9-21-2012

The external and internal educational factors that contribute to student achievement and self-perceptions of urban middle school Title I students

Ja'Shanna Jones

Recommended Citation

Jones, Ja'Shanna, "The external and internal educational factors that contribute to student achievement and self-perceptions of urban middle school Title I students" (2012). *Theses and Dissertations*. 240.
https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/240

**THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL EDUCATIONAL FACTORS THAT
CONTRIBUTE TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND
SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF URBAN MIDDLE
SCHOOL TITLE I STUDENTS**

by
Ja'Shanna Jones

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
May, 2012

Dissertation Chair: Mark Raivetz, Ed. D.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my two beautiful children Michael and Michele-Grace Haywood. This grueling task was done by your mother at a very difficult time in all of our lives; yet it was done to inspire you to acquire the highest level of education possible. I hope that this inspires you and helps you to remember that even though you are now the product of a single and divorced home, no matter what statistical data out there that says that you do not have a chance, you can do it!

To Grandma Grace, thank you for sacrificing your life and helping my mom, a teenage mom. Without you I probably would not have graduated from high school let alone earned a doctoral degree. I know that you are resting in peace, hopefully, but I am truly blessed to have had a grandmother like you who wore my honor roll pins to bingo and told me that with hard work I can accomplish anything and live a life that I deserve to have. Grandma Grace, I will always love you no matter what, and I carry you in my heart. I have never forgotten my promise to you grandma, you are my spiritual ROCK!

To my parents, thank you mom, Regina without your determination, mean, and nagging ways (when I was a child, although you still act that way) I would have never graduated high school, although I was an honor roll and GOOD student and GOOD child. Also, thank you for working all that overtime so that I could graduate college. I truly appreciate you. Mom; thank you for coming to school and popping in, peering in the back of the classroom door to make sure that I was hard at work and would graduate. Thank you Dad, Robert Booker. Although you did not give me life, you gave me a life that is a

greatest gift that a father can give. Now that I am an adult with children of my own I truly can continue to appreciate all the hours of work and sacrifices that you made to build a foundation for our family and to get us out of a low socio-economic environment.

Thank you Bahiyyah and Na'eemah, my sisters, for watching my two children Michael and Michele-Grace whenever I was unable to find a sitter and was basically desperate during those Saturday classes. I truly appreciate your time and efforts.

Thank you to all colleagues who assisted in this study. Mr. Joseph Bochniak, thank you for your time, effort, and continuous peer dialogue throughout the course of the study.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my students. Please overcome your adversity. As I tell you every day, just because someone may have not made it or have a college degree does not mean that you cannot have a college degree. Remember you are a caged bird unless you have a college education. Continue to work hard and strive for your goals. No one is going to give you anything; you have to work for it.

Acknowledgements

Thank you, Dr. Raivetz, for your calm, cool, and overall collective attitude during this study. I am already a worry-wart and with your calm, no nonsense, no games, and attitude I was able to write this dissertation. I hope to work with you in the future.

To Dr. Perry, thank you for your encouragement and admiration. I truly respect you as an educational leader and hope that I fulfill your expectations.

To Dr. Warfield, thank you for your insight during the opening of the dissertation journey, I truly appreciate that you have taken the time from your active and grueling schedule to help me fulfill my dreams.

Abstract

Ja'Shanna Jones
THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL EDUCATIONAL FACTORS THAT
CONTRIBUTE TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND
SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF URBAN MIDDLE
SCHOOL TITLE I STUDENTS
2012
Mark Raivetz, Ed. D.
Doctorate in Educational Leadership

This study was conducted in order to explore the depths of internal and external

factors within the urban school community that effect student self-perceptions and

academic achievement, so that programs/interventions are developed to meet the needs of

urban students. The internal and external factors identified for the purpose of this study

were parental achievement, parental and community involvement, school morale, teacher

quality, students peer groups, and resources among internal and external educational

factors.

The researcher examined test scores and survey data of the entire middle school in

the first phase of the study. During the second phase of the study, open-ended interviews

were conducted along with observations, and collected documents. The study highlighted

how high achieving urban middle school students of the same socioeconomic and

demographic backgrounds were able to succeed under conditions similar to those of their

urban middle school counterparts. That is, if a small portion of urban school students

were able to achieve given the same educational factors, what prevented other students

from doing so? The results of the study indicated that students succeeded when there was

collaboration amongst external and internal stakeholders, students had a strong value or moral base, and an innate drive to succeed as measured by the open-ended interviews and classroom observations by the researcher.

Student success and self-perceptions are strongly influenced by the external home and/or community environment. Despite the various efforts of internal school stakeholders to reach students through extra-curricular activities, additional instructional programs, or outreach initiates, those parents and students that sought the guidance and resources of the school on a consistent basis succeeded in achieving success according to the criteria of the study. As a result of the study I hope to promote programs and initiatives that model the behaviors and attitudes of peers, and reinforce programs and initiatives that meet the needs of students, helping a greater number to succeed. Future programs will seek to further establish a stronger connection to the external community.

What was discovered throughout the course of the study was that many urban students that have failed derive from a hereditary line of academic failure. The students throughout the study that failed state tests and exhibited negative social and academic behaviors did not utilize-the internal and external resources available within the school community. In addition, there was a lack of buy-in and collaboration amongst educational stakeholders that is vital for student academic success. Yet when students practice academic behaviors such as participating in instructional and non-instructional programs, utilize external and internal educational resources, and have an overall positive attitude toward educational stakeholders, they succeed.

Overall this study revealed that in order to close the achievement gap of urban students, all educational stakeholders must invest time, social, and financial resources to

ensure their academic success. Currently research suggests that students that pass state tests enter and are able to compete in a global market and competitive society (Darling-Hammond, 2011). For the students included in this study, the results confirm the findings in the literature that educators must invest in programs and state initiatives that surpass what is encouraged in the traditional educational classroom (Noguera, 2011). Educators must meet the needs and value the cultural norms outside of their personal experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Society must recognize the barriers that many students in urban communities face and address those barriers so that students can succeed (Noguera, 2011).

Table of Contents

Table of Contents (Continued)

Table of Contents (Continued)

Table of Contents (Continued)

List of Tables

List of Tables (Continued)

Chapter I

Introduction

Research Problem

The purpose of this study is to develop a plan to enable middle school students

within urban areas to succeed academically, socially, and financially. According to

educational researchers such as Darling-Hammond (2011), students failing state

academic tests are just a precursor to the dilemma that lies ahead. Shafer (2001) suggests

that students in more affluent areas are more prepared to take state tests versus urban

students, because they live in a world of academics. Williams (2004) writes, "with the

implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, school districts were focusing

on improving student achievement for all, yet there were still students left behind"

(Williams, 2004, p. 1). Shafer (2001) states,

> Statistics from the 2000 testing year show that 80 percent of the students in the
> wealthy district of Bloomfield Hills garnered scholarships, while a paltry six
> percent earned them from the Detroit area. For a nation that aspires to fairness, it is
> a paradoxical and troubling way to "leave no child behind." (p. 1)

Many educational policy makers have failed to address the societal dilemmas and/or

factors that play a huge role in student achievement (Check, 2002; Darling-Hammond,

2011).

Across the nation, many urban students are disproportionately failing state tests

(Darling-Hammond, 2011; Warren-Gross, 2009). Shafer (2001) argues that students in

urban areas are not given the appropriate amount of time and even resources to decipher

test questions that may conflict with their cultural intelligence and therefore aptitude to

understand questions on state tests. As a result of dismal academic failure, within the

1

urban school community students usually drop out of school, urban schools lose human and financial resources, and more mandates are added to an already complicated and stressful work environment (Warren-Gross, 2009). In order to change the face of the current failing urban school crisis, educational leaders must become more innovative and receptive of the internal and external factors that affect urban minority students' academic success (Darling-Hammond, 2011). Freidman, Lipshitz, and Overmeer (2001) imply that in order to establish a successful and/or innovative institution there must be shared knowledge, consistent peer critique, and openness. In addition, teachers that educate students in urban areas often work in stressful demoralizing environments due to the constant pressure from the state/federal government to pass the test. Sawchuk (2009) found that educators often enter the urban school system unprepared and culturally antagonized. Gold (2007) notes that New Jersey school districts struggle to provide equitable education for students in urban areas. Many students in urban areas live in an environment where they have to fight in order to survive, therefore schools are secondary (Bushweller, 2005; Ford, 2009).

Students who are products of parents with a low socio-economic background do not usually have the resources that those students with parents and/or families of a higher socio-economic background have (Check, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ford, 2009). Students in urban areas often are in competition and/or strife with their urban community (Ford, 2009). The violence and/or inability to conform to authority and/or modern societal expectations deter urban student academic progress in itself (Ford, 2009). Gold (2007) implies that many urban school areas do not have the same resources found within a suburban school community. The internal and external factors that affect minority

student achievement are external support, environmental conditions, social capital, and financial resources.

Research Question

Through data collection, observation, surveys, and open-ended interview protocols, this study attempts to answer this research question:

1. What are the ways in which urban educational stakeholders can overcome and/or encourage external and internal factors that influence the academic success and self-perceptions of students?

Recent Studies

Most failing schools are urban. By the year 2014, if urban schools continue to fail state tests they are in danger of dramatic changes that may alter the face of urban education altogether (Williams, 2004). Educational policy makers have attempted to improve urban student achievement through various reform initiatives and models (Fullan, 2007). Check (2002) found that although society has failed to reform adults, schools seems to be one of the last proponents of change or the idea that schools are designed to prepare individuals to enter the world prepared. According to the New Jersey Department of Education (2010), in an effort to determine student success, policy makers have assessed student academic achievement through standardized state assessments. Currently, a sub-class of tracked high-risk and Title I students are failing at disproportionate amounts. Check (2002) argues that it is difficult to measure a direct link between student academic achievements and self-perceptions due to a degree of factors that are involved in producing student achievement. However, this paper will focus on factors such as parental illiteracy, parental/community involvement, school climate, and

teacher quality as a means to determine the impact of external and internal factors on minority urban student achievement.

Since the 1950s educational policy makers have sought out reforms in order to close the achievement gap (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990). In light of many education reforms, New Jersey urban schools have begun to use systematic and comprehensive reform in an attempt to meet the needs of students (Gold, 2007). The author states, "The notion that every child in New Jersey might someday be given what the kids in Princeton now enjoy is not even entertained as a legitimate scenario" (Gold, 2007, p. 7). The needs of urban students may be more complex and diverse than suburban students (Cohen, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2011;).

> School efforts to close the gap in academic achievement between ethnic and racial minority student and white students have been largely unsuccessful to date; differences in educational performance persist at all achievement levels, with the gap greatest between students of color and immigrants and their white and Asian American peers at high achievement levels. (Schwartz, 2001, p. 2)

As more students are attending urban school systems it is crucial that American educational leaders come to grips with this overwhelming new social phenomenon of urban student failure (Darling-Hammond, 2011).

For too many, poverty is a self-perpetuating state. Poverty serves as a trap and/or barrier to societal success. There are many factors of poverty that affect minority students' capability to achieve (Cohen, 2010; Lamont & Small, 2008). Turner (2009) suggests that poverty instigates stressors that can make families vulnerable to violence, suicide, and lack of resources. Currently there are limited programs and/or literature within the educational community or schools to address how poverty may affect student self-perceptions and students' academic achievement. Check (2002) suggests that there

has been a list of generalized reform efforts that have been instituted that focus on students' academic achievement versus the external factors that have a direct relation to their education.

Many critics argue that one of the reasons that urban students fail is lack of educational resources. Many parents of urban students lack the human and social capital to provide an avenue for academic growth. Haggard (2004) suggests that urban students need to read; yet often there are no books in the home. In order to ensure successful literacy for urban students, parents must become involved in reading. Limited educational resources and/or materials are but one of many external factors that affect student achievement (Macleod, 1995). Parents must be allotted the funds and/or resources to ensure that student learning is not only found within the schools. President Barack Obama has encouraged education not only inside of the school, but outside. The author states, "there is a big gap in the literacy achievement of children from poverty and other children" (Haggard, 2004, p. 26). Haggard (2004) notes that children in poor homes have limited access to books. Therefore, parental literacy and their beliefs concerning their child's reading has a direct effect on how well a student may perform academically as well as a child's self-perceptions.

In order for progress and/or effective reform in schools, there must be a buy-in externally from the parents and community as well as internally from teachers and educational staff for urban educational institutions to flourish. Factors such as violence and illiteracy, among other norms found in the urban external community, have a huge impact on the internal urban educational community. There is a divide amongst students and teachers based upon race, culture, class, and money (Rogalsky, 2009). As previously

stated, relationships between stakeholders can help to improve conditions in urban areas. Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (2003) offers that there must be integration of social institutions to combat negative features in the environment that affect student success. Further, the authors imply that there is difficulty in achieving the academic success of urban students due to lack of trust within the internal and external community. Furthermore, due to circumstances internally and externally, youth are placed at risk, so there must be collaboration between the community, the school, social institutions, and bureaucratic agencies (Wang et al., 2003).

Definitions

The following definitions should be used as a guide to understand the terms throughout the study.

Standards based achievement. Student academic achievement is based upon the ability to understand and pass state assessments (Darling-Hammond, 2011).

Poverty. Persons lacking a socially acceptable means of finances or material possessions (Haggard, 2004).

Title I recipients. A program that provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers or high percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Federal funds are currently allocated through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state (New Jersey Department of Education, 2010).

Parental illiteracy. Adults with limited to no reading and/or comprehension skills (O'Callaghan, 2001).

Policy. Guiding rules and procedures enforced by the state and federal government to guide the outcomes of educational stakeholders (Darling-Hammond, 2011).

School climate. Interactions between adults and students, environmental factors, academic performance, feelings of safety, and feelings of trust and respect among educational stakeholders (Marshall, 2002).

Critical race theory. The idea that racism has created inequity and inequality to such an extent that it has permeated all aspects of society historically affecting marginalized groups, specifically African-Americans (Aria & Kivel, 2004; Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology, 2004).

Internal educational factors. "Attributes of the academic discipline that is the intellectual core of the school subject—its knowledge structure, typical ways of knowing, unique contents, how to present it to uninformed learners" (Iluz & Rich, 2009, p. 42).

External educational factors. "Broad social trends and norms, current and past educational policies, and organizational structures in schools" (Iluz & Rich, 2009, p. 44).

Significance of Study

The study generally examines the disproportionate number of failing students within an urban school environment yet focuses on high achieving students that encounter similar external and internal conditions in order to provide an explanation for and assess behaviors within the internal and external educational environment that contribute to student self-perceptions and academic achievement. Fullan (2007) implies that over the past decade, many educational leaders have used studies and research to propose that students born within a low socio-economic status will most likely not

elevate to a desirable and/or successful quality of life. If this is the case, there would be no overall purpose or need to invest substantial amounts of tax payers' dollars into educating urban students. Williams (2004) writes that urban minority students will most likely leave the 12th grade unable to read or compute basic math computations. Educators and teachers must be able to reach the hearts and minds of urban minority students in order to change the bleak future of urban minority students. Check (2002) implies that a disproportionate number of African-American students living in urban areas fail state tests and drop out of high school. This study seeks to discover the internal and external factors that contribute to self-perceptions and academic success of sixth to eighth grade African-American urban students.

Students enter the classroom with individual experiences and reasons for striving for academic achievement and overall success. Nearly 60 years after the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, African-American students as a group continue to fall behind disproportionately, compared to their White and Asian counterparts. Since the NCLB mandate initiated by the Bush administration in 2001, the educational progress of students in urban areas according to test scores has worsened. In an effort to attain funding and avoid accountability penalties, educators and educational leaders have focused primarily on standardized test scores (Williams, 2004). There are many variables that contribute to student academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2011). Darling-Hammond (1999) suggests that educators so not know what variables support student achievement. Gold (2007) implies that money simply is not the paramount factor of failure amongst students whose parents are illiterate and/or poor.

Due to the large emphasis and pressure that the state and federal government place on urban schools, students soon learn through teacher and administrative focus that they must pass state tests. Fuhrman and Elmore (1990) have found that urban schools rely heavily on state funding and the political initiatives of the state far surpass the needs of urban students and their local school districts. Check (2002) implies that standardized testing quickly separates the "will haves" and the "will not haves." Due to the large failure within the urban school system, unless there is an overhaul of urban reform, many urban students "will not have." Standardized testing is a poor and biased way of measuring student achievement. As standards increase significantly, students in urban areas continue to fail (Check, 2002).

Families in urban communities have needs that American leaders must address. It would be beneficial to educators and/or educational stakeholders to address the attitudes and factors that contribute to urban Middle School African-American success and/or achievement. As stated previously, if there is no successful reform in urban education, society may breed a class of illiterate and dependent citizens.

This study offers policies and programs that may lead to overall accountability for urban student achievement. Currently, the NCLB policy dictates that by the year 2014, all students must be proficient in reading and writing. If students fail the state tests in grades 6 to 8 there is no immediate consequence; they are promoted to the next grade. Yet, schools lose funding and teachers risk losing their instructional positions. As recently as 2012, educators throughout the nation have resorted to many efforts, some unethical. Cheating scandals in Atlanta, New York, and Philadelphia made national headlines. Many educators are desperate for a formula or solution to ensure that students in urban

areas pass state tests. To many urban educators, ensuring that students pass state tests means future financial and social success not only for their students, but for them as well.

Fundamentally, many educational leaders argue that within a public educational system, it is illegal to choose specifically who enters a classroom. As a result of student failure, many qualified teachers are leaving urban areas altogether. According to Check (2002), many students that are failing state tests are members of an urban educational community. According to the New Jersey Department of Education (2010), students in urban areas are failing to meet adequate yearly progress. Considering the environment which urban schools occupy, it is not surprising to see that many new teachers are not seeking positions within urban areas.

The Purpose Statement

The intent of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study is to identify specific variables that contribute to sixth to eighth grade urban African-American students' academic achievement and self-perceptions. The researcher reviewed the overall academic progress of middle school students by analyzing high achieving urban middle school African-American students faced with the similar internal and external factors that may impact their academic achievement and self-perceptions in order to provide an explanation for the overall success of these students. In the first phase, quantitative research questions or hypothesis addressed the relationship between internal and external factors that contribute to student academic achievement and self-perceptions. Students identified in the study are sixth to eighth grade students from a subclass of urban students who are identified high-risk and Title I recipients. Those

students labeled as Title I recipients receive free or reduced lunch, have not passed state tests or are reading below the reading level, and are living at or below the poverty line.

Population

The population of Green Wave School is homogeneous. The student population is 626 students. Out of the 626 students, four are Asian, 20 are of white/European descent, 124 are Hispanic/Latino, and 478 are African-American/Black. There are 63 full time teachers; over 50 percent of the teachers are of White/European decent and female. There are 17 para-professionals that work on site. The average student to teacher ratio in the middle school is 19 to 1 teacher in the Language Arts and Math classes, and 15 to 1 in the Social Studies and Science classes.

Data collected from Green Wave School evaluates Middle School students' overall progress. Students selected to participate in the study have passed the state tests three years consecutively in grades five through seven. Students interviewed are currently in grades six through eight. All students in the study have and/or receive Title I funding. Information from this first phase will be explored in a second qualitative phase. In the second phase, qualitative interviews and observations are used to probe how significantly internal and external factors impact student academic success and self-perceptions. The lived experiences of individuals in the study are further analyzed to understand the impact of internal and external variables on urban students' academic success and self-perceptions.

Many students in urban areas start their education with a disadvantage. Most students in urban areas live at or below the poverty line (Coleman, 1988, 1990; Milner, 2010 Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gregory, 2000). Coleman (1988, 1990) suggests that in

examining socio-economic backgrounds, physical wealth provides the physical resources that children need in order to thrive and compete in the global market. Coleman (1988,1990) suggests that financial income helps to ensure that students have a place to study, tutorial assistance, and money to maintain a stable residence. The study of high achieving African-American urban students that are Title I recipients at Green Wave may enable school leaders and policy makers to create outreach programs that will encourage academic success, trust, and relationship rebuilding amongst school organizations and the community.

Goal of Study

In order to address the issues that affect the success and/or failures of African-American students, researchers need to examine factors within the home environment, school, and community (Gregory, 2000). This is the goal of the study. Students that participate in the American public school system do so, under the belief that they will gain "a piece of the American pie." Oakes (1997) suggests that under difficult conditions, some urban schools have raised student achievement. In order to improve the conditions within urban schools, schools must form coalitions with the community (Lakins, 2002; Oakes, 1997).

Parents want the best for their children and desire high academic achievement. Yet, the social norms and values within the urban school and community often conflict with survival and thriving. Researchers imply that partnerships between social institutions have helped to establish long-lasting positive bonds that have resulted in urban students' academic success (Check, 2002; Oakes, 1997). Yet, recent laws and/or mandates have made it difficult for social institutions to share information for the safety

of their institution and clients. Gregory (2000) argues that many urban students have an idea that they want to succeed yet do not have a plan. Partnerships with internal and external institutions are not being serviced. In addition, if urban students were exposed to other people and environments that are outside of their high crime and poverty environments, it may give them an idea or plan to succeed. Researchers suggests that as a result of exposure to people and environments outside of urban areas, students have an opportunity to develop a real idea of life outside of the urban community and are better able to understand the values and norms that society and teachers promote (Check, 2002; Gross, 2008).

Location of Study

The researcher conducted a study of urban students at the Green Wave site in the Atlantic County, New Jersey area. The population is defined as sixth to eighth grade urban students attending an inner city school (K-8). The study of the population began in September of 2011 and ended in March of 2012. The researcher used observations, surveys, and open-ended interviews in order to analyze the trends and patterns that occurred within the population. Creswell (2011) noted that the data collection tool is essential in determining the recommendations for improving student academic success.

The mixed methods approach utilizes the strengths of qualitative and quantitative research (Creswell, 2009). According to the New Jersey Department of Education (2010), schools in urban areas are doomed to fail due to demographics. The mixed methods approach will allow the researcher to analyze data as well as inquire of the human experiences and/or perceptions that have contributed to this phenomenon.

Overview of Chapters

Even before the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983), schools have struggled with educating minority youth. As the years progress, the achievement gap continues to widen in urban American schools across the nation. "Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts" (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Americans have struggled with ways to increase student academic achievement and argue that there are a number of external and internal factors that affect students' abilities to achieve.

Educational evidence suggests that poverty has a great impact on the way students achieve academically (Noguera, 2011). In addition, the educational perspectives of teachers and their ability to provide instruction to a diverse population that does not mirror the educational and ethnic backgrounds of the majority of white female teachers also influence students' abilities to perform well in traditional classroom settings (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Urban students are more likely to be educated by white (European descent) women from a middle class background than teachers that share similar ethnic backgrounds and/or demographic (National Center for Educational Statics, 2011).

The study is a mixed methods sequential explanatory study. In the first phase of the study the researcher focused on three years of students in sixth to eighth grade, prior data scores (three years consecutively), and a survey that utilized a Likert scale to measure student attitudes and behaviors as related to the nature of the study. In the second phase the researcher used a holistic strand in order to provide insight and highlight the experiences of stakeholders directly impacted by students' self-perceptions

and academic achievement. Individuals that participated in the study had contact with the internal and/or external educational community and/or school for a year or more. As a result of the study, the researcher will promote the implementation of programs and/or groups that will encourage student academic achievement and positive self-perceptions.

The remaining four chapters discuss various topics related to the study in the Literature Review, Methodology, Findings, and Recommendations/Conclusions for the study. The Literature Review, Chapter II, explains various grounded research that provides an explanation for the achievement gap and the disproportionate failure of minority youth in urban schools. Chapter III, the Methodology, discusses the various strategies to conduct a successful mixed methods sequential study. Chapter IV analyzes data and findings related to the study. In Chapter V, the researcher provides a summary of the study, significant findings, discussion of the limitations, the impact on the researcher's leadership platform, and implications on future policy, practice, and additional educational research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

This chapter identifies literature that helps to clarify and recognize the internal and external factors that contribute to sixth to eighth grade urban students' self-perceptions and academic achievement. The literature review examines and analyzes how specific variables such as parental involvement, community involvement, school climate, and teacher quality may relate to urban students self-perceptions and academic achievement. In an effort to provide substantial clarity to the study, specific variables are consistently mentioned throughout the literature as related to external and internal factors and influences on sixth to eighth grade urban students' self-perceptions and academic achievement. At the conclusion of the study, various programs and initiatives are recommended for the purpose of improving overall student academic achievement.

Theoretical Framework

Beginning in the 1960s, after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), and before the formal recognition brought on by *A Nation at Risk,* educational reformers have tried to find solutions and/or reasons for underperformance amongst minorities. The two theoretical perspectives that lend themselves to the study of underachievement of minority students are oppositional cultural theory and cultural poverty theory. Lundy (2003) argues that oppositional cultural theory is the idea that members of a cultural group will often undermine their own academic success because institutions such as schools often challenge norms and/or values within their own culture. "It is said that these racial and ethnic groups respond to their set of circumstances by developing modes

of behaviors that conflict with, and at times, challenge dominant cultural practices and ideology" (Lundy, 2003, p. 451). Black Americans have experienced the burden of acting white because of their oppositional collective identity and cultural frame of reference (Ogbu, 2004). Within that study, attitudes and perceptions provided meaning to quantitative data.

Many of the attitudes and cultural norms expressed within schools conflict with values accepted within an urban community. "Dominant group members stigmatize minorities' food, clothing, music, values, behaviors and language or dialect as bad and inferior to theirs" (Ogbu, 2001, p. 4). In order to master the content within a school, educational stakeholders must value the beliefs and/or attitudes of a social institution such as schools. Ogbu (2004) argues that when successful Black students express the norms cherished within the oppositional culture they are often stigmatized as acting white (Ogbu, 2004). Many students are often faced with the challenge of failing and/or going against the societal norms of the urban community (Ogbu, 2004). "Like the adults, Black students have strategies for coping with peer pressures" (Ogbu, 2004, p. 29). The influence of external and internal factors has an impact on how well Black students will perform in school and later in society (Ogbu, 2004).

