
#### Abstract

Title of Dissertation: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CLIMATE AND GRADUATION RATES FOR PREDOMINATELY AFRICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOLS

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The purpose of this correlational study is to examine the relationship between the school climate and the graduation rate amongst students in a predominantly African American school district in a mid-Atlantic state. Using the School Climate Survey along with components of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development theory as the framework, this study employed a quantitative correlational design. The secondary data for the study were extracted from the urban school district's database and websites of 21 traditional high schools, where 33,621 students participated and responded to the school district's School Climate Survey. Three graduation rates as defined by the U. S. Department of Education, served as the dependent variable. The eight subscale


scores on the School Climate Survey were used to predict high school graduation rates.

The regression models for predicting the three graduation rates were significant. However, students' perceptions of Effective Teaching, Challenging and Relevant Curriculum, High Expectations for All Students, Positive and Nurturing Environment, Effective Plant Operations, Safe and Orderly Environment, and Meaningful Use of Data were not predictive of high school graduation rates. Only Parental Involvement was found to be predictive of the graduation rates. It is important to note that the lowest ratings from students were Effective Plant Operations, Safety and Discipline, and Parental Involvement.

# EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CLIMATE AND GRADUATION RATES FOR PREDOMINATELY <br> AFRICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOLS <br> by <br> Angela D. McNair 

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

## MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

# EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CLIMATE AND GRADUATION RATES FOR PREDOMINATELY AFRICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOLS by <br> Angela D. McNair 

has been approved
April 2019

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my Heavenly Father and my family of Angels that watched over me during this journey. He knew my plan before I embarked on my journey and He was with me every step of the way. I dedicate a special feeling of love and gratitude to my mother Helen, who has been my support and cheerleader, every step of the way. Thank you mom for never letting me give up and encouraging me when I started to have doubt! A special thank you to my father John for the support and prayers! My darling children Ajshay and Nathaniel, I cannot thank you enough for being by my side and rooting me on. The phone calls to just say mom I love you is what kept me driven to finish my journey. I love you to the moon and back!

I would like to thank my brother Vernon, your silent cheering me on never went unnoticed. That out of the blue phone call to tell me how proud you were of me meant the world to me. I want to give a special thank you to my cousin Phyllis P. and Stephanie. Both of you in your special way helped me to stay grounded and focused. I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Vivian Price and Jernice Lea, you saw a gift that had been bestowed upon me and pushed me to let the world see what you saw. I will forever be grateful to you both. My dearest friends, Savitra and Wanda, I cannot thank you enough for taking my late night phone calls, stopping what you were doing to review and edit my work and for your words of encouragement.

I want to give a very special thank you to my Morgan State University Family. Many of you were there with me through some very trying times. The loss of my sister impacted my life to depths that could never be explained. It was because of you, Keotia, Trevor, Edwin, Marquenta (Que), Eric, William and others, that I got back in the race and finished the journey that I was destined to be on. A huge thank you to my co-workers, Michelle and others for keeping me grounded and picking up the pieces when I was under pressure with trying to complete my assignments. There are many others who played a vital part in helping me finish my journey, you know who you are and know that I hold a special place in my heart for you all.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge several individuals who were instrumental in ensuring that I successfully completed my journey. Dr. Warren Hayman my dissertation chair, words cannot express how much I appreciate your undying support and encouragement. You kept me grounded when I was in doubt. You never let me give up. Your guidance was a huge part of my successful completion. Dr. Sylvester McKay my co-chair, you spent hours on top of hours dedicating your time and attention to ensuring I completed my journey. There are no words that can express my gratitude to you. You saw something in me and for that reason, you agreed to be part of my committee. Dr. Thurman Bridges and Dr. Willie Bragg, your guidance, time, feedback and support were critical and humbly appreciated. I thank you!

I would also like to acknowledge the faculty and staff of the Advanced Leadership Studies, Urban Education Program. Dr. Anderson, thank you for your critique and feedback. Your humbled spirit was encouraging and kept me on the path to complete. Dr. Prime I thank you for being a huge support, and taking time out of your busy schedule to assist me when I needed guidance. Ms. Griffin and Ms. Bryson, your support cannot go unnoticed. You two ladies went above and beyond to assist me in the final phase. Thank you!

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Becoming a parent or parents is one of the greatest experiences and unique accomplishments one could achieve. Once a child enters the world, as parents, the clock starts. Parents begin examining how they will plan out the future and ways by which they intend to help their children achieve their goals, hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Before these can be accomplished, parents must first determine the educational journey they hope they will complete. As early as preschool, parents seek to find the best schools in the safest environments. Parents seek out a school that will tap into the inner being of their children and help them pursue and achieve their educational goals.

Parents, in the U.S. and globally, hope that first step of achievement is for children to become a high school graduate. Despite these parental expectations, many young people drop out of high school and do not earn a high school diploma. The number of students that are no longer attending school has been an ongoing issue and has begun to draw national, but inconsistent attention. Although it has drawn national attention, Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morrison (2006) referred to the high school dropout problem as the silent epidemic noting that there is no one reason why a student decided to drop-out of high school.

The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation presented profound facts about the high school dropout rate, noting every 26 seconds a student drops out of high school (Stewart, 2007). They further enlightened that being smart is a sign of weakness
amongst peers, citing approximately eight to ten individuals that drop out of school end up incarcerated, adding that $75 \%$ of the prison inmates are high school dropouts. These students usually have no emotional or financial support at home and are often easily lured to the streets to make quick "easy" money (Stewart, 2007).

Over $\$ 40$ billion dollars is spent each year on incarcerated individuals, with an alarming rate of $80 \%$ of the individuals behind prison walls being illiterate (Stewart Foundation, 2007). Overall, the Stewart Foundation (Stewart, 2007) reminded us that approximately 7,000 students drop out every day and over one million students quit each year. Sadly, from 2007 to present, the United States has attributed over \$329 billion dollars in costs associated with lost wages, taxes and overall lifetime productivity for students who did not complete high school (Stewart, 2007).

The Current Population Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau (2001) suggested that $85 \%$ of high school students graduate. However, this number is based on a general population of young adults and not students currently in high school. Results from the survey may overestimate the graduation rate, and the findings cannot be disaggregated to local school districts. A more disturbing number is provided by the Urban Institute. According to research conducted by the Urban Institute, approximately two-thirds of public high school students graduate with a high school diploma.

About 50\% of students from disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups complete high school. In the country's high poverty urban school districts, the percentage who graduate may be as low as one-third and may be lower from some subgroups. For example, the Urban Institute, using various studies, reported graduation rates of Chicago-48.8, Cleveland-30.0\%, Houston-40.2, Los Angeles46.4\%, New York City-38.2\%, Oakland-30.4\%, and Philadelphia-41.9\%.

More importantly, the African American high school dropout rate is higher than any other ethnic group, raising the eyebrows of many, but not enough to command consistent national attention. Thus, the focus of this study is an examination of the graduation rate of students enrolled in a predominantly African American urban school district. The shift to a focus on the graduation rate was necessary because the school district does not report an individual school's dropout rates.

## Background of the Study

Today, parents are faced with helping their children deal with and overcome the disparities, challenges, and obstacles they encounter on their academic journey. Similar to most parents, the parents in the selected school district hope that their children will successfully complete high school and attend college. The unfortunate fact is that students, age 18 to 21 , represent the highest high school drop-out rates in their states. In the 2010-2011 school year, approximately 827 high school seniors dropped out of the urban school district and of that number, the African American students represented the highest number, which was also
higher than the state average (Casey Foundation, 2013). In most instances, it is difficult to get students re-engaged once they have dropped out; convincing them that returning to school would be beneficial to them presented a daunting challenge to educators and those who were in support of them returning (Casey Foundation, 2013). Faced with the challenges of graduating from school or dropping out to provide a source of income for the home or provide care to a family member, they usually chose dropping out over graduation (Casey Foundation, 2013).

On average, every nine seconds a student in the United States opts out of traditionally graduating from high school. Nearly 1.2 million students in the United States between the ages of 16 to 21 dropped out of high school, fueling a persistent high school crisis (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). Rumberger (2011) indicated that between 2008 and 2009 the United States reported 607,789 students had not graduated from high school. Of this number, these students represented over $4 \%$ of all students that were enrolled in grades $9-12$ (Rumberger, 2011). He further concurred that the low graduation rates only provided one part of a story. According to Rumberger, the graduation rate being reported by the Federal government is actually much lower. Rumberger noted that great emphasis was placed on reducing the dropout rate amongst racial and ethnic minorities.

On March 1, 2010, President Barack Obama weighed in stating that the high school graduation rates impact our nation in many ways. Suggesting that low graduation rates harm the economy and our communities, he stated, "This is a
problem we cannot afford to accept and we cannot ignore. The stakes are too high—for our children, for our economy, and for our country. It is time for all of us to come together-parents, students, principals, teachers, business leaders and elected officials from across the political spectrum-to end America's dropout crisis" (Rumberger, 2011, p. 15).

This crisis reaches back as far as 1963, when President John F. Kennedy was in office and initiated a dropout campaign (Rumberger, 2011). Rumberger argued that of the challenges within the workforce that a high school dropout encounters, society will also feel the impact. This means that these individuals earn very low to minimum wages, and their potential work options are limited to part time or seasonal work. The impact to society is demonstrated through unearned and unpaid taxes, a contribution to the workforce, as well as financial outcomes that fall upon the cities and states (Rumberger, 2011).

High school dropouts are faced with difficulty when trying to seek employment, and oftentimes when they do obtain employment it is seasonal or limited based on the lack of education and limited skill set of these individuals (Rumberger, 2011). Rumberger further highlighted that the pay which these individuals earned is substantially lower than that of someone who graduated from high school. Rumberger conveyed how dropouts encountered economic challenges based on their having low levels of education. Dropouts are not just faced with the challenges of earning adequate pay: there is also the healthcare challenge that often comes with this lesser status (Rumberger, 2011). The health
of these individuals is much poorer, combined with high mortality rates. This is due in part because they are more likely to become engaged in some type of criminal activity (Rumberger, 2011).

Studies have revealed students who did not graduate from high school reported a wide variety of reasons why they elected to take that final step of leaving school (Rumberger, 2011). Of those reasons listed, the students revealed that they made the choice to drop out of school based on having missed too many days of school, convinced it would be easier to obtain a GED, failing grades or low grades, and inability to maintain what was required of them in the classroom (Rumberger, 2011). Of the findings, Rumberger stated that there was no direct causal factor that identified why these students had poor attitudes towards school, which eventually caused them to dropout.

Rumberger (2011) concluded, there is no one factor why these students are not graduating, but there are individual factors that perpetuated attitudes of these individuals, which prompted their decision to permanently remove themselves from school. The combined factors presented include (a) inability to effectively transition from middle school to high school, (b) poor academic achievement, (c) attending numerous schools, (d) unsupportive school environments, (e) poor attendance and high absenteeism, and (f) misbehaving in school (Rumberger, 2011). Other factors that have been brought to the forefront are childhood poverty and family dynamics. School and community so often impacted and stifled the development of students that were identified or categorized as poor (Rumberger, 2011).

