the Hill protocol. The survey results will be placed in my dissertation, and all results of this study will remain confidential and anonymous. (*See: <https://www.wku.edu/healthyonthehill/>*)

Your approval to conduct this study will be much appreciated. I will follow-up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. We will also discuss the time and date of my arrival to conduct the research study. You may contact me at my email address: michelle.patrick676@topper.wku.edu.

If you agree, kindly sign the attached consent letter in the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

Sincerely,

Michelle E. Patrick,

Doctoral Student of Western Kentucky University

Enclosures

Appendix F: Consent Letter from Organization

DATE

Dear Institutional Board:

After careful consideration and conducting a lengthy conversation with Miss Michelle E. Patrick, a doctoral student from Western Kentucky University.

I am writing to inform you that I give Miss Michelle E. Patrick permission to conduct the research titled “College for What...How Middle School Students from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds Perceive Post-Secondary Education” during our after-school program within our organization.

Sincerely,

Name of Signatory _____

Title of Signatory _____

Appendix G: Consent/Assent Letter

Parental or Guardian Permission Form for Research Involving their Child.

Dear Parent or Guardian of _____

Your permission is being sought to have your child participate in this study. Please read the following information before you decide to give permission.

Title of Project: "College for What...How Middle School Students from Diverse Socioeconomic Backgrounds Perceive Post-Secondary Education"

Researcher: Michelle E. Patrick, Western Kentucky University Doctoral Student

Purpose of the research: The purpose of the study is to examine factors that influence diverse socioeconomic middle school students' attitudes and perceptions toward attending and graduating from post-secondary education.

Procedure to be followed: In order to obtain the information needed, your child will participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The responses will be recorded and then transcribed at the end of the session. All tapes will be erased after the results are copied.

Discomforts/risks: The risk is minimal. Your child will be asked to answer questions regarding college attendance. There is no foreseeable discomforts or danger to either you or your child in this study.

Incentives/benefits for participation: There are no direct benefits to your child, however your child will receive a ten-dollar gift card from McDonalds for participating. The results from the study, will help to increase the knowledge of what educators must do to prepare, recruit, and retain college preparedness for students across the state of Kentucky.

Time duration of participation: The actual time spent for each participant is about 55 minutes and will not exceed 60 minutes.

Statement of confidentiality: All data is kept confidential and will be available only to professional researchers and staff. If the results of this study are published, the data will be presented in group form, and individuals that participated in this study will not be identified.

Voluntary participation: Your child and your participation are voluntary. We ask that you read this letter to your child and inform your child that the participation is voluntary. As the researcher, I will also remind your child during the session that the involvement is strictly voluntary.

Termination of participation: If, at any point, during the study, you or your child wishes to terminate the session, we will do so.

Questions regarding the research should be directed to: Miss Michelle E. Patrick @502.418.967

Questions or concerns regarding participation in this research should be directed to: Miss Michele E. Patrick@502.418.9673

This research has been reviewed and approved by Western Kentucky’s Institutional Review Board. If you any questions about the study or its outcomes, please feel free to contact us.

SIGNING THE FORM BELOW WILL ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY DURING TIME YOUR CHILD ATTENDANCE IN HIS/HER AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM. If you do not sign and return this form, the researcher will understand that you and your child do not wish to participate.

Parent Signature Box

*I, the parent or guardian of _____, a minor _____ years of age, **permit** his/her participation in the research titled, “College for What...How Middle School Students from Diverse Socioeconomic Backgrounds Perceive Post-Secondary Education” conducted by Miss Michelle E. Patrick from Western Kentucky University,*

Signature of Parent or Guardian *Date*

Adult Participant Signature Box

I, _____, agree to participate in the study name “College for What...How Middle School Students from Diverse Socioeconomic Backgrounds Perceive Post-Secondary Education” and that my participation is voluntary.

Signature of Adult Participant *Date*

Student Signature Box

I, _____, agree to participate in the study name “College for What...How Middle School Students from Diverse Socioeconomic Backgrounds Perceive Post-Secondary Education” and that my participation is voluntary.

Signature of Student Participant *Date*

Please print your name here.

APPENDIX H: WKU/ IRB Approval Letter



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY

DATE: November 11, 2021

TO: Michelle Patrick, EdD
FROM: Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1804665-2] College for What...How Middle School Students from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds Perceive Post-Secondary Education

REFERENCE #: IRB# 22-045

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: November 11, 2021

EXPIRATION DATE: November 11, 2022

REVIEW TYPE: Full Committee Review

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Full Committee Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a *signed* consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of November 11, 2022.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Robin Pyles at (270) 745-3360 or irb@wku.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB's records.

APPENDIX I: IRB Stamped Approval Consent Document (Focus Group)

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT (Focus Group)



Project Title: "College for What...How Middle School Students from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds Perceive Post-Secondary Education"

Investigator: Michelle E. Patrick, Western Kentucky University Educational Leadership Doctoral Program michelle.patrick676@topper.wku.edu.

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

- 1. Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of the study is to examine factors that influence middle school students' attitudes and perceptions toward attending and graduating from post-secondary education.
- 2. Explanation of Procedures:** You will participate in a focus group. All responses will be recorded and transcribed daily. The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes.
- 3. Discomfort and Risks:** There are no known risks associated with this study. The probability of harm anticipated is no greater than I would encounter in everyday life.
- 4. Benefits:** The anticipated benefits /incentives from the study are the importance of awareness and preparedness for positively impacting how middle school students think about attending a post-secondary institution.
- 5. Confidentiality:** All data is kept confidential and will be available only to professional researchers and staff. Records will be viewed, stored, and maintained in private, secure files only accessible by the P.I. and advising faculty for three years following the study, after which time they will be destroyed. If the results of this study are published, the data will be presented in group form, and individuals that participated in this study will not be identified.