Since 1968, Lewis (1969) has argued that cultural poverty exists under the conditions in which some poor people self-perpetuate a cycle of poverty. Inherently, poor people create more poor people when their cultural values and/or beliefs conflict with the values of the dominant majority "white middle class." Small, Harding, and Lamont (2010) argue that whether poor minority children will work hard in school depends upon the cultural beliefs and attitudes espoused in their respective homes. Small et al. (2010)

argue that poor children may do worse over their lifetimes in part because their parents are more committed to "natural growth" than "concerted cultivation" as their cultural model for child rearing" (p. 7). The cycle of poverty is sustained due to cultural beliefs, attitudes, and values (Small et al., 2010). The authors state, "exploring further how low-income populations make sense of their experience and options is essential for developing stronger explanations of how they escape poverty" (Small et al., 2010, p. 11). Small et al. (2010) state, "first, ignoring culture can lead to bad policy" (p. 11). Many educational policy makers ignore the impact that poverty may have on student success and failures; these external factors impact the success and failures of minorities (Small et al., 2010).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory is a social justice theory that addresses the fact that many African-Americans have not progressed historically despite societal and governmental reforms (Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology, 2006). Critical race theory addresses the color line between Blacks and Whites as well as the issues that African-Americans primarily have in low-income communities. In addition, critical race theory reports the conflicts within the African-American community with a focus on how some African Americans treat other African-Americans that may have presumably rejected their African-American cultural and social norms instead adopting what would be considered white racial norms and/or societal values (Coates, 2004). Coates (2004) argues that historically through slavery, the enforcement of racial codes, and covert racism, some Whites have purposely posed institutional barriers to ensure the racial dominance of their heirs.

Individuals that have adopted the norms and beliefs of White Americans are more likely to prosper and enjoy fewer social barriers (Arai & Kivel, 2009). Critical race theory focuses on the discriminatory practices and policies toward minority groups in white dominant institutions (Aria & Kivel, 2009). The authors imply that there is a need to understand how race is constructed in social institutions. Critical race theorists argue that in order to create real societal change in diverse communities, policy makers and government officials must address the impact of how historically race has played an impact in the construction and maintenance of institutions.

Parental/Community Involvement

Parents in urban areas are often challenged with extraneous circumstances. While living in a difficult environment, they must work to provide a living for their families. Studies indicate that parental and community involvement is the key factor in determining student academic success. Despite some common misperceptions, many successful urban students derive from urban homes that have high expectations for their students, have good communication, high regard for literature, monitor their children's media influences, maintain a structured home environment, and have an established system of rewards for their children (Gregory, 2000).

Although the urban community may be exposed to high crime and violence, it is up to the parent and student to survive the conditions found there. In order to maintain healthy, successful students, parents must be vigilant of their external and internal environment. No one institution can be fully trusted to ensure student success. Coleman (1988,1990) implies that the actions of individuals within a community help to influence the development of social organizations. Furthermore, parental or community influences

are the entities that make possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible (Coleman, 1988, 1990).

The relationships that are made between and amongst educational stakeholders are the glue that builds a strong educational foundation. Gregory (2000) states, "Students' perceptions of the impact of their academic performance and their home environment, specifically their parents' expectations, were important as they related to their self-image" (Gregory, 200, p. 6). Coleman (1990, 1998) suggests that social capital is embedded in the investments that people make within each other. If educational stakeholders invest in students as if they were investing in a business, faithfully and devotedly, in all areas, students would most likely fulfill their academic potential. Gregory (2000) offers that the students' ability to believe that others not only expect the best, but believe that they can achieve, affects student success. Coleman (1988, 1990) writes that educational stakeholders can only be successful if there is a community of trust. The investments that people make in students not only affect the school community, but also the community at large. If the community, school, and parental expectations are in sync, the student will rise to meet the expectations of all educational stakeholders, therefore achieving the goals of the school and the community (Coleman, 1988, 1990).

Parental and Community Investments

The time and effort a parent invests in a child's education is a determining factor in a child's success. The expectations of parents/community versus students are intergenerational (Coleman, 1990, 1998). There are more expectations amongst students and/or peers that interact each day versus parents and community members. Students are more likely to adhere to the norms and customs of school peers than the norms and

customs of parental and community figures. The expectations of parents/community members may be irrelevant if students believe that their parents/community members are not a vital element of their life. If parents and community members are more vested in the concerns of work/community than the students' lives, their expectations of student academic success is null from the perspectives of students. The physical time that the family and community members invest in students is the structure to ensure academic success (Coleman, 1988, 1990).

The impact that parental/community influence has on urban students depends upon the social investments that parents and community members have with urban students. Urban students' academic success depends largely upon the quality time that community members and parents invest in their lives. Coleman (1988, 1990) found that if parents hope to ensure that their student performs successfully, they must be fully involved and have a strong relationship with their student. Students that are products of large families have a greater chance of dropping out of school and/or failing school. Parents with huge families simply do not have the time to ensure that each individual child has the most attention and/or individual support. Parents that invest the most time and energy in their children are most likely to develop a child that will enter a good paying job and greater social status (Coleman, 1988, 1990).

The investments that even a single person makes to a school community have a rippling "butterfly effect" on individuals within the school. Coleman (1998) writes that there are dense associations made between members of a school community. The members of associations benefit marginally from the associations that they have made within the school community. Yet, if one member decides that he/she can no longer

participate in an association that directly affects the school, the member may be benefiting his/her family individually but may have drastic effects on the association. The withdrawal from the school activities constitutes a loss for everyone dependent upon the efforts of the now absent and/or vacant member of the association. The social capital consists of relations that are made among stakeholders. Any severance of relations made between stakeholders weakens the norms and sanctions that aid the schools tasks, goals, and objectives (Coleman, 1998).

Student Motivation

Family and community involvement in school helps students to achieve academic success and become motivated in attending school. Ottke-Moore (2002) indicates that schools are now beginning to understand the impact that community and parental involvement have on student academic success. The relationships that educational stakeholders have benefit students and help them to reach academic success. The networks that students have do not have to rest primarily within the family. Students can benefit from social capital from forming relationships with adults within the community. The structure of the bonds and relationships that are formed within the community and family are the structures that mirror the expectations of society at large. Coleman (1988, 1990) writes that any adult in the community that invests a considerable amount of time in a student will increase the student's likeliness of success. If family members and community members are involved in the school, they will be able to understand the expectations and changes needed to ensure academic success. Ottke-Moore (2002) infers that students want their parents to be involved. There is a serious lack of communication between teacher and family members of school students. If schools are to increase

academic achievement for urban students, there must be a fluid and trusting communication between parents and students.

A student's motivation to learn is greatly affected by their parental and community influence. Urban students are faced with many challenges that average American students cannot fathom. Urban students are challenged with horrendous school conditions, crime infested neighborhoods, and problems outside the classroom. These problems affect students' motivation to learn and directly affect their academic achievements. Ottke-Moore (2002) surmises that urban students' primary concern is not learning, but surviving day to day. According to Maslow (1943), if a person's basic needs or physical needs are not met, they cannot satisfy their social-emotional needs. Slavin (2005) infers that schools and governmental agencies must form coalitions that will help to serve the basic needs of students. When basic needs are met, students can focus on learning needs. With increasing academic demands, an emphasis on home collaboration with schools is essential. Most observers agree that urban schools are in crisis. American schools in general are nearly in the back of the class in achievement. When compared to other developed nations, educators concur that the most needy, urban schools, should get all that they can get in order to succeed academically.

The Needs of Students

It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to create and build upon any opportunities and communication in order to improve the academic success of all urban students. Price (2008) concludes that there needs to be a protective and promoting cultural structure in place in order to improve urban students' academic success. Price (2008) gathers that there has been a breakdown in the protective forces within the urban

community and therefore as a result, a break down in education amongst some urban students. The traditional values once held in African-American homes such as community trust have deteriorated over the past few decades. In order to resolve the urban school crisis, educators and stakeholders must create a protective atmosphere of trust and relationship building that will foster the future of change and academic success for urban students (Price, 2008).

If all educational stakeholders collectively challenge and address the issues that interfere with the academic success of students, urban students would be more likely to achieve academic success. Price (2008) surmises that something as simple as a mentorship program between the community and students can make a positive difference and therefore good academic change for urban students. Any type of after school program is beneficial to students and the community. The community itself is a resource that should not be ignored. The community is an untapped gold mine of skills and real life experiences that can be used to foster academic success (Price, 2008).

Parent and Community Outreach

In order to survive and thrive, urban schools must find a way to reach out to parents. Since the start of the industrial revolution, many urban families and communities have struggled with the actual time invested in students. Chavkin (1993) implies,that as more parents entered the work force and/or the world industrialized educational accountability was placed further in the hands of teachers or trained specialist.. Chavkin (1993) implies that historically parents and schools worked together. There was a societal context of shared values and beliefs, therefore students performed better. In an urban school there is hardly a connection between the parents, school, and community. All

variables are separate that greatly impact the lives of children and counteract against the success of children because there is no trust and/or relationship foundation. Urban schools must reach beyond the snobbery and/or inexperience and discomfort of reaching out to the community and parents. Urban schools have more to lose from not reaching out than reaching out to parents and the community. "A growing body of evidence has emerged suggesting that involving parents involved in the educational process enhances school success" (Gregory, 2001, p. 29).

Teachers simply cannot accomplish the arduous task of educating African-American urban students alone. Fullan (2007) proposes that even the most highly educated parents enter the school community uncomfortable and/or bewildered. Educators have created barriers that must be removed in order to establish long-lasting change. The educational community must reach out and tap into all of their community and parental resources. Educators that embrace an empathetic approach involve encouraging parents to actively participate in the school (Fullan, 2007). Fullan argues that the parents and other community members are crucial resources to educational partnerships. Fullan (2007) states, "however badly they do it, parents are their children's very first educators" (p. 190). Evidence suggests that parental practices, belief systems, resources, and relationships have an impact on student success (Gregory, 2000).

Perceptions

The overall success of students depends upon the beliefs and attitudes of all stakeholders (Gregory, 2000). If students believe that their parents care and they are vigilant of a parental plan and/or home structure, they will perform well; and if students believe that their teachers and administrators care and are persistent in ensuring an

effective education, they will continue to perform (Gregory, 2000). Coleman (1990, 1998) submits that children are encouraged to learn based upon the beliefs and experiences of their parents. Fullan (2007) states, "under conditions of power asymmetry, with poor parents who are vulnerable and unconfident in their relationship to schools, it is incumbent on principals and teachers to reach out, be empathetic, and create non-threatening possibilities for parent involvement" (p. 190). Fullan (2007) writes that despite parents' socio-economic background, if parents are involved and has a great relationship with their child's school, the child will succeed. Most parents do not want to be in charge of the day-to-day functions of a school; they want their child to succeed. If a teacher or school exhibits a positive and respectful attitude towards parents they will be able to reach even the most difficult students (Fullan, 2007).

Families that are involved have a better view of the overall urban school versus un-involved parents. In addition, due to their participation and school efforts, parents of high achieving students have a general overall better attitude toward education. Often times urban students' parents are excluded from the school environment. In a study conducted by Gregory (2000), students that were high achievers had parents that were involved; therefore they felt better about the school and their purposes there. In addition, parents that volunteer in schools are able to establish essential connections and/or formal connections that the average non-participatory parents are unable to take advantage of (Gregory, 2000). Parents that contribute to the school stated reasons such as, "supporting the development of their children, building and strengthening relationships with teachers and other parents, enhancing the school environment, maintain relationships with children, providing good role models for their children, and enriching their own lives"

(Gregory, 2000, p. 33). Parents of high achieving students realize that in order to ensure

academic success and/or ensure a better chance for their child they must take an active

part outside of telling their children that they can do a good job in school.

Resources

Many parents of high achieving students realize that they must take advantage of

their resources. Students in urban areas generally do not have the social and/or financial

capital found in suburban areas. Many parents of high achieving students realize that they

must overcome their fears of the school and/or teachers based on their negative

experiences (Gregory, 2000). Considering the lack of financial resources, the community

as a free volunteering force helps to challenge the behaviors and mentalities that combat

education. In order to achieve, schools must build upon the negative relationships that

have been a barrier to a positively nurtured relationship between the urban community

and school in order to bring about real change. There must be a collaboration of resources

and dialogue amongst the parents, community, and school. Fullan (2007) suggests that in

establishing a relationship with the community there must be an authentic type of

communication; how one district or school has formed a relationship with families and

the community will not be successful for all institutions.

Those families that have more money tend to have the ability to give more.

Unfortunately, there are far more stressors and/or barriers to urban student success.

Fullan (2007) found that the gap between the rich and poor is rising, particularly within

the United States. Many more poor people reside and study in urban areas versus

suburban areas. Parents that possess more financial resources are more successful in

acquiring things that will serve the interest of their children. Milner (2010) noted that schools help to reinforce class and power inequalities.

In order to close the gap between rich and poor and provide resources for all students, policy makers and educational leaders must approach issues in the urban community that affect the school systematically (Gregory, 2000). Class influences the type of schools students attend, the materials that they have such as books, the ability to visit museums, attend concerts, and go to the theater. The United States has become a country in which the socio-economic level of a parent has a huge impact on the ability of a student to progress (Macleod, 1995; OECD, 2009a). In order to succeed in today's schools, students must read books, visit museums, and theaters (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Macleod, 1995). "The literature on collaborative, feeder systems indicates that problems challenging the successful implementation of the concept rest largely in strained interpersonal relationships" (Gregory, 2000, p. 94). Fullan (2007) surmises that parents from financially well to do families have successful influence over political, curricular, and educational decisions that affect the welfare of their child. Parents from less than well to do finances are ignored and do not succeed in acquiring the political, curricular, and educational resources that will enable their children to be successful. Schools must enforce reform initiatives that promote equity and social justice in order to ensure academic success for all students (Fullan, 2007).

Self-Perception Theory

Since 1969, sociologists such as LaBenne and Greene (1969) have argued that often the way a person feels about themselves influences how well they will perform. LaBenne and Greene (1969) suggest that self-concepts determine a person's behavior.

28

According to LaBenne and Greene (1969), self-concept is generally stating that because of a person's personal background and experiences, he or she may feel a specific way about him or herself. Due to a person's general self-perception, he/she may exhibit various behaviors due to personal background and life experiences. Cohen (2010) argues that the environment, and hence the cultural norms and behaviors in a community, has an impact on the belief system and values of an individual.

Many students and parents in urban areas must overcome the hard aspect of everyday crime and violence. Crime and violence are characteristics of the urban community (Cohen, 2010). LaBenne and Green (1969) gather that how people deal with the external environment around them shapes how well they will be able to triumph in life. In a study, Cohen (2010) notes how people within a community helped and cared for each other; he noted that the behavior indicated that people did look out for the best interest of others. LaBenne and Green (1969) imply that people shape their self-perceptions and/or self-concepts based upon the experiences that they have had with people. If persons are born in an environment in which they always have to defend themselves, they will always be on the defensive. Persons that are the products of an insecure and unsafe environment often create a barrier that may be unreachable. Some students must develop a tough demeanor to survive.

School Climate

Effective organizations are successful due to the interactions and perceptions of all members that outwardly and inwardly influence the organization. Konishi, Hymel, Zumbo, and Li (2007) find that testimony and reports on the condition of urban schools feed the perception those urban students flounder in decaying, violent environments with

poor resources, teachers, and curricula, and with limited opportunities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Konishi et al. (2007) write that when there is an environment of nurturing and trust, schools are successful. National Center for Education Statistics (2005) research suggests that students from schools with high concentrations of low-income students and students from urban schools would be expected to have less positive school experiences. Teacher absenteeism, an indicator of morale, was more of a problem in urban schools. Students in high poverty schools regardless of location were less likely to feel safe at school.

Safety

School climate and student-teacher relations are essential factors in increasing student academic achievement. Schools that have high levels of violence and poor student-teacher relations are considered at-risk and most likely to fail. According to Konishi et al. (2007), students that are threatened by violence will not perform at their best academically. Outside family and community, schools serve as the primary socialization beacons in American culture. Student-teacher relations are important in establishing academic and social outcomes. The National Center for Children Exposed to Violence (2011) states, "many children who display violent behavior at school are exposed to violence or abuse outside of school and may be in need of help from adults" (p. 1). Many students could overcome the scars and/or impact of violence by seeking additional help and/or guidance from school counselors, positive adults within their community, and parental support. Awareness of the impact of school violence and/or prevention may deter the negative impact that violence has on students' self-perceptions and academia (National Center for Children Exposed to Violence, 2011).

Parental Resistance/Frustration

Regardless of the urban environment, parents of high achieving students that teach their children how to cope with their frustrations and/or challenges have limited experiences associated with school violence and/or negative behavior (Booth, Van Hasselt, & Vecchi, 2011). Many parents in urban areas work outside of the home and therefore are difficult to reach during schools hours. Parents of high achieving students develop positive relationships with the school to avoid issues of frustration and/or resistance. Konishi et al. (2007) surmised that schools are aware that a safe school promotes academic achievement and overall good social interactions. The American Federation of Teachers (2011) proposes that educational stakeholders must have the guts and patience to rebuild urban schools into communities in which students can learn and flourish.

In order for urban schools to flourish, they must create an atmosphere of want and acceptance. Unfortunately, in many urban schools, teachers and students do not feel wanted or accepted. The public views urban school teachers as under qualified and urban students as under achievers. Price (2008) suggests that the consistent negative feedback emitting from educational stakeholders helps to build devaluation amongst teachers and students. Price (2008) implies that it is important for students to feel valued and wanted in order for them to achieve academic success. Due to the many roles and responsibilities of sub classes of students that have illiterate parents, poor and Title I students' experience can interfere with their self-perceptions as students. Many students in urban areas must substitute for the role of care-giver, therefore, their education takes a back seat to survival. Price (2008) suggests that if adolescents are the ones to make the primary

31

decisions in their lives it can be destructive. Many urban students have no guidance; their guidance takes the shape of the models that are prevalent in their communities.

Recognizing Success

In order to promote success, success needs to be recognized. More often than not, many teachers are not recognized for their efforts and therefore students fail. Often times in urban areas, teachers fail to help students because they have lost faith in the educational system. The federal and state governments have instituted many mandates and/or policies, often times with limited resources. It is up to schools to promote an environment in which learning is praised and recognized (Price, 2008). If educational leaders believe that there is not enough external support for teachers outside of parents and/or the community, a community of trust and praise must be established within the school (Price, 2008). There needs to be a system in place that will consistently reward students and teachers for academic success. Price (2008) suggests that ceremonies and celebrations to credit achievement are effective ways to ensure student academic success and achievement. Evans (2001) hints that schools are one of the only institutions that expect significant change without congratulating and or recognizing teachers that are instrumental in change. Evans (2001) also suggests that teachers are resistant to formal recognition due to negative educational cultures that are threatened by recognition, therefore perpetuating the cycle of school failure.

Teacher Attitudes

The attitudes and beliefs of teachers have a great impact on the school morale and therefore, students' overall success. The classroom environment has an impact on what teachers teach and how they perform in class. If teachers and students do not feel good

about coming to school, it will reflect in the overall school product (DuFour and Eaker 1998; Earthman & Lemasters, 2009). Due to the state and federal emphasis of all students passing the state test by the year 2014, many schools cannot afford to spend time on teacher morale (Earthman & Lemaster, 2009). Schools focus on policy and procedure rather than the climate (Darling-Hammond, 2011). DuFour and Eaker (1998) note that it is difficult for policy makers and the community to determine and assess the underlying attitudes and beliefs of teachers. The authors state, "Changing culture is not like changing the décor. Altering beliefs, expectations, and habits that have gone largely unexamined for many years is a complex, messy, and challenging task" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 133). The overall appearance and comfort of a school yields the expected product.

Change

If schools want to produce positive effective citizens; they must foster an environment that is positive and effective (Earthman & Lemaster, 2009). Changing the climate of schools is not easy. School leaders must create a united effort in which the teachers and leadership discuss and address ways in which to create a positive environment conducive to learning. Schools that do not offer the basic comforts for teachers and students are often distracting and deter from student learning (Earthman & Lemaster, 2009). DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggest that schools create mental and physical models in which teachers and students practice shared values. If students and teachers feel that the school is unsafe, their focus will be on safety rather than learning (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009).

A school must be committed to change in order to make positive and successful change for students. Evans (2001) writes that a useful solution is only effective when all

stakeholders adopt a plan of reform. Evans (2001) suggests that change cannot take place unless school leaders identify and understand the school culture. The underlying assumptions and norms generally govern the behavior of members of a school community. In order to make positive change within the school organization, leaders must change the mentality of the organization. Cultural change is a difficult undertaking for any school community to undertake (Evans, 2001). School climate will not change overnight; it must be done systematically and with the involvement and input of all stakeholders. Good leadership understands that all stakeholders contribute to the cycle of failure and success within schools.

Socio-Economic Status

The goal of education is to ensure that everyone has an equal education. Student performance and/or success in school determine success in adult life. The New Jersey Department of Education (2010) found that socio-economic status has a huge impact on student academic success. Research has found that socio-economic status affects student performance. Socio-economic status is strongly related to student's cognitive skills (Barry, 2005). According to Coleman (1998), students who are products of parents with a low socio-economic background do not have the resources that students with parents and/or families of a higher socio-economic background have.

Family background is a factor used often to explain achievement differences. Many researchers claim that students from a low socio-economic background tend to enter school below level. Americans view schools as the equilibrium or socio facet to equality, yet urban students enter schools academically unequal compared to other American students. In examining socio economic backgrounds, physical wealth provides

the physical resources that children need in order to thrive and compete in the global market (Coleman, 1998). Financial income helps to ensure that students have a place to study, tutorial assistance, and money to maintain a stable residence.

If students' basic needs are not met, they will find it hard to meet their needs of self-actualization and intellect. Maslow (1954) states students must have food and basic comforts. According to Maslow (1954) if a student does not have basic comforts in the home, he/she cannot feel safe. In addition, if the student is in a perpetual state of physiological insecurity, the student cannot meet their needs to achieve and desire some form of self-recognition. A low socio-economic status greatly interferes with students' academic success.

Students cannot grow and thrive if they are in a hostile and/or unorganized environment (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009). Young men and women are filled with rage and a sense of rejection and do not believe they owe society anything. As a result, a self-perpetuating mental model is enforced. Students often wonder how learning benefits them. Students begin to question the validity of an education, when survival is the only thing that they have always known. Schools must face the reality that although the country is moving in a fast technological pace, there are families that are not able to adapt due to socio-economic influences. The reality of the nation is moving too quickly for some urban families and schools. Apparently, some students in urban areas do not have the resources to compete with the demands of the nation. There must be a renewal of trust and a new foundation of values and priorities in order to solve the crisis of urban student failure. In order to thrive, urban schools must accept change in order to change their self-persona. Evans (2001) notes that the changes that urban schools must make in order to

thrive will not be natural or normal. It is natural for schools to be resistant to change. All educational stakeholders must be willing to make the investment in order to change their own minds about education, to create a pleasant and conducive environment to learning (Evans, 2001). Students' and teachers' competence and confidence is often challenged by the poor outside perspectives and decisions of stakeholders, which in result lead to a perpetual cycle of failure.

The atmosphere of a school has to be one that supports caring and support. Littky and Grabelle (2004) surmised that schools must create an atmosphere in which all people are valued. Littky and Grabelle (2004) proposed that many educators are challenged with the task of becoming more nurturing and supportive of their students. Fun and happiness are important factors in improving school climate and academic success. If teachers and administrators exhibit negative attitudes they have helped to create a barrier to a peaceful and serene school environment (Littky & Grabelle, 2004). Urban schools must morph into places where everyone is safe, valued, and want to attend in order to reach academic growth.

Teacher Quality

In order to solve the crisis of failing students, especially in urban areas, the federal government and state have adopted policies to guarantee credibility and accountability towards educator and student academic success. The state and federal governments are urging and creating policies to ensure that districts and/or schools hire quality teachers. Rockoff (2004) infers that policy makers have placed their faith in teachers improving the educational system by funding programs and initiatives to improve student academic performance. Teachers are considered part of the answer to the problems with students'

academic performance. Unfortunately, there has not been enough credible data and/or

evidence to suggest that federal and state policy and/or criteria are capable of identifying

quality teachers. Teacher quality is driven by elements that are often very difficult to

measure. Studies and research that has been conducted indicate that teacher credentials

do not determine if students will accomplish positive academic achievement. Although

studies and research indicate that teacher credentials are irrelevant in deciding whether or

not students will be successful in the classroom, people outside of the educational

community, such as policy makers, believe that teacher credentials impact student

achievement (Rockoff, 2003). Recently, states were required to submit a plan to the

United States Department of Education. The plan was to ensure that all districts received

an equal share of highly qualified teachers (Rockoff, 2003). Highly qualified teachers are

teachers that have mastered a teacher preparation program after the completion of a

bachelor's degree and/or have passed a state test in a specific area of education. States, in

collaboration with schools, have a duty to ensure that urban students have access to the

same physical resources, including teachers that any other district has. In order to

ascertain that districts are "playing fair" the state has developed a data tracking system to

ensure that urban districts have a fair amount, although unequal of highly qualified

teachers compared to other schools that have more highly qualified teachers.

Race to the Top

Many educators' world is filled with complex issues that derive inside and outside

of the classroom (Donovan, 2010). "As education professionals, our world is filled with

the challenges of complex policy issues, new best practices in curriculum, instruction and

technology use, and an array of acronyms that color our conversations" (Donovan, 2010,

37

p. 1). Some people that are not inside of the educational "bubble" are uninterested in the purposes behind Race to the Top and believe that it undermines the success and happiness of students' education. "Community members want to make sure students have the knowledge and skills necessary for success in an increasingly competitive work life" (Donovan, 2010, p. 1).