Unfortunately, in today's educational arena, the nation is faced with the reality that African American males represent the lowest rates of high school graduates in comparison to other ethnic groups. Approximately 100,000 African American males drop out of school each year (Kunjufu, 2010). NCEA (2009) reported that African American males make up 8.4\% of the drop-out statistics. African American males represent a large pool of poorly educated men that have been disconnected from the mainstream society. For many African American males, completing high school has become the exception and prison has become routine (Eckholm, 2006). So often these young men were forced to forfeit school so that they can care for families. This was not a choice, but an unsolicited obligation. High rates of absenteeism or truancy, poor classroom behavior, less participation in extracurricular activities, and bad relationships with teachers and peers were linked to lowering the chances for graduation (Jerald, 2006).

One of the wealthiest counties in one mid-Atlantic state represents a microcosm of what is occurring across the United States, when it comes to the African American students dropping out of high school. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education identified the selected urban school district as the twentieth largest school system in the country (Casey Foundation, 2013). In addition, the urban school district was recognized for having the highest concentration of African American students (Casey Foundation, 2013). The Brookings Institute (2010) reported that approximately 7,000 students were identified as disconnected from the urban school district. The Annie Casey

Foundation (2013) reported that approximately 9,500 students dropped out of high school in the selected state, and of them, the greatest number were in the selected urban school district.

While there are preventative measures in place to assist students identified as "at risk" youth and potential dropouts, there is no guarantee that the programs were effective. In 2009 the state of Maryland renewed the commitment to getting the disconnected youth engaged through the Job Opportunities Task Force that had been put in place (Casey Foundation, 2013). The initiative was a part of multiple pathways that would assist the disconnected youth with completing high school (Casey Foundation, 2013). Smink and Schargel (2007) recommended effective strategies that served as preventative measures. The strategies appeared independent at times but actually overlapped and were synergistic (Smink \& Schargel, 2007). Heckman and LaFontaine (2007) agreed, that once a student had been identified as "at risk" of dropping out of high school, this could provide the impetus to implement intensive targeted interventions. While there are preventative measures that have been put in place to assist those students that were identified as "at risk" youth and potential dropouts, there are no guarantees that programs will be effective.

## Statement of the Problem

In today's educational arena, African Americans present one of the lowest high school graduation rates in comparison to other ethnic groups. Many African American students, ages 18-24, especially African American males, are
embedded in a context least supportive of their mental health and wellbeing. Given the high dropout rate in the country, this study seeks to identify causal factors that are associated with the students, age 14 to 21 , not graduating high school in a predominantly African American school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state.

It is unclear why the selected school district, in one of the wealthiest minority African American counties in the country, has such low graduation rates in some areas. The county located in the mid-Atlantic state, has a median household income of $\$ 94,000$, as well as a high percentage of African Americans with college degrees (Brown, 2015). According to a recent report presented in 2018 by the United States Demographic Statistical Atlas, the median income range for families residing in this mid-Atlantic state's urban school district range in accordance to the racial make-up: Non-Hispanic White is $\$ 86.7 \mathrm{~K}$, All white $\$ 80.7 \mathrm{~K}$, Black is 76.5 K , Mixed is $\$ 80.1 \mathrm{~K}$, Asian $\$ 79.8 \mathrm{~K}$, Hispanic $\$ 61.8 \mathrm{~K}$, American Indian $\$ 59.1 \mathrm{~K}$, and Other $\$ 60.9 \mathrm{~K}$ per annum. The well-known affluent African American county is comprised of 80 full sub-divisions, and two partial sub-divisions within the midAtlantic state, with a reported overall household income breakdown ranging from a low of $\$ 58$ to a high of $\$ 116 \mathrm{~K}$. In addition, it was further reported that approximately 46 of the 80 subdivisions are made up of six-figure income households.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this correlational study was to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of school climate and the graduation rate amongst
the students' in a predominantly African American urban school setting. Using the ecological theory as the framework, this study employed a quantitative correlational design to answer the research question and its associated hypotheses. The data for the study were collected from 33,621 students in 21 traditional high schools using secondary data from the School Climate Survey administered by the selected school district. Essentially, the study used the measure of school climate to explain the variation in high school graduation rates for an urban school district, located in the mid-Atlantic.

## Theoretical Framework

The study used the theoretical framework of the Brofenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Brofenbrenner,1974,1979). Brofenbrenner's ecological systems theory offered an array of constructs that aided in the current research. The theory provided a systemic breakdown identifying five systems that defined how the students evolve within their environment.

Ecological systems theory was first presented in the 1970s by Urie Brofenbrenner. The theory was developed to explain how the inherent qualities of a child and the characteristics of their external environment interacted to influence how they would grow and develop (Brofenbrenner, 1974). Brofenbrenner approached his theory through a system's concept categorically identifying the roles by which the five systems identified, correlated and intertwined. He believed that there are five (5) environmental systems that define the ecological system theory and contribute to the influence of a child's development.

With this theory, Bronfenbrenner expressed the importance of studying a child in multiple environments, also known as ecological systems, in an attempt to understand their individual development (Brofenbrenner, 1974). Brofenbrenner believed that a child will be simultaneously enmeshed in different ecosystems, from home ecological system being the most intimate, moving outward to the larger as the school systems and the most expansive of the systems, which would be society and culture.

Each of the systems inevitably interacted with and influenced each other and every aspect of the child's life (Brofenbrenner, 1974). The theory is based on his belief that a child's development is not just influenced by a child's immediate environment, but also by multiple systems. Giving recognition to Brofenbrenner's bioecological system, Berk (2003) shared his thoughts and views of the bioecological system and his belief that the psychosocial life world of a child is comprised in a multi-layered set of nested and interrelated ecological systems. He further enlightened that child's home, school and neighborhood where most of a child's time is spent, influences the child's development and adjustment. Berk (2003) further gave reference to the micro system components and the impacts it has, as immediate, because of its influences on a child's development and outcomes.

Brofenbrenner's theory is based on his belief that a child's development is not just influenced by a child's immediate environment, but also by multiple systems including the following:

1. Microsystem
2. Mesosystem
3. Exosystem
4. Macrosystem
5. Chronosystem

Studies of the various systems revealed relationships that influenced the ecological systems theory and demonstrated the diversity of interrelated influences on the child's development (Brofenbrenner, 1994).

As presented in Figure 1, the theory began with the microsystem which was closest to the child based on the environmental system. Components of the child's family and child's neighborhood in which a child resides comprise this system. The microsystem was described as the smallest and most immediate environment in which the child lives (Brofenbrenner, 1994). The interactions within the microsystem involved personal relationships with family members, classmates, teachers and the caregivers (Brofenbrenner, 1994). The microsystem was related to the home, school, daycare, peer groups and the community environment of the child (Brofenbrenner, 1994). The role of family and friends was vital to the child within the microsystem. The microsystem was viewed as that by which a child engaged and socialized with others as well as having the opportunity to build the bridge between two different settings that provided consistency and familiarity in their lives (Brofenbrenner, 1994).

## Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Figure 1.
Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

The mesosystem described the second part of the five systems identified, as the interactions between the Microsystems or the smaller subsystems within the entire system. Brofenbrenner viewed the interaction of the microsystem and mesosystem as that which helped develop a sense of self. The mesosystem
provided a linkage between home, school, peer groups and family or family and church (Brofenbrenner, 1994). Brofenbrenner provided an example of parent involvement and interaction with the child's friends, that which represented harmony and like-mindedness, which would lead to the positive development of the child. However, if the opposite occurred and the parents had a dislike for the peers, this could cause conflicting emotions, which at times have led to negative development (Brofenbrenner, 1994).

The exosystem was identified as the community or family and church (Brofenbrenner, 1994). The exosystem provided linkages between two or more settings, one of which did not contain the development of the child, but would affect the child indirectly (Brofenbrenner, 1994). Comprised of people and places that the child did not directly interact with, the exosystem may still have affected them (Brofenbrenner, 1994). The exosystem was comprised of places and people which included the parents' workplaces, the larger neighborhood, and extended family members (Brofenbrenner, 1994).

The macrosystem was identified as the larger system that represented a system and culture by which the child lived. It was also known to influence the beliefs, customs, and other life factors of a child's culture (Brofenbrenner, 1994). When looking at the macrosystem, it was a distant collection of people and places to the child which exercised significant influence on the child (Brofenbrenner, 1994). The system was composed of the child's cultural patterns and values, along
with the child's beliefs and ideas, political as well as economic systems (Brofenbrenner, 1994).

The last of the five systems is the chronosystem. The system relates to life experiences as well as environmental changes, events, transitions, and history (Brofenbrenner, 1994). The dimensions within this system demonstrated the influence of change and constancy within the child's environment, which included a change in family structure, address, parent's employment status, and changes in society and economic cycles (Brofenbrenner, 1994).

## Ecological Systems Theory Applied to this Study

This study focused on the microsystem, the system closest to the child. This includes elements of the environment such as the family and school. The School Climate Survey was used to capture students' perceptions of their high school learning environment (see Figure 2). Based on the theoretical framework, the assumption is that the students' perceptions of the school climate as measured by the School Climate Survey will be predictive the high school graduation rates.

## Research Question

This study was designed to address the following research question:
What is the relationship between students' perceptions of the school climate and the high school graduation rate for students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state?

## Microsystem



Figure 2.
Application of the Ecological Systems Theory to the Current Study

## Hypotheses

Associated with the research question are the following hypotheses:
$H_{01}$ : There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Effective Teaching and high school
graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located, in a mid-Atlantic state.

Ho2: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Challenging and Relevant Curriculum and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly urban African American school district located in a midAtlantic state.

Ноз: $^{\text {There }}$ is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score High Expectation for All Students and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in urban located in a midAtlantic state.

Ho4: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Positive and Nurturing Environment and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state.

Ho5: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Effective Plant Operations and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state.
$\mathrm{H}_{06}$ : There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Safety and Discipline and high
school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state.

Ho7: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Meaningful Use of Data and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state.

Hos: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Parental Involvement and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state.

## Significance of the Study

The nation is faced with the reality that African Americans represent the lowest high school graduation rates in comparison to other ethnic groups. Within the selected state, one urban school district was recognized as one of the richest counties in the nation (Brown, 2015). However, it represents the largest number of high school dropouts in the state of Maryland (Casey Foundation, 2013). Research indicated that unsupportive school environments, chaotic family lives, and academic and social deficits undoubtedly contributed to high school dropout rates within urban communities (Heckman \& LaFontaine, 2007). Jerald (2006) stated that many approaches have been attempted to reduce the alarming high school dropout rates, but oftentimes these young people, especially males, were forced to forfeit school so that they could fulfill an unsolicited obligation of caring for their
families. Many males became the head of household and the primary source of family income. The gap in the literature suggested that further research is needed to be conducted to further explain school-related factors for why young people, especially students in the selected school districts, fail to graduate.

## Limitations

Limitations are aspects of the study that were not controlled by the researcher. The primary limitation of the study was related to the accuracy or inaccuracy of the participants' responses to items on the School Climate Survey. The data from the survey completely relied upon the students completing the information honestly; so therefore, the data received may have been compromised. Another limitation was the researcher did not speak directly with the students, in particular, those students that had chosen to drop-out of high school. It was not possible to identify the gender or ethnicity of those individuals that completed the survey. The study relied on aggregate data from 21 traditional high schools that could not be disaggregated by gender and ethnicity. In addition, the selected school district did not provide information regarding the reliability and validity of the instrument.