WKU IRB# 22-045
Approved: 11/11/2021
End Date: 11/11/2022
Full Board Review
Original: 11/11/2021

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Signature of Participant

Date

Witness

Date

- I agree to the audio recording of the research. **(Initial here)** _____

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Robin Pyles, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-3360



WKU IRB# 22-045
Approved: 11/11/2021
End Date: 11/11/2022
Full Board Review
Original: 11/11/2021

APPENDIX J: IRB Stamped Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT



Project Title: "College for What...How Middle School Students from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds Perceive Post-Secondary Education"

Investigator: Michelle E. Patrick, Western Kentucky University Educational Leadership Doctoral Program michelle.patrick676@topper.wku.edu.

Your student is being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

In this document, I will explain in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project.

If you then decide your student may participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

- 1. Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of the study is to examine factors that influence middle school students' attitudes and perceptions toward attending and graduating from post-secondary education.
- 2. Explanation of Procedures:** In order to obtain the information needed, your student will participate in a one-on-one, face-to-face interview with the researcher. The responses will be recorded and transcribed daily at the end of the session. All tapes will be erased after the results have been transcribed. The actual time spent for each participant will not exceed 60 minutes.
- 3. Discomfort and Risks:** The risk is minimal. Your student will be asked to answer questions regarding college attendance. There is no foreseeable discomforts or danger to either you or your child in this study.
- 4. Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to your student, however your student will receive a ten-dollar gift card from McDonalds for participating. The results from the study will help to increase the knowledge of what educators must do to prepare, recruit, and retain college preparedness for students across the state of Kentucky.
- 5. Confidentiality:** All data is kept confidential and will be available only to professional researchers and staff. Records will be viewed, stored, and maintained in private, secure files only accessible by the P.I. and advising faculty for three years following the study, after which time they will be destroyed. If the results of this study are published, the data will be presented in group form, and individuals that participated in this study will not be identified.

WKU IRB# 22-045
Approved: 11/11/2021
End Date: 11/11/2022
Full Board Review
Original: 11/11/2021

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Signature of Guardian

Date

Witness

Date

- I agree to the audio recording of the research. *(Initial here)* _____

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Robin Pyles, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-3360



WKU IRB# 22-045
Approved: 11/11/2021
End Date: 11/11/2022
Full Board Review
Original: 11/11/2021

APPENDIX K: IRB Stamped Informed Assent Document

INFORMED ASSENT DOCUMENT FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING MINORS



Project Title: "College for What...How Middle School Students from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds Perceive Post-Secondary Education"
Investigator: Michelle E. Patrick, Western Kentucky University Educational Leadership Doctoral Program michelle.patrick676@topper.wku.edu

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The purpose of the study is to examine factors that influence middle school students' attitudes and perceptions toward attending and graduating from post-secondary education.

I, _____, understand that my parents (mom, dad, or guardians) have given permission (said it's okay) for me to take part in a project about _____ under the direction of _____.

I am taking part because I want to. I have been told that I can stop at any time I want to and nothing will happen to me if I want to stop.

Signature _____ Date _____

WKU IRB# 22-045
Approved: 11/11/2021
End Date: 11/11/2022
Full Board Review
Original: 11/11/2021

Copyright Permission

Name: Patrick, Michelle Evon

Email (to receive future readership statistics): mpatrick502@bellsouth.net

Type of document: ['Dissertation']

Title: COLLEGE FOR WHAT...HOW MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS PERCEIVED POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Keywords (3-5 keywords not included in the title that uniquely describe content): middle school, career awareness, and parent engagement

Committee Chair: Dr. Nicholas Brake

Additional Committee Members: Dr. Gary Houchens Dr. Daniel Super

Select 3-5 TopSCHOLAR® disciplines for indexing your research topic in TopSCHOLAR®: Examining the relationship between perception of service quality, student satisfaction, and intention to persist at Higher Education Institution
Examining teacher practices related to student -to-student discourse in the middle school classroom
Best Practices in Parent and Family engagement implications for student access

Copyright Permission for TopSCHOLAR® (digitalcommons.wku.edu) and ProQuest research repositories:

I hereby warrant that I am the sole copyright owner of the original work.

I also represent that I have obtained permission from third party copyright owners of any material incorporated in part or in whole in the above described material, and I have, as such identified and acknowledged such third-part owned materials clearly. I hereby grant Western Kentucky University the permission to copy, display, perform, distribute for preservation or archiving in any form necessary, this work in TopSCHOLAR® and ProQuest digital repository for worldwide unrestricted access in perpetuity.

I hereby affirm that this submission is in compliance with Western Kentucky University policies and the U.S. copyright laws and that the material does not contain any libelous matter, nor does it violate third-party privacy. I also understand that the University retains the right to remove or deny the right to deposit materials in TopSCHOLAR® and/or ProQuest digital repository.

['I want to embargo access to my document in TopSCHOLAR and ProQuest for ONE YEAR (after this time my document will be openly accessible).']

The person whose information is entered above grants their consent to the collection and use of their information consistent with the Privacy Policy. They acknowledge that the use of this service is subject to the Terms and Conditions.

['I consent to the above statement.']