Under the Race to the Top initiative, teachers will be evaluated based on test scores, there will be an increase in the number of charter schools, and quicker routes to teachers' attainment of teacher licensure (Sawchuk, 2009). Under the Race to the Top initiatives. schools will have tighter goals, yet states and districts will have more flexibility to achieve reforms (Sawchuk, 2009). The National Education Association unions fought the No Child Left Behind mandates, and now have to face the reforms of the Race to the Top initiatives, which union members argue are unrealistic and impractical (Sawchuk, 2009).

Considering the environment in which urban schools operate, it is not surprising to see that many new teachers are not fighting for positions within urban areas. Urban areas are usually characterized as having high crime and limited resources. Due to this fact, urban students are disproportionately taught by less qualified teachers. The academic achievement of students in urban areas is dependent on the teacher that urban students are assigned (Sawchuk, 2009).

An urban school setting creates many challenges that prove difficult for veteran and novice teachers alike. Rushton (2004) writes that reflective practices help to foster best teaching practices. Research has rarely captured the perspective or voice of urban students (Rushton, 2004). Milner (2010) found that colleges and universities must

prepare student teachers for diverse populations while influencing the attitudes and best teaching practices of student teachers. Rushton (2004) implies that student teachers generally have a negative attitude about teaching in the inner city schools. Teachers' lack of empathy regarding the personal histories and occurrences of students' lives reflects in the products of poor novice teachers and academically failing students (Rushton, 2004).

According to Rockoff (2004, the type of teacher that an urban student has significantly affects academic potential and/or achievement. The qualifications of a teacher do not necessarily rest within his/her credentials. The collegiality, drive, and willingness of a teacher to ensure that his/her students are successful are associated with urban students' academic achievements. Providing students with clear objectives and expectations will increase student academic achievement. If a student understands the teacher's goals and expectations, the student will succeed academically.

Most stakeholders presume years of experience correlate with students' academic success. Teacher quality has been associated with level of experience. Rockoff (2003) infers that during the first five years of teaching is when teachers thrive and contribute significantly to students' learning. Teachers who are new to the field often yield positive experiences in reference to student perspectives and/or achievement (Rockoff, 2004). Yet, within the first few years of teaching in an urban school, some new teachers leave the field of education altogether. How well a student performs in class depends upon the relationship between the student and the teacher.

Parental Illiteracy

Parental literacy has a great impact on student literacy and academic success. As far back as the 1980s, educational researchers like Auerbach (1989) explain that as more

and more educational stakeholders realize the importance of literacy, programs have been developed in schools. Jerder (2009) states, "Parents with poor reading or comprehension skills lack the verbal and written skills to effectively advocate for their children. That also affects the home environment in a negative way" (p. 1). Jerder (2009) concludes that a parents' inability to read and write creates a perpetual cycle of illiteracy.

Usually parents that cannot read and write are unable to monitor and create mutual relationships of trust and respect amongst teachers. Jerder (2009) writes that parental illiteracy directly affects the relationships amongst teachers, parents, and students, which affect the academic success of students. When parents have poor literacy and reading skills it becomes difficult for them to communicate with their children or to read to them, as they fear that their children will think they are 'stupid' (Jerder, 2009). When children enter early education programs or the public school system, parents are unable to take an active role in performing the necessary at home and school related tasks that will support their child's educational development. Parental participation in a child's learning process is critical, as a parent is the child's first and most influential teacher and role model. Illiterate parents do not have the motivational experiences to inspire their children to read (Jerder, 2009). The author states, "They cannot pass on that wonder or enjoyment of books and reading to their children." Parental illiteracy subconsciously promotes the message to the children of illiterate parents that reading is not important (Jerder, 2009). He states, "those children often do not like to read and do not see why reading is such a big deal" (Jerder, 2009, p. 2). Once the child falls behind in school due to reading problems or a dislike of reading, the potential exists for that student to become illiterate and drop out of school without graduating from high school. The environment of

illiteracy is perpetuated when those young adults have children. The impact of parental literacy has a huge impact on the attitudes and success of students. It is just as important to focus on parental literacy as student literacy (Jerder, 2009).

Imitation is one of the first teaching strategies that all children adopt. Fullan (2007) infers that whether parents are capable or not, they are their child's first teacher. McConnell (2010) found that imitation and modeling often play a large role in a child's love of or disinterest in books. Children who live in homes with books, who regularly see parents, grandparents, and other caretakers engaged in reading books, magazines, and newspapers are more likely to pick up books, pretend to read, or ask for a story to be read to them than other children. Yet still, the National Institute for Literacy (NIL, 2009) estimates that only 46 percent of parents read to their kindergarten age children every day. McConnell (2010) proposes that parents that cannot read automatically place their children at a disadvantage. Macleod (1995) submits that middle class families have the resources to ensure that their children are able to read. African-American children understand that they are at a disadvantage and therefore develop the attitude that they will not learn and succeed (Macleod, 1995). Mikulecky (1996) noted that parents that read to their children promote complex language skills, home-school support, and student self-esteem. The success of a student greatly depends upon a parent's ability to read (Mikulecky, 1996).

Chapter III

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to discover and examine ways in which external and internal educational factors affect the success and self-perceptions of sixth to eighth grade, Title I, African-American students in an urban school community. A two-phase sequential mixed method approach was used. Creswell (2009) suggests that the researcher do the following: In such studies, within the first phase, data are collected within the form of NJASK test scores and surveys. In the second phase data are collected from observations, open-ended (written) interviews, and artifacts, which will help to provide substantial meaning to the data.

Research Design Method

This study used a mixed method design. The mixed method sequential explanatory research approach has been utilized to determine how external and internal factors such as parental involvement, the community, and school morale impact urban students' academic achievement. The rationale for using a mixed methods design is to give a complete understanding of the phenomenon of the study; neither quantitative and/or qualitative data alone may be sufficient enough for the study. The research design enables the researcher to access the needs, document steps, inquire, and analyze data in order to suggest possible solutions for complex problems. The research design enables the researcher to examine educational issues systematically using research techniques.

Ferrance (2000) surmised that educators create successful solutions when they are able to resolve their organizational problems.

Quantitative data are data in numerical form. Examples of quantitative data are, but not limited to test scores, surveys, and statistics (Sukamolson, n.d.). In quantitative research, researchers collect numerical data (Sukamolson, n.d.). Quantitative data are particularly used to explain a social phenomenon (Sukamolson, n.d.). Quantitative data may also be collected in a survey form to ascertain participant subjects' attitudes and/or beliefs (Sukamolson, n.d.). In a quantitative approach, a researcher may isolate variables to determine a frequency in which to investigate reliability and results.

The qualitative research approach usually consists of researchers attempting to provide explanation and/or provide an in depth meaning of a phenomenon through the use of observations, artifacts, interviews (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). The authors imply that qualitative research may be more holistic. For the purpose of the study, the research questions were designed to provide insight into experiences felt by individual persons within their lived experiences. When conducting a study involving individuals lived experiences the researcher must bracket themes to describe the essence of the study (Creswell et al., 2007).

Rationale and Assumptions of Research Method

The researcher conducted research using a sequential mixed method research design. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) suggest that using a mixed method approach ensures that the researcher is able to address issues within the study that cannot be addressed using either quantitative or qualitative data. Creswell (2009) writes that when using sequential mixed method approaches, that the researchers use qualitative data to

analyze quantitative data collection. Within the study, I collected quantitative data through the form of student NJASK test scores as well as surveys. Following the collection of testing data scores, observations, interviews, and artifacts were used to further inform the study.

According to Creswell (2011) using a mixed method design strengthens validity, diminishes the weaknesses found solely within quantitative or qualitative research, enables multi-level analysis, and combines the depth and breathe found within quantitative and/or qualitative information. While using a mixed method sequential approach, the researcher is able to use quantitative data to strengthen qualitative data. The quantitative data allows for controlled calculations and based on those statistical calculations, I provided a narrative explanation derived from numerical trends. Qualitative data supported with qualitative data are flexible and provide in-depth understanding of numerical trends. Due to the nature of the study, I was able to provide an explanation based upon both quantitative and qualitative results.

Research Question

The essential purpose of this study is to discover the external and internal educational factors that influence urban middle school students' self-perceptions and academic achievement with an emphasis on high achieving minority students. The research question is as follows:

1. What are the ways in which urban educational stakeholders can overcome and/or encourage external and internal factors that influence academic success and self-perceptions of students?

1a. Is there a relationship between social and financial capital that influences urban student's self-perceptions and academic achievement?

1b. Do the behaviors and/or attitudes of stakeholders regarding students' social and financial capital have an influence on student achievement and self-perceptions?

Participants and Sampling Methods

Location of study. The study took place within an urban educational community located in Atlantic County, New Jersey. The study was conducted within this area due to the fact that over 85% of the school population are Title I recipients, receive free or reduced lunch, have failed the state tests three years consecutively, and are overwhelmingly African American. In addition, the majority of students within the selected population is reading below level and has failed state standardized tests. During the study I was a participant observer. Due to the nature of the study and the time required, the study was conducted at my work place. Approval to conduct the study was received prior to beginning data collection (Appendix A).

Participants. The participants were seven sixth to eighth grade, Title I, African-American students, seven parents, four teachers, one community representative, and one administrator. All participants signed a letter of consent prior to participating in the study (Appendices B & C). In order to effectively conduct the research, I chose to use stratification and single sampling to select students within the population that have specific characteristics that relate to the research questions that inform the study. When using stratification, the researcher purposefully selects members within a population that

share specific characteristics. The researcher had access and/or had selected specific names from a population utilizing single sample procedures (Creswell, 2009).

Data Collection Methods

The researcher used student test scores and surveys followed by observations and open-ended interviews to provide a source of informative data in order to develop and/or enhance interventions. Based on the data analysis, the researcher examined recurring themes in order to determine findings and solutions to the lived experiences of urban educational stakeholders. During Phase I, the NJASK test scores were cross-checked by colleagues and administration. The surveys were conducted based upon the results of the test scores in order to examine specific attitudes and behaviors. Creswell (2009) found that specific attitudinal surveys are able to measure the attitudes and behaviors of participants. Throughout Phase II of the research, the researcher conducted weekly observations of participants and cross-checked interpretations of participants through colleagues. The open-ended interviews of participants were conducted throughout December and the end of February.

Instrumentation

Within Phase I of the study a survey was constructed based upon the test scores of the stratified and single sampled population (Appendix D). "A survey design provides quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (Creswell, 2009, p. 145). Students completed a survey created by the researcher during their non-instructional time. Creswell (2009) states, "Using this survey, researchers can create their own surveys quickly using custom templates and post them on Web sites or email them for participants to complete"

(Creswell, 2009, p. 145). The survey has been offered in order to provide available

accommodation in reference to time for participants as well as quick results for the

researcher.

Following the examination of test data, once students completed the survey,

participants that met research criteria were interviewed. The researcher examined

multiple levels, on the first level the researcher conducted interviews and also collected

qualitative interviews in order to further discover aspects of individuals' lived

experiences. Following the survey, the researcher created tables (Appendix E) reflecting

the results (Creswell, 2009). "When using a survey the researcher should report how

these results answered the research question or hypothesis" (Creswell, 2009, p. 153).

Survey results may provide an explanation for results and should be supported by studies

found within the Literature Review. Findings from surveys and/or quantitative data

should help the researcher to expand research or improve educational practices (Creswell,

2009).

Data Management and Analysis

Data are essential tools used to analyze research issues. The data collected from

test scores, a survey, interviews, observations, and student artifacts will allow an

opportunity for change within the organization. Creswell (2009) notes that researchers

examine multiple levels, on the first level the researcher should conduct interviews and

also collect qualitative interviews in order to further discover aspects of lived

experiences.

Throughout the first phase of the study I reviewed NJASK scores and conducted

surveys to determine respondents' attitudes and/or perceptions as they relate to the nature

of the study. Following the review and analysis of quantitative data, participants were observed and artifacts gathered in the form of pictures/photos, and/or observations in order to determine consistent themes throughout the study. A researcher log was created in order to construct relevant themes related to the study.

Observations. Throughout the study I observed and collected field notes of the students, teachers, and administrative participants weekly. In order determine variables and/or themes throughout the study, the researcher must conduct observations in order to analyze the behaviors and attitudes of the participants. The researcher cross-checked information gathered from interviews with colleagues in order to ascertain various perspectives and validity. Within observations the researcher provided descriptive and reflective notes. Observations consisted of the following: portraits of the participants, a reconstruction of dialogue, a description of the physical setting, accounts of particular events, or activities (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) finds that there is reflection within observations, such as, "the researcher's personal thoughts, such as speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices" (Creswell, 2009, p. 182). I have identified the major themes and patterns that needed to be addressed within the organization.

Interviews. The researcher conducted open-ended response interviews with participants as needed. The last interviews consisted of an informal follow-up interview with parent and student, and teacher interviews. Depending upon the availability of participants, the researcher conducted phone and/or face-to-face interviews. Interviews help to provide views and opinions from the perspectives of the participants, which help to add validity to the study (Creswell, 2009). The researcher consistently analyzed data in

order to determine recurrent themes and significant statements that added to the essence of the study. Creswell (2009) states, "I urge researchers to look at qualitative data analysis as following steps from the specific to the general and as involving multiple levels of analysis" (Creswell, 2009, p. 184).

Documents. The researcher reviewed dialogues of board and teacher meetings in order to determine the relationship of attitudes and behaviors as related to the research questions. The issues within school boards often have an effect on how well schools are governed and/or managed. Issues discussed in school board meetings also related to the resources that Green Wave School was allotted. The researcher was able to access board meetings/minutes through the Green Wave union representative and/or the Green Wave district website. Creswell (2009) also implies that the researcher cross-check information with colleagues in order to determine various perspectives to add to the clarity and validity of the study.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Throughout the study, the researcher acquired assistance through peers and colleagues in order to obtain various perspectives that inform the study. Creswell (2009) suggests that throughout a study, peers and/or colleagues consistently review various forms of data to further inform the study. Within the first phase of quantitative data collection, I reviewed data results with building representatives in order to ensure that the data were properly analyzed and to diminish the threat to validity within the study. Researchers should "identify the potential threats to validity that may arise in your study" (Creswell, 2009, p. 164). Within the qualitative component of the study and/or second

phase, I cross-checked data with colleagues in order to ascertain various perspectives and themes within the study.

Prior to conducting the study I obtained IRB approval and permission to study participants through the Green Wave Board of Education, administration, and parents. In order to ensure trustworthiness and validity prior to interviewing participant students, parents were given interview protocols to review a week prior to the interview. Before conducting surveys with student participants, parents were mailed surveys prior to students completing the surveys at Green Wave School. The participants within the study were notified of the nature of the study and its intent, which is to further inform middle school practices and to institute programs that will further service the needs of students.

Role of Researcher

Throughout this study I was a full participant. I had contact with members within the Green Wave district for over nine years prior to the study. The study has enabled me as the researcher to analyze the quantitative data and qualitative data derived from the study through a scholarly lens.

Due to the political climate in which the research was conducted, I conveyed to participants that the purpose of the study was to possibly enable programs and/or reforms to assist students that are products of parents with low socio-economic backgrounds and to measure how this might affect students' academic success and self-perceptions.

Ethical considerations. In order to conduct an effective study, I had to obtain full access to students initially through administration and parents. "It is important to gain access to research or archival sites by seeking the approval of gatekeepers, individuals at the research site that provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to be

done" (Creswell, 2009, p. 178). Therefore, weeks before the study was to take place I discussed with the Green Wave site administrator that I would be conducting a study, the nature of the study, and permission to conduct the study. The site administrator agreed to allow me to conduct the study as long as I was open in relation to the type of study that would be conducted with participants.

Throughout this study I completed various observations, and interviews on site in order to answer research questions and further inform the study. The study was completed openly with the support of staff, parents, community members, and students. The idea or nature of the study was to discover the impact of parental illiteracy and poverty on students' academic success and self-perceptions. I was fortunate to have taught many of the siblings of the participants, therefore I was able to pre-establish a relationship with parent and student participants. At the end of the study, the school administration was provided the dissertation in order to further inform best K-8 practices.

Chapter IV

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Introduction

The primary purpose of the study was to identify possible explanations for the dismal failure of minority students in middle school urban school settings by examining the external and internal educational factors that impact students' academic success and self-perceptions. Many educational reformers have, and continue to attempt to address the issue of failure amongst minority youth in America (Darling-Hammond, 2010; NCES, 2010). Statistically, minority students in urban areas do not do as well as White students (NCES, 2010). Throughout the years Green Wave School has been notified of disproportionate failure amongst minority youth and has been given the directive to focus on instructional strategies, primarily in the area of Language Arts Literacy, to improve its failing test scores. Strategy after instructional strategy such as prompting teachers how to write student centered objectives, after-school programs that focused on test taking skills, after school programs that focused on teaching teachers how to implement literacy skills and test skills, and after school homework programs were introduced with little buy-in from educational stakeholders. The majority of students in grades six through eight failed state tests, and the goals and objectives of the school and district have not been met.

Many students in urban areas fail to succeed due to external and internal educational factors such as, but not limited to, some of the values and beliefs that are respected in the home as well as social constraints addressed by peers (Ogbu, 2004). One of the goals of the study is to initiate partnerships internally and externally within the

Green Wave School community that will promote positive academic success and self-perceptions within the school community to increase student NJASK test scores and urban students' self-perceptions. It is a social norm for many students to not achieve in minority areas due to cultural conflicts (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Many students that attempt to achieve are often tormented and accused of acting too White and more may actually prefer to fail than be ridiculed by peers (Ogbu, 2004). If students continue to fail state tests, the Green Wave School (like many other schools that share similar characteristics) will be in danger of state take over.

Over the years many students have failed to meet state and federal objectives three years consecutively. This study addresses the failure of minority students in urban areas yet highlights the achievement, characteristics, and behaviors of urban African-American middle school students that live under similar conditions and social constraints of their peers, yet passed the state Language Arts Literacy section of the test three years consecutively. High achieving students were highlighted and targeted in order to provide an explanation for specific behaviors and attitudes practiced that enabled them to succeed and have a positive self-perception. In the quantitative phase of the study, state test score and surveys were examined and explored through a qualitative explanation based on observations and open-ended interviews taken during the course of the study. Within the qualitative phase of the study there was a focus on minority students and other stakeholders' actions and behaviors to provide a qualitative explanation for test score results and urban middle school students self-perceptions. A sequential explanatory mixed-method approach was used to discover the impact of internal and external factors on urban students' academic achievement with a focus on high achieving students.

The research questions that guided this explanatory mixed method design were:

1. What are the ways in which urban educational stakeholders can overcome and/or encourage external and internal factors that influence academic success and self-perceptions of students?

    1a. Is there a relationship between social and financial capital that influences urban students self-perceptions and academic achievement?

    1b. Do the behaviors and/or attitudes of stakeholders regarding students' social and financial capital have an influence on student achievement and self-perceptions?

This chapter contains a summary of the population and sample, collection instruments, data gathering methods and findings, and data analysis. The findings were organized to address the research and sub research questions. The initial research question was addressed to discover causal relationships between student test scores and internal and external factors in the community using test scores and surveys. The Research questions a and b were used to address the qualitative phase of the research, which was to provide an explanation for academic success and self-perceptions within an urban middle school community which is predominately African American. During the qualitative phase, open-ended interviews were conducted as well as classroom observations. Tables were also used in the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study to enable the reader to conceptualize the themes and issues that arose throughout the study.

Population and Sample

      The population for this study consisted of teachers in the middle school grades seven to eight, African-American middle school students, parents of high achieving African-American urban middle school students, a community member, and an administrator. The subjects selected to participate in the study were chosen using single sampling and stratification approaches. The subjects had specific characteristics that helped to inform the study (Creswell, 2009). After receiving permission from the school administrator, I evaluated test scores to determine the success rate, and distributed surveys to all students in the middle school, grades six to eight. From the sample size of 205 students, 74 percent of the students participated in the survey. Those subjects not completing the survey failed to do so due to absenteeism. Of the sample size of 12 teachers, four elected to participate in the interviews. Those teachers electing not to participate in the interviews agreed to be observed per the request of the building principal.

Data Collection Instruments

      NJASK State Tests. All students in New Jersey, grades three to eight and 11 are required to complete a state assessment as a component of No Child Left Behind legislation. The NJASK (New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge) was used to measure student achievement. (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This assessment was used to guide the study to determine the internal and external factors that affect overall student perceptions and academic achievement (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Data were collected to determine how well middle school students performed on the NJASK test three years consecutively. According to the New Jersey Department of Education (2011)

one of the purposes of the NJASK was to measure students' academic preparedness for the following grade, and enabled comparability of measurement across research populations over time. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2011; Tashakori & Teddlie, 2003). Data from the test were collected over a period of three consecutive years and are longitudinal. The data provided the researcher with information regarding the percentage of students at or below the proficient or passing score, as determined by the state. The researcher gathered data of students that passed the NJASK in Language Arts Literacy three years consecutively in order to add to the nature of the study in determining appropriate successful behavior and attitudes in the internal and external educational community that affect academic success and self-perceptions of urban middle school students. The test data allowed the researcher to rank the priority needs of students as determined by test scores. The test was administered to students during school years 2008 to 2009, 2009 to 2010, and 2010 to 2011 by licensed highly-qualified teachers. Data, indicating how high achieving students passed the NJASK three years consecutively during the years 2008 to 2011, are also provided. Based on the testing data, over 50 percent of the Middle School population failed to achieve proficiency in Language Arts Literacy, which is considered failing according to the State criteria (New Jersey Department of Education, 2011).

Survey. Student participants completed a survey to measure their attitudes and beliefs (Barco, Mira, & Carroza, 2007). The Likert scale survey was adapted from Barco et al. (2007), *An Evaluation of Opinions Concerning Immigration and Multculturality in the School for Teacher Training.* The survey was designed to measure student attitudes and behaviors related to self-perceptions and academic achievement. The use of the

56

Likert scale enabled the researcher to highlight specific if applicable social, cognitive, and linguistic factors that lend themselves to the nature of the study (Todd & Pierce, 1998). The researcher modified the format and content of the survey to meet the needs of the study in order to focus on the internal and external factors that influence urban African-American student academic success and self-perceptions. Cross-sectional data were collected using the survey instrument at one time. The survey was measured on a five point Likert scale ranging from one to five: true, mostly true, unsure, slightly true, and not at all true. Over 85 percent of the students that completed the survey were Title I recipients and therefore met the criteria for the study. The software *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS), Student Edition Version (2011) was used to measure the frequencies of the survey results. Based on the variables identified in the survey, statistical evidence was generated to determine the likelihood of behaviors and attitudes of the respondents. There were expert peer debriefings in order to develop expert judgment as related to the nature of the study and the creation of the survey. The survey results were tested using variable frequencies to determine the overall attitudes and behaviors as they related to the nature of the study.

Interview protocol. The interviews were conducted with Title I African-American urban students and parents to provide an explanation for the internal and external factors that impact student academic success and self-perceptions. The standard open-ended interview allowed for consistency across participant's responses (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The interviews were conducted in person or over the phone and lasted approximately one hour. The researcher guided the interview questions. The questions were framed to determine a respondent's behavior and attitudes concerning internal and

external educational factors that contribute to student self-perceptions and academic

success. Each stakeholder group (student, parents, teacher, and community

member/administrator) had different interview questions; the questions were framed from

the major research question.

      Observations. The researcher observed participants in natural and structured

environments that related to the nature of the study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The

researcher informed the group of the purpose of the study, therefore taking on the role of

a participant observer. A field journal was taken and codes were used to add to the study.

The observations provided a clear indication of the behaviors, attitudes, social norms,

formal policies, climate of the school, and overall lived experiences of participants. The

researcher was able to record information as it was revealed and had a firsthand account

as it related to the study (Creswell, 2003).

      Key data sets are represented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Sources of quantitative and qualitative data and significance for inclusion.

Data	Significance	Type	Source
NJASK scores	Student scores for 2008-09; 2009-10; 2010-11 examined to determine proficiency in Reading/Language Arts/Literacy	School records	Quantitative
Surveys	Determine the attitudes and perceptions by frequency of responses	Students and Teachers	Quantitative
Interview Questions	Provide an explanation for success and/or self-perceptions	High achieving Students, teachers, an administrator, parents of high achieving students, and a community member	Qualitative
Observations	Strategies and Perceptions/Attitudes	Students, teachers, administrator, parents, and community member	Qualitative

Data Analysis

Research Question 1 was addressed through the quantitative strand gathered from the use of NJASK data and a survey from school attitudes and perceptions.

Research Question 1. What are the ways in which urban educational

stakeholders can overcome and/or encourage external and internal factors that influence

academic success and self-perceptions of students?

The researcher used results from NJASK scores to determine student academic

success. In the survey, the researcher measured the frequency of responses to determine

the overall attitude and perceptions as they relate to the nature of the study – the external

and internal factors that contribute to urban African-American Middle school students'

academic success and self-perceptions.

Research Questions 1a and 1b were addressed through the qualitative strand and

gathered from open-ended interview responses, observations, and artifacts. The research

questions were:

1a. Is there a relationship between social and financial capital that influences
    urban students' self-perceptions and academic achievement?
1b. Do the behaviors and/or attitudes of stakeholders regarding students' social
    and financial capital have an influence on student achievement and self-
    perceptions?

Qualitative data were gathered to emphasize the nature of the study and the

external and internal factors that contribute to student success and self-perceptions. The

qualitative data added to the experiences of stakeholders. The researcher read through all

respondent data to gain a holistic impression of the study. The researcher coded interview

responses. The coded data were characterized according to frequency and themes. The

coded data were placed in a word processor file and organized according to theme and

frequency of similar characteristic responses.

Findings: Quantitative

In the first phase of the study the NJASK scores and student surveys were used to address Research Question 1: What are the ways in which urban educational stakeholders can overcome and/or encourage external and internal factors that influence academic success and self-perceptions of students?

NJASK test data. According to the New Jersey Department of Education (2011), a score of 200 or higher on the NJASK determines academic proficiency in Language Arts Literacy. Based on the overall test score results of students in current grades six through eight, the majority of students failed the NJASK tests. The data clearly indicate that there have been few academic gains since year 2008 at Green Wave School (Table 2).