## Delimitations

Delimitations are aspects of the study controlled by the researcher. The key delimitation for this study was that the data came from one urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state. The urban school district parental make-up has a high medium household income and a high percentage of African Americans with
college degrees. The student profile was predominantly African American, 58\%, Hispanic/Latino, 33\%, White, 4\%, Asian, 3\% and 1.7\% Other (Selected Urban School District, 2017). It is possible that the findings may not be generalized to school districts that do not have similar characteristics as those of the selected school district.

## Definition of Key Terms

The key terms of this study are defined below to assure clarity and consistency for the reader.

School Climate: Students' perceptions of the overall social and learning climate of the school.

Graduation Rate: The percentage of the schools' students who completed their program for the first time and within the dedicated timeline for the program.

Classroom Climate: The overall feeling of a class that include aspects of the physical, social and psychological environment.

Engagement: The students' behavioral, cognitive, and effective investment in their subjects and their classroom.

Dropout Rate: A person who leaves school for any reason except death, and does not transfer to another school or enroll in an educational program that is recognized by the School District.

Ecological Theory: A theoretical belief that a child's development is not just influenced by the immediate environment, but also by the surrounding environment.

## Summary

There is a silent epidemic amongst the American youth, especially African Americans who are not graduating from high school. There are underlying issues why these young people have elected not to graduate. Unfortunately, the dropout rate in the United States disproportionately impacted young people who were from low-income, minority, urban, and single parent households, again, having an impact on the graduation rates (Bridgeland, Dilulio, \& Weissbourd, 2009).

Additionally, family dynamics and social issues were also identified as contributing factors why youths were not graduating from high school.

The purpose of this correlational study was to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of school climate and the graduation rate amongst students in a predominantly African American urban school setting. Using the School Climate Survey and Ecological theory of Urie Brofenbrenner as the framework, the study employed a quantitative correlational design to answer the research question and its associated hypotheses. The data for the study were collected from 33,621 students that were enrolled in 21 traditional high schools. Secondary data from the School Climate Survey, administered by the selected school district, was also used.

Initially, the study's intended use was to measure the school climate and explain the variation in high school dropout rates for an urban school district located in the mid-Atlantic. Because the dropout information was not being
publicized or accessible, the study was prompted to view the students' perceptions of the school climate and the relationship to the graduation rate.

Klemick (2007) informed how individual states varied in the manner by which they reported graduation and dropout rates. Greene and Winters (2002) reported that although there were methods of accountability and transparency put in place for schools that report graduation rates, oftentimes, the graduation rates that were reported could be misleading. They further reported that some states tend to report inflated graduation rates, which promoted an impression that the system works, therefore, not requiring any type of reform. Mishel and Roy (2006) supported the report, stating there is no consistency in accurately checking or verifying the graduation data reported by school districts.

## CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The high school graduation rate has been and continues to be one of the most critical issues facing urban schools. Each year urban high schools across the nation are challenged with alarming numbers of high school dropouts and the lower than desirable rate of students who graduate from high school on time. There is an even greater alarm associated with the graduation rates of African American males that are well below the national average. Researchers have associated the catalyst of low graduation rates to factors of social issues, economical issues, single parent households, and disengagement from school. In recent studies, experts continue to identify some of the primary factors as those of social-economic background and disengagement, or lack of interest in school (Heckman \& LaFontaine, 2007).

Reports from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013) "Kids Count" revealed that every nine seconds students in the U.S. between the ages of 16-24 drop out of school. On a positive note, the U. S. Department of Education (2018) presented data indicating that the national graduation rate had increased to $84 \%$ for public high schools in 2015-2016. This increase was in comparison to the last data reported in 2010-2011, The Department further indicated that approximately four out of five students that entered the ninth grade actually received a traditional high school diploma within the four-year timeline (U. S. Department of Education, 2018).

As observed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013), the state of selected school district had an estimated average of 9,500 students dropping out of high school each year, and again, the highest dropout rate occurred in one of the wealthiest counties located within the state. During 2011 and 2012 school years, 2,621 students dropped out of this urban school district. This decision is one that is not made overnight: the dropout process is gradual, and signs are shown early during a student's educational career (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). Also, students that had a history of unexcused absences, truancy issues, poor grades and home life complications were at a high risk of becoming dropouts at or around the age of 15 (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013).

The Brookings Institution (2013) reported approximately 7,003 youth in the school district selected for this study were identified as being amongst the population of disconnected youth. In light of the recent reporting of graduation data in 2013, the Brookings Institution was blatant in stating that the students residing in an affluent county within a mid-Atlantic state were faced with many challenges and that the solution required action on the part of the community, parents, businesses, school leaders and policy makers. The Brookings Institution further stated that a call to action was needed to put an end to crisis of the youth being disconnected to ensure that no student became a drop-out (The Brookings Institution, 2013).

Dedicated to ensuring students graduated from high school within four years or five years, the U. S. Department of Education now requires that each
school use an adjusted cohort high school graduation rate for accountability purposes. Implementation of the four- and five-year cohorts was a method for ensuring that students who entered high school in the ninth grade for the first time were included in the graduation rate calculated for the four years and that the methodology was consistent for all high schools. The five-year cohort was put in place for those students who did not complete in the four years, however, did graduate in five years. The intent was to make schools more accountable.

A report released by the U. S. Department of Education (2017) for 20132014 indicated disparities in high school completion rates among ethnic groups. The data for 2013-2014 reported how these groups graduated in four years, ranking them in order of ethnicity from highest to lowest with Asian Pacific Islanders with an $89 \%$ completion rate, whereas the Whites were $87 \%$, Hispanics $76 \%$, Blacks at 73\% and American Indians at 70\%. However, The Associated Press (2017) referenced data suggesting that there was a rise in graduation rates although students from low-income and minority students still lagged behind their peers. In 2015, the graduation percentage reported was 83.2 overall. The rates were for Hispanic students 77.8 and 74.6 for black students (Associated Press, 2017).

They are often referred to as low performers as stated by Domenico (1998) and Noguera (1995). African American males were not perceived as fitting to the norm and were often labeled as "dangerous." Casella (2003) and Bowditch (1993) stated that these students were labeled as "trouble makers."

Skiba et al. (2000) believed students who were labeled as dangerous were primarily of poorer backgrounds, members of a minority or non-white ethnic group, and coupled with having academic challenges. In addition, these students are removed from the classroom for minor infractions (Skiba et al., 2000). Wald and Losen (2003) reported how teachers' fears and anxieties played a vital part when it came to their perception of these students, which in-turn perpetuated a more punitive method of discipline for these individuals (Wald \& Losen, 2003). Wald and Losen noted that sadly, those students who do not fit the school norm, due in part to their social-economic status and academic challenges, are targeted and faced with the unfortunate acts of removal. So often, when these individuals are removed, the direct connection to the "school to prison pipeline" occurs (Wald \& Losen, 2003).

## Factors Identified as Having an Impact on Successful Graduation

Experts have offered their insight, beliefs and opinions as the factors they deemed to have prompted young people to drop out of high school and prevent them from successfully graduating. The common factor identified as having contributed the behavior was growing up in single parent households and living in low income socially and economically challenged communities (Heckman \& LaFontaine, 2007).

A student's home life and school environment have impacts that could possibly prevent successful completion of high school graduation (Jeynes, 2007). Further, the importance of parental involvement during their four years of school
would possibly promote positivity towards graduating. Wehlage and Butler (2011) highlighted school climate, giving attention to students' perceptions of teachers' lack of interest as well as the unfair systems put in place for punishment and their being ineffective. Each of these and other related factors are discussed below.

Truancy and Absenteeism. The U. S. Department of Education (2009) reported truancy as an indicator that students will eventually elect to drop out of school rather than staying in school and graduating, further putting themselves at a long-term disadvantage of ever becoming productive citizens. Jansson (2005) believed that if students did not secure a high school diploma, chances were that they would likely become dependent on welfare as a source of financial support.

Garry (2005) described truancy as an indicator that something is going wrong in a child's life. Further if society and the communities continue to rely on the bureaucracy of the government to resolve the problem, the children will never advance in the educational growth, and the mean streets of the urban neighborhoods will continue to recruit the young people, particularly the males who tend to get involved in selling drugs and committing crimes as they try to survive.

Gullat and Lemoine (1997) identified specific social causes that promoted school truancy that impacted timely graduation. They were of the belief that the dysfunction and breakup of a traditional family structure, standardizing of curricula, working mothers, and growing sizes of schools and communities, are contributors to this issue. In addition, Rohrman (1993) shared the observation that truancy can be traced to four causes: (a) unsupportive school environments, (b) lack of
community support, (c) chaotic family life, and (d) personal and academic or social deficits.

Similarly, Kinder, Wakefield, and Wilkin (1996) reminded us that postregistration truants are not necessarily absent from school, as they may oftentimes be hiding within the premises of the school. Truant students oftentimes adopt behaviors of disengagement while attending middle school. Balfanz, Herzog, and Maclver (2007) noted students who attend school less than $90 \%$ of the time in sixth grade increased the chances that they would not graduate from high school.

Forfeiting school so that they can care for their families was not a choice for many of these young men, but a necessity which caused their truancy (Gerald, 2006). "High rates of absenteeism or truancy, poor classroom behavior, less participation in extracurricular activities and bad relationships with teachers and peers all have been linked to lower chances for graduation" (Jerald, 2006, p. 5).

The U. S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) reported in the school year 2015-2016 approximately eight million students had missed over three weeks or more during the school year (Litvinov, Alvarez, Long, \& Walker, 2018). They further referenced "chronic absenteeism," defining it as students that have missed $10 \%$ or more days of school during the year, equating to two days a month or 18 days a year. CRDC identified "chronic absenteeism" as a precursor to students not completing high school or graduating on time (Litvinov et al., 2018).

Low Income/Single Parent Households. Jerald (2006) posited that students who were from single parent families, had a parent or parents who dropped out of high school, and had parents who provided low support for their learning, were "at risk" of dropping out of school. According to Jerald, African American males from disadvantaged families are at a higher risk of leaving school without a high school diploma.

Many students at an early age, voluntarily or involuntarily assumed the responsibility as head of household. Assuming the role required that they provide for the family by any means necessary. Forfeiting school in an attempt to provide for their family was not a choice many of these young men have. "Middle grade students in high-poverty neighborhoods face greater dangers and temptations when they are younger and are often recruited into roles that interfere with school attendance and involvement (e.g., as they are recruited by their families to be caregivers, by drug gangs to be cheap labor, or by peers to be colleagues on out-of-school adventures)" (Balfanz, Herzog, \& Maclver, 2007, p. 225).

Transitioning to High School. Students transitioning from middle school to high school in many cases have already been identified as "at risk" of not graduating from high school. This recognition is reflective of their low attendance rates and low academic grades. Much research focused on students entering the ninth grade at non-selective urban high schools, who entered with academic skills several years below their grade level often encountered severe academic problems in the ninth grade (Allensworth \& Easton, 2005; Neild, Stoner-Eby, \&

Furstenberg, 2008; Steinberg \& Almeida, 2008). By placing more emphasis on a student's ninth grade year, there exists the possibility of preventing students from opting out of school and not graduating.

Disengagement. Although there is no one specific reason why students become disengaged, there is the question as to what the relationship is with their teachers, peers, and school administration. School engagement was defined, using three profound concepts that make up the constructs (e.g., Appleton, Christian, \& Furlong 2008; Fredericks, Blumenfield, \& Paris, 2004). The constructs of Behavioral Engagement focused on the idea of student participation in the academic, social and extracurricular activities (Fredericks et al., 2004; Fredericks, Blumenfield, Friedel, \& Parks, 2005). The constructs entailed positive conduct, absence of disruptive behavior of skipping school, learning and academic tasks, and participation in school related activities which also included athletics and student government (Fredericks et al., 2004, 2005).

Looking through the lens of the African American males, it is useful to understand the relationship these young men have with their school environment and if the relationship or non-relationship contributes to their graduating or not graduating from school. Ryan (1995) and Ryan and Connell (1989) argued that the interaction amongst teachers and students can shape students' engagement within classrooms. By promoting students' intrinsic motivation, students can be introduced to fun learning activities as well as challenging ones affording students an opportunity to discover and explore their interest and goals. By creating
classroom contexts that support the development of more self-determined reasons for accomplishing learning, students will become more engaged and motivated (Ryan, 1995; Ryan \& Connell, 1989).

It is further stated, teachers who display motivational support and foster caring relationships are known to encourage and inspire students' learning (Ryan, 1995; Ryan \& Connell, 1989). Patrick, Hisley, Kempler, and College (2000) observed that when teachers are enthusiastic and excited about school subjects, their behavior can often become contagious to students. Employing this mode of enthusiastic behavior can also promote the importance of knowledge and the value of knowledge to students (Patrick et al., 2000). These experts also believe that those teachers who share their compassion for learning could possibly offer students avenues to obtain resources that might assist in their increased knowledge and understanding (Patrick et al., 2000).

Appleton, Christian, and Furlong (2008) employed the constructs of student engagement, concurring with other researchers that attendance, suspensions, voluntary classroom participation along with extracurricular activities are all part of the behavioral engagement concepts. Newman and Newman (2009) believed that adolescents aged 12-18, encountering a high level of expectations, complexities and responsibilities, are expected to adhere to the rules and laws that govern their conduct in an adult society.

## School Climate

The National School Climate Center (NSCC, 2007) defined school climate as a method for determining the character and quality of school life. The center designed a survey to identify traits that make up the school climate (NSCC, 2007). Many school districts around the country have employed various measures of school climate to gain a better insight on the perception of students, teachers and parents (Department of Testing, Research, and Evaluation, 2017).

Freiberg and Stein (1999) highlighted the importance of school climate and how it could influence a positive and healthy learning environment. They further noted the importance of receiving feedback as well as how the information would assist in efforts for improvement. The expectation is that adjustments to the school climate would aid in improving and sustaining educational excellence (Frieberg \& Stein, 1999).

Attention was given to students and their concerns that schools often do not enlist their feedback as a source for measuring the school climate (Frieberg \& Stein, 1999). Of the measures reported from the survey, the most important and critical measure highlighted was students transitioning from one level to the next (Frieberg \& Stein, 1999). The experts placed emphasis on how moving from middle school to high school often presented frightening experiences for students at that grade level (Frieberg \& Stein, 1999).

In 2018, Pew Research Center conducted a school climate survey. From that survey, it was reported that approximately $57 \%$ of the teenagers in the $\mathrm{U} . \mathrm{S}$.
stated how they worried about school safety and the fear of possible shootings at their schools (Alvarez, 2018). Alvarez, as a counselor working in an urban school district, observed in 2018, many students were hospitalized from anxiety, depression and other mental health issues because of their feelings about school.

During the research, it was noted how teachers need to look beyond the behavior of students and look at them as a person, further stating that oftentimes their inappropriate behavior could be a cry for help (Alvarez, 2018). It was further believed that implementation of the Restorative Justice Practice (RJP) was a method for educators to break the school-to-prison pipeline for students (Alvarez, 2018). It is believed that this trend occurs on a national basis and has the most impact on those from low-income environments as well as students of color (Alvarez, 2018). The academic year 2013-2014 data reported that nationwide, black students received more in and out of school suspensions than white students (Alvarez \& McNair, 2018). In addition, these students were often pushed out of the school system into some type of juvenile or criminal system (Alvarez \& McNair, 2018).

Warren and Halpern-Manners (2007) expressed the concern that communities needed to look at the turnover rate of the teachers and administrators. Their perceptions showed that teachers believe they were not backed by the administration when students acted out, perceiving that administrators felt the teachers were not doing their jobs managing the classrooms. Some of the students say they found some caring teachers, but
others were capricious and unfair. Looking at these traits, it appears to be a school where the teacher-administrator and teacher-student relationships had been broken down.

## Accuracy of Reported Graduation Rates

Swanson (2004) noted that the focus on graduation rates being relegated to a "dark, dusty corner" of educational statistics is prominent (p. 3). He further believed it was not until recently that there has been greater concern given to the high school completion and graduation rates. Swanson concluded that there was no real scientific validation of a method to calculate graduation rates, which could systemically be applied to data available to school districts and states across the nation. Swanson (2004) continued his argument by stating that in the past, there were accusations made regarding school districts using deceptive practices that masked the "true extent" of graduation data.

Bringing attention to the Houston school district, more than a dozen schools were accused of falsifying their data, along with the lack of accurately maintaining their records (Swanson, 2004). "According to an independent audit, reported dropout rates in these schools were less than half of the true rates" (Swanson, 2004, p. 4). Swanson found from an investigation in New York City Public Schools that students who were low performers were pushed out of regular high schools and into alternative types of education. However, many of these students remained on the rolls of the referring schools so that the students could not be counted as dropouts. Enrollment in the alternative programs was not verified. Such
actions were undertaken by teachers and administrators to show their schools as effective and positive environments for learning and promoting successful and timely graduation for students.

An urban school district located in Maryland was faced with similar allegations, this again, leaving thoughts in the minds of many as to whether the students that had received their official diplomas were in fact entitled to them (St. George, 2018). Approximately 30\% of the students sampled were a part of the "late grade" changes; however, there was no supporting documentation or justification for these grade changes. The study revealed that of the 5,500 students included in the late grade changes, many were not eligible to graduate. In 2017, the urban school district reported having graduated 150 students, each of whom had over 50 days of recorded unexcused absences (St. George, 2018).

There is no excuse for such unethical practices; however, so often, the pressure to show positive results can prompt unethical behaviors. These practices can and will have impacts on the accuracy of current and future data and information being reported by school districts.

A 2018 article written in The Baltimore Sun revealed that school districts in the state of Maryland showed slight increases in graduation rates. In 2017, the year prior, however, there was only a slight increase of $.06 \%$, which accounted for an overall rise in students' receiving four-year diplomas to $87.67 \%$. Included in this article was a reference to African Americans, special education students, and
those students who received free and reduced lunches (FARMS), as also having graduated in the four-year timeline.

## Dropout Intervention Efforts

Hahn, Knopf, Wilson, Truman, and Johnson (2014) suggested implementing programs that would encourage high school completion and improve the graduation rate of high-risk students. For example, the U.S. Department of Education (2010) High School Graduation Initiative Program awarded discretionary grants for up to 60 months to state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to support dropout prevention programs and to encourage high school graduation. Those funds were allocated to promote programs as early identification of students as "at risk" of not graduating and providing those students with services designed to help them remain in school (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). Funds could also be used to encourage those students who left school without graduating to re-enter and graduate.

In addition to the initiatives established by the U. S. Department of Education, other strategies have been employed. Stand-alone programs such as mentoring, or family involvement projects focused on relationship building with the family. Mentoring/tutoring, service learning, alternative schooling and after school activities were recommended in the basic core of strategies (Smink \& Schargel, 2007). Early intervention in early childhood education, along with family engagement and early literacy development, are strategies that have assisted students with the completion of high school. These techniques have proven
successful in grades K-12 and in rural, suburban and urban educational environments.

The Center for Labor Market Studies (2009) Pathways through Education (HOPE USA) initiative on re-enrolling students who had dropped out of high school, believed that HOPE would be a $\$ 2$ billion federal matching incentive grant program to spur state and local school districts. The comprehensive programs would assist those students that had dropped out of high school to earn a high school diploma. HOPE USA aimed each year to re-enroll more than 480,000 high school dropouts by way of comprehensive small school initiatives with 80 to 150 students who were led by experienced principals and teachers. The focus was on instructional methods that focused on real world learning accompanied by summer school and after school components year around. Students who have involved themselves into a service learning program have reported that they became more interested in their coursework, and from this they were better motivated to do well in school (Manzo, 2008).

Alternative high schools were recommended as another option for those students determined to be unable to function in a "traditional" school setting and/or those identified as "at risk" of dropping out of high school and not graduating (Smink \& Schargel, 2007). The alternative high schools historically offered programs that proved successful in helping students obtain their high school diplomas (Smink \& Schargel, 2007). Other suggestions were to have smaller class sizes, which would allow the struggling students to have more individualized
attention. It is recommended that more attention should be given to the early warning signs for the students that are struggling along with strategies to engage the parents.

Earning a high school diploma can open many doors and opportunities for employment, college entry, or establishing independent business practices and other options (Smink \& Schargel, 2007). Research has shown that students that successfully fulfill the four-year graduation requirements tend to earn an increase of $15 \%$ in lifetime wealth, in comparison to those students who do not graduate (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, \& Rouse, 2007).

## Summary

There are many factors that have been deemed as viable reasons why students make the decision to drop out and not graduate from high school. The literature suggests students who chose not to graduate were more likely to be from single parent households, living in social and economically challenged environments or had become disengaged from school for one reason or another. Based on some of the challenges within their families and communities, many students were forced to assume roles as head of household, caregiver or take on adult responsibilities, which caused them to place school as something less important or not of interest.

Educators have taken on the quest to ensure each student is given the same educational opportunities and positive educational outcomes. They have employed an array of programs to ensure the success of high school graduation.

Students that were made aware of the various initiatives and service learning programs and take part are re-engaged and have a greater chance of completing high school on time. In addition, improving school climate has also become a tool to increase high school graduation rates.

## CHAPTER III

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this correlational study was to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of the school climate and the high school graduation rate. Using components of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of human growth and development as the framework, this study employed a quantitative correlational design. The School Climate Survey results, a secondary data source, were extracted from the school district's data base for 33,621 students enrolled in 21 traditional high schools.

## Research Question

More specifically, this study was designed to address the following research question:

What is the relationship between students' perceptions of the school climate and the high school graduation rate for students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state?

## Hypotheses

Associated with the research question are the following null hypotheses:
$H_{01}$ : There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Effective Teaching and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state.

Ho2: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Challenging and Relevant Curriculum and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a midAtlantic state.

Ноз: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score High Expectation for All Students and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state.

Ho4: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Positive and Nurturing Environment and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state.

Ho5: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Effective Plant Operations and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state.

Ho6: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Safety and Discipline and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state.

Ho7: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Meaningful Use of Data and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state.

Ho8: There is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Parental Involvement and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state.