Table 2.

2010-2011 Grade 6 NJASK Language Arts Literacy Proficiency Results

New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK6) LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY	Location	Year	Number Tested	Proficiency Percentages		
				Partial	Proficient	Advanced
Student Population	School	2010-2011 Grade 6	58	74.1%	25.9%	0.0%
		2009-2010 Grade 5	74	68.9%	31.1%	0.0%
		2008-2009 Grade 4	55	47.3%	52.7%	0.0%
Student Population	District	2010-2011 Grade 6	393	58.0%	41.0%	1.0%
		2009-2010 Grade 5	400	56.0%	43.5%	0.5%
		2008-2009 Grade 4	358	54.2%	45.3%	0.6%
Student Population	State	2010-2011 Grade 6	103,342	33.3%	59.4%	7.3%
		2009-2010 Grade 5	102,281	34.5%	57.9%	7.6%
		2008-2009 Grade 4	101,751	29.9%	62.9%	7.2%

Table 2 shows NJASK scores for Green Wave students in grade 6 for 2010-2011 and their scores in grade 5 and 4. District and state scores are provided by way of comparison. Overall, Green Wave students consistently scored in the Partial Proficient-failing-range. Based on the researchers role as a participant observer throughout the course of the study it was found that teachers in the school were encouraged by the administration to routinely practice NJASK testing strategies. The Green Wave school provided after school resources focused on testing skills without a measurable impact.

Table 3 shows NJASK scores for Green Wave students in grade 7 for 2010-2011 and their scores in grades 6 and 5. District and state scores are provided for comparison overall. Green Wave students consistently scored in the Partially Proficient-failing-range. Students that scored Partially Proficient on the NJASK three years consecutively in Language Arts were encouraged to participate in a mandatory cohort that started in 2009-2010 and focused on NJASK test taking skills. Yet, despite the data, many students refused to participate after-school in an effort to enhance their NJASK testing skills. Even throughout the school day, many students were unable to master NJASK skills that their teachers focused on per encouragement of the Green Wave school administration. In addition, after reviewing students' report cards and other school artifacts, over half of the Green Wave middle school students that scored partially proficient were reading one to three years below their reading grade level prior to taking the NJASK tests as measured by local instruments and teacher generated report cards. These data were not included as part of this analysis as they were considered to be too subjective.

Table 3.

2010-2011 Grade 7 NJASK Language Arts Literacy Proficiency Results

NJASK7 LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY	Location	Year	Number Tested	Proficiency Percentages		
				Partial	Proficient	Advanced
Student Population	School	2010-2011 Grade 7	97	69.1%	30.9%	0.0%
		2009-2010 Grade 6	75	58.7%	40.0%	1.3%
		2008-2009 Grade 5	65	58.5%	41.5%	0.0%
Student Population	District	2010-2011 Grade 7	396	60.6%	38.4%	1.0%
		2009-2010 Grade 6	349	56.2%	39.5%	4.3%
		2008-2009 Grade 5	346	47.1%	49.4%	3.5%
Student Population	State	2010-2011 Grade 7	103,368	36.7%	51.0%	12.3%
		2009-2010 Grade 6	102,516	30.5%	51.9%	17.6%
		2008-2009 Grade 5	102,020	27.6%	54.1%	18.3%

Table 4 shows NJASK scores for Green Wave students in Grade 8 for 2010-2011 and their scores in grade 7 and 6. District and state scores are provided for comparison. Overall, Green Wave students consistently scored in the Partially Proficient-failing-range. Students and parents were informed of previous NJASK test scores and were encouraged to allow students to participate in after-school activities that focused on NJASK skills in order to promote an increase in student NJASK test scores. Despite the overall notifications of student NJASK test results, many students argued that they would not attend after-school programs if they were not retained in grade for failing the NJASK. Despite the sentiments of instructional staff that unless students and parents were made accountable for scoring Proficient on the NJASK, students would not practice NJASK testing skills. The views of instructional staff were ignored by administration. The lack of buy-in from parental and student stakeholders contributed to some teachers' negative attitudes and behaviors concerning the NJASK tests.

Table 4.

2010-2011 Grade 8 NJASK Language Arts Literacy Proficiency Results

NJASK8 LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY	Location	Year	Number Tested	Proficiency Percentages		
				Partial	Proficient	Advanced
Student Population	School	2010-2011 Grade 8	70	47.8%	50.7%	1.4%
		2009-2010 Grade 7	67	41.8%	56.7%	1.5%
		2008-2009 Grade 6	74	58.1%	41.9%	0.0%
Student Population	District	2010-2011 Grade 8	355	40.6%	54.8%	4.5%
		2009-2010 Grade7	352	34.7%	59.7%	5.7%
		2008-2009 Grade 6	386	46.6%	51.6%	1.8%
Student Population	State	2010-2011 Grade 8	103,151	17.8%	63.0%	19.1%
		2009-2010 Grade 7	102,168	17.1%	64.4%	18.5%
		2008-2009 Grade 6	103,391	17.5%	71.3%	11.2%

Research Question 1 determined the academic success of students within the school community. The NJASK scores were further used to determine and validate the need for the study. The researcher used data from the study to determine if there was a

relationship between students' academic success and their self-perceptions based on internal and external variables that affect their performance. Schools like Green Wave School with a population that disproportionately fails the NJASK in numbers lower than students in the state and district are at risk of losing funding, and with new State legislation promised, teachers losing their positions.

High achieving students. Tables 2, 3, and 4 document that over half of the Green Wave middle school students scored partially proficient in Language Arts Literacy on the NJASK for three consecutive years. Still, there are students within the middle school population that have scored Proficient in Language Arts Literacy (200 and over) on the NJASK Language Arts Literacy for three consecutive years, despite sharing similar social economic conditions as compared to their disproportionately failing peers. The students that passed the NJASK state assessment have exhibited positive and consistent social and academic behaviors throughout the 2008-2011 academic school years. These students are listed in Tables 6, 7, and 8. Table 5 identifies nine Green Wave students in grades six, seven, and eight that passed the NJASK three consecutive years and whose parents allowed them to participate in the qualitative strand of this study.

Table 5.

High Achieving Study Participants' Scores

Participant	Grade in 2011	2011 score	2010 score	2009 score
A	Six	219	230	244
B	Seven	238	231	238
C	Seven	234	245	215
D	Seven	211	219	234
E	Seven	200	216	234
F	Seven	241	227	238
G	Eight	212	226	222
H	Eight	240	226	200
I	Eight	218	205	209

The New Jersey ASK proficient score is 200 or better. The table includes only those students whose parents agreed to allow their participation in the study and lends itself to the qualitative strand of the mixed method study.

Throughout the mixed method sequential study, nine students and their parents agreed to participate in the study. The students that participated in the study maintain an overall grade point average of a 75% or better; have passed the NJASK three years consecutively; have a good rapport with all teachers and peers; participate in after-school instructional and non-instructional programs; and maintain a consistent pattern of positive

behaviors and attitudes that are socially and academically acceptable. One of the purposes of the study was to provide strategies for educational stakeholders to follow in order to develop a student that may potentially mimic the successes of the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students that agreed to participate in the study and have had consistent success in Green Wave middle school. If the students that agreed to participate in the study, along with other high achieving students, are able to succeed, then other students of the Green Wave middle school may also have a chance to succeed.

Research Question 1 was used to determine the academic success of students within the school community. The data collected from the NJASK in Language Arts Literacy as listed in Table 5 passed the State tests three years consecutively and are considered high achieving students. All of the high achieving students were African-American, representing the dominant ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

Table 6.

High Achieving Grade Six Scores

Participant	2011 Grade 6	2010 Grade 5	2009 Grade 4
1	219	230	244
2	246	250	219
3	238	219	207
4	238	225	228
5	234	230	250
6	230	257	219
7	226	206	224
8	223	230	211
9	223	236	204
10	216	219	219
11	216	230	219
12	213	202	219
13	207	210	224
14	207	215	238

Note. New Jersey ASK proficient score is 200 or better. The table includes all students in grade six meeting the criteria.

Of 58 students completing the NJASK in grade six in 2010-2011, 14 (24.1%) were Proficient three consecutive years. All of the sixth grade students that passed the NJASK are motivated individuals. The sixth grade high achieving students are among the few that are consistently working toward improving or enhancing their academic potential. Based upon my observations as a participant observer, many of these sixth grade students stayed after school for help with homework, took advantage of gifted and talented opportunities, and participated in instructional and non-instructional after school programs. The high achieving students rarely were behavioral problems and were considered a "pleasure" to have in class by current and prior teachers. It is also noted that none of the sixth grade students at Green Wave scored Advanced Proficient on the NJASK. Many of the high achieving students reported the difficulty working within a student population that struggled to grasp academic instruction and demonstrated behavioral issues that distracted from the quality of their everyday instructional time.

Table 7.

High Achieving Grade Seven Scores

Participant	2011 Grade 7	2010 Grade 6	2009 Grade 5
1	241	236	231
2	224	211	209
3	224	215	245
4	213	211	219
5	213	219	200
6	210	241	227
7	203	200	216

Note. New Jersey ASK proficient score is 200 or better. The table includes all students in grade seven meeting the criteria.

Of 97 students completing the NJASK in grade seven in 2010-2011, 7 (7.2%) were Proficient three consecutive years. Compared to the state and district data shown in Table 3, students at Green Wave School perform disproportionately lower than their state and district student counterparts.

Table 8.

High Achieving Grade Eight Scores

Participant	2011 Grade 8	2010 Grade 7	2009 Grade 6
1	218	205	209
2	228	237	219
3	212	226	222
4	228	215	219
5	240	223	252
6	228	205	226
7	206	200	209
8	209	205	209
9	212	223	222
10	209	220	230
11	209	220	219
12	209	237	234

New Jersey ASK proficient score is 200 or better. The table includes all students in grade eight meeting the criteria.

Of 70 students completing the NJASK in grade eight in 2010-2011, 12 (17.1%) were Proficient three consecutive years. One of the purposes of the study is to determine and therefore motivate other students to mimic the behaviors and attitudes of

students that have successfully passed the NJASK tests three years consecutively. Based on observer participant observations of parent teacher conferences, students that perform well have parents that are aware of students' strengths and weaknesses and that take advantage of the available resources offered at the school. Many of the afterschool instructional programs are free because 85% of Green Wave student population is Title I or living at or below the poverty level. The current high achieving eighth grade students are self-motivated and are genuinely concerned based upon their drive to maintain good grades, seek help when applicable, and participate in school functions to succeed. Even now, the current eighth grade high achieving students have already begun researching colleges and universities to develop a plan for their futures; some have realistic goals and even a financial plan already in place to achieve their secondary goals. Table 9 summarizes the number of students at Green Wave that were Proficient on the NJASK three consecutive years for grades six, seven, and eight.

Table 9.

Students by Grade Scoring Proficient on NJASK

2010-11 Grade	# Tested 2010-11	# Passed three consecutive years – 2008-09; 09-10; 10-11	% Passed three consecutive years – 2008-09; 09-10; 10-11
Six	58	14	25.9%
Seven	97	7	7.2%
Eight	70	12	17.1%

Survey data. The survey was distributed to all middle school students during their non-instructional time, the advisory period. The survey questions added to the quantitative strand of the study and measured the attitudes, behaviors, and self-perceptions of students. The researcher was unable to obtain the specific responses of high achieving students in grades sixth to eighth due to the anonymity of the survey and overall nature of the study.

Table 10.

Survey Question 1: Teachers Support Students

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	63	41.7%
Mostly True	62	41.1%
Unsure	10	6.6%
Slightly True	11	7.3%
Not True	5	3.3%
Total	151	100%

Table 10 suggests that 82.8% of the student respondents believe it to be True or Mostly True that teachers support students. Based upon the researcher's ability to act as a participant observer, it was observed that although students stated that they received support from their teachers, many of the students rarely participated in after school instructional and non-instructional programs. In addition, based on observations and student artifacts, there were many instances throughout the course of the study in which

students exhibited disrespectful or inappropriate behavior that posed as a barrier for positive academic success.

Table 11.

Survey Question 2: Students Exhibit Positive Behavior

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	12	8.0%
Mostly True	37	24.8%
Unsure	32	21.5%
Slightly True	53	35.6%
Not True	15	10.1%
Total	149	100%

Table 11 indicates that 32.8% of the student respondents believe it to be True or Mostly True that students exhibit positive behavior. Based on participant observations, many instructors complained that they were unable to provide quality instruction due to constant disruptions in class. Also based upon responses in survey question 1, (see Table 10) many students responded that teachers provided adequate support in the school. This was among many "disconnects" discovered in analyzing the survey questions.

Table 12.

Survey Question 3: I Enjoy Coming to School Each Day

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	51	33.6%
Mostly True	40	26.3%
Unsure	11	7.2%
Slightly True	25	16.4%
Not True	25	16.4%
Total	152	100%

Table 12 shows that 59.9% of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that they enjoyed coming to school each day. This finding, when examined beside that of Question 2 (Table 11) shows some inconsistency. It may be implied that students responded based on what they perceived as socially acceptable responses, or due to the nature of their age group, where instances of socially inacceptable behaviors are the norm.

Table 13.

Survey Question 4: The Student Work-Load is Challenging

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	28	18.7%
Mostly True	34	22.7%
Unsure	41	37.3%
Slightly True	30	20.0%
Not True	17	1.3%
Total	150	100%

Table 13 shows that 41.4% of respondents believe it to be True or Mostly True that the work load is challenging at Green Wave. Based on participant observations, teachers throughout the course of the study were encouraged to focus on testing strategies and rigorous instruction through the monitoring of lesson plans, workshops, and faculty meetings. Given the low test scores as reported in Tables 2, 3, and 4, one would expect students to consider the work to be more challenging than reported. It was unsurprising to learn based on respondents that students believed the work-load was challenging at Green Wave School. In addition, many students scored Partially Proficient on the NJASK Language Arts Literacy, which may imply that the coursework and NJASK may be above their level (see Tables 2-4).

Table 14.

Survey Question 5: My Parents Take Me to Museums, Zoos, Parks, and the Theater

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	54	35.5%
Mostly True	30	19.7%
Unsure	8	5.3%
Slightly True	34	22.4%
Not True	26	17.1%
Total	152	100%

Table 14 shows that 55.2% of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that parents take their children to museums, zoos, parks, and the theater. Based upon observations as a participant observer it is believed that students responded to what they perceived would be socially acceptable responses. In addition, many students associated the theater with a movie theater in contrast to the purposes of the survey question. The theater implies an artistic display such as a drama or opera performance. Many teachers also argued based upon participant observations that students rarely were able to experience enrichment activities such as zoos, museums, parks, and/or the theater due to limited financial resources.

Table 15.

Survey Questions 6: My School Provides Various Field Trips Throughout the Year

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	39	25.7%
Mostly True	18	11.8%
Unsure	32	21.1%
Slightly True	38	25.0%
Not True	25	16.4%
Total	152	100%

Table 15 shows that 37.5% of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that the school provides various field trips throughout the year. As a participant observer it was observed and encouraged by teachers to acknowledge that one of the many purposes of the field trips was to provide enrichment for students, yet based upon funding and student discipline issues many students in the middle school were unable to participate in field trips (see table 12). As a result of discipline issues, some students that may have benefited from school field trips are denied external instructional development opportunities. It is believed that many students responded to the field trip questions based upon previous opportunities in the elementary grades. It was observed that the elementary teachers were able to participate on an average of at least five or more field trips a year.

Table 16.

Survey Question 7: My Family and I Discuss Ways to Ensure That I Get Good Grades

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	113	74.8%
Mostly True	24	15.9%
Unsure	7	4.6%
Slightly True	4	2.7%
Not True	3	2.0%
Total	151	100%

Table 16 indicates that 90.7% of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that their parents discussed ways to ensure good grades. Yet over half of middle school students scored partially proficient on the NJASK reading test (see Tables 2-4*)*. In addition, many students demonstrated negative behavior in classes (see Table 12). Based on participant observations, due to high behavior disturbances many students were unable to receive quality instruction during instructional time.

Table 17.

Survey Question 8: I Am Concerned About the State Tests.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	93	61.2%
Mostly True	27	17.9%
Unsure	13	8.6%
Slightly True	8	5.3%
Not True	10	6.6%
Total	151	100%

Table 17 indicates that 79.1% of students believe it to be True or Mostly true that they are concerned about the NJASK test. Yet, many students exhibit behaviors that often distract from everyday classroom instruction (see Table 12). Observations have revealed that teachers regularly discussed the importance of the NJASK, and that test results were distributed to parents and students.

Table 18.

Survey Question 9: Teachers Have clear High Expectations

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	82	54.7%
Mostly True	43	28.7%
Unsure	16	10.6%
Slightly True	7	4.7%
Not True	2	1.3%
Total	150	100%

Table 18 illustrates that 83.4% of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that their teachers have high expectations. The attitudes of respondents support the attitudes that teachers are supportive and that the work-load is challenging (see Tables 11 and 13).

Table 19.

Survey Question 10: Teachers Do Not Like Teaching at This School

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	11	7.4%
Mostly True	9	6.0%
Unsure	38	25.5%
Slightly True	15	10.1%
Not True	76	51.0%
Total	149	100%

Table 19 specifies that only 13.4% of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that teachers do not like teaching at the school. The majority of respondents (61.1%) believe that it is not at all true that teachers do not like teaching at the school; while 25.5% of respondents are unsure if teachers like teaching at Green Wave School. Based on observations, students may believe that teachers like teaching at the school based on the amount of referrals and the general attitude or behaviors exhibited by teachers during instructional and non- instructional time in the presence of teachers. Many students stated that they knew that teachers liked teaching students based on how they were treated or their individual experiences with teachers.

Table 20.

Survey Questions 11: I Do Not Feel Safe at This School

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	10	6.8%
Mostly True	10	6.8%
Unsure	16	10.9%
Slightly True	14	9.5%
Not True	97	66%
Total	147	100%

Table 20 indicates only 13.8% of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that they do not feel safe at the school. While 75.5% of the students stated that it is not at all true that they do not feel safe at school (see Tables 11, 12, and 13). Based on observations, many students enjoy coming to school and are supported by teachers.

Table 21.

Survey Question 12: There Are Many Places That I Can Go to Other Than School for
Help

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	71	46.7%
Mostly True	25	16.4%
Unsure	25	16.4%
Slightly True	11	7.2%
Not True	20	13.2%
Total	152	100%

Table 21 indicates that 63.1% of students stated that it is True or Mostly True that they can go and may know of other places they can go to for help other than school. Students are aware of resources inside and outside of the school if a social, financial, or academic barrier arises.

Table 22.

Survey Question 13: Teachers Talk Bad About Students in This School

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	20	13.4%
Mostly True	15	10.0%
Unsure	29	19.3%
Slightly True	33	22.0%
Not True	53	35.3%
Total	150	100%

Table 22 shows that 23.4% of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that teachers talk bad about students. Based upon observations, students were aware if teachers talked bad about them if they overheard a teacher or administrator discussion concerning a student, or if teachers complained about students in the presence of respondents. This finding, when examined beside question 1 (Table 10), shows some consistency.

Table 23.

Survey Question 14: Only Parents With Money Are Able to Take Their Children to Fun

and Interesting Places

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	24	15.8%
Mostly True	14	9.2%
Unsure	23	15.1%
Slightly True	17	11.2%
Not True	74	48.7%
Total	152	100%

Table 23 indicates that 25.0% of students believe that it is True or Mostly True
that only parents with money are able to take their children to fun and interesting places.
The survey response may indicate that students believe that despite any economic
barriers, they are capable of the same social and economic advantages as a student that
may be more affluent.

Table 24.

Survey Question 15: My Teachers Can Relate to My Experiences

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	35	23.5%
Mostly True	23	15.4%
Unsure	40	26.9%
Slightly True	23	15.4%
Not True	28	18.8%
Total	149	100%

Table 24 indicates that 38.9% of respondents believe it to be True or Mostly True that teachers could relate to their experiences, and 34.2% of respondents believe that teachers could not relate to their individual experiences, or may not have empathy concerning the conditions or issues that students often face on an on-going basis as preteens/teens or individuals living within an urban environment. Overall, student responses were distributed equally for this question.

Table 25.

Survey Question 16: I Don't Like People That Have More Money Than I

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	7	4.6%
Mostly True	4	2.7%
Unsure	5	3.3%
Slightly True	8	5.3%
Not True	127	84.1%
Total	151	100%

Table 25 indicates that 7.3% of students believe it to be True or Mostly true that they do not like people that have more money than they, while 89.4% of respondents believe that it is Slightly True or Not at all true that they do not like people that have more money. Many of the students apparently hold no resentment against individuals that they perceive to be more affluent than they are.

Table 26.

Survey Question 17: I Care About My Education

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	118	80.8%
Mostly True	17	11.7%
Unsure	5	3.4%
Slightly True	4	2.7%
Not True	2	1.4%
Total	146	100%

Table 26 indicates that 92.5% of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that they care about their education, yet many students have scored Partially Proficient on NJASK and display inappropriate behavior in class, often distracting or interrupting instructional time (see Tables 2-4, and 12). Findings suggest that students may have responded to what they believed to be socially acceptable.

Table 27.

Survey Question 18: Parents Support the School

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	73	48.7%
Mostly True	27	18%
Unsure	32	21.3%
Slightly True	10	6.7%
Not True	8	5.3%
Total	150	100%

Table 27 indicates that 66.7% of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that parents support the school. Based on participant observations some parents support the school by attending school events and parent advisory meetings throughout the school year.

Table 28.

Survey Question 19: There Are After School Programs at This School

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	136	90.1%
Mostly True	3	2.0%
Unsure	5	3.3%
Slightly True	3	2.0%
Not True	4	2.6%
Total	151	100%

Table 28 indicates that 92.1% of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that there are after school programs at the school site. However, based on participant observations, many students had to be coerced in order to participate in instructional and non-instructional after-school programs, or did not participate at all despite various opportunities to participate presented to them. Throughout the study many instructional and non-instructional staff complained that many students did not take advantage of resources offered at the school.

Table 29.

Survey Question 20: Many of the Students at My School Are Poor

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	11	7.3%
Mostly True	9	6.0%
Unsure	60	39.7%
Slightly True	17	11.3%
Not True	54	35.7%
Total	151	100%

Table 29 indicates that 13.3 % of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that students at the school are poor. The largest populations of respondents, 39.7%, are unsure just who is poor or what "poor" is. Based on observations, many students at Green Wave School dwell in subsidized housing and receive free or reduced lunch; over 85% of the student population is considered Title I, which indicates that students are living at or below the poverty line, or are not reading on grade level.

Table 30.

Survey Question 21: I Know When I Am Failing School

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	66	44.0%
Mostly True	24	16.0%
Unsure	22	14.7%
Slightly True	23	15.3%
Not True	15	10.0%
Total	150	100%

Table 30 indicates that 60% of students stated that it is True or Mostly True that they knew when they were failing school. During participant observations, students were routinely given progress reports, distributed NJASK test scores, and parents were informed of how students were performing academically in school.

Table 31.

Survey Question 22: Students Did Well on the State Tests

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	26	17.2%
Mostly True	36	23.8%
Unsure	78	51.7%
Slightly True	9	6.0%
Not True	2	1.3%
Total	151	100%

Table 31 indicates 41.0% of the students believe it to be True or Mostly True that students did well on State tests. Throughout the course of the study, students and parents received NJASK test score results and were invited to attend the annual district parent meeting, which discussed test scores and the aims of the district throughout the year. During the study, it was observed that teachers and administrators constantly discussed with parents and students that many students were failing the state tests in the middle school. In addition, administration encouraged instructional and non-instructional staff to discuss on an individual basis, students' individual test scores so that students were aware of their NJASK results and its direct impact on their academic future.

Table 32.

Survey Question 23: Students Study or Plan for State Tests at This School

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	59	39.6%
Mostly True	27	18.1%
Unsure	38	25.5%
Slightly True	14	9.4%
Not True	11	7.4%
Total	149	100%

Table 32 indicates that 57.7% of students stated that it is True or Mostly True that they study or plan for state tests at the school. The responses may indicate that students responded to what they believed were socially acceptable behaviors. Many students throughout the study exhibited negative behaviors that posed as a challenge to teachers when presenting test taking strategies and many students failed the NJASK or scored Partially Proficient (see Tables 2-4, and 11). In addition, many students in the middle school did not turn in classroom work on a consistent basis and were failing major academic subjects such as Math and Language Arts.

Table 33.

Survey Question 24: The Community Involvement is Good at This School

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	37	25.0%
Mostly True	34	23.0%
Unsure	41	27.7%
Slightly True	20	13.5%
Not True	16	10.8%
Total	148	100%

Table 33 indicates that 48.0 % of students believe it to be True or Mostly True that the community involvement is good at the school. During the study, many members of the community often volunteered at the school and participated in school events. Green Wave School is also a community school.

Table 34.

Survey Question 25: There Are Hardly Ever Any Fights at This School

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	18	12.3%
Mostly True	9	6.2%
Unsure	23	15.7%
Slightly True	27	18.5%
Not True	69	47.3%
Total	146	100%

Table 34 indicates that18.5 % of students think it is True or Mostly True that there are hardly ever any fights at the school. There were many fights at the Green Wave School, specifically in the middle school. Despite the attitude of respondents that they felt safe at school, many students exhibit distracting behaviors during instructional and non-instructional time (see tables 12 and 20).

Table 35.

Survey Question 26: Parents Help Students With Their School Work

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	70	49.7%
Mostly True	29	20.6%
Unsure	27	19.1%
Slightly True	10	7.1%
Not True	5	3.5%
Total	141	100%

Table 35 indicates that 70.3% of respondents stated that it is True or Mostly True that parents help students with their homework. It is believed that students responded based upon their idea of a socially acceptable response. Based on observations, many parents admitted during parent teacher conferences that the student work was too challenging for them to help their children, or that due to their work hours and responsibilities they were unable to assist their children with homework.

Findings: Qualitative

In the second phase of the study the researcher conducted open-ended interviews with urban middle school high achieving student participants, observed participants at the school site, reviewed school artifacts and reviewed district board meetings and board meeting documentation. The observations, journals, and documentation of board meetings were collected and stored in a field journal using codes. Following the collection of qualitative documentation, the researcher reviewed consistent themes that surfaced in the qualitative strand of the study to provide insight into the external and internal educational factors that impact urban middle school students' academic achievement and self-perceptions. The observations, interviews, and documents provided the qualitative data used to address Research Questions 1a and 1b. Is there a relationship between social and financial capital that influences urban students' self-perceptions and academic achievement? And, do the behaviors and attitudes of stakeholders regarding students' social and financial capital have an influence on student achievement and self-perceptions? The surveys and student achievement data provided the quantitative data for the study.

The findings from the qualitative data identified the emergent themes that arose throughout the observations, interviews, and documents: (a) parental concerns, (b) work ethic, (c) academic attitude, (d) school morale, (e) peer pressure, (f) resources, and (g) goals/life plan. The common attitude and statements centered on the idea that all educational stakeholders must be accountable and work hard in order to succeed.

Observations and documents. Green Wave School is located in a picturesque neighborhood. The school is surrounded by many new and attractive homes. As I

observed the neighborhood in the early morning hours, I noticed that some of the occupants of the new homes were elderly. Others were leaving their homes with children in school uniforms that are not the standard uniform of the Green Wave School or district. Some of the children attending Green Wave School live in subsidized housing. There are few Green Wave students in the new homes across the street from the newly renovated school. Many of Green Wave School students walk blocks across a busy highway from poorer neighborhoods or low income housing in a notorious high crime area that the students normally refer to as "Back."

As I enter the school each day, the school is very clean. Staff seem to stay to themselves; speaking when they are spoken to. The students at the middle school level bustle by and are receptive and speak to the teachers that they like, often screaming a teacher's name as loud as they can, hollering throughout the halls only to be told to be quiet by teachers. In the hallway, the teachers often acted as shepherds, forcing students by guarding the hallway and moving students to the right of the hall so that others are able to pass.

Walking through the halls and peering into the classes, I observed many teachers hard at work. The teachers had their objectives on the wall, they have their students' homework assignments written on the boards, and they were either engaged in instruction or correcting a child's behavior so that they could instruct their classes.

Many of the parents visiting the middle school for their students are there either for assemblies, parent meetings, or when their child was in trouble. Based upon observations, whenever there have been Green Wave school assemblies, most of the parents from the primary grades come out in numbers so large that some are forced to

stand, watching from the doorway. However, the students in the middle school grades hardly have parents come out to assemblies. When asked, middle school students often stated, "Parents have to work or may have other important things to do."

Throughout the year when parents were not attending parent teacher meetings or assemblies, they were present at Green Wave School due to discipline issues with their children. Many middle school parents were forced to attend parent-teacher conferences, as administration threatens to exclude middle school students with discipline problems until parents speak with the teacher or specific grade level middle school team. Upon observing many conference dialogues, during teacher team meetings or a parent-teacher conference, the behaviors of some of the parents were statements similar to wanting their children to succeed or appear to support the appeals and comments of teachers. Upon the parents' exit of a meeting or parent-teacher conference, many of the teachers made statements to the effect that the parents were hopeless and that they were only pretending; that the next week their student would be up to the same degrading behaviors. On the other hand, some teachers agreed that a student's behavior might improve with proper support and guidance from the home. Administration continued to urge all teachers during parent conferences to create and share a strategy or plan with parents to ensure academic progress.

The overall central focus of most staff meetings throughout the year was test scores. During staff meetings, teachers were given suggestions for books or reviewed data for the purpose of improving test scores. The school administration urged teachers to follow instructional models or classroom practices to avoid confrontation and issues with students. Many of the staff looked back and forth at the clock, occupied themselves with

other tasks or else watched the administration talk at a podium until the conclusion of the staff meeting at 3:45 p.m. sharp. Most of the staff quickly exited the cafeteria where staff meetings took place.

During Board meetings, the board, community members, and district leadership discussed comparisons of student performance from school to school within the Green Wave School District, Board positions, and personnel issues during open sessions. The Board publicly compared test scores from school to school across the Green Wave School District, which lead to competition to have better scores. During many of the Board meetings, members discussed how Green Wave School students' test results were among the lowest in the district.

In the teachers' lounge I observed teachers quietly eating alone. Teachers were often observed calling parents from the lounge because they were unable to call out in some of the classrooms and parents' primary numbers were cellular. The teachers often informed parents of disciplinary problems as students waited in the hall with the door propped open. In some cases, students were invited to speak to their parents over the phone during conferences. In some instances, teachers that attempted to call parents were unable to inform parents of issues in their class because the parent was unavailable or the phone was disconnected or the number incorrect. Many of the teachers also used the teachers' lounge to vent their frustrations regarding students or events in the school.

Throughout the day at Green Wave School, there were various announcements made over the intercom system, before, during, and after regular instruction time. The average number of announcements throughout the day ranged from two to five. In the morning, middle school students inform others of the important school events. As I

observed the middle school hallways, or peered into classrooms during the announcements, students and teachers talked during the announcements or appeared to continue the instruction. Throughout the day announcements were made over the intercom alerting the students and staff of inappropriate behavior, warning of the consequences of poor behavior while referring to general operations of the school.

Green Wave teachers. The teachers that participated in the study come from various socio-economic or marginalized groups. Ms. C is a female teacher who has taught in the Green Wave School district for over 12 years, primarily in the middle school grades. Ms. C has had over five years contact and provided instructional support for the high achieving and low achieving middle school students of Green Wave School district. Ms. C would be considered a veteran teacher; she has a good rapport with administration and students and has been known to use her own personal time to support after-school instructional programs.

Mr. J is known as the school guru, who spends most of his time dedicated to assisting the staff and students at Green Wave School and Green Wave School District. Mr. J has spent over 10 years teaching. He would also be considered a veteran teacher of Green Wave. Many non-instructional programs have been created and facilitated by Mr. J. Like many of the students in Green Wave School district, he has experienced a share of marginalization and discrimination in his lifetime. Mr. J is a very religious man and has dedicated over half of his life working with marginalized students.

Ms. E is a very active person within the Green Wave School District. Ms. E is also a member of a marginalized group and can relate to the discriminatory biases or experiences of students in the Green Wave School and District. She has spent over 10

years teaching in the Green Wave School and is considered a veteran teacher. Ms. E has a good rapport with students, staff, and parents. Ms. E is a very religious woman and has spent her entire career working with marginalized students.

Mr. B is a very active member of the Green Wave School, district, and community. Mr. B shared the same socio-economic background of the students during his childhood to early adulthood. Mr. B has been known to empathize and assist teachers, staff, and students throughout the district that have had issues with the administration in the school. Mr. B is also considered a "go to" individual; whenever teachers need assistance he is always there. Mr. B enjoys a good rapport with Green Wave students, staff, district administrators, and community members. In addition, Mr. B is a veteran teacher, having taught in the district for over 10 years.

Many of the student subjects and parent participants that volunteered to assist in the study reside in the outer communities and live at or below the poverty level. The parents and students have borne witness to crime and violence at the school and in their neighborhood communities. Like many of the students at Green Wave School, those who volunteered to participate in the study are Title I recipients, meaning they are living at or below the poverty line, and receive free or reduced lunch. But, the students that were selected to participate in the study are high achieving middle school students, live at or below the poverty line, are African-American, and have passed the state standardized test three years consecutively, therefore meeting academic standards. The students in this study have a positive rapport with teachers, are frequently requested to represent the school, and take advantage of the free after school or before school instructional and non-instructional programs offered at Green Wave School.

Green Wave high achieving students. The reader, in reviewing these profiles, may consider them to be too subjective. As the researcher, having known these students and in many cases their families, I have a special insight that others may not enjoy. As both researcher and member of the Green Wave community, I have a thorough knowledge and perspective of those students characterized as high achievers in this study. Their stories follow.

D. M. D. M. is unlike many seventh grade boys his age at Green Wave School. Despite his high intelligence and ability to be well liked by peers and teachers, he does not appear to work hard or do a lot of hard work. Yes, he seeks help when he needs it after school, and he is a part of many instructional and non-instruction programs like drama and even the culinary club, but he has advantages others do not have. D's paternal aunt is a teacher at Green Wave School and since he was in kindergarten, it has been his will and inspiration to succeed. Ms. M has kept an eye on her nephew for years and finds it her hardest challenge to make sure that D attends school each day; if it were not for her, I do not think that he would be a part of this study.

Like many of his peers, D is a product of a single parent home and he is considered Title I. Title I are students that are either at or below the poverty line or reading below level. D is reading above level but receives free lunch and is considered poor. You will never see D on a basketball court or football field. But, he is not even what you would consider studious; he does not spend his days late into the night reading and writing papers. Instead, D enjoys watching movies, hanging out with his peers, tweeting, or chatting on Face Book. D enjoys listening to the latest divas in the Hip Hop

world such as Beyoncé' and Rihanna. During "free" time in class, D is known to show off the latest Beyoncé' moves or sing Beyoncé' songs.

D is a very confident young man and is aware of his intelligence. D can often be found, to the worriment of teachers, asking why he received a lower grade than he anticipated in a writing assignment or overall grade. The Green Wave teachers and administration often worry that students like D will not succeed because they are not challenged enough. Despite instances in which some Green Wave students whisper that D is flamboyant or gay, D always comes back with, " That's why I am going to make it, while, I am in my Lexus or Mercedes...hey…singing to Beyoncé', your ghetto self will be in McDonald's flipping burgers!" D constantly seems to be at battle with his peers. He is often frustrated with students' inability to keep up with content in class or poor behavior. He has been known to scream, "I can't stand these ghetto stupid kids!" Often times D is frustrated with instruction and believes that he is not challenged. D has admitted that at times he feels bored in class or that there are too many disruptions for him to even desire coming to school.

Like too many middle school students at Green Wave, D's mom hardly ever comes to the school. In a trick of fate or chance D's biological father is the brother of Ms. M. Ms. M often complains, "His mother does not do enough for D, D is pretty much on his own." In an attempt to ensure that D arrives to school each day, his aunt is very involved in his life. Like many middle school males at Green Wave School, D is raised in a single parent home and in all the years I have worked at Green Wave I have only seen his mother twice. Ms. M is not present during D's honor roll assembles, school events, or

parent teacher conferences. It is clear that D wants to achieve due to the influences from his aunt, teachers, and an innate will.

It is difficult to accept that D is so smart, but lives in a household in which some would argue that he is raising himself. Some teachers have blatantly stated that they have had D as a pupil and over the years teachers argued that whenever they had an issue the first person they went to was usually his aunt because D's mother was unavailable or would behave irrationally if approached by staff regarding her son's attendance and her participation in his school work. D has to constantly be reminded to attend school on time and his aunt and the school closely monitors his attendance. Upon speaking to D's mother during conferences she voiced concerns regarding making sure that her son attended school and that he earned good grades and was challenged. I found D's mother, J's dialogue over the phone to be contrary to what occurred in school because although J was interested in her child's success she was never present in school. As I asked around and interviewed other teachers informally regarding D's mother, I learned that her behavior was questionable. An educational party promptly informed me upon further inquiry of D's home life that D's mother was currently in the midst of a squabble with another parent concerning a male relationship or admirer. Green Wave School is a very small community. Many of the teachers and parents were former Green Wave District students. After I casually asked the educational party, "How is D's mom?" she quickly showed me the face book dialogue between D's mother and another parent who also was in the middle school. The language between D's mother, and the other adult parent was appalling. They said a few "colorful words" in the four and three letter variety promising to beat each other to a pulp and stating personal accusations toward each other so

furiously that as I and the educational party reviewed the dialogue on Face Book, the educational party stated, "Now that would make a prostitute blush."

A. B. A. B. is a bright eighth grade student who comes from a lineage of hardworking and industrious siblings, up until the ninth grade at least. I have taught in the district for many years and previously I have taught A's brother. My biggest fear is that A will succumb to the same influences as her older brother. Like many of the girls her age, A. B. wants to fit in, so if her friends are loud, depending on who's looking, she's loud; if A's friends wear bright colors, A will wear bright colors as well. As the saying goes "birds of a feather flock together." A. B. socializes with a decent crowd of girls in her age group and she is no less vulnerable to the dilemmas that other individuals her age may face in an urban community. Like the members within her social group, A attends instructional and non-instructional after school activities. Even if her friends do not wish to attend, with a quick phone call home or some persuasion, A stays to receive help.

Many children in middle school desire to fit in with the crowd. At the first glance, A stands out. Unlike other children in the eighth grade, A is Muslim and must wear a hijab, or head scarf, to school each day. She is not permitted to wear short skirts or low midriff tops. A's mom usually wears a full Muslim garment. I could barely see her mother's eyes through her religious clothing when I first met Mrs. C during a parent-teacher conference with her son, A's brother years before. Mrs. C, is determined to see her daughter aspire to accomplish her dreams and is always present at the school at a moment's notice if there is any issue good or bad with A. A has creatively found a way to ensure that her covered garments or hijab stay up to date with the teenage and modern-day hip hop trends. A has even participated in the cheerleading and basketball team

making sure to wear pants under her uniform. She is determined to fit in with the students and be accepted.

A's determination to fit in has ensured acceptance with peers, but at times grief with her teachers. A's mom is a no nonsense type of parent. If A is found to be non-compliant or disrespectful, she is punished, sometimes severely. Thankfully, A is not a slow learner; she knows just when to stop to ensure that she does not cross the line. Although A is adored by many of her teachers, some complain, "She can be "fresh" or disrespectful at times, you have to watch her." A has a quick temper and absolutely hates to lose face with her peers. If she gets out of line, the best route a teacher should take to solve the issue with A is to speak with her in the hallway or away from her classmates. Sometimes I believe that A puts on a show for her peers, I once had to have a conversation with A about purposely saying a word incorrectly to earn her classmates acceptance, even after I told her that she pronounced the incorrectly wrong she stated, "well it sounds better that way" or she would refuse to participate in a class discussion believing that everyone would think she was a nerd. After speaking with A's mom and motivating her to choose her friends wisely, A has continued to travel back onto the right path although she has had a few side turns.

Like many of her peers, A has a bright hope for the future. She speaks of becoming a doctor and last year she created a plan for ensuring that she reaches her goal. A stated that she would get no less than A's and B's in class and that her best hope at affording college is earning a scholarship and attending a university like Rutgers because she liked the medical program there and the fact that the school was not too far from home. A has kept the first part of her plan in order, she has earned all A's and B's and

was invited to attend the Southern college tour. Unfortunately, A did not have the money to attend the college tour and no funds were available to support her. A is always concerned about her mother and her mother's safety. She believes that she lives in a harsh community and often complains of the violence or student fights within the neighborhood. A once told me, "Fighting is a way of life those that can't fight should not pop junk." I reflected on this comment thinking that this girl has to literally wear a mask of faces, one for home, one for the street, and one for school.

D. W. D. W. is a pleasant seventh grade student. If I had the financial will and resources to clone D, I would. Unfortunately D comes from a long line of siblings I have known. Out of all her siblings, D is the brightest star of the family. D comes from adverse and challenging financial circumstances. D has known the depths of poverty. This student knows what it is like to live from shelter to shelter, and yet each day she enters the school building, she comes in with a positive attitude and the will to achieve. D does not allow a "small" thing like poverty to stand in her way.

Many would say that D is an old soul. She is more mature than many of the children her age. D does not have the best of clothing. Some is torn or worn out. But she carries herself with such grace that all students show her respect. I have never witnessed D yell or behave disrespectfully, her voice never goes above an octave toward a disagreeing peer. D is the ideal model of grace. Whenever there have been discussions towards fairness and kindness, she always reflects or thinks back to situations in her life in which she had to struggle or watch others struggle in an attempt to teach others a lesson.

D is one of the youngest of her siblings. Unlike her sisters and brothers, D does not read below level and her grades have never been Fs and Ds. Once, when D's mother told me that I would see a change with her next child, I must admit that I did not believe her. This student, D. W. simply wants to succeed. She stays after school for help, participates in instructional and non-instructional programs, improves in areas when she is addressed concerning an academic weakness, and helps other students when she can. D has told me that she once wanted to be a teacher, but after observing the issues that her teachers face on a daily basis she changed her mind. If all of my students had D's attitude the school would not face an academic crisis in the middle school.

K. M. K is one of the smartest students in the seventh grade. K is being raised by her step mom and dad. Each day K comes to school she makes it her "business" to look good and fit in with the popular crowd. You would not know looking from the outside in, that K is as smart as she is because of the crowd that she accompanies. Yet, she also manages to stay after school for instructional and non-instructional activities. She is the quintessential teenager. Although the group of young ladies that she socializes with is smart, their behavior is questionable. Many are already dating boys in the Green Wave School District high school and are known by their fighting abilities in the local neighborhoods. Like K, these young ladies wear the latest fashions and hair-styles. Although Green Wave School has a uniform policy, you would not know looking at this group of young ladies. They wear the latest accessories, colorful shoes, colorful shirts that are visible through the uniform tops, colorful socks, and lip gloss to pass for local pop stars rather than the average student. Based on administrative directives, if students

are dressed in the stated uniform colors and tops, they are essentially in uniform at Green Wave School.

Unlike the other young ladies, K's mom practices what she preaches or espouses. K's mom and dad have great expectations for her. K is expected to act in a respectable manner at school and earn good grades. Yet, like many of the Green Wave middle school students, K's parents are rarely ever present at school. Based on observations and informal interviews, K has an innate drive to succeed. She already has a plan. K consistently inquires about her grades and comes after school when applicable. But my fear is that K's associates will be her greatest obstacle to overcome. She is starting to change from the impressionable young lady that I enjoyed having in my class to an unimpressionable young lady that people may not like to have in their class, because K is beginning to become the center of gossip and dissention due to the crowd with which she chooses to socialize.

Already this year, K has been in teacher conferences concerning situations in which she allegedly knew there would be a fight in the local neighborhood or in which she instigated a fight in the local neighborhood. K's step mom and dad have begun to try to tighten their hold on her activities and social peer group, but I believe that they are a little too late. K spends her weekends outside of school participating in religious activities and is a member of the local church. Yet, until recently, she decided to drop out of the Church dance group because she did not want to listen to the Church's dance instructor. K's family members believe that she has what it takes to succeed but her attitude toward adults has begun to change dramatically within the past few weeks.

Like many middle school students at Green Wave School, K feels the pressure and stress of trying to "fit in" or becoming accepted by her peers. To try to lessen the social strain, teachers recommended that K become active in a young ladies group at Green Wave School and K seems to enjoy the discussions and activities at the young ladies group. Yet, in the hall I have constantly observed K associating with the same group of trouble-makers. In the end K will have to decide what is best for her.

O. B. I and many others agree that O is an exceptional student. O. B. is certainly a star. I believe that if O continues to behave and socialize with positive individuals, he will accomplish his goals. O lives in a two-parent home and like many of the high achieving students he spends much of his time in after school instructional and non-instructional programs. Unlike a lot of children that I have observed at Green Wave School, O is in touch with his spirituality, he lives much of his life trying to be what he believes is a "good" Christian.

O. B. attempts to associate himself with students that are goal driven and are also spiritual. From my observations and interviews I have learned that O does not try to push others to be Christian, but like children his age he tends to want to be in a social group with people that think and act as he does. O throughout the years, due to his decisions regarding social and academic choices, has been called a nerd or accused of acting too white. When I asked O. B. how he felt about it, he said, "I don't care as long as I do what I need to do, to have my home on South Beach and a nice car, I don't care what these kids think."

O. B. is the type of individual that teachers and other adults can rely upon to make positive decisions. Once when the school administration needed a student at the last

minute, literally three hours before the Board meeting, O. B. agreed to help. He dropped what he was doing, completed his entire academic work load for the day, created a presentation, and convinced his mother to take him to the board meeting so that he could represent the middle school students at the Board meeting. The Board was very impressed by O's actions. There is a sense of exquisiteness and maturity that O possesses. He knows when to turn on his maturity and when to act like the average "goofy" kid his age.

Aside from stating that O acts "too white," many of the students believe that he is goofy and has a dry sense of humor. O once told me that he wants to be accepted by his peers, but underneath it all, he will not allow the acceptance of friends to cost against his potential future. O's parents have instilled a sense of expectations and drive in him. O truly does not want to let his parents down. O told me that he sees how hard his parents work so that he has a decent life. O believes that by working hard in school he will not continue to see his parents work hard for the rest of his life. He believes that education is the key to his success.

A. L. A. L. is an intelligent, vivacious teenage girl. A lives with her grandmother and other siblings. Although A does not have the same financial resources as other students, she still finds a way to come to school presentable, sometimes in the latest teenage fashions, and is a member of the popular crowd. One of A's closest friends is K, the high achieving middle school student already profiled. Like K, A is a member of the local church and comes from a stern and Christian household.

Mrs. L, A's grandmother, believes that if A is not handled with a firm hand she will become disrespectful and not achieve academically. Mrs. L has a strong sense of

faith in A; she has already raised her own children and is now trying to raise her grandchildren the best way that she can to ensure that they graduate high school. Mrs. L would like to see A. L. graduate college, but will settle for high school. She once told me that although her daughter graduated high school with a baby on her hip and another in her belly, literally walking across the commencement stage pregnant, she was proud that her child finished school. Mrs. L promised me that she would do all that she could to ensure that A finishes high school. A. L. cannot do anything without her grandmother's permission.

A participates in many events inside and outside of school. A is a member of the Green Wave cheerleading squad, the ladies group, and the girls dance group at her church. A. L. desires to become something in her life so that she can help her grandmother who is currently seriously ill. Without the support of Mrs. L, I honestly do not know if A will be able to survive the peer pressures from her social group or friends. A. L. already has sisters that are teenage parents. Currently, Mrs. L closely watches A's friends and like a mother lioness quickly snatches A away from peer groups that she feels will threaten her success. Once a teacher called Mrs. L to inform her that A was socializing with students that Mrs. L told A not to socialize with in school. Once Mrs. L found out she arrived at the school in less than five minutes, Mrs. L quickly coming to the school and embarrassing A in front of the entire class. After the middle school embarrassment, A has never socialized with people that her grandmother did not want her to socialize with. Mrs. L does not know of her best friend K's antics, but of course no parent knows everything outside of the home.

D. B. D. B. is a very smart and shy sixth grade girl. Each day she comes to school and attends to her work. If there was not a requirement that students participate in class discussion at Green Wave School, many teachers would not know that D was present. During a conference D informed me that she is often overwhelmed by the social norms of peers in her school and feels that it is safe to stay away from others during school. D confessed that she once counted that her teacher was interrupted 25 times during a Language Arts lesson. D feels that she is sometimes afraid to come to class; she said that she sometimes feels like she is in a cage. But, her outlet is the gifted program. D loves her Gifted and Talented teachers and strives to do her best so that she can remain in the program.

D does not participate in many instructional and non-instructional after school programs, yet seeks help with work when needed. D said that she prefers to stay to herself. In many regards D has metamorphosed into a loner. Once she socialized with her peers and attempted to fit into the crowd, but recently she prefers to talk with her teachers or stay to herself.

A. H. A. H. is a very funny, energetic, and outspoken eighth grade student. During the time that I had A as a student, she was a pleasure to have in class. A is industrious and spends most of her time studying and participating in non-instructional and instructional programs at Green Wave School. A is the quintessential example of a young lady.

Throughout A's tenure as a student she has never been reprimanded for disrespectful behavior. Whenever A had a problem or disagreement with a teacher or student she has always followed protocol. Either A has called her parents or she has

asked in a respectful manner to speak with adults one-on-one. To my knowledge no one has explained to A how to circumnavigate the bureaucracy of a school, she has learned the behavior on her own. Once when I asked A. H. what she wanted to be she told me that she wanted to either become a doctor or lawyer. I told A. H. her best bet would be to be a lawyer.

A. H., like some of the high achieving students, prefers to hang with the "nerds" or listen to music idols like Mylie Cyrus. A's parents refuse to succumb to the expensive trends and styles of girls her age. Therefore A does not always wear the latest trends and is not associated with the popular crowd. When I asked A. H. what she felt about wearing trendy clothing, she told me that the behavior of some of her peers was shallow. She then quickly informed me that when she is an adult the latest fashions will not mean a thing if she cannot pay the rent.

A. H. has a strong familial foundation; she is not an avid church member but has a great sense of spirituality and believes that there is a God. If it were up to A. H. she would not attend instructional after-school programs, but in her household she does not have a choice. A's parents believe that it is a shame that many of the parents at Green Wave School do not take advantage of the free after school programs since most of the student population is considered Title I. Her father told me, "Although his daughter may attend an urban school, she will not be an urban statistic." A' s parents support many of the events during and after school and are always present at Parent Teacher Conferences, Open House, and other school events. A told me, "My parents got my back, Ms. Jones."

T. M. T. M. like many teenage girls her age, wants to fit in. T is a stellar student, consistently earning As and Bs and has established a great rapport with teachers. Initially

upon meeting T, I was taken aback. It seemed that T always was in trouble or had conflicts with peers. Usually students that are always in trouble or that have disagreements with their peers lack social skills. However, after careful observation and later interference, I learned that T. M. was teased for acting and talking "too white." According to her peers T acted like she was a white girl.

Like most middle schools there are acceptable and unacceptable norms amongst students. Many students at Green Wave middle school believe that all students should speak using slang and dress outside of school according to what "they believe is cool." An outsider would think that T would be readily accepted by this group of students since she has been in classes with them for years, and yet year after year she is teased, called a white girl, or is told that she acts like a baby. T. M. even attempted to speak and dress like the other students who stated that she talked and acted "too white" just to be teased and ridiculed more.