## Research Design

The research was conducted using the correlational research design. The correlational approach allowed for the analysis of relationships between two or more variables. Cherry (2017) noted that correlational research is often used in psychology and other social sciences as a manner of gathering information about a topic or a situation, where an experiment may not or cannot be performed. Although correlational research can show a relationship between two variables, the research, however, cannot prove that if changes occurred on one variable that the variable caused the changes to occur on the other variables.

The advantage when using the correlational design is that it provides the researcher the opportunity to view the variables of interest in a natural setting and offers ideas for further research (Cherry, 2017). The disadvantages are that it could be time consuming, there is no scientific control of the variables, researcher cannot control the variables, and the participants may be aware they are being
studied and behave differently (Cherry, 2017). This study, like others, has limitations in that it cannot prove that one variable causes a change in the other variable; therefore, correlation does not equal the causation (Cherry, 2015).

## Setting

The data were extracted from the publicly available data from an urban school district located in a mid-Atlantic state, where the annual median household income is \$94,000 and a high percentage of African Americans hold college degrees. The urban school district is located in a well-recognized county, noted for being one of the richest predominantly African American counties in the nation (U. S. Census Bureau, 2018).

The mean ACT composite score for the school district was 17.81 (SD = 2.164) in 2015-2016, compared to the state mean of 23.6, and a national average of 20.1 (see Table 1). The district's mean SAT composite score was 942.64 (SD = 63.47), compared to the state mean of 1,080 , and the national mean of 1,068 .

Table 1 also provides summary information regarding the district's high school dropout rates. The graduation rate for students who entered high school in the fall of 2011 and should have completed high school in the spring of 2016 (4year graduation rate) was 84.66 (Cohort $A$ ). Cohort B students who started high school in the fall of 2012 and should have graduated in the spring of 2017 (4-year graduation rate) had a graduation rate of 83.42. The 5 -year graduation rate for Cohort C, students who started high school in the fall of 2011 and should have graduated in the spring of 2016 but did not graduate until the spring of 2017 (5-
year graduation rate) had a graduation rate of 85.81. The statewide graduation rates for Cohort A 84.66, 83.42 Cohort B, and 85.81 for Cohort C.

Table 1.

## Selected School District's Outcome Measures

|  | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. <br> Deviation |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| ACT Composite | 21 | 14.80 | 24.81 | 17.81 | 2.164 |
| SAT Composite | 21 | 869.53 | 1165.29 | 942.64 | 63.47 |
| Graduation Rate A | 21 | 62.86 | 95.00 | 84.66 | 9.505 |
| Graduation Rate B | 20 | 62.46 | 94.55 | 83.42 | 8.733 |
| Graduation Rate C | 21 | 67.37 | 95.00 | 85.81 | 7.794 |

Data for the of schools from the selected school district were used to provide a descriptive analysis of the district's PARCC scores for Algebra I, Algebra II and Geometry. The mean PARCC Algebra I was 8.233, Algebra II was 4.514 , and 25.28 for Geometry (see Table 2). The state averages were not available.

Table 2.
Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)

| Variable | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. <br> Deviation |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| PARCC Algebra I | 21 | 1.2 | 26.00 | 8.233 | 6.153 |
| PARCC ALGEBRA II | 21 | .0000 | 31.20 | 4.514 | 7.343 |
| PARCC Alela 10 <br> (Geometry) | 21 | 9.400 | 58.40 | 25.28 | 13.60 |

## Participants

The targeted population was students in grades ninth through twelfth enrolled in a selected urban school district that had participated in completing the School Climate Survey for the academic year 2015-2016. The data were aggregated data from 33,621 public high school students from 21 traditional high schools. It was not possible to describe the participants based on their gender, age, and academic classification. The schools' websites do not provide disaggregated data for the measures used in this study.

## Instrument

The School Climate Survey from the selected school district is comprised of 12 key characteristics that are related to the school and teachers. The survey's intent was to gain insight of the students' feelings about different aspects of their school. The survey was designed by the staff of the Department of Research and Evaluation of the selected school district. The urban school district, located in the mid-Atlantic state, started administering the test in 2007 to students, teachers, and parents as a method for securing firsthand information of their perceptions and feelings about different aspects of their school and if they related to the subscales of the School Climate Survey. The survey is administered by the selected school district's Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) on a biannual basis with the most recent administration in 2017. In 2017, approximately 48,000 participants, which included 33,621 students, 5,732 teachers and 9,119 parents completed the survey.

The 12 subscales conveyed through the school climate survey are (a) effective leadership, (b) sense of shared mission, (c) effective teaching, (d) challenging and relevant curriculum, (e) high expectations for all students, (f) positive and nurturing environment, (g) effective plant operations, (h) safety and discipline, (i) meaningful use of data, (j) parental involvement, (k) teaching involvement and decision making, and (I) relevant professional development. Effective instructional leadership, sense of shared mission, teacher involvement, and decision making, and relevant professional development were eliminated from the data analysis because these four subscales are not completed by students. The four omitted subscales were completed by parents and teachers but were not completed by students. While the survey enlisted demographic questions inclusive of race, age, and gender, this information is not publicly available. Each subscale is described below:

Effective Instructional Leadership: Shared the vision and goals of the principal which are communicated to all stakeholders and support the best practices to promote and advance student learning (not completed by students).

Sense of Shared Mission: Shared the extent to which the stakeholders strongly believe in the mission of the school, shared in the ownership of ensuring students' success and participate in activities that support the school's mission (not completed by students).

Effective Teaching: Measured if teachers were experts in the subjects they taught, and if they used effective instructional strategies and approaches to ensure all students learned the information taught (not completed by students).

Challenging and Relevant Curriculum: Measured the students' insight of the school curriculum to the extent it is challenging and the extent to which it met the needs and interests of all students.

High Expectations for All Students: Described that all students, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or social backgrounds were expected to achieve at high levels.

Positive and Nurturing Environment: Described how principals, teachers, and students are to be respectful and supportive of one another, and the extent to which students' successes were rewarded and are publicly recognized.

Effective Plant Operations: Defined how the buildings and the grounds are maintained, the equipment is updated and functional, and adequate resources are made available to support teaching and learning.

Safety and Discipline: Indicated the extent to which the school's disciplinary procedures were enforced in a fair manner, and all stakeholders were made to feel safe in and around the school.

Meaningful Use of Data: Described the measurement that teachers were reliant upon and used data readily available to them informing on student achievement and other information. This information was used for future teachings.

Parental Involvement: Measured the involvement of parents and if they were actively engaged and supported the learning goals for their children's education.

## Procedures

Institution Review Board approval was obtained from Morgan State University. Similar approval was not required from the selected school district because the data were publicly available and published on the school districts' websites.

The researcher utilized secondary data made publicly available on the school district's website and the websites of the individual high schools. Data were extracted from these websites and recorded in an electronic spreadsheet for each school. The data included each school's mean values for each of the School Climate Survey subscales completed by students. The websites also provided the graduation rates for each high school. The graduation data were presented as three cohorts: Cohort A-4 years, Cohort B-4 years, and Cohort C-5 years. As a result, the data presented a limited finding in comparison to the other 20 schools that reported on all three cohorts.

## Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Each approach is discussed below:

Descriptive Statistics. Minimum values, maximum values, means, and standard deviations were computed for each of the school climate survey subscale
scores. In addition, these statistics were calculated for PARC I and PARC II, which the data report for Algebra I and Algebra II, respectively. PARCC Geometry scores were also reported. In addition, data were provided that for the three graduation cohorts reported for each school as Cohort A - 4 years, Cohort B-4 years and Cohort C-5 years.

Inferential Statistics. Knuffer and McLellan (1994) defined inferential statistics as those which attempt to determine what the cause and effect are of an issue. Inferential statistics allowed the use of samples to make generalizations about the study's population from which the information was extracted (Lund Research, 2013). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) defined inferential statistics as method by which data are collected from a sample that is randomly selected. The sample that is selected must provide inferences regarding the population (Gall et al., 2007). Inferential statistics were further defined as a set of mathematical procedures for the use of probabilities and information about the sample population (Gall et al., 2007). The data extracted and reported on behalf of the 33,621 students' perception data inferred for the population that did not participate or were not included in the numbers from those of the 21 schools that participated.

For this study, multiple linear regression was used to test the hypotheses concerning the predictive relationship between the school climate subscale scores on the School Climate Survey and the dependent variable, graduation rates. The hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. Multiple linear regression was determined to be the appropriate statistical procedure because the study used
eight interval independent variables (the School Climate Survey subscale scores) to predict an interval dependent variable, high school graduation rate. These specific procedures are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3.

## Summary of Data Analysis Procedures

| Research Question | Hypothesis | Dependent Variable | Independent Variable | Statistical Procedure |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1 | 1 | Effective Teaching | Graduation Rate | Multiple Linear Regression |
| 1 | 2 | Challenging and Relevant Curriculum | Graduation Rate | Multiple Linear Regression |
| 1 | 3 | High Expectations for all students | Graduation Rate | Multiple Linear Regression |
| 1 | 4 | Positive and Nurturing Environment | Graduation Rate | Multiple Liner Regression |
| 1 | 5 | Effective Plant Operations | Graduation Rate | Multiple Linear Regression |
| 1 | 6 | Safety and Discipline | Graduation Rate | Multiple Linear Regression |
| 1 | 7 | Meaningful Use of Data | Graduation Rate | Multiple Linear Regression |
| 1 | 8 | Parental Involvement | Graduation Rate | Multiple Linear Regression |

Note. The Table represents the eight subscale scores from the School Climate Survey.

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of the school climate and the graduation rate amongst students in a predominantly African American school district, located in a midAtlantic state. The research question and hypotheses explored the relationship between student perceptions of school climate and the high school graduation rate. Secondary data from the school climate survey based on approximately 33,621 high school students enrolled at 21 high schools were extracted from the school district's website. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential analytics and the hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance.

## CHAPTER IV:

## FINDINGS

The purpose of this correlational study was to examine the relationship between students' perceptions of school climate and the high school graduation rate amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school setting, located in a mid-Atlantic state. This research study was guided by Brofenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory of human growth and development as the theoretical framework. The study employed secondary data to answer the research question and its associated hypotheses.

Data for the study were collected from 33,621 students in 21 traditional urban high schools, located in a mid-Atlantic state. The study used secondary data from a school climate survey to explain the variation in high school graduation rates for an urban school district. The study focused on the overall students' perceptions of the eight tenets identified on a school climate survey.

The U.S. Department of Education required that each school use an adjusted cohort to report high school graduation rates for accountability purposes. This was required to ensure that students who entered high school in the ninth grade for the first time in fall 2011 were included in the graduation rate for the four years or spring 2016 (Cohort A). Cohort B includes all graduates who entered the ninth grade for the first time in fall 2012 and graduated four years later in spring 2017. These three measures were used as the dependent variables for the study.

The five-year cohort (Cohort C) was put in place for those students who did not complete in the standard four years but required an extra year or spring 2017.

This study addressed the following research question:
What is the relationship between students' perceptions of school climate and the high school graduation rate amongst the students in a predominantly African American school district located in urban predominantly African American school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state?

A summary of the results from the School Climate Survey and results of the hypothesis testing related to this research question are reported below and presented in Table 4.