Furthermore, due to the constant teasing and poor treatment that T receives from other students in school, T does not have many friends in the middle school. Although T tries to fit in with the popular students from time to time, every once in a while I have observed T using slang words like "ain't" and "that's a husky." Since T is ridiculed for her dress and speaks standard English, she does not have many friends outside of one other girl who is also teased for speaking and dressing "too white" as well. T is not an avid church member. Like some of the other high achieving students T's parents do not come to the school very often. T is not a problem child therefore her parents have not been to school except once the entire year and that was to pick her up from school early due to the winter break. T has an innate drive to succeed. She encourages her parents to

sign her up to participate in instructional after school programs. T is not the typical cheerleader or glee member, she is just the average bright, attractive, and independent student. T once told me, "Ms. Jones, I am ready to take on the world, I just hate middle school sometimes."

D. A. D.A. is an intelligent eighth grade student. D is well liked by peers and teachers. D is able to fit in well with the popular crowd and what the Green Wave middle school students call, "the nerds." Each day before arriving to school, D runs over a mile, just to clear his mind and work out. The only issues that I have observed D having throughout the years are when he is teased for his African features (dark skin, full lips, and broad nose). D told me, "I don't care Ms. Jones if they have no confidence in themselves, how can they hate being Black? They are ignorant people."

D is a very confident young man. I am always impressed with his sense of independence and self-authority. D is very mature for a teenager his age. He is rarely in trouble and others always seek his advice to stay out of trouble. Whenever D's peers misbehave in class he is always the one to try to talk them out of getting in trouble, always cleverly stating the consequences of their actions. D has never gotten into trouble his entire academic year except once when a student grilled him about his broad nose, lips, and dark skin and called him an "African booty scratchier." The remark incensed D and he immediately attacked the student. After the altercation no one ever called D anything remotely similar again.

D is an active student, participating in instructional and non-instructional programs. D gets along well with the athletic students in the school as well as students that are more studious. D is an all-around well-liked student, participating in the after

school recreation program, soccer, tutoring, and young men's club at the school. D has even been selected to participate in the college tour. His father is working extra hard to save for the trip. Unlike many of the young men in middle school, D has a great relationship with his dad and seeks to acquire an education so that he can help with his parents and provide a good life for his own future children.

D believes that his father is a great role model and does a good job providing for their family. Whenever I can get D to have a serious one-on-one conversation he always discusses his strong commitment or faith in God and the close bond that he has with his father. I am always happy to see such a well-adjusted student.

Like some students in D's grade, money always seems to be a barrier. D knows the value of a dollar and consistently seeks to get a job so that he can help out at home, but his father believes that his education should come before any part-time jobs at his age. D has a lot of pressure to perform well academically and behave respectfully. Recently D was accepted at a prep school for the ninth grade, but had to reject the acceptance because the prep school did not offer a scholarship. The teachers attempted to pool together as much money as possible, but were unable to raise enough money to ensure that D would have a stress free year. Unfortunately D had to learn early the value of a dollar.

Open-ended interviews. Those that interacted daily with the high achieving students identified in the quantitative portion of the study agreed to be interviewed by the researcher in order to support the qualitative aspects of the Research Question. Those interviewed included concerned parents, teachers, a community member long active in the school, and the students themselves. The open-ended interviews addressed the areas

of parenting, student work ethic, academic attitude, school morale, peer pressure, resources, and goals. Efforts to interview a Green Wave administrator were unsuccessful in spite of several attempts to set a time, place, and agenda. The administration did, however support the completion of the study. The actual questions presented to the subjects interviewed are found in Appendix F.

Concerned parents. The statements made by parents and high achieving students centered on the theme that students are to work hard, have reliable, qualified, and patient teachers. Many parents' responses indicated that they wanted their students to succeed. Yet, many of the students' parents admitted that they rarely helped students with homework instead insisting that their children ought to acquire help from teachers or use instructional resources at the Green Wave School. A parent stated,

> I would like for that teacher to be very stern with the kids. The problem with many of these children or why they don't make it is that sometimes adults want to be friends, my child needs guidance at home and school. (V. L., parent)

Teachers at the Green Wave School often complained that they either met with parents that they did not need to meet with, or parents that they dreaded meeting. The overall complaint was that parents with good students came when requested, supported staff or teacher decisions, or parents that teachers needed to come never supported their students' academic or social growth, and could never be reached. When teachers were asked what their experiences were whenever discussing with parents their students' academic and/or social behaviors, their responses were: "Two extremes...not my child because she or he is an A student or a perfect child…or if their child is a problem; I see the same thing that you are seeing" (Mr. J, teacher).

> Depending on the student, it can be a pleasure to talk about their child's academic progress, or frustrating to discuss. Sometimes a parent will apologize for their

123

child's lack of progress, and promise to assist the child and work with the teacher to ensure improvement. Yet, more often than not, the parent will blame the teacher or administrator, even the district, for the child's issue academically, and not hold the child accountable. (Ms. C, teacher)

I find that the parent experience depends mostly on the purpose of the contact. Some conversations are very productive and rewarding and others suck. Sorry. Generally, most parents want to work with the teacher, but as students get older, the parent's influence diminishes and sometimes I have more influence than they do. I wish there was a way that we could utilize our parents, they are an undervalued resource. (Mr. B, teacher)

I hate when some of these parents pretend like they did not know that their child does not get it; these kids have been failing, some of them since kindergarten. Read to your damn kids when they start school and stop acting like you don't know Johnny or Cindy can't read. It is not fair to try to make me into a damn magician and act like I can create a genius in a few months. I love my students, I do, but I hate liars and fakers that are parents. I want to scream, "parents get your damn heads out the sand and wake up." I also hate that I have to focus so much of my energy on failing students when I have such gifted students that miss out on premium instruction and creativity because their peers are over three years behind. This is just not fair. (Ms. E)

I have been in the community for 70 years, born and raised in the community. I have seen it all, it seems that there are people that are here working in the school that are not for the children that are at the top. There are many hard working teachers at the school that care about other teachers and the children. A child knows when you care about them. (Ms. S, community member)

Student work ethic. Many of the parents of the high achieving students commented or suggested that their children had a good work ethic. The high achieving students often came before or after school for help when faced with a social or academic challenge, used the academic resources at the Green Wave School, and participated in non-instructional and instructional after school programs. On the contrary, among teachers who volunteered to be interviewed, the biggest complaint was students' lack of drive or motivation. Also, the community member suggested, that student work ethic was undermined by inappropriate decisions made by staff and administration at Green Wave School.

In an open-ended interview, high achieving students stated the following:

"It's okay to be smart because it'll help you in life. Maybe how they're doing is

the best they can do; they'll have to just work harder" (D. M., student).

However, student D. W. stated, "We try to help them, but most of them don't

want our help."

Parents stated,

> She needs extra homework, extra credit. I feel she would be happy just passing
> and that is something I will never allow. I believe that she is capable of so much
> more, even though she is an intelligent and hardworking young student. She is
> very willing to please. She is capable of so much more when she is challenged.
> (D. H., parent)

"She is intelligent and studies. My daughter strives to be something in her life and

I am very proud of her and her accomplishments" (D. W., parent).

When the researcher asked teachers about the dominant academic behaviors

displayed by students the responses were not always consistent with parents. "The

dominant academic behaviors that are displayed by my students are low-performing,

lacking in basic skills knowledge and low motivation" (Ms. C, teacher).

"They do little outside work out of the classroom work, cannot follow multi-step

directions, and have very little perseverance" (Mr. J, teacher).

> Sometimes I think that the parents want me to raise their children like make sure
> their child has their homework done and is organized when they, the parents,
> should be checking for home work and calling in, every once in a while to check
> on their child's progress. On the other hand I believe that some of the students
> want me to basically read and write their work for them. Only the high
> achieving students turn in work and do the right thing and often the low-
> achieving students may turn in their work one or two days out the week and
> have the audacity to think that they are going to pass my class. (Ms. E, teacher)

> This is a difficult question. I believe that students in our school demonstrate a
> great range of academic behaviors. Students who are successful are engaged,
> inquisitive, take responsibility for their learning, pay attention to detail, and
> demonstrate perseverance when presented with a challenge. With that said, the

reverse is also true, with students off task, unable to concentrate, and give up at the earliest hurdle. (Mr. B, teacher)

"In order for the school to get any better, the school needs to clean house from the top down" (Ms. S, community member).

The high achieving students that came from equal or similar socio-economic backgrounds to their middle school Green Wave counterparts, overall, agreed that in order to succeed in school, students had to be respectable and have a solid work ethic. For example, in general students suggested that the responsibilities of students were to attend school so that they could earn good grades, attend school daily and on time, study after school, work on academic work after-school for over an hour each night, participate in after-school instructional and non-instructional programs, and seek help with academic content if applicable as soon as an academic barrier was posed.

Academic attitude. The overall attitude and behaviors of high achieving students indicated that students that perform well have a good rapport with faculty and staff and seek help when needed. The observations of high achieving students suggested that students that are high achievers are self-motivated and able to navigate academic institutions independently with little or no assistance from parents. The parents of high-achieving students often emphasized the need for their students to be challenged or nurtured at the school, and the community member was also concerned about the overall social and academic growth of students.

Students stated,

"Our teachers are caring and they work with us until we understand the lesson" (D. M., student).

"They are nice and teach a lot of helpful things" (D.W., student).

Parents stated,

"I prefer a teacher that stays on him and won't allow failing" (J. M., parent).

"I prefer someone who has patience and can take time to explain things" (N. C., parent).

Students had an overall impression that their teachers were nice and helped them to better themselves.

When teachers were asked about student socio-economic status and self-perceptions and its influence on academic achievement the responses were:

> I believe that student's self-perception becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. They will achieve negatively if they see themselves negatively, and have a greater potential be successful if they see themselves that way. For the most part, my students have what they need to be successful in school. But, the general attitude of the community does not promote academic success as being important. (Mr. J, teacher)

> I think that student self-perceptions greatly influence academic achievement. This influence can either be positive or negative. If a student has a positive perception of his or her self, then this will translate into rewarding experiences as a student in school. If a student has a negative perception, it is very challenging to overcome this perception not only for the student, but for the teacher as well. This I feel is one reason why students can be reluctant learners. I feel that the impact of poverty is greatly impacting the students' academic progress. There are certain rights every student that need to be fulfilled before learning can be done…being fed, clothed properly, well-rested, and nurtured. I can't expect my students to be able to pay attention in class if they've been up all night, or did not eat breakfast or dinner the night before as a matter of fact. (Ms. C, teacher)

> I believe that my students want to learn, it is just that they do not have a proper guide. When all they see is survival or violence in their neighborhoods it may be hard to know how to get to where you want. Many of the parents work two and three jobs; they are struggling to make ends meet; they also want the best for their children. These students a lot of them do not get a chance to do anything outside of the city; how can you seek the "good life" when there is no guide or you have nothing to look forward to? If you have never been to a museum or you have never seen that other society? My high achieving students have traveled places outside of the country or throughout the country, their parents take them places other than the movies; this is one of the reasons why they do so well. The high achieving students get that if they work hard in school and have a positive

academic attitude they will do well. In addition, I cannot expect a child to concentrate when Johnny got shot last night. It takes a very strong person to overcome the adversary. (Ms. E, teacher)

The way that students perceive themselves has a direct effect on their achievement. This statement is supported through my own experiences and can be supported in the literature. One glaring example that supports this belief is Jane Elliott's blue eye, brown eye experiment conduction in 1968. Although a lesson about prejudice, it also discussed self-perception. (Mr. B, teacher)

A community member stated,

"The school can improve if they got rid of people that were there for the wrong reasons. Start forcing people that just want to be there for the wrong reasons to focus on the children themselves" (Ms. S, community member).

School morale. Many of the participants stated that in order to succeed students and teachers had to have a positive attitude about school. The responses of stakeholders suggested that the way that a person may feel about their, teachers, parents, and academic career has a great impact on their work ethic, self-perceptions and therefore academic achievement. The overall school morale of teachers was contrary to parents and students in that teachers suggested that the school was in need of overall improvement, whereas high achieving parents and students suggested that the school was a good place to learn and that teachers were helpful. However, a long-standing and influential member of the community and school stated that the morale of the school was horrible.

Students stated,

"I attend school to better my knowledge for the real world. This is a phenomenal school with very few flaws" (D. M., student).

"I attend school to learn and to listen to what my teachers offer; I think that this school is a nice and cool place" (D. W., student).

"I attend school to learn, I have no choice, and I think this school is a good school and that the teachers try hard but some kids don't care" (K.M., student).

"I attend school because with an education, I would have a better chance in life. I think that school is really a cool experience to have a chance to do something in life" (O. B., student).

"I attend school because I want to have a better future. My school is a good environment for learning because they try to bring out the better in us kids" (A. L., student).

Parents stated,

"I always celebrate my child's success at school, at this time my child needs no help at this school" (Ms. H., parent).

> As of yet I have had few problems with the teachers at this school, yet whenever there was if any I addressed it, I want a teacher to be nice and help my child so that her test scores can be brought up, she only really needs help in Math, there are teachers here that help and are concerned about the students. (Ms. R, parent)

> I want these teachers to push my daughter, she needs to be pushed, whenever I have time off from work to come to the school for a conference or anything, I come. I reward my daughter verbally and tell her to keep up the good work and strive for college. I want those teachers to keep encouraging and motivating my daughter so that she becomes something successful in life. (Ms. H, parent)

However, teachers stated,

"The general morale of the school is low from both staff and the students" (Ms. C, teacher).

> The general morale of this school sucks. There seems to be a feeling of being bullied…that negativity starts from the top and is pushed down….There is a sense of punitive policies (gotcha) as the way things are done…Not a safe place to take risks to help your students….that one person's opinion or program is used to make decisions for all, cookie cutter, that are outside of the expertise of that person…what we do as a Middle School subject specialists is not understood by leadership. (Mr. J, teacher)

The general morale of the school is low. There are more people that are here for the students and most people want to do the right things, but I cannot help but feel that too many people are here for a pay check and cannot relate to the students. You would have to have a strong skin to survive in this building or you will be eaten alive, there is simply no trust it seems like everyone else is out to get the other person. From the acceptable norms of violence, meritocracy, and lack of reality to cookie cutter programs, this is a place that has taught me that if I survive here I can teach anywhere and be a super star. (Ms. E, teacher)

"Low – our poor self- image has impacted our achievement. A child is more than a test score!" (Mr. B, teacher).

The community member stated,

The principal of the school is frankly an embarrassment. One person should not only run the show, everyone should have a part. If people at the top are not working with you, nothing will get done. Things should be done with entire input from the building. (Ms. S, community member)

Peer pressure. Many of the high achieving students and parents suggested that they overcame pressure from peers and were able to perform well in school. The high achieving students stated overall that they rarely are in trouble in school and socialize with peers that have like interests. Based on open-ended interviews and teacher observations, the findings suggested that the overall behavior of students in reference to peer pressure was negative and disruptive to the school and district goals. The community member would not comment on student peer pressure.

Students stated,

"My friends get As and Bs and some are average C's. Whenever we get in trouble we usually get a detention or write up, whether it's me or them. I know that you're supposed to be sophisticated and act how you would at home" (D.M., student).

"My friends do very well at this school, my friends don't get into trouble and I rarely get into trouble either. While in school we are supposed to be respectful, quiet, and determined" (A. B., student).

"My friends do their work but some of them are bad, I usually only stick with people that are good because I don't want my mom to find out and I get in trouble. I mean I try to get along with everyone, but most of the kids in these classes are bad and disrespectful. The teacher yells and yells and they don't care, they are still bad. I don't get in trouble I want my teachers to like me and I don't want to get in trouble at home and disappoint my mom and dad. In school you are supposed to be nice, respectful and listen." (D.W.)

However, teachers stated,

"The dominant behaviors displayed by my students can be classified by defiant, disrespectful, and non-motivated. There is a small group of students who display acceptable student behaviors in school" (Ms. C, teacher).

"The dominant behaviors are to impress others by yelling the loudest, do whatever it takes to be accepted, doing well is not cool" (Mr. J, teacher).

It seems like many of the student look at the students that are doing well as doing the impossible, so most of them don't do their work and expect to be given a passing grade. Many of the students even the high achievers try to fit in with students although they know their limits, they would not dare try the kids that are really hard core…It seems like they accept and/or are amused by the stunts and disrespectful behavior of their peers, it takes a lot of energy just to get a class simmered down. I have to stay on the good kids and encourage them not to give up all the time, but it's only a small group of them and they are always missing out because I have to focus on the knuckle heads and administration does not seem to get it. They scream test scores, test scores, really, do they think they can raise tests cores with the antics these kids play each and every second of the school day. If I wasn't a strong teacher I would not make it, you have to be strict and tough to work here. (Ms. E, teacher)

With middles school students, peers play a dominant role. Students want acceptance from their teachers and families, but peer respect is paramount. Therefore, student behavior fluctuates depending on the dynamic of the class. In some instances, students are well behaved, respectful, and very cooperative. In other instances, the class has a hostile undercurrent that can rise to the surface at any moment. Although, students are generally cooperative if they feel that they

131

"matter." In addition many teachers are mindful of how sensitive many of our students are. (Mr. B, teacher)

Resources. Many of the students stated that they had adequate resources and they were working towards improving their financial and social resources through academic achievement and a positive attitude. On the contrary, many educators argued that due to lack of resources the majority of their students had a poor self-image or were failing state tests and school. The community member, based on the open-ended interview, stated that the administration at the school neglected to use the resources of the external and internal school community.

A student stated,

"I don't think about stuff like money. I attend school so that I can have that good life" (K. M., student).

"I think that people that have more money than me are truly blessed there are people that can't afford living in their house" (O. B., student).

Teachers stated,

The children would do more if there were more resources at home, parents need to overall think priority. I see students that have Section 8 have the best shoes and yet come to school with no notebook and pen. As far as resources in this school we have the top of the line almost everything, and we offer tutoring, and all kinds of after school programs and yet these kids don't come. It's not fair; I wish there was a tutoring program for my kids that I did not have to pay for. I would take advantage of everything free that there was. You have to beg some of the parents and students and hunt them down to come to something that is there to help them. (Ms. E, teacher)

"As a result of living arrangements, my students are not usually able to break the cycle of poverty and apathy. The local community has developed a sense of entitlement and it is engrained from childhood in them" (Mr. J, teacher).

"There is a correlation between SES and achievement. While low SES does not cause low academic achievement, it is a factor that contributes to it" (Mr. B, teacher).

> The administration at the school after a program...completely cut off all the things that outside community sources offered for the school. We want the students to pass the test just like the administration and teachers, but if there is nothing there to motivate the students or help them …forget about a test. (Ms. S, community member)

Goal centered. Many of the high-achieving students are goal centered. Based upon observations of the high achieving students compared to their urban counterparts, the high achieving students were competitive, worked toward academic rewards, and were disappointed if they failed or did not acquire high grades such as As and Bs. The high achieving students also mentioned colleges and universities they planned to attend and what they would do before and after college. Overall, most high achieving students, based upon observations and open-ended interviews, seemed to have developed an academic plan and step-by-step process to ensure their academic success. Parents also discussed overall that their hopes were that their students succeeded. However, many teachers and the community member suggested that the school in general was in danger of an academic crisis due to disproportionate failure.

> A student stated,

> Education is the most important thing in your life, I take it seriously, I will have a Master's degree, 1 or 2 kids, a beautiful house living in South Beach with my feet in the sand, all I have to do is stay focused in school, get help when I need it, and if there is a problem, tell my mother. Teachers also depend on me to keep up my grades and stuff because they are, I know proud of me. (O. B., student)

A parent stated,

"As long as my son attends school, I know that he will make it, education is the key and it is very important. My son must focus on his studies at all times" (Mr. B, parent).

A teacher stated,

"Many of the students here have dreams or goals but they will not achieve them because they are not willing to put in the work" (Ms. E, teacher).

The community member stated,

> I have worked and represented all people, I have a mother who also worked for people, in order for the school to get better the school must try to work with the Board of Education and focus on the school system itself, versus self. (Ms. S, community member)

Chapter V

Overall Discussion, Conclusion, and Leadership Initiatives

Introduction

Historical data suggest that for over the past few decades the achievement gap between White and African-American students has worsened (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Many educational leaders struggle to find strategies to cope with a diverse and challenging educational population. Failure within urban school districts is not a new phenomenon, yet there has been little evidence of consistently validated and achieving programs to answer the unique needs of students according to their respective districts. What was found throughout the mixed methods study was that in order to make long-lasting change within Green Wave School District there needs to be a reestablishment of trust and collaboration amongst stakeholders in order to close the achievement gap. In order to enrich the educational experiences of urban students, educators must look beyond the status quo and discover more creative approaches in order to meet the needs of students (Noguera, 2011). A specific strategy in one district may not work for all. Barriers to student success exist within the unique fabric of external and internal issues unique to every individual school, such as, but not limited to, parental involvement, parental illiteracy, parental involvement, community involvement, and teacher quality. Throughout the study internal and external factors were identified that may contribute to Title I academic success and self-perceptions of middle school urban students. The researcher examined test scores and survey data of the entire middle school in the first phase of the study. During the second phase of the study, open-ended

interviews were conducted along with observations, and document collection. The study highlighted how high achieving urban middle school students of the same socio-economic and demographic backgrounds were able to succeed under conditions similar to those of their urban middle school counterparts. As a result of the study I hope to promote programs and initiatives that meet the needs of students and parents, helping a greater number to succeed.

The Green Wave School, through the support of Title I and other programs, makes considerable efforts to support instructional and non-instructional programs to meet the needs of students. But there is little demonstrable proof that these efforts are successful. The overall findings suggest that in order to ensure the likely success of students, there must be an overhaul; and a reformation in the way that all educational stakeholders communicate and correspond in the external and internal educational community. In order for the middle school students to succeed there must be buy-in from all stakeholders (Fullan, 2007). The examination of quantitative data and the corresponding qualitative data observations and interviews show there was a low school morale and poor collaboration amongst stakeholders. This in itself may contribute to students' academic success and self-perceptions.

Summary of Study

The students that participated in the study were all Title I Green Wave students in middle school grades six through eight. During the first phase of the study, I examined the overall achievement data and conducted surveys with most of the sixth through eighth grade students to assess student achievement and gain an impression of self-perceptions. The results showed that these urban middle school students were failing to meet state and

federal standards, consistent with the literature cited in this dissertation (Darling-Hammond, 2011). During the second phase of the study, the researcher observed and conducted open-ended interviews. Ten students and their parents were selected to participate in the open-ended interviews, based on the criteria students attended Green Wave Middle School for a year or more, passed the Language Arts Literacy section of the NJASK three years consecutively, lived at or below the poverty line, and were African-American. From this small portion of population, I determine the factors that contributed to their relative success that could be replicated, and programs and services that could be applied to the larger lower-achieving middle school population.

Findings. During the study I conducted a sequential mixed method explanatory design. During the first phase of the study, data were collected through students' achievement scores and surveys. As I reflected upon the first phase, I discovered that depending on the grade of the students, anywhere from 41% to 74% of students collectively failed the Language Arts Literacy section of the NJASK three years consecutively (see Tables 2, 3, and 4). In addition, I conducted a survey with the majority of sixth to eighth grade students; following the survey results I discovered that most students were unsure of how they performed on the tests and yet nearly everyone discussed with parents and teachers ways to increase their grades. In order to achieve success there must be a sense of urgency within the school community (Fullan, 2007). While this urgency was often recognized in the answers to the survey, it was not demonstrated in actual performance.

Unless there is a sense of urgency and plan to change, transformation cannot occur (Fullan, 2007). If students and parents were unaware of performance on state tests,

it will be hard to expect change. The observations implied that administration and staff were aware of student results, yet students were ignorant of their own State test results. As a result of students' lack of knowledge and the implications of long-term failure, many failing students were forced to attend after school instructional programs. Without the complete buy-in from all stakeholders change cannot be successful (Evans, 1996). Parents and students are the biggest stakeholders in the acquisition of education. Everyone should be aware of what is, or is not happening in an urban school setting that has a stake in education (Darling-Hammond, 1999; 2011). Regrettably, I did not find that to be the case at Green Wave.

During the second phase of the study, observations and interviews were conducted with students and teachers. As a result of the findings, I was not shocked to discover that teachers believed that many students were un-motivated and did not possess a strong enough work ethic to pass state tests. The comments of staff were those that I had been accustomed to hearing over the years. This was also a limitation to the study. I was a participant observer, having worked in the school for many years. I was also not surprised concerning comments regarding high achieving students' work ethic. In reviewing survey results, what I was surprised about was that many students did not consider themselves poor, despite the fact that over half live at or below the poverty line. As an educator and product of an urban school community, I have to reflect upon the students' ability and their everyday experiences. Were students comfortable with their surroundings? Many students lived in the surrounding neighborhoods that exhibited characteristics of high crime or violence. Poverty and crime contribute to social problems and help to create a perpetual cycle of poverty (Darling-Hammond, 2011). If the majority

of Green Wave students were content with their home environment and community, this could suggest that they simply had pride in where they came from and that poverty and the threat of crime were a way of life that they had become accustomed to living. In an effort to conform to urban cultural norms, students refused to comply with institutional policy, procedures, and practices (Ogbu, 2004). In addition, after reviewing student documentation over their academic years, over half of Green Wave School students had been reading below level between kindergarten and grade three. This was not a new problem that surfaced in the middle school grades. These overall internal and external factors, such as school morale, financial resources, parental achievement, teacher quality, parental involvement, and community involvement among a few educational factors had a direct impact on students, influenced how they viewed themselves, their future, and their current academic progress (Darling-Hammond, 2011).

An examination of Research Questions 1a and 1b indicated that there was a clear relationship between social and financial capital and its influence on student achievement and self-perceptions. Social and financial capitals, as identified throughout the study, are monetary resources and personal relationships that may enable students to succeed. Macleod (1995) implies that children are destined to take on the roles or occupations that their parents once had unless they have access to similar social and financial experiences as their suburban counterparts. Throughout the study, Green Wave middle school students were unable to attend field trips due to lack of funding, stated in observations and interviews that they were unable to visit museums and other academically enriching locations outside of school (despite a disconnect in survey), receive free or reduced lunch, and the majority of their parents live at or below the poverty line. Many Green

Wave students lack the financial and social resources and supports that are beneficial in ensuring academic success.