## School Climate Survey Results

The School Climate Survey yielded eight subscale scores. The mean for Effective Teaching score of the district's 21 traditional high schools used in this study was 84.61 ( $\mathrm{SD}=8.33$ ). The mean for all high schools in the district was 74.1. The mean score for all high schools is lower than the mean for the traditional high schools because the high schools excluded from the study were nontraditional or served special needs students. Students appear to believe that effective teaching is occurring in their schools.

The mean for Challenging and Relevant Curriculum score of the District's 21 traditional high schools in this study was 80.75 ( $\mathrm{SD}=7.84$ ). The mean for all high schools in the District was 78.6. The curriculum was perceived to be challenging and relevant. Table 4.

Means and Standard Deviations for the School Climate Survey Subscale Scores

| School Climate Survey <br> Subscales | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard <br> Deviation |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Effective Teaching | 65.20 | 96.70 | 84.61 | 8.33 |
| Challenging and <br> Relevant Curriculum | 67.30 | 93.00 | 80.75 | 7.84 |
| High Expectations for <br> All Students | 69.20 | 98.20 | 83.60 | 7.69 |
| Positive and Nurturing <br> Environment | 58.30 | 97.10 | 74.26 | 10.99 |
| Effective Plant <br> Operations | 27.30 | 93.00 | 60.08 | 16.88 |
| Safety and Discipline | 34.20 | 85.30 | 59.85 | 14.16 |
| Meaningful Use of <br> Data | 54.50 | 97.10 | 78.32 | 9.61 |
| Parental Involvement | 17.40 | 62.50 | 38.37 | 12.76 |

The mean for High Expectations for All Students score of the District's 21 traditional high schools in this study was 83.60 ( $\mathrm{SD}=7.69$ ). The mean for all high schools in the District was 85.1. Students' perceptions revealed positive on the school climate subscale for high expectations for all students.

The mean for Positive and Nurturing Environment score of the District's 21 traditional high schools was 74.26 (SD = 10.99). The mean for all high schools in
the district was 57.6. While the perceptions are positive, there is room for improvement.

The mean for Effective Plant Operations score of the District's 21 traditional high schools was 60.08 ( $\mathrm{SD}=16.88$ ). The mean for all high schools in the district was 43.2. Generally, the students were not very positive about the effectiveness of plant operations.

The mean for Safety and Discipline score of the District's 21 traditional high schools in this study was $59.85(S D=14.16)$. The mean for all high school in the district was 70.0. Many of the students do not perceive the schools to be safe and are concerned about the discipline.

The mean for Meaningful Use of Data score of the District's 21 traditional high schools in this study was 78.32 ( $\mathrm{SD}=9.61$ ). The mean for all high schools in the district was 60.7. While perceived positively, the schools can do more to demonstrate that they are using data to improve students' academic performance.

The mean for Parental Involvement score of the District's 21 traditional high schools was $38.37(S D=12.76)$. The mean for all high schools in the district was 79.6. Interestingly, the non-traditional high schools appear to have higher parental involvement scores than the traditional high schools.

## Summary of Graduation Rates

Descriptive statistics were computed for the three graduation cohorts, Cohort A, Cohort B, and Cohort C as defined by the U. S. Department of Education. The mean graduation rate for Cohort A was 84.609 ( $\mathrm{SD}=9.505$ ). This
indicated that approximately $85 \%$ of the students who entered the ninth grade in the fall of 2011 graduated in spring of 2016 after spending four years in high school (see Table 5). The mean graduation rate for Cohort B was 83.424 (SD = 8.733). This indicated that approximately $83 \%$ of the students who entered the ninth grade in the fall of 2011 graduated in spring of 2016 after spending four years in high school (see Table 5). The mean graduation rate for Cohort C was 85.809 ( $\mathrm{SD}=7.795$ ), indicating that approximately $86 \%$ of the students who entered the ninth grade in the fall of 2011 graduated in spring of 2017 after spending five years in high school (see Table 5).

Table 5.
Descriptive Statistics of Graduation Rates for Cohorts A, B, and C

|  | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. <br> Deviation |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Cohort A | 21 | 62.860 | 95.000 | 84.609 | 9.505 |
| Cohort B | 20 | 62.460 | 94.550 | 83.424 | 8.733 |
| Cohort C | 21 | 67.370 | 95.000 | 85.809 | 7.795 |

## Results of Hypothesis Testing

Three multiple linear regression models were tested using the eight subscales of the School Climate Survey as the independent variables and each of the three cohort graduation rates as the dependent variables. The overall
regression model for the graduation rate for Cohort A was significant, $F=4.717, p$ $=.008$ (see Table 6), and the model accounted for $59.8 \%$ of the variation in the Cohort A graduation rates. The overall regression model for Cohort B was significant, $F=4.739, p=.008$, and the model accounted for $59.9 \%$ of the variation in the Cohort B graduation rates (see Table 7). The overall regression model for Cohort C was also significant, $F=5.296, p=.005$, and the model accounted for $63.3 \%$ of the variation in the Cohort $C$ graduation rates (see Table 8). Thus, each model indicated that the subscale scores, jointly, were able to explain a significant proportion of the variation in the graduation rates. The regression results for each of the independent variables' predictive relationship with the graduation rates are presented below. The frequency distributions for each of the items on the survey and complete regression tables can be found in the Appendix.

Table 6.

## Multiple Linear Regression for Predicting Graduation Rate A

| Model | Sum of <br> Squares | Df | Mean <br> Square | F | Sig. |
| :--- | ---: | ---: | ---: | ---: | ---: |
| Regression | 1370.722 | 8 | 171.340 | 4.717 | $.008^{\text {b }}$ |
| Residual | 435.872 | 12 | 36.323 |  |  |
| Total | 1806.593 | 20 |  |  |  |

Predictors: (Constant), Parental Involvement, Effective Plant Operations, Challenging and Relevant Curriculum, Meaningful Use of Data, Safe and Orderly, Effective Teaching, Positive and Nurturing Environment, High Expectations
R-Square $=.598$

Table 7.
Multiple Linear Regressions for Predicting Graduation Rate $B$

| Model | Sum of <br> Squares | Df | Mean <br> Square | F | Sig. |
| :--- | :---: | ---: | ---: | ---: | ---: |
| Regression | 1157.912 | 8 | 144.739 | 4.736 | $.008^{\text {b }}$ |
| Residual | 366.739 | 12 | 30.562 |  |  |
| Total | 1524.651 | 20 |  |  |  |

Predictors: (Constant), Parental Involvement, Effective Plant Operations, Challenging and Relevant Curriculum, Meaningful Use of Data, Safe and Orderly, Effective Teaching, Positive and Nurturing Environment, High Expectations
R-Square $=.599$

Table 8.
Multiple Linear Regression for Predicting Graduation Rate C

| Model | Sum of <br> Squares | Df | Mean <br> Square | F | Sig. |
| :--- | ---: | ---: | ---: | ---: | ---: |
| Regression | 983.865 | 8 | 122.983 | 5.296 | $.005^{\text {b }}$ |
| Residual | 278.676 | 12 | 23.223 |  |  |
| Total | 1262.541 | 20 |  |  |  | | Predictors: (Constant), Parental Involvement, Effective Plant Operations, Challenging and |
| :--- |
| Relevant Curriculum, Meaningful Use of Data, Safe and Orderly, Effective Teaching, Positive <br> and Nurturing Environment, High Expectations <br> R-Square $=.632$ |

Effective Teaching. The first null hypothesis indicated that there is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Effective Teaching and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American school district located in an urban school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state. The Effective Teaching subscale score was a significant predictor of the graduation rate for Cohort $\mathrm{A}(t=-$ 2.309, $p=.040$ ). Effective Teaching subscale scores were not predictive of the graduation rate for Cohort $\mathrm{B}(t=-2019, p=.066)$ and Cohort $\mathrm{C}(t=-1.970, p=$ .072). The difference in findings for Cohort A and Cohort B suggest that the Effective Teaching subscale score is not a consistent predictor of graduation rates and therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected and it was concluded that there is not a predictive relationship between high school students' perceptions of the

School Climate Survey subscale score Effective Teaching and high school graduation rates.

Challenging and Relevant Curriculum. The second null hypothesis suggested that there is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Challenging and Relevant Curriculum and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state. The Challenging and Relevant Curriculum subscale score was not a significant predictor of the graduation rate for Cohort $\mathrm{A}(t=-0.520, p=.612)$, Cohort B $(t=0.275, p=.788)$, and Cohort $\mathrm{C}(t=0.207, p=.839)$. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected, and it was concluded that the Challenging and Relevant Curriculum subscale score is not a predictor of graduation rates.

High Expectations for All Students. The null hypothesis indicated that there is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score High Expectation for All Students and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state. The High Expectation for All Students subscale score was not a significant predictor of the graduation rate for Cohort A $(t=2.147, p=.053)$, Cohort B $(t=1.666, p=.122)$, and Cohort C $(t=$ 1.727, $p=.110$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected, and it was concluded that the High Expectation for All Students subscale score is not a predictor of graduation rates.

Positive and Nurturing Environment. The fourth null hypothesis suggested that there is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Positive and Nurturing Environment and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state. The Positive and Nurturing Environment subscale score was not a significant predictor of the graduation rate for Cohort $\mathrm{A}(t=0.530, p=.606)$, Cohort $\mathrm{B}(t=1.048, p=.315)$, and Cohort $\mathrm{C}(t=1.315, p=.213)$. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected, and it was concluded that the Positive and Nurturing Environment subscale score is not a predictor of graduation rates.

Effective Plant Operations. The fifth null hypothesis considered the possibility that there is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Effective Plant Operations and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American school urban school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state. The Effective Plant Operations subscale score was not a significant predictor of the graduation rate for Cohort A $(t=0.162, p=.874)$, Cohort B $(t=1.045, p=.316)$, and Cohort C $(t=$ 1.197, $p=.254$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected, and it was concluded that the Effective Plant Operations subscale score is not a predictor of graduation rates.

Safety and Discipline. The sixth null hypothesis indicated that there is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate

Survey subscale score Safety and Discipline and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state. The Safety and Discipline subscale score was not a significant predictor of the graduation rate for Cohort A ( $t=-0.335, p=.743$ ), Cohort B ( $t=-0.898, p=.387$ ), and Cohort C $(t=-1.072, p=.304)$. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected, and it was concluded that the Safety and Discipline subscale score is not a predictor of graduation rates.

Meaningful Use of Data. The seventh null hypothesis suggested that there is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Meaningful Use of Data and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state. The Meaningful Use of Data subscale score was not a significant predictor of the graduation rate for Cohort A ( $t$ $=-0.259, p=.800)$, Cohort B $(t=-0.576, p=.575)$, and Cohort C $(t=-0.822, p=$ .427). Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected, and it was concluded that the Meaningful Use of Data subscale score is not a predictor of graduation rates.

Parental Involvement. The eighth null hypothesis indicated that there is not a predictive relationship between students' perceptions of the School Climate Survey subscale score Parental Involvement and high school graduation rates amongst the students in a predominantly African American urban school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state. The Parental Involvement subscale score was found to be a significant predictor of the graduation rate for Cohort A $(t=2.597, p$
$=.023)$, Cohort $\mathrm{B}(t=2.436, p=.031)$, and Cohort $\mathrm{C}(t=2.556, p=.025)$. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected, and it was concluded that the Parental Involvement subscale score is a predictor of graduation rates.

## Summary

The regression models for predicting the three graduation rates were significant. However, students' perceptions of Effective Teaching, Challenging and Relevant Curriculum, High Expectations for All Students, Positive and Nurturing Environment, Effective Plant Operations, Safe and Orderly Environment, and Meaningful Use of Data were not predictive of high school graduation rates. Only Parental Involvement was found to be predictive of the graduation rates. It is important to note that the lowest ratings from students were Effective Plant Operations, Safety and Discipline, and Parental Involvement.

## CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS

## AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to determine causal factors as to why an urban school district, located in a mid-Atlantic state, which is recognized as one of the richest African American districts in the nation has low representation of graduates in the mid-Atlantic state. The variables used to conduct the study were the School Climate Survey which was administered by the Department of Research and Testing (DRE) for the urban school district and Brofenbrenner's Ecologicial Systems.

## Implications

After conducting the study, one of the implications determined was that there should have been personal interviews with the students. In addition to one-on-one interviews, the study should have employed the perceptions from focus groups consisting of participants that may or may have not graduated from high school as well as key informants, i.e., teachers, parents and others that have or had a role in their academic journey. The data left uncertainties as to how accurate the information was and if the individuals that actually participated in the School Climate Survey were the result of sampling or factual reporting of the data.

Although there were indicators that related to low to high school graduation rates, the disparities in the rates reported were based on the locale of the urban school. Specifically, one school identified as reporting low graduation data is
located in a lower income district in comparison to some other schools that reported a higher percentage. When looking at the overall budget of $\$ 1.9$ billion dedicated to the urban school district, questions arise as to what areas are actually receiving the most funding. There is a question whether or not the schools that are in the lower zip-code district, that on average, have the higher amount of students that receive Free and Reduced Lunch (FARMS) are provided the same financial resources as those that are located in the high zip-code zone, where the homes range from $\$ 400,000$ or higher.

Within the urban school district, there appears to be an equal distribution of funding and resources. Because of this, further research should employ the components of reviewing the urban school district's budgets. In doing so, there could be un-equal distribution of funding without questions being asked. It could be considered that unspoken rule that directly or indirectly has been agreed upon. One could presume, the information for dropouts was intentionally withheld. That being the case, the factors surrounding the withholding of information could possibly be based upon this urban school district, located in the mid-Atlantic state, which is recognized as one of the 25 richest African American counties in the nation.

Oftentimes, when the decision is made to purchase a home, one of the key determinants is the school district and the success rate of that school district. This would mean, the selection of the right pre-schools and elementary schools that are feeder schools to exceptional high schools. One would not want to feel or think
that for the sake of reputation, notoriety and stellar recognition, that an urban school district would intentionally withhold vital data and or information that could be of assistance for future programs and school funding.

One of the implications revealed from the study, identified students' perceptions of school safety in their environment, as not being positive. Experts, Lezotte and Snyder (2011) provided insight, stating, orderly, purposeful and a businesslike environment, free from threats of any emotional or physical harm, is the making of an effective school. Further, the culture and climate are conducive to effective teaching and learning. Putting in place and maintaining a positive and safe school environment is the responsibility of the principal and administrators (Lezotte \& Snyder, 2011). A manner by which this concept occurs is to ensure that all teachers are committed during their time at school and on duty (Lezotte \& Snyer, 2011). In 1999 Astor, Meyer, and Behre pointedly noted, many incidents of violence that do take place on school grounds, occur in lavatories, common areas of the school.

Parental Support was another implication that revealed low within the study. The study identified the students' beliefs that the support of their parents was limited. The urban school that had the lowest reporting of parental support is geographically located in a low-income area within the urban school district and has a high rate of ethnic diversity.

Although the highest rate reported was based on the low-income area, there were also low ratings of parental support in middle to high income areas with
more modern and updated facilities. Parental support was reported higher only in a few of the schools that were geographically located in the high-income areas, where the schools are new or recently renovated, as well as the school noted for specializing in a foreign language program, baccalaureate program as well as being recognized for their exceptional and well recognized athletic programs.

## Recommendations

Based on the study and the components revealed within the current study, recommendations for further research would be made. The study should be replicated and broadened to look at other school districts as a measure for having a larger sample size for comparison. In addition, the school districts should include data from other urban districts as well as suburban school districts and rural school districts to use as a gauge of measurement and comparison. Enlisting data from the recommended school districts would make the study stronger. Other studies should look at school districts with varied demographics. Another factor that should be taken into consideration would be the size of the high school to determine if minority students do better in smaller school settings as opposed to schools that have a larger population with larger class sizes. There should be demographic information, gender specific, for each student to gain insight as to how many males and females are actually graduating from high school.

For future studies, there should be interviews conducted with students that have actually graduated or not completed high school. There should also be an interview conducted with the parents of the students or key informants that could
speak to the students' perceptions based on firsthand knowledge and personal interaction.

The study could also be expanded by looking at specific items on the scales that were reported as negative. For example, "Effective Teaching," delving deeper into the questions and responses, to determine if there was any impact. Looking further into specific questions on Climate Survey would provide insight as to what, if any, impact occurred. The study should also consider the perceptions of the parents and teachers about the school environment.

By the time students enter into high school, some parents mistakenly believe that a hands-off approach will meet their adolescence with aplomb; they stop checking homework, taking it on faith that the work is being done. Some relinquish their parental grip just when they should be more focused, not less. And as parents allow their children to exert their burgeoning independence, less communication not more becomes the accepted practice, setting the stage for academic challenges and other issues to emerge.

Parental involvement serves as an important metric in the data collection for predictive graduation rates. By employing dedicated accountability measures, educators, parents and students are better positioned to promote positive impacts, which in turn, can lead to successful on-time graduation rates.

In addition to traditional meetings where teachers sit with parents once or twice per year to discuss academic shortfalls and successes, educators should take advantage of modern technology platforms in order to gain more effective
engagement from parents. For example, the teacher can create a Google Sheets, which is a live, auto-saving data table that allows content sharing with multiple parties, at any time, with the most current data enclosed. The educator can grant permissions to parents only, to view student assignments, completion statuses and progress reports, etc. This partnership would allow parents to have insight into their students' daily, weekly and quarterly progress - or lack thereof. Such unfettered access would undoubtedly establish and/or reinforce accountability between the parent and student as well as to reduce the inevitable anxiety that stems from the report-card-waiting-game.

With the ability to monitor their students' progress so closely, missing the parent-teacher conferences because of scheduling issues would not have the same potential adverse effects. In its place, educators could use media platforms such as Skype or Adobe Connect to conduct short, mandatory voice or video conferences to provide weekly agendas with tasks and timelines. This hands-on approach in communication would remove any guesswork about where the student stands academically or what students need to do to get caught up and/or to improve or excel. All involved are aware of what is required and share in the responsibility of the workload. And while some of these devices may already be in use at high-performing schools, this real-time communication method might be one of the missing links between getting and keeping vulnerable or otherwise susceptible youth on the path to graduation.

With the ability to capture 'attendance' via login and keystrokes, the need for in-person attendance and signatures is reduced and often no longer required. The in-house Information Technology team would administer the programs and provide alerts and notifications via mobile phone to all parties regarding the aforementioned agendas, tasks and schedules. Acknowledgement of the notifications would serve as a signature and an implicit understanding of each person's role and responsibility or a voluntary parental involvement agreement.

Alternatively, the lack of a signature or login into one of the digital platforms would also inform all parties as to the need for more formal communication or for an in-person meeting, specifically catering to the platform users that are not technically knowledgeable or comfortable using the technology applications. So often, many students in the target population are being raised by grandparents, some of whom may not have access to these platforms. Some may prefer the traditional face to face meeting with educators. For those students who may be experiencing homelessness or are in the foster care system, any or all of these methods might serve to bridge the gap between educator, caregiver and student.

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## Appendix

## Table 9.

## Descriptive Statistics for Effective Teaching Questions

| Question | Number <br> Responding | Mostly <br> Disagree | Disagree <br> a little | Agree <br> a little | Mostly <br> Agree |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1. The teachers I have seem to <br> like teaching. | 15,658 | $5.7 \%$ | $15.0 \%$ | $36.4 \%$ | $39.9 \%$ |
| 2. I am confident that my <br> teachers are experts in the <br> subjects they teach. | 15,607 | $4.7 \%$ | $15.9 \%$ | $35.7 \%$ | $43.8 \%$ |
| 3. My Teachers work hard to <br> make our classes <br> interesting. | 15,494 | $13.0 \%$ | $25.2 \%$ | $37.7 \%$ | $24.2 \%$ |
| 4. If needed, teachers will give <br> students individual attention. | 15,456 | $9.0 \%$ | $20.1 \%$ | $39.7 \%$ | $31.3 \%$ |
| 5. The teachers I have explain <br> material in a number of <br> ways. | 15,454 | $8.8 \%$ | $22.9 \%$ | $41.8 \%$ | $26.5 \%$ |
| 6. My homework assignments <br> reinforce what I learn in the <br> classroom. | 15,478 | $5.6 \%$ | $13.1 \%$ | $34.8 \%$ | $46.6 \%$ |
| 7. My Teachers explain how <br> our school work relates to <br> the real world. | 15,454 | $19.0 \%$ | $24.2 \%$ | $32.6 \%$ | $24.2 \%$ |
| 8. My Teachers build on what <br> students have already <br> learned when introducing <br> new material. | 15,563 | $6.7 \%$ | $17.2 \%$ | $44.5 \%$ | $31.6 \%$ |
| 9. My Teachers ask questions <br> throughout each lesson to <br> make sure students <br> understand the material. | 15,518 | $6.00 \%$ | $15.1 \%$ | $37.5 \%$ | $41.3 \%$ |
| 10. My Teachers integrate <br> technology throughout the <br> lessons to improve learning. | 15,529 | $11.4 \%$ | $22.6 \%$ | $38.7 \%$ | $27.3 \%$ |

Table 10.
Descriptive Statistics for Challenging and Relevant Curriculum

| Question | Number <br> Responding | Mostly <br> Disagree | Disagree <br> a little | Agree <br> a little | Mostly <br> Agree |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1. I learn a lot in school every <br> day. | 15,522 | $10.8 \%$ | $22.2 \%$ | $40.3 \%$ | $26.7 \%$ |
| 2. The math that I learn in <br> school is useful in everyday <br> life. | 15,543 | $21.2 \%$ | $21.8 \%$ | $28.8 \%$ | $28.2 \%$ |
| 3. What I learn in my science <br> class helps me understand <br> the natural world. | 15,602 | $11.8 \%$ | $14.3 \%$ | $32.1 \%$ | $41.9 \%$ |
| 4. The work I do at school <br> challenges me to think. | 15,453 | $5.3 \%$ | $11.4 \%$ | $42.2 \%$ | $41.1 \%$ |
| 5. I look forward to learning <br> new things every day. | 15,408 | $10.6 \%$ | $18.2 \%$ | $37.1 \%$ | $34.04 \%$ |
| 6. I believe that doing well in <br> school will help me succeed <br> in whatever career I choose. | 15,416 | $3.9 \%$ | $7.2 \%$ | $21.8 \%$ | $67.2 \%$ |
| 7. I have to study a lot to do <br> well in the classes I take. | 15,402 | $6.8 \%$ | $15.5 \%$ | $37.7 \%$ | $40.1 \%$ |