One of the aims of public education is to ensure an equitable education for all students regardless of race, economic status, or gender (New Jersey Department of Education, 2011). Yet, it is clear that those students of a higher economic and social status perform better on NJASK and earn college degrees in greater numbers (Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2011; Milner, 1995). Based on quantitative and qualitative findings, over 85% of the student population observed throughout the study was Title I, which indicates that most students in Green Wave School receive free or reduced lunch. In two situations throughout the study two identified high achieving students were unable to take advantage of vital educational opportunities. A. B. was unable to attend a college tour which would have provided her with an arguable head start in selection of colleges and an idea of what college life would provide, and D. A. was unable to attend a highly credible and prestigious private school in the ninth grade due to the fact that he was unable to obtain a competitive scholarship to pay for tuition. Unfortunately these two students were unable to allocate the funding that may have enhanced their academic opportunities and possibly self-perceptions.

Many students in more affluent areas enjoy a socio-economic advantage that the students at Green Wave middle school do not have. Throughout the middle school, it was observed that the standard norm of the classrooms were the expectations of frequent classroom disruptions, lack of support at home academically, and lack of parental involvement in the middle school. The biggest challenges at Green Wave School are lack of collaboration amongst parents and educational support.

Many of the students were comfortable with the Green Wave School educational environment. Although over half of the students enjoyed coming to school each day (see Table 12), it was clear that their perception of school was highly contrary to that of the expectations of administration and educational staff. As regards the school climate, 83.4% of students believed that they were supported by staff at school (see Table 18), 75.5% of students believed that they were safe at school (see Table 20), and yet believe that there were many fights and disruptions at school (see Table 34). In interviews many of the high achieving students admitted that classroom instruction was always interrupted, which affected the desire to achieve in one student's case (identified high achiever, D. M.) by not wanting to come to school at all. If students that can easily master academic material are un-motivated to come to school due accepted poor academic norms, how are the struggling students feeling? It has become the norm at Green Wave School to challenge basic everyday values such as valuing education and allowing education to take place.

Many of the students and their parents care about their education (see Table 16, Table 17, Table 26, Table 27 and Table 35), but some individual actions do not demonstrate students and parents that value their education. During observations and interviews, many failing and high achieving parents admitted that they were unable to grasp the concepts discussed in the academic areas; therefore, they were unable to assist students with homework. Some teachers informally stated that they had difficulty with most students in even the first grade in reference to parents being able or willing to assist their children with their homework. This suggests that education has been undervalued for some failing students for years. In addition, even with the assistance provided by the

141

school, failing students frequently avoided after-school instructional programs. All of the high achieving students with the exception of D. M. had supportive parents who may have not been able to assist their children academically themselves, but made sure that their children took advantage of academic resources at the school.

During observations, although many parents mentioned that they wanted the best for their children, there was a disconnection with respect to actions at home and at school. Actions speak louder than words. Many of the parents of failing students are inactive within the school community. At Green Wave Middle School failing students' parents usually only come to school when there is a problem. A high achieving student, D. B., stated that in one class alone there were 25 interruptions, not to mention in addition the average of five interruptions a day from the main office. How can students arguably learn with consistent classroom distractions and interruptions? As a participant observer, when I further inquired specifically why parents did not come out to support the school more often, I was informed that parents could not come to the school all the time because most worked double shifts and on average 16 hours, or worked in the late evening. A parent's ability to have work hours that correlated with school hours certainly had a better financial and social advantage than their parental counterparts, simply put they were available.

Many educational critics argue (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Macleod, 1995; Milner, 1995) that exposure to enriching activities enables students to pass state tests such as the NJASK and excel academically. Based on observations as a participant observer, I learned that the school was unable to finance school trips, or some teachers did not want to be responsible for middle school students due to inappropriate behaviors

142

some middle school students exhibited in school. During preparations for NJASK tests when students were asked mock content specific questions many were unable to answer questions correctly. In addition, many of the parents did not take their children to museums or academically enriching places due to expenses, work hours, and transportation, therefore students were unable to take advantage of academically enriching activities due to lack of resources at home and at school, possibly contributing to their academic failure and failure to pass state tests.

In some cases at the Green Wave School there were instances of class confrontations, middle class versus working class values. It seemed to be an "us" against "them" attitude from the perspective of the parents and educational staff. Many of the parents and educational staff did not work together due to past differences or disagreements. Many teachers admitted that they entered the urban educational community thinking that they would able to help and were disillusioned because of their experiences with urban students and parents. Some parents entered the school believing that teachers would make a positive difference in their children's lives and believe that they have been met with coldness and hostility. Some parents of failing and high achieving parents readily admitted that they had bad experiences within the public school system; this often lead to confrontations amongst staff and educational staff harming the educational success and possible self-perceptions of parents and students. In order to ensure help for failing students there must be collaboration amongst all educational stakeholders.

Conclusions

During the process of the dissertation I reflected upon my experiences with students. Since the start of my educational career, the dialogue of most educators has been how to improve test scores, to close the achievement gap. Educational reformers suggest that successes in urban school are measured by achievement data (Darling-Hammond, 2011). Despite the overall intelligence or capability of students, each year more and more students fail state tests, therefore further deteriorating the professionalism of the school and efforts and commitment of students and teachers. Policy makers and educational administration at the state and federal levels look to results (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Many educational policy makers refuse to recognize the external and internal educational factors such as parental achievement, parental involvement, student attitude, school morale, resources, community involvement, and teacher quality, to name a few, that influence the success of students (Noguera, 2011). Even the school community refuses to recognize these factors and create flexible programs that meet the needs of an over-whelmingly poor, uneducated, and under-resourced student and parent population; instead suggesting that students perform at the highest level despite these barriers (Noguera, 2011). Results of my interviews and observations confirmed that high achieving students selected in the study were able to achieve and pass the NJASK three years consecutively, because they and their parents had a great rapport with teachers, had a strong work ethic, and were able to work on academic assignments for at least an hour after school each day, participated in after school instructional and non-instructional programs, set realistic life goals, and had a solid value system. However, teachers often emphasized the social norms of defiance, unaccountability, and low morale within the

overall school; it seemed that the failing conditions of the outer community had somehow rooted themselves within the school community.

Implications. This concluding chapter discusses strategies that support strategic partnerships and learning communities that foster change in order to meet the needs of all students.

Social Justice and Ethical Considerations

To date, advocacy for the individual needs of children have been addressed, yet society is unsure of how to meet the needs of a marginalized group (Power, 2008). The focus or attempts at systematic change have primarily been focused on what individuals do in a classroom versus an entire school district and community (Power, 2008). The majority of teachers that enter the educational workforce are overwhelmingly white middle class women, who prefer to teach white middle class students in suburban educational settings similar to what they experienced themselves (Medina, Morrone, & Anderson, 2005). The trend that neighborhood and community problems find their way into the schools they surround is not new and it continues to increase. One of the only ways to solve the issues of neighborhoods and community problems finding their way into the school will not be a magical solution. There must be collaboration and buy-in form all stakeholders in order to help students. City, state, and federal government programs that service the needs of students and address the social, political, and institutional factors that affect students' academic success and therefore self-perceptions, continue to be developed. Their relative success, based on the data collected in this study, seem more dependent on internal factors coming from the home than those directly created and managed in schools.

Organizational Norms and Research Questions

The research questions throughout the course of the dissertation were as follows:

1. What are the ways in which urban educational stakeholders can overcome and encourage external and internal factors that influence academic success and self-perceptions of students?

   1a. Is there a relationship between social and financial capital that influences urban student's self-perceptions and academic achievement?

   1b. Do the behaviors and/or attitudes of stakeholders regarding student's social and financial capital have an influence on student achievement and self-perception

Throughout the study I discovered that many of the issues that conflict with the goals and objectives of Green Wave School derive from the home and community. In light of the fact that educators are prohibited from participating in discriminatory practices such as choosing their students, all students must be treated and educated equally. Milner (1995) argues that it is impossible to treat marginalized students equal to other students and that there must be programs and initiatives fostered that will meet a student's individual needs. Schools like Green Wave can be revived with collaboration and hard work. One size fits all programs will not help schools like Green Wave. There is no magic program to solve the problems of failing schools like Green Wave.

Limitations of Study

This study focused on the internal and external factors that impact urban middle school students' academic success and self-perceptions. Some of internal and external factors examined in the study were parental involvement, teacher quality, school morale,

resources, parental achievement, and community involvement. The location of the study was Green Wave School within an urban community in Atlantic County, New Jersey. All of the subjects that participated in the study were African-American Title I recipients. Among the recognized limitations of the study, it is acknowledged that it was only conducted in one school, there were limited ethnic variations, and limited criteria identified to study. Additionally, because the researcher worked at the study site, she formed close relationships with subjects and their families prior to the study.

Due to the nature of the study, the external and internal factors of urban middle school students and their influence on academic success and self-perceptions, the study was conducted at the Green Wave School versus elementary schools throughout the Green Wave District located in Atlantic County, New Jersey. Due to time constraints it would have been difficult to conduct open-ended interviews, surveys, and observations in all of the schools throughout the district between students regular instructional hours. The time constraints and inabilities to observe educational stakeholders related to the nature of the study greatly impacted the studies generalizability and ability to measure the effectiveness of programs or initiatives that may have better serviced students in other schools that had similar criteria or conditions of Green Wave School. In future studies of Green Wave District, all Green Wave District students may have to be included in order to ensure validity, generalizability, and transferability.

All of the students that participated in the study were African-American. One of the purposes of the study was to find solutions, programs, and initiatives to ensure academic success for all students regardless of race. The researcher selected African-Americans as the criteria because they make up over 85% of the general Green Wave

School and District. Although Green Wave District has a majority African-American population, there are other subgroups that exist that have high achieving and low achieving students that live in similar socio-economic conditions to those in the study. In the future the researcher may have to include all students regardless of ethnicity in order to contribute to generalizability and transferability.

Throughout the study all subjects that participated in the study were Green Wave students, employees, or had established a rapport with educational staff and students for three or more years. The criteria were limited in order to provide a longitudinal insight into the study in order to potentially discover a pattern if applicable. The criteria limited the study because they excluded individuals that scored Proficient on the state tests three years consecutively that may have been transfers from other schools in or outside of the district. In the future the researcher may have to lessen the number of years that subjects may have attended, worked, or volunteered at Green Wave School in order to provide enrichment to future studies and allow possible generalizability and transferability.

Lastly, the researcher worked with subjects and their families prior to conducting the study, which posed as a limitation. The close relationships and bonds may have contributed to researcher participant subjectivity versus objectivity, which may be argued would have provided more validity to the study. Yet due to students' educational hours and the research participants' work hours, it would have posed stress and time constraints on subjects had the study been conducted at another school within the Green Wave District. In addition, it could also be argued that because the researcher observer had formed close relationships with students throughout the Green Wave District due to mentorship programs and prior student relationships in other schools that there could

have been a threat of subjectivity to the study as well. In future studies it is recommended that due to the nature of the study the study be conducted in a school in Green Wave District in which the researcher has had limited relationships with educational stakeholders prior to the study in order to ensure objectivity.

Educational Leadership

Throughout the course of my educational career I have always desired to work with urban students. I am a product of an urban education and strongly believe that despite the environment or socio-economic status of an individual, all students can achieve. I have worked within an urban environment for 11 years and desperately sought an avenue to initiate change from the first day that I began my tenure in the Green Wave District. It seemed that although the year was different, nothing in terms of the average cultural norms or acceptable behaviors had changed within urban schools. I believe that in order to ensure long-lasting transformational change an environment of collaboration must be the norm. As per the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child."

At the beginning of my educational career I was unsure of how to best service the needs of urban students and create long-lasting change. Due to instructional practices learned throughout my courses at Rowan and throughout the study, I learned that many of the failures or problems associated with students' barriers to academic success and self-perceptions fostered around lack of collaboration amongst stakeholders. Despite the many social and financial resources that Green Wave School has, due to lack of collaboration, the needs of students are rarely met. Educational factions work

independently of each other within Green Wave School. Fullan (2007) implies that one of the reasons that schools fail is lack of collaboration and misunderstanding.

Many educators want to do a good job but do not know where to start. Due to my mentorship program I was able to foster relationships with students, parents, and members within the Green Wave School and community. As I worked to build my program, I learned that in order to have a successful program I could not work alone. I learned that when I worked with others there was a shared accountability. During my educational career years and throughout the course of the study I tried to collaborate with others and initiate collaborative values throughout the school.

The educational norms of schools are slow to change (Fullan, 2007). Many teachers prior to the study were resistant to my collaborative ideas. Some stated "Do you think that you will actually change things around here, these people will eat you alive." It was not simply put that teachers wanted to continue with the status quo, but because there was a lack of morale. In the past six years there have been consistent political strife and administrative changes within Green Wave School. Due to my beliefs at times I felt isolated and secluded, but I learned that educational stakeholders must have a sense of urgency. Due to my persistence and charismatic attitude, some of my ideas became more accepted and some educational stakeholders began to buy-into my beliefs, yet due to my position as a teacher, my ideas were often challenged by some leadership.

The educational environment of Green Wave School and its leadership has been traditionally transactional and power driven. There are individuals within the school that have been selected, including myself, based upon their ability and rapport with leadership. Yet the select group or faction of individuals, including myself, that were

selected to facilitate events, design schedules, organize professional development, initiate

dialogue and rapport with the community/parents, amongst other tasks, limits the

creativity and innovativeness of the overall staff, poses as a barrier to the overall goals

and objectives of the school, and continues to contribute to a cliquish atmosphere which

promotes an "us" against "them" attitude.

Due to the educational norms within the school, I had to establish trust with

stakeholders. Individuals within the school and external community had to believe that I

was truly there to help and make a difference in the lives of students. I quickly learned

that saying things was not enough. Instead I have committed most of my time throughout

the course of my educational and professional career to trying to put myself out in the

open and establish positive relationships with the Green Wave Press and stakeholders. I

consistently volunteer and work with others at the Green Wave School parent resource

center, and students one-on-one during my own time. There have been many teachers that

have disappointed stakeholders therefore, teachers must rebuild trust with students,

parents, and community members in order to evoke long lasting change.

In conclusion, I believe that as I progressed in my education and career I was

successful because I began to share and collaborate with others. As one community

member stated in the study, "It takes more than one person to run the show." Ciulla

(2003) states,

> Many of the scandals we have witnessed in recent years have evolved from
> privileged access to information, people and objects from leaders' apparent,
> inability to understand that their privileged position is supposed to give them a
> perspective from which they can more effectively lead-not from which they can
> more effectively satisfy personal wants. (Ciulla, 2003, p. 75)

Many people desired to take part in Green Wave School, but felt devalued and rejected because they were not allowed to participate in shared decision-making. As a person with influence on the Green Wave leadership I began to advocate for shared decision-making and collaboration amongst others. It has been a slow journey in reference to the many barriers that I consistently face, but I am determined to see long-lasting change.

In conclusion, I have learned that I have been successful throughout the years because I am open to learn, I like working with others or sharing ideas, and I believe in loyalty and honesty. In order to evoke change and collaboration, trust is paramount (Fullan, 2007). I believe that during the course of the study many subjects were open and frank because they felt safe and believed that they could rely on me to convey a message in the best interest of all people versus my individual singular interest. Educational organizations are successful when there is a shared vision and sense of collaboration amongst stakeholders (Fullan, 2007).

Recommendations for Future Study

Although many of the research questions were answered in the study, parental support and its direct influence on student success is not new. In order to measure the success of collaboration and its influence on students it is suggested that all schools within the Green Wave District contribute to future studies. Many authors have suggested that due to lack of buy-in and limited knowledge of the overall challenges that many urban students face, more and more urban students fail to close the achievement gap (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Fullan, 2007; Macleod, 1995; Milner, 1995). Through the study it was concluded that students' lack of success was due primarily to factors in the home.

152

The limitations of the study included the criteria and research conducted at only one site in Green Wave District. Recently there have been studies that have identified factors inside of students' homes and their neighborhoods and the effects on students' academic success and attitudes (Darling-Hammond, 2011; Noguera, 2011). Further research could be conducted throughout the district to determine the effectiveness of collaboration in order to create or further existing programs and educational initiatives in order to help all students. Further research could be done to include all ethnic groups in order to make comparisons amongst cultural groups or ensure transferability to other potential studies similar to the study conducted. Lastly, additional research in the field of factors contributing to students' overall achievement can contribute to helping students. Arguably, many people are successful due to their overall experiences, which include the external and internal factors (parental involvement, teacher quality, school moral, resources, and parental achievement) that have influenced their lives.

More often than not change efforts are destroyed before they begin because many stakeholders are not involved and therefore do not buy-in (Schultz, 2007). In order to make effective change and ensure the success of all students and other students living and learning in similar conditions in schools like Green Wave, there must primarily be collaboration amongst all stakeholders. Educational stakeholders are usually limited to time constraints and therefore limiting many change initiatives or potentially successful programs. It is recommended that schools that share similar characteristics or all Green Wave District middle school students be allowed the opportunity to participate in similar studies in order to create programs and educational initiatives to help all students. Real change is effective when there is active participation and buy-in from all stakeholders.

Urban school communities face a crisis. If students do not achieve, they will continue to

perpetuate a class of illiterate and poor people (Darling-Hammond, 2011).

References

Arai, S., & Kivel, B. D. (2009). Critical race theory and social justice perspectives on whiteness, difference(s) and (anti)racism: A fourth wave of race research in leisure studies. *Journal of Leisure Research, 41*(4), 459-472.

Auerbach, E. R. (1989). Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy. *Harvard Educational Review, 59*(2), 165. Retrieved from http://linksprogram.gmu.edu/tutorcorner/NCLC495Readings/Auerbach-Sociocontemp_familyLit.pdf

Barry, C. (2005). *Learning for all.* (Thesis). Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ.

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Booth, B., Van Hasselt, V. B., & Vecchi, G. M. (2011). Addressing school violence. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, 80*(5), 1-9.

Barco, B., Mira, R. A., & Carroza, G. A. (2007). An evaluation of opinions concerning immigration and multiculturality in school for teacher training. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology, 5*(2), 259-282.

Bushweller, K. (2005). Minority students. *Education Week, 25*(03), 11.

Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology. (2006). Critical race theory. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.rowan.edu/login?qurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.credoreference.com/entry/cupsoc/critical_race_theory

Chavkin, N. (1993). *Families and schools in a pluralistic society.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Check, J. (2002). *Politics, language, and culture: A critical look at urban school reform*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Ciulla, J. B. (2003). *The ethics of leadership.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Clonan, S., Lopez, G., Ryarchyk, G., & Davison, S.. (2004). School Wide positive behavior support. Implementation and evaluation at two urban elementary schools. Syracuse University Violence Prevention Project (SUVPP).

Coates, T. (2004). Critical race theory. *The Washington Monthly, 36*(4), 53-55.

Cohen, P. (2010). Culture of poverty makes a comeback. *New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/18/us/18poverty.html?pagewanted=all

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, 95-120.

Coleman, J. S. (1990). *Foundations of social theory*. London, UK: Harvard University Press.

Coleman, J. S. (1998). *Foundations of social theory.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2011). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. Columbus, OH: Pearson.

Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Plano Clark, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(2), 236-264.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano-Clark, V. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1999). *Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence.* Seattle, WA: University of Washington: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *Restoring our schools.* Retrieved from http://www.thenation.com/article/restoring-our-schools

Darling-Hammond, L. (2011). Challenge the aggressive neglect of our children: Linda Darling-Hammond. Retrieved from http://californiaschildren.typepad.com/californias-children/2011/08/the-remarks-of-linda-darling-hammond-ttitktktk-at-saturdays-save-our-schools-march-on-washington-dc-that-was-attended-b.html

Donovan, J. F. (2010). Race to the Top, NCLB and Why my Mom doesn't care. *School Administration, 67*(7)*, 40.* Retrieved from http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministrtorArticle.aspx?id=15972

DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement.* Bloomington, IA: National Education Service.

Earthman, G. I., & Lemasters, L. K. (2009). Teacher attitudes about classroom conditions. *Journal of Educational Administration, 47*(3), 323-335. doi:10.1108/09578230910955764

Evans, R. (1996). *The human side of school change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Evans, R. (2001). *The human side of school change: Reform, resistance, and the real- life problems of innovation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ferrance, E. (2003). *Action research.* Providence, RI: Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

Ford, R. (2009). Why the poor stay poor. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/08/books/review/Ford-t.html

Friedman, V. J., Lipshitz, R., & Overmeer, W. (2001). Creating conditions for organizational learning. In M. Dierkes, A. Berthoin Antal, J. Child, & I. Nonaka (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational learning and knowledge* (pp. 757-774). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Fuhrman, S. H., & Elmore, R. F. (1990). Understanding local control in the wake of state education reform. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 12*(1), 82-96.

Fullan, M. (2007). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gold, B. (2007). *Still separate and unequal: Segregation and the future of urban school reform.* New York, NY: Sociology of Education Series, Teachers College Press.

Gregory, S. (2000). *The academic achievement of minority students: Perspectives, practices, and prescriptions.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Gross, D. (2008). Today's 'Culture of Poverty.' Viewpoint essay. *Newsweek.* Harmon Retrieved from HighBeam Research: http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-177334431.html

Haggard, G. L. (2004). Making a difference: Stamping out illiteracy. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, 70*(2), 26-8.

Iluz, S., & Rich, Y. (2009). Internal and external factors shaping educational beliefs of high school teachers of "sacred" subjects to girls. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 25*(1), 42-51.

Jerder. (2009). The impact of poor parental literacy skills and raising children. Retrieved from http://www.bukisa.com/articles/24066_the-impact-of-poor-parental-literacy-skills-and-raising-children

Konishi, C., Hymel, S., Zumbo, B., & Li, Z. (2017). Do school bullying and student–teacher relationships matter for academic achievement? *Canadian Journal of School Psychology , 25*(1), 19 - 38.

LaBenne, W., & Greene, B. (1969). Educational implications of self concept theory. Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear Publishing Company.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. Schools. *Educational Researcher, 35*(7), 3-12. doi: 10.3102/0013189X035007003

Lakins, L. (2002). National Urban League builds coalition for Black student achievements. *New Pittsburgh Courier*. Echo Media. Retrieved from HighBeam Research: http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P3-480574361.html

Lamont, M., & Small, M. L. (2008). How culture matters: Enriching our understanding of poverty. In D. Harris & A. Lin, (Eds.), *The colors of poverty: Why racial and ethnic disparities persist* (pp. 76-102). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Lewis, O. (1969). Culture of poverty. In D. P. Moynihan (Ed.), *On understanding poverty: Perspectives from the social sciences* (pp. 187–220). New York, NY: Basic Books.

Littky, D., & Grabelle, S. (2004). *The BIG picture: Education is everyone's business*. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Lundy, G. F. (2003). The myths of oppositional culture. *Journal of Black Studies 33*(4): 450-467.

Macleod, J. (1995). *Ain't no makin it: Aspirations and attainment in a low income neighborhood.* Oxford, UK: Westview Press.

Marshall, M. L. (2002). Examining school climate: Defining factors and educational influences. Retrieved from Center for Research on School Safety, School Climate and Classroom management website: http://education.gsu.edu/Schoolsafety/downloadfiles/wp2002schoolclimate.pdf

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review 50*(4), 370-9.

Maurer, T. J., & Pierce, H. R. (1998). A comparison of Likert scale and traditional measures of self-efficacy. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 83*(2), 324-29.

McConnell, A. (2010). *Understanding policy success: Rethinking public policy.* Northwestern University: Palgrave McMillan.

Medina, M. A., Morrone, A. S., & Anderson, J. A. (2005). Promoting social justice in an urban secondary teacher education program. *The Clearing House, 78*(5), 207-212.

Mikulecky, L. (1996). *Family literacy: Parent and child interactions.* Family Literacy: Directions in Research and Implications for Practice. Retrieved from http://www/ed/.gov/pubs/FamLit

Milner, R. (1995). *Ready or not: Diversity in education.* Retrieved
From www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFF5-WDF91k

Milner, R. (2010). What do teachers have to do with teaching? Implications for
Diversity studies. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(1-2), 118-131.

Milner, R. (2011) Let's focus on gaps in opportunity, not achievement. Retrieved from
http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/05/06/30milner.h30.html

National Center for Educational Statistics. (2011). Retrieved from
http://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/commissioner/remarks2010/5_20_2010.asp

National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE]. (1983). *A nation at
risk: The imperative for educational reform.* A report to the nation and the
Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education. Washington,
DC: Author.

National Institute for Literacy. (2009). The National Institute for Literacy.
University of Minnesota.

New Jersey Department of Education. (2010). Retrieved from
http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/2010/njask7/summary.pdf

New Jersey Department of Education. (2011). Retrieved from
http://education.state.nj.us/rc/rc11/index.html

Noguera, P. A. (2011). A broader and bolder approach uses education to break the cycle
of poverty. *Phi Delta Kappan, 93*(3), 8-14..

Oakes, J. (1997). *Detracking: The social construction of ability. Teacher's College
Record, 98,* 483-510.

O'Callaghan, C. A. (2001). Literacy journey: One teacher's battle for empowerment.
Reading Improvement, 38(1), 10-11.

OECD. (2009a). OECD Fact book 2009: Economic, environmental and social statistics.
Washington, DC: OECD Publishing.

OECD. (2009b). *Poverty and social inequality in America*. Retrieved from
http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=14716

Ogbu, J. U. (2004). Collective identity and the burden of "Acting White" in Black
history, community, and education. *Urban Review, 36*(1), 1-35.

Ottke-Moore, C. (2002). What high school students think about their families being
involved in school? Retrieved from
http://www.urbanschools.org/pdf/about_high_school_students.pdf?v_document_
name=Families%20Being%20Involved

Power, T. J. (2008). Editorial note: Promoting social justice. *School Psychology Review*, *37*(4), 451-452.

Price, H. (2008). *Mobilizing the community to help students succeed*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Rockoff, J. E. (2004). The impact of individual teachers on student achievement: Evidence from panel data. *American Economic Review, 94*(2), 247–252.