Table 11.
Descriptive Statistics for High Expectations for all Students' Questions

| Question | Number <br> Responding | Mostly <br> Disagree | Disagree <br> a little | Agree <br> a little | Mostly <br> agree |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1. My teachers believe that I <br> can learn what they are <br> teaching. | 15,345 | $4.1 \%$ | $8.9 \%$ | $35.9 \%$ | $51.2 \%$ |
| 2. All students are expected to <br> do well in their classes. | 15,333 | $5.1 \%$ | $11.1 \%$ | $29.0 \%$ | $54.8 \%$ |
| 3. My teachers let us know that <br> we are expected to go to <br> college. | 15,338 | $11.3 \%$ | $18.5 \%$ | $34.2 \%$ | $36.0 \%$ |
| 4. I know what courses I need <br> to take to be college-or <br> career-ready. | 15,351 | $12.6 \%$ | $18.5 \%$ | $33.9 \%$ | $35.0 \%$ |
| 5. I'm encouraged to take <br> courses that will hem me get <br> into college. | 15,340 | $8.0 \%$ | $12.8 \%$ | $32.5 \%$ | $46.7 \%$ |

Table 12.
Descriptive Statistics for Positive and Nurturing Environment Questions

| Question | Number <br> Respondents | Mostly <br> Disagree | Disagree <br> a little | Agree <br> a little | Mostly <br> Agree |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1. I believe my teachers care <br> about me as a person. | 15,384 | $14.9 \%$ | $20.5 \%$ | $35.9 \%$ | $28.7 \%$ |
| 2. I believe the principal cares <br> about all the students in the <br> school. | 15,322 | $16.2 \%$ | $16.5 \%$ | $29.7 \%$ | $37.7 \%$ |
| 3. The students in this school <br> get along with each other. | 15,352 | $32.9 \%$ | $30.8 \%$ | $25.9 \%$ | $10.4 \%$ |
| 4. I like going to school here. | 15,361 | $20.7 \%$ | $20.0 \%$ | $35.3 \%$ | $24.0 \%$ |
| 5. If I had a problem, I know <br> there is at least one adult in <br> this school who would help <br> me. | 15,446 | $12.0 \%$ | $12.2 \%$ | $28.5 \%$ | $47.3 \%$ |
| 6. Teachers treat student with <br> respect. | 15,357 | $13.1 \%$ | $24.2 \%$ | $36.2 \%$ | $26.5 \%$ |
| 7. Students show respect for the <br> teachers in this school. | 15,284 | $26.5 \%$ | $35.4 \%$ | $27.5 \%$ | $10.6 \%$ |
| 8. My teachers often say <br> positive things to me. | 15,112 | $8.6 \%$ | $17.5 \%$ | $41.7 \%$ | $32.2 \%$ |
| 9. Students in this school are <br> rewarded or recognized <br> publically for academic <br> success. | 15,326 | $18.2 \%$ | $24.0 \%$ | $34.0 \%$ | $23.8 \%$ |
| 10. The principal takes time to <br> talk to students when he/she <br> sees them in the hallways. | 15,299 | $25.1 \%$ | $23.8 \%$ | $30.2 \%$ | $20.8 \%$ |
| 11. I feel like I am an important <br> part of the school <br> community. | 15,224 | $26.1 \%$ | $26.1 \%$ | $31.0 \%$ | $16.8 \%$ |

Table 13.
Descriptive Statistics for Effective Plant Operations Questions

| Question | Number of <br> Respondents | Mostly <br> Disagree | Disagree <br> a little | Agree <br> a little | Mostly <br> Agree |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1. My School is clean. | 15,284 | $39.5 \%$ | $25.6 \%$ | $22.5 \%$ | $12.4 \%$ |
| 2. My school is equipped with <br> up-to-date technology | 15,203 | $17.9 \%$ | $21.7 \%$ | $34.7 \%$ | $25.7 \%$ |
| 3. Our school library has many <br> resources that I can access <br> to increase my knowledge of <br> subjects that interest. | 15,215 | $16.2 \%$ | $18.4 \%$ | $35.9 \%$ | $29.5 \%$ |
| 4. The bathrooms at this school <br> are clean and well- <br> maintained. | 15,256 | $53.6 \%$ | $21.5 \%$ | $16.3 \%$ | $8.6 \%$ |
| 5. Our school's media center is <br> equipped with up-to-date <br> computer accessories. | 15,270 | $18.1 \%$ | $22.1 \%$ | $34.6 \%$ | $25.1 \%$ |

Table 14.
Descriptive Statistics for Safety and Discipline Questions

| Question | Number of <br> Respondents | Mostly <br> Disagree | Disagree <br> a little | Agree <br> a little | Mostly <br> Agree |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1. I feel safe when I am in <br> school. | 15,328 | $17.8 \%$ | $22.5 \%$ | $35.6 \%$ | $24.2 \%$ |
| 2. Students at this school <br> respect the authority or the <br> teachers. | 15,205 | $26.7 \%$ | $33.1 \%$ | $29.3 \%$ | $10.9 \%$ |
| 3. I have NOT been the target <br> of a bully at this school. | 15,156 | $13.3 \%$ | $10.8 \%$ | $15.7 \%$ | $60.2 \%$ |
| 4. I am NOT aware of a gang <br> problem at this school. | 15,061 | $15.0 \%$ | $11.8 \%$ | $18.7 \%$ | $54.5 \%$ |
| 5. I have not felt threatened by <br> another student or group of <br> students at this school. | 15,180 | $14.4 \%$ | $12.5 \%$ | $19.5 \%$ | $53.6 \%$ |
| 6. The school's discipline policy <br> is enforced fairly. | 15,160 | $16.7 \%$ | $23.3 \%$ | $37.5 \%$ | $22.5 \%$ |
| 7. This school is a safe place to <br> be. | 15,152 | $17.2 \%$ | $24.3 \%$ | $37.2 \%$ | $21.4 \%$ |

Table 15.
Descriptive Statistics for Meaningful Use of Data Questions

| Question | Number of <br> Respondents | Mostly <br> Agree | Disagree <br> a little | Agree <br> a little | Mostly <br> Agree |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1. The teachers I have explain <br> why I got something wrong. | 15,082 | $17.6 \%$ | $23.4 \%$ | $34.9 \%$ | $24.2 \%$ |
| 2. My teachers make comments <br> on my homework assignments <br> to help me improve. | 15,236 | $17.3 \%$ | $21.7 \%$ | $35.3 \%$ | $25.7 \%$ |
| 3. My teacher talks to me about <br> my progress. | 15,175 | $14.7 \%$ | $20.4 \%$ | $37.5 \%$ | $27.4 \%$ |
| 4. The tests that I am given <br> reflect what h seen taught in <br> class. | 15,132 | $7.1 \%$ | $14.1 \%$ | $37.8 \%$ | $41.0 \%$ |

Table 16.
Descriptive Statistics for Parental Involvement Questions

| Question | Number <br> Responding | Mostly <br> Disagree | Disagree <br> a little | Agree <br> a little | Mostly <br> Agree |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1. My parents make sure I do <br> my homework every day. | 15,167 | $9.0 \%$ | $10.9 \%$ | $26.4 \%$ | $53.7 \%$ |
| 2. My parents ask me about <br> what happened in school <br> every day. | 15,140 | $10.7 \%$ | $12.7 \%$ | $26.7 \%$ | $50.0 \%$ |
| 3. My parents attend school <br> events | 15,195 | $27.6 \%$ | $24.1 \%$ | $29.4 \%$ | $18.9 \%$ |
| 4. My parents encourage me to <br> do well in school. | 15,176 | $2.7 \%$ | $3.7 \%$ | $14.4 \%$ | $79.3 \%$ |
| 5. My parents make sure I am <br> on time for school each day. | 15,158 | $4.4 \%$ | $6.6 \%$ | $22.3 \%$ | $66.7 \%$ |
| 6.I know my parents sometimes <br> talk to my teachers. | 15,207 | $17.7 \%$ | $18.0 \%$ | $32.2 \%$ | $32.2 \%$ |

Table 17.
Regression Coefficients for Predicting Graduation Rate A

| Model | Unstandardized <br> Coefficients | Unstandardized <br> Coefficients |  |  |  |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. |
| (Constant) | 58.039 | 20.544 |  | 2.825 | .015 |
| Effective | -.817 | .354 | -.716 | -2.309 | .040 |
| Teaching <br> Challenging <br> and Relevant <br> Curriculum | -.159 | .307 | -.132 | -.520 | .612 |
| High <br> Expectations | 1.065 | .496 | .861 | 2.147 | .053 |
| Positive and <br> Nurturing <br> Environment | .164 | .309 | .189 | .530 | .606 |
| Effective Plant <br> Operations | .017 | .106 | .030 | .162 | .874 |
| Safe and <br> Orderly <br> Environment | -.059 | .175 | -.087 | -.335 | .743 |
| Meaningful Use <br> of Data | -.094 | .364 | -.095 | -.259 | .800 |
| Parental <br> Involvement | .451 | .174 | .605 | 2.597 | .023 |

Table 18.
Regression Coefficients for Predicting Graduation Rate $B$

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients |  | Unstandardized Coefficients <br> Beta | t | Sig. |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | B | Std. Error |  |  |  |
| (Constant) | 49.522 | 18.845 |  | 2.628 | . 022 |
| Effective <br> Teaching | -. 655 | . 325 | -. 625 | -2.019 | . 066 |
| Challenging and Relevant Curriculum | . 077 | . 281 | . 070 | . 275 | . 788 |
| High Expectations | . 757 | . 455 | . 667 | 1.666 | . 122 |
| Positive and Nurturing Environment | . 297 | . 283 | . 374 | 1.048 | . 315 |
| Effective Plant Operations | . 102 | . 097 | . 197 | 1.045 | . 316 |
| Safe and <br> Orderly <br> Environment | -. 144 | . 160 | -. 233 | -. 898 | . 387 |
| Meaningful Use of Data | -. 192 | . 334 | -. 212 | -. 576 | . 575 |
| Parental Involvement | . 388 | . 159 | . 567 | 2.436 | . 031 |

Table 19.
Regression Coefficients for Predicting Graduation Rate C

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients |  | Unstandardized Coefficients <br> Beta | t | Sig. |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | B | Std. Error |  |  |  |
| (Constant) | 55.384 | 16.427 |  | 3.371 | . 006 |
| Effective <br> Teaching | -. 557 | . 283 | -. 584 | -1.970 | . 072 |
| Challenging and Relevant Curriculum | . 051 | . 245 | . 050 | . 207 | . 839 |
| High Expectations | . 684 | . 396 | . 662 | 1.727 | . 110 |
| Positive and Nurturing Environment | . 325 | . 247 | . 449 | 1.315 | . 213 |
| Effective Plant Operations | . 102 | . 085 | . 216 | 1.197 | . 254 |
| Safe and <br> Orderly <br> Environment | -. 150 | . 140 | -. 268 | -1.075 | . 304 |
| Meaningful Use of Data | -. 239 | . 291 | -. 289 | -. 822 | . 427 |
| Parental Involvement | . 355 | . 139 | . 570 | 2.556 | . 025 |