Rogalsky, J. (2009). Myth busters: Dispelling the culture of poverty myth in the urban classroom. *Journal of Geography, 108*(4/5), 198-209.

Rushton, S. P. (2004). Using narrative inquiry to understand a student-teacher s practical knowledge while teaching in an inner-city school. *The Urban Review, 36*(1), 61–79.

Sawchuk, S. (2009). NEA at odds with Obama team over 'Race to the Top' criteria. *Education Week, 29*(2), *6.*

Schwartz, R. (2001). *Improving the transition from school to work: An American perspective. Strategies against youth unemployment: An international comparison.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Shafer, G. (2001). TESTS that fail democracy. *Humanist, 61*(3), 14.

Slavin, R. E. (2005). *Educational psychology: Theory and practice.* New York, NY: Allyn and Bacon.

Small, L., Harding, D., & Lamont, M. (2010). Reconsidering culture and poverty. The *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 629*(6). doi: 10.1177/0002716210362077

Sukamolson, S. (n.d.) *Fundamentals of quantitative research*. Retrieved from http://www.culi.chula.ac.th/e-journal/bod/suphat%20sukamolson.pdf

Tashakorri, A. (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Taskakorri, A., & Teddlie, C. (1998). *Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

The American Federation of Teachers. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.aft.org/

The National Center for Children Exposed to Violence. (2011). Retrieved from http://www.nccev.org/violence/school.html

Turner, M. (2009). *Rising poverty threatens neighborhood vitality*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. Retrieved from www.urban.org/uploadedPDF/901285_neighborhood_vitality.pdf_

Wang, M. C., Haertel, G. D., & Walberg, H. J. (2003). Fostering educational resilience in inner-city schools. Retrieved from www.temple.edu/Iss/htmlpublications/pubs97-4.htm

Warren-Gross, L. (2009). How does a failing school stop failing, *Knowledge Quest, 38*(2), 40-43.

Williams, M. (2004). *Investigation of the correlation between learning and student achievement of minority students.* (Thesis). Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ.

Letter of Consent

The external and internal educational factors that contribute to student achievement and self-perceptions of urban Middle School Title I students
Rowan University
Ja'Shanna Jones/Mark Raivetz
202 Creek Road
Bellmawr, NJ 08031

Administrator approval to Conduct Study at Designated Site
Letter of Consent
I Ja'Shanna Jones, a doctoral candidate at Rowan University am conducting a study entitled, "The external and internal educational factors that contribute to Title I student achievement Self-Perceptions of Urban Middle School Students." The following building principal, Lakecia Hyman, has agreed to allow me access to student test scores, student and staff observations, and informal academic data and artifacts for the purpose of the study/project.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the extent of the impact of parental literacy and poverty on the academic success and self-perceptions of urban middle school students. The data collected in this study will be used for dissertation purposes and possibly future article(s) and/or journal(s). All participant information is voluntary and individuals are free to withdraw without penalty at any time. The information collected throughout this study will be used to initiate possible policy, programs, and best teaching practices. The overall goal of the study is to help to increase student test scores and improve (if applicable) student self-perceptions.

The data and/or interviews will be kept private; pseudonyms will be used throughout the study to maintain the participant's privacy. The data collected will be kept confidential or private. All participants will be given a pseudonym. The researcher will keep a master list connecting the participant's pseudonym with the participant's true identification and/or data in a locked password accessible lap top. There are minimal risks involved in reference to your participation in this study. Your name, student(s) name(s), identification, address, and school name will be private and pseudonyms will be used where required. Data collected will be kept in a locked file and password entry personal lap top computer. I agree that any information obtained from the study may be used to best serve the interest of educational stakeholders.
Participant observations and/or other forms of data collection are estimated to be between four to nine months. The interviews should not exceed over sixty (60) minutes. Participants are expected to participate in at least two interviews.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment from the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator. If

you have any questions regarding rights of subjects in a study please contact the Associate Provost at following:

Rowan University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research 201 Mullica Hill Road Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701 Tel: 856-256-5150

I understand that my participation does not imply employment from state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

Your signature(s) below signifies your permission to allow the researcher to collect data and/or interviews throughout this research project. **You may request a copy of this form for your own records.** Any questions concerning this study may be directed to the researcher Ja'Shanna Jones at 609-344-8809 or jajones@acboe.org or the researcher's advisor, Dr. Mark Raivetz, Ed. D at 856-869-7700 or Raivetz@rowan.edu.

Lakecia Hyman   *3/9/11*

_____
(Signature of Building Principal, Approval)   date
*Obtained on original document and submitted previously

_____
Signature of Investigator   date

_____
Signature of Investigator   date

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form Teachers/Administration/Community Member

Rowan University
The external and internal educational factors that contribute to student achievement and self-perceptions of urban Middle School Title I students

I agree to participate in the study entitled "**The external and internal educational factors that contribute to student achievement and self-perceptions of urban Middle School Title I students**," which is being conducted at your school site by Ja'Shanna Jones a Doctoral candidate at Rowan University under the advisement of Dr. Mark Raivetz, Ed.D.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the extent of internal and external educational factors that contribute to the Academic Success and Self-Perceptions of Urban Middle School Students. Currently, at your school site there are a disproportionate number of students that fall financially at or below the poverty line and/or have failed the state test at the secondary 6-8th grade level. The data collected in the form of informal and formal academic data and interviews will be kept confidential or private and used for dissertation purposes as well as possible article(s) and/or journal(s). During interviews you will be asked to use a pseudonym name in order to maintain your confidentiality or privacy, a pseudonym is a fictional name.

The information collected during this study will help to initiate and/or enrich programs to enhance student social and/or academic growth. The overall goal of this study (if applicable) is to increase student test scores and social growth.

The data collected will be kept confidential or private. All participants will be given a pseudonym. The researcher will keep a master list connecting the participant's pseudonym with the participant's true identification and/or data in a locked password accessible lap top. Information will only be shared between the researcher and the academic advisor. You (participants) can opt to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. There are minimal risks involved in regards to your participation in this study. Your name, student(s) name, address, length of work service, and school name will remain private and pseudonyms will be used. Data collected will be kept in a locked file and/or a password locked computer. The researcher agrees that any information obtained from this study will be used for educational purposes to serve the best interest of educational stakeholders.

Participant observations and/or other forms of data collection are estimated to be between four to nine months. The interviews should not exceed over sixty (60) minutes. Participants are expected to participate in at least two interviews.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment from the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If you have any questions regarding rights of subjects in a study please contact the Associate Provost at following:
Rowan University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research 201 Mullica Hill Road Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701 Tel: 856-256-5150

Your signature(s) below signifies your permission to allow the researcher to collect data and/or interviews throughout this research project. **You may request a copy of this form for your own records.** Any questions concerning this study may be directed to the researcher Ja'Shanna Jones at 609-344-8809 or jajones@acboe.org or the researcher's advisor, Dr. Mark Raivetz, Ed. D at 856-869-7700 or Raivetz@rowan.edu.

Thank you,
Signature

Participant Name _____ date_____
  Investigator_____ date_____

  Investigator_____ date_____

Informed Consent Form Parents/Students

Rowan University
**The external and internal educational factors that contribute to student
achievement and self-perceptions of urban Middle School Title I students**

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student in the Educational Leadership Department at Rowan University. I
will be conducting a study under the supervision of the building principal Lakecia Hyman
and Dr. Mark J. Raivetz as a requirement for the completion of my Doctoral dissertation
concerning The external and internal educational factors that contribute to Title I student
achievement Self-Perceptions of Urban Middle School Students. I am requesting
permission for you and your child to participate in this research. As a result of this study
the researcher hopes (if applicable) to initiate programs to improve the educational
environment at your child (s) school that may result in higher test scores and positive
social growth.

Each child will be invited to participate in a survey and open-ended interview. Any child
that desires not to participate will be excluded from the study without incident. If at any
time the child wishes to be withdrawn, the parent will also be withdrawn without
incident. During the study I will review and analyze you and your child's behavior,
formal and informal academic data, school records, and interview you and your child. To
preserve each participant confidentially, names will remain private and shared only
between the researcher and academic advisor. Pseudonyms will also be used throughout
the collection of data in an attempt to maintain privacy. All participants will be given a
pseudonym. The researcher will keep a master list connecting the participant's
pseudonym with the participant's true identification and/or data in a locked password
accessible lap top. The interviews, survey's, artifacts, testing data, audio recordings, and
field notes, will be reported in a dissertation and/or future journal (s)/article(s).

Participant observations and/or other forms of data collection are estimated to be between
four to nine months. The interviews should not exceed over sixty (60) minutes.
Participants are expected to participate in at least two interviews.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment from the state of New
Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If you have any questions regarding rights of subjects in this study please contact the
Associate Provost at the following:
Rowan University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research 201 Mullica Hill Road Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701 Tel: 856-256-5150

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have no effect on your child(s) standing in class. At the conclusion of the study a summary of observations, survey's, artifacts, testing data, and notes recorded during observations of YOUR child may be available upon your request.

Your signature(s) below signifies your permission to allow the researcher to collect data and/or interviews throughout this research project. **You may request a copy of this form for your own records.** Any questions concerning this study may be directed to the researcher Ja'Shanna Jones at 609-344-8809 or jajones@acboe.org or the researcher's advisor, Dr. Mark Raivetz, Ed. D at 856-869-7700 or Raivetz@rowan.edu.

Thank You,
Ja'Shanna Jones

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement, writing your child's name on the line and returning this document to Ja'Shanna Jones by October 1.

_____ I grant permission for my child _____ to participate in this study.
_____ I do not grant permission for my child _____to participate in this study.
Subjects Initial's_____
Subjects Initial's_____

_____   _____
Parents/Guardians Signature   Date

_____   _____
Student Signature   Date

School Attitudes and Perceptions Survey

Rowan University
The external and internal educational factors that contribute to student achievement and self-perceptions of urban Middle School Title I students
School Attitudes and Perceptions Survey
(Students)

This survey is designed to explore your attitudes and/or perceptions regarding 6th-8th grade student success and attitudes. The information collected from this survey may be used to create programs in the district. Please complete the general information then select the response that best suits your opinion/belief for each of the statements in the survey. There is no right or wrong answer. Your honesty is appreciated when answering each question. Responses will be kept anonymous. Remember to mark only one response for each statement.

Please complete the general information below by selecting one from each category that best describes you:

Gender:	Male	Female	
Grade:	6	7	8

Survey Questions

Select one response in relation to yourself:	True	Mostly True	Unsure	Slightly True	Not at all True
1. Teachers support students.					
2. Students exhibit positive behavior.					
3. I enjoy coming to school each day.					
16. The student work load is challenging.					
4. My parents take me to museums, zoos, parks, and/or the theatre.					
5. My schools provide various field trips throughout the year.					
6. My family and I discuss ways to ensure that I get good grades.					
7. I am concerned about the state test.					
8. Teachers have clear high expectations.					
9. Teachers do not like					

	True	Mostly True	Unsure	Slightly True	Not at all True
9. Teachers do not like teaching at this school.					
10. I do not feel safe at school.					
Select one response in relation to yourself:	**True**	**Mostly True**	**Unsure**	**Slightly True**	**Not at all True**
11. There are many places that I can other than school for help.					
12. Teachers talk bad about students in this school.					
13. Only parents with money are able to take their children to fun and interesting places.					
14.My teachers can relate to my experiences.					
15. I don't like people that have more money than I.					
17. Parents support the school.					
18. There are after school programs at this school.					
19. Many of the students at my school are poor.					
20. I know when I am failing school.					
21. Students did well on the state test.					
22. Students study or plan for state tests at this school.					
23. The community involvement is good at this school.					
24. There are hardly ever any fights at this school.					
25. Parents help their students with their school work.					

Appendix E

Tables Representing Survey Responses

Table 1.

Sources of quantitative and qualitative data and significance for inclusion.

Data	Significance	Type	Source
NJASK scores	Student scores for 2008-09; 2009-10; 2010-11 examined to determine proficiency in Reading/Language Arts/Literacy	School records	Quantitative
Surveys	Determine the attitudes and perceptions by frequency of responses	Students and Teachers	Quantitative
Interview Questions	Provide an explanation for success and/or self-perceptions	High achieving Students, teachers, an administrator, parents of high achieving students, and a community member	Qualitative
Observations	Strategies and Perceptions/Attitudes	Students, teachers, administrator, parents, and community member	Qualitative

Table 2.

2010-2011 Grade 6 NJASK Language Arts Literacy proficiency results for Green Wave

School as compared to their scores in grades 5 and 4 by state and district

New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK6) LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY	Location	Year	Number Tested	Proficiency Percentages		
				Partial	Proficient	Advanced
Student Population	School	2010-2011 Grade 6	58	74.1%	25.9%	0.0%
		2009-2010 Grade 5	74	68.9%	31.1%	0.0%
		2008-2009 Grade 4	55	47.3%	52.7%	0.0%
Student Population	District	2010-2011 Grade 6	393	58.0%	41.0%	1.0%
		2009-2010 Grade 5	400	56.0%	43.5%	0.5%
		2008-2009 Grade 4	358	54.2%	45.3%	0.6%
Student Population	State	2010-2011 Grade 6	103,342	33.3%	59.4%	7.3%
		2009-2010 Grade 5	102,281	34.5%	57.9%	7.6%
		2008-2009 Grade 4	101,751	29.9%	62.9%	7.2%

Table 3.

2010-2011 Grade 7 NJASK Language Arts Literacy proficiency results for Green Wave

school as compared to their scores in grades 6 and 5 by state and district

(NJASK7) LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY	Location	Year	Number Tested	Proficiency Percentages		
				Partial	Proficient	Advanced
Student Population	School	2010-2011 Grade 7	97	69.1%	30.9%	0.0%
		2009-2010 Grade 6	75	58.7%	40.0%	1.3%
		2008-2009 Grade 5	65	58.5%	41.5%	0.0%
Student Population	District	2010-2011 Grade 7	396	60.6%	38.4%	1.0%
		2009-2010 Grade 6	349	56.2%	39.5%	4.3%
		2008-2009 Grade 5	346	47.1%	49.4%	3.5%
Student Population	State	2010-2011 Grade 7	103,368	36.7%	51.0%	12.3%
		2009-2010 Grade 6	102,516	30.5%	51.9%	17.6%
		2008-2009 Grade 5	102,020	27.6%	54.1%	18.3%

Table 4.

2010-2011 Grade 8 NJASK Language Arts Literacy proficiency results for Green Wave

school as compared to their scores in grades 7 and 6 by state and district

(NJASK8) LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY	Location	Year	Number Tested	Proficiency Percentages		
				Partial	Proficient	Advanced
Student Population	School	2010-2011 Grade 8	70	47.8%	50.7%	1.4%
		2009-2010 Grade 7	67	41.8%	56.7%	1.5%
		2008-2009 Grade 6	74	58.1%	41.9%	0.0%
Student Population	District	2010-2011 Grade 8	355	40.6%	54.8%	4.5%
		2009-2010 Grade7	352	34.7%	59.7%	5.7%
		2008-2009 Grade 6	386	46.6%	51.6%	1.8%
Student Population	State	2010-2011 Grade 8	103,151	17.8%	63.0%	19.1%
		2009-2010 Grade 7	102,168	17.1%	64.4%	18.5%
		2008-2009 Grade 6	103,391	17.5%	71.3%	11.2%

Table 5.

High achieving study participants scoring proficient on the New Jersey ASK Reading

Language Arts assessment for three consecutive years at Green Wave School

Participant	Grade in 2011	2011 score	2010 score	2009 score
A	Six	219	230	244
B	Seven	238	231	238
C	Seven	234	245	215
D	Seven	211	219	234
E	Seven	200	216	234
F	Seven	241	227	238
G	Eight	212	226	222
H	Eight	240	226	200
I	Eight	218	205	209

Table 6.

High achieving grade six students scoring proficient on the New Jersey ASK Reading

Language Arts assessment for three consecutive years at Green Wave school

Participant	2011 Grade 6	2010 Grade 5	2009 Grade 4
1	219	230	244
2	246	250	219
3	238	219	207
4	238	225	228
5	234	230	250
6	230	257	219
7	226	206	224
8	223	230	211
9	223	236	204
10	216	219	219
11	216	230	219
12	213	202	219
13	207	210	224
14	207	215	238

Note. New Jersey ASK proficient score is 200 or better. The table includes all students

in grade six meeting the criteria

Table 7.

High achieving grade seven students scoring proficient on the New Jersey ASK Reading

Language Arts assessment for three consecutive years at Green Wave school

Participant	2011 Grade 7	2010 Grade 6	2009 Grade 5
1	241	236	231
2	224	211	209
3	224	215	245
4	213	211	219
5	213	219	200
6	210	241	227
7	203	200	216

Note. New Jersey ASK proficient score is 200 or better. The table includes all students

in grade seven meeting the criteria

Table 8.

High achieving grade eight students scoring proficient on the New Jersey ASK Reading

Language Arts assessment for three consecutive years at Green Wave School

Participant	2011 Grade 8	2010 Grade 7	2009 Grade 6
1	218	205	209
2	228	237	219
3	212	226	222
4	228	215	219
5	240	223	252
6	228	205	226
7	206	200	209
8	209	205	209
9	212	223	222
10	209	220	230
11	209	220	219
12	209	237	234

New Jersey ASK proficient score is 200 or better.   The table includes all students in

grade eight meeting the criteria

Table 9.

Green Wave students by grade scoring proficient on the NJASK for three consecutive

years as a proportion of students tested

2010-11 Grade	# Tested 2010-11	# Passed three consecutive years – 2008-09; 09-10; 10-11	% Passed three consecutive years – 2008-09; 09-10; 10-11
Six	58	14	25.9%
Seven	97	7	7.2%
Eight	70	12	17.1%

Table 10.

Survey Question 1: Teachers support students.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	63	41.7%
Mostly True	62	41.1%
Unsure	10	6.6%
Slightly True	11	7.3%
Not True	5	3.3%
Total	151	100%

Table 11.

Survey Question 2: Students exhibit positive behavior.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	12	8.0%
Mostly True	37	24.8%
Unsure	32	21.5%
Slightly True	53	35.6%
Not True	15	10.1%
Total	149	100%

Table 12.

Survey Question 3: I enjoy coming to school each day.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	51	33.6%
Mostly True	40	26.3%
Unsure	11	7.2%
Slightly True	25	16.4%
Not True	25	16.4%
Total	152	100%

Table 13.

Survey Question 4: The student work load is challenging.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	28	18.7%
Mostly True	34	22.7%
Unsure	41	37.3%
Slightly True	30	20.0%
Not True	17	1.3%
Total	150	100%

Table 14.

Survey Question 5: My parents take me to museums, zoos, parks, and the theater.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	54	35.5%
Mostly True	30	19.7%
Unsure	8	5.3%
Slightly True	34	22.4%
Not True	26	17.1%
Total	152	100%

Table 15.

Survey Questions 6: My school provides various field trips throughout the year.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	39	25.7%
Mostly True	18	11.8%
Unsure	32	21.1%
Slightly True	38	25.0%
Not True	25	16.4%
Total	152	100%

Table 16.

Survey Question 7: My family and I discuss ways to ensure that I get good grades.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	113	74.8%
Mostly True	24	15.9%
Unsure	7	4.6%
Slightly True	4	2.7%
Not True	3	2.0%
Total	151	100%

Table 17.

Survey Question 8: I am concerned about the state tests.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	93	61.2%
Mostly True	27	17.9%
Unsure	13	8.6%
Slightly True	8	5.3%
Not True	10	6.6%
Total	151	100%

Table 18.

Survey Question 9: Teachers have clear high expectations.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	82	54.7%
Mostly True	43	28.7%
Unsure	16	10.6%
Slightly True	7	4.7%
Not True	2	1.3%
Total	150	100%

Table 19.

Survey Question 10: Teachers do not like teaching at this school.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	11	7.4%
Mostly True	9	6.0%
Unsure	38	25.5%
Slightly True	15	10.1%
Not True	76	51.0%
Total	149	100%

Table 20.

Survey Questions 11: I do not feel safe at this school.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	10	6.8%
Mostly True	10	6.8%
Unsure	16	10.9%
Slightly True	14	9.5%
Not True	97	66%
Total	147	100%

Table 21.

Survey Question 12: There are many places that I can go to other than school for help.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	71	46.7%
Mostly True	25	16.4%
Unsure	25	16.4%
Slightly True	11	7.2%
Not True	20	13.2%
Total	152	100%

Table 22.

Survey Question 13: Teachers talk bad about students in this school.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	20	13.4%
Mostly True	15	10.0%
Unsure	29	19.3%
Slightly True	33	22.0%
Not True	53	35.3%
Total	150	100%

Table 23.

Survey Question 14: Only parents with money are able to take their children to fun and interesting places.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	24	15.8%
Mostly True	14	9.2%
Unsure	23	15.1%
Slightly True	17	11.2%
Not True	74	48.7%
Total	152	100%

Table 24.

Survey Question 15: My teachers can relate to my experiences.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	35	23.5%
Mostly True	23	15.4%
Unsure	40	26.9%
Slightly True	23	15.4%
Not True	28	18.8%
Total	149	100%

Table 25.

Survey Question 16: I don't like people that have more money than I.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	7	4.6%
Mostly True	4	2.7%
Unsure	5	3.3%
Slightly True	8	5.3%
Not True	127	84.1%
Total	151	100%

Table 26.

Survey Question 17: I care about my education.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	118	80.8%
Mostly True	17	11.7%
Unsure	5	3.4%
Slightly True	4	2.7%
Not True	2	1.4%
Total	146	100%

Table 27.

Survey Question 18: Parents support the school.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	73	48.7%
Mostly True	27	18%
Unsure	32	21.3%
Slightly True	10	6.7%
Not True	8	5.3%
Total	150	100%

Table 28.

Survey Question 19: There are after school programs at this school.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	136	90.1%
Mostly True	3	2.0%
Unsure	5	3.3%
Slightly True	3	2.0%
Not True	4	2.6%
Total	151	100%

Table 29.

Survey Question 20: Many of the students at my school are poor.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	11	7.3%
Mostly True	9	6.0%
Unsure	60	39.7%
Slightly True	17	11.3%
Not True	54	35.7%
Total	151	100%

Table 30.

Survey Question 21: I know when I am failing school.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	66	44.0%
Mostly True	24	16.0%
Unsure	22	14.7%
Slightly True	23	15.3%
Not True	15	10.0%
Total	150	100%

Table 31.

Survey Question 22: Students did well on the State tests.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	26	17.2%
Mostly True	36	23.8%
Unsure	78	51.7%
Slightly True	9	6.0%
Not True	2	1.3%
Total	151	100%

Table 32.

Survey Question 23: Students study or plan for State tests at this school.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	59	39.6%
Mostly True	27	18.1%
Unsure	38	25.5%
Slightly True	14	9.4%
Not True	11	7.4%
Total	149	100%

Table 33.

Survey Question 24: The community involvement is good at this school.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	37	25.0%
Mostly True	34	23.0%
Unsure	41	27.7%
Slightly True	20	13.5%
Not True	16	10.8%
Total	148	100%

Table 34.

Survey Question 25: There are hardly ever any fights at this school.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	18	12.3%
Mostly True	9	6.2%
Unsure	23	15.7%
Slightly True	27	18.5%
Not True	69	47.3%
Total	146	100%

Table 35.

Survey Question 26: Parents help students with their school work.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
True	70	49.7%
Mostly True	29	20.6%
Unsure	27	19.1%
Slightly True	10	7.1%
Not True	5	3.5%
Total	141	100%

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

The external and internal educational factors that contribute to student achievement and self-perceptions of urban Middle School Title I students

Interview Protocol questions

Administration

1. How do you think student self-perceptions influence their academic achievement?
2. How would you describe the academic attitudes of your students?
3. How are parents involved in this school?
4. What expectations do you have for our students?
5. Describe your role as an educational leader.
6. Do you believe that there are sufficient resources to educate our children?
7. Are you satisfied with the way teachers are monitoring student academic progress?
8. How often do your teachers inform parents of your students' academic and/or social progress?
9. What more could teachers do to involve parents in their kids' education?
10. Does teacher monitoring impact student academic growth?

Teacher

1. How do you think student self-perceptions influence academic achievement?
2. What are the dominant academic behaviors displayed by your students?
3. What are the dominant social norms (behaviors) displayed by your students?
4. Tell me what it is like to talk to parents about their child's academic progress.
5. Describe the general behaviors and/or attitudes of your students' parents regarding their students' academic progress.
6. How often do you talk to parents?

7. Why did you enter this profession? How do you feel about teaching now?
8. Would you send your child to this school?
9. Describe the external or immediate community outside of the school.
10. Describe the impact of poverty on your students' academic progress.
11. Describe the impact of poverty on your student's social-emotional growth.
12. How do you feel as a teacher when state test results come back?
13. What is the general morale of the school?

Students

1. Who is in your family?
2. What are your teacher(s) like?
3. How much time do you spend outside of school on school work?
4. Do you attend the before and after school programs at your school?
5. How do your friends do at school?
6. What happens when your friends get into trouble at school? What about you?
7. Tell me how you are supposed to behave in school?
8. Is it okay to be smart? What about the children that don't do so well?
9. What do you think about the students that may have more money than your family? (Your Family would mean your parent(s) and/or guardian(s).)
10. What do you think about the students that may have less money than your family? (Your Family would mean your parent(s) and/or guardian(s).)
11. Why do you attend school?
12. What do you think about this school?
13. What do your parent(s)/guardian(s) tell you about this school?
14. Tell me what a good life would be?

Parents

1. How would you describe your student (s)?

2. Describe the type of teacher you would prefer educating your child.
3. What kind of help do you think your child needs in this school?
4. Do you ever come to school when there is not a problem?
5. How do you celebrate your kid's success in school?
6. Tell me about a recent project your child has done for school.

Community Member

1. How long have you been a member of the community and School?
2. Describe how the school has changed over time since you have been here?
3. If you could, what would you change about this school?
4. What more could this community do for the school?
5. What more could this school do for the community